

**Changing perspectives on the value of literacy to blind persons as  
reflected in the production, dissemination and reception of  
publications in raised type in Britain c.1820-1905**

**John Philip Oliphant of Rossie**

**Institute of Education**

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### **Abstract**

This study examines historically the provision of literature to Britain's blind community. It addresses issues relevant to present debates on the blind person's right to equality of access to information, and the state's responsibility to ensure this. Changing perceptions of blindness and blind people's needs are traced through hitherto neglected primary sources, including institutional records, government reports, conference proceedings and journals. The legacies of individuals who invented reading systems and of institutions and associations that shaped attitudes and practice are evaluated. There follows a critical account of the prolonged 'Battle of the Types', when contending systems were promoted as the universal method of instruction, creating duplication and waste. The achievements and shortcomings of charitable institutions and associations are discussed and comparisons are made with nations where the State played an earlier, more substantial role. Recent findings in the history of education, debates on the history of the book and alternative interpretations of charity are incorporated to introduce new perspectives on early blind education and publishing. The thesis examines 'improving' initiatives, such as the foundation of Worcester College, which sent blind youths to university, and the British and Foreign Blind Association, conceived and run by blind men, which revolutionized publication. The success of certain school boards in integrating blind children, and the Royal Normal College's effective training of teachers and musicians promised a new dawn. Utilitarian influences proved stronger, however, and the 1889 Royal Commission report's recommended continued voluntary control of institutional education and publishing. In new suburban institutions built for the twentieth century, the culture of the workshop largely prevailed over that of the word. Launched in 1898, the *Blind Advocate* nonetheless exemplified the liberating power of literacy and auto-didacticism by giving a voice to radical blind workers, inspiring a questioning spirit and foreshadowing later examples of protest literature.

## **Table of Contents**

<b>Acknowledgements</b>	6
<b>Abbreviations</b>	7
<b>1 Introduction</b>	
1.1 Focus and aims	8
1.2 Locating this work in the field of disability studies	19
1.3 Theoretical and conceptual points	22
1.4 Research questions	27
1.5 Methods	28
1.6 Sources	33
1.7 Ethical issues in research	37
<b>2 Review of literature</b>	
2.1 A short historiography of blindness	40
2.2 Blindness and alterity	46
2.3 On the Enlightenment and educability	49
2.4 On British pioneers	50
2.5 On charity and the blind	51
2.6 'Improvement'	55
2.7 The democratization of literature and the blind reader	58
<b>3 Changing perceptions of blindness in European society and the invention of literacy for blind people.</b>	
3.1 Ways of seeing disability	60
3.2 Paris	63
<b>4 British responses</b>	
4.1 Echoes from France	69
4.2 Pioneers	69
4.3 The British institution: a philanthropic challenge	79

4.4	Victorian critics	88
4.5	Literacy and blindness: the British institutional perspective	92
<b>5</b>	<b>‘The Battle of the Types’ in institutions and visiting societies</b>	
5.1	The freedom of choice	96
5.2	The Great Exhibition	100
5.3	‘The unfortunate bone of a very unseemly contention’	103
<b>6</b>	<b>The Improving Impulse</b>	
6.1	Worcester College and the creation of ‘a higher culture for the blind’	118
6.2	Thomas Armitage and the British and Foreign Blind Association: from ‘unfortunate objects’ to agents	126
6.3	The Royal Normal College	133
6.4	The school boards and the discovery of the blind child	136
6.5	Conferences	144
6.6	The State bestirred. The establishment of the Royal Commission	150
6.7	The Royal Commission findings and recommendations on education, literacy and publishing	155
<b>7</b>	<b>A revolution passed by?</b>	
7.1	The democratization of reading: the expansion of publishing in Britain	163
7.2	That the blind may read	167
7.3	Literature for the blind child	177
7.4	Libraries	180
7.5	Literacy and the birth of protest	185
<b>8</b>	<b>Conclusions</b>	192
	<b>Appendices</b>	198
	<b>Bibliography</b>	204

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## **Abbreviations**

BFBA	British and Foreign Blind Association
COS	Charity Organisation Society
HMI	Her Majesty's Inspectorate
IOE	Institute of Education, University of London
PP	Parliamentary Papers
PRO	Public Record Office London.
RCBD	Royal Commission on the Blind, Deaf and Others of the United Kingdom
Westminster Conference	The Conference on Matters Relating to the Blind. Held at Westminster, April 22-24 1902. Organised by the Gardner's Trust
UPIAS	Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation



## **Chapter 1     Introduction**

### **1.1 Focus and aims**

This is a study of the historical factors determining the extent and nature of the provision of literature in raised print to the blind person in the United Kingdom in the nineteenth century. The way a society provides for its members with disabilities may reveal much about how its social bonds are formed, strengthened and weakened. With battles over physical access and workplace equality fought and largely won, the discussion of disability in Britain and North America has now been widened to include questions pertaining to cultural parity, such as the provision of literature.

The main purpose of this work is to offer new perspectives on this contemporary issue through a fuller, critical account of the development of publishing for Britain's blind community up to the start of the twentieth century. The patterns of provision set then have had a bearing on the present unsatisfactory situation. In contrast to previous publications on the subject, this work analyses the providers' changing perceptions of the blind person's spiritual, educational and cultural needs, and incorporates and connects the recent work of historians and disability studies researchers in a number of areas. It draws from studies on the nature and practice of charity in Victorian Britain, on histories of institutional and state education and on the democratization of literature, as well as on wide ranging explorations in critical disability history. To substantiate this critical narrative, new statistical evidence from previously unexamined primary sources is introduced to trace more accurately both the development of the teaching of reading by institutions and home teaching societies and the expansion of publishing for blind people in the second half of the nineteenth century.

The influence of literacy on the blind person's construction of identity is critical. Since the first raised type publications were made available, the policies of institutions and visiting societies regarding the teaching of reading have had a marked impact on this process, as has the selection of works for publication and their distribution. To understand more fully the blind person's self-perception, this study makes reference to the intensive exploration of experiences and representations of disability by specialized scholars in the past three decades, especially in the United States. A preliminary examination of the theories and intersecting rhetorics that have emerged is necessary to determine which can throw light on the developments discussed. For this purpose, section 1.2, on the origins and development of disability history precedes the review of literature in Chapter 2. This review suggests new interpretative frameworks drawn from alternative accounts of charity, publications on the

history of the book and recent studies by historians of education. Chapter 3 identifies a shift in the notion of disability that underpinned changes in blind education and alternative format publication, and reflected the spirit of Enlightenment rationalism in France and Scotland. This novel evaluation of blind persons' educability indicated a new path for educators and providers of literature. The choices on whether to follow that path made subsequently by British institutions, associations and providers of literature are the basis of this study.

Chapter 4 draws on a selection of neglected primary sources, such as diaries, journals, and institutional documentation in providing fuller descriptions and evaluations of the contributions of the pioneers of raised types in Britain, and takes into account the unexpectedly forceful criticisms of philanthropic provision at the time. Chapter 5 makes the first extensive examination of the 'Battle of the Types', a long and costly contest between supporters of different systems seeking acceptance as the universal form. The issues at stake are clarified and the protagonists and their aims identified. Private journals of the leading figures are taken into consideration for the first time and the oral testimonies to government enquiries of publishers, educators and readers involved shed new light on this extended episode, which deserves attention since, at the time of writing, such private initiatives are widely suggested as the most effective way forward in social welfare provision. Chapter 6 introduces more detailed and analytical accounts of certain nineteenth century attempts to 'improve' the life of blind people. Drawing extensively on the college archives it focuses first on Worcester College, a mid-nineteenth century private venture to offer higher education to blind male youths of the upper classes. It then describes Thomas Armitage and the British and Foreign Blind Association's publishing crusade, and considers Armitage's less well known involvement with the Royal Normal College, that pioneered music education for the blind in Britain. Another aspect of this progressive interlude, examined in more detail than heretofore, was the highly successful work of a few school boards in educating children with visual impairments. In this section of the thesis, the involvement of the State is discussed with reference to the Royal Commission that collected evidence from 1885 to 1889 on the situation of people with disabilities in Britain. In each case, a detailed examination was made of journals, correspondence, annual reports and minute books, and transcripts of royal commission interviews. Chapter 7 examines the response of those publishing for the blind to the democratization of literature in Britain. This unprecedented exploration of an untouched aspect of disability history is built on primary evidence in the form of library holdings, sales lists and committee reports and correspondence of the associations involved.

Historians of education can, in some cases, contribute to debate on contemporary disability issues and the provision of printed literature for Britain's visually impaired community is one example. More evidence has appeared to show that this remains sadly inadequate. The 'Right to Read' campaign, carried out by the Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB) and the publications of The Right to Read Alliance, begun in 2004, have indicated that there are severe shortcomings in educational publishing, which have hindered the educational progress of visually impaired children, who are now often integrated in ordinary state schools with the sighted. The Alliance indicates that the education of over 20,000 blind and partially sighted children is adversely affected by a shortage of appropriately formatted textbooks. Following a protest at Westminster in which blind children, parents and teachers participated, a two year accessible pilot project was launched by the government in September 2009.<sup>1</sup> Blind adults, meanwhile, have access to only a very small part of the literature published in their society. While this examination of the evolution of publishing for blind persons has a bearing on a contemporary problem, it also raises issues of distributive justice and has relevance in the framework of current academic conversations not only in the field of disability studies, but in the history of literacy and the 'new' history of charity also.

In 1995, Paul Longmore wrote that the disability movement in America had reached a historic juncture: 'The first phase has been a quest for disabled rights, for equal access and equal opportunity, for inclusion. The second phase is a quest for collective identity. Even as the unfinished work of the first phase continues, the task in the second phase is to explore or to create a disability culture'.<sup>2</sup> To do so requires a more nuanced understanding of the multiple forms of exclusion and discrimination experienced by disabled people, and how the less overt of these continue to prevent a full participation in cultural life. While the literature offered blind people may not be an immediately apparent indicator of their degree of integration, this work suggests that in the stigmatizing of blindness, a blind person's self-perception essentially informs identity and the act of reading may have little or no part in this identity construction if the limited notions of educability prevalent in society are accepted and internalized. In this enquiry, long held perceptions of the blind person's spiritual, cultural, social and educational needs have been examined, as have the representations of blindness which played a part in moulding them. If we are to understand the place of literacy

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<sup>1</sup> 'Right to Read Alliance' [Online] Available at <http://www.rnib.org.uk> (Last consulted 2 October 2010).

<sup>2</sup> Paul K. Longmore, 'The Second Phase: From Disability Rights to Disability Culture'. [Online] First published in *Disability Rag and Resource*. Sept./Oct.1995. Available at <http://independentliving.org/docs3/longm95.html>, 1 (Last consulted 2 October 2009).

in the sightless person's habitus, it is imperative to consider the way in which blindness has been identified and represented in many forms of alterity.

In the ancient world, blindness was regarded as either a punishment for wrongdoing or, as in the case of the blind seer, the price paid for gaining spiritual vision or insight. In Henri-Jacques Stiker's 1982 work on the history of disability he traces the roots of the classical world's 'ancestral fears' of monstrosity and of the weakening and extinction of the species, providing Old Testament references to blindness as 'unclean', a form of 'cultic impurity' in itself a blemish sufficient to debar the blind person from offering religious sacrifices.<sup>3</sup> Numerous examples exist from past social investigations, legislation, literature and even the visual arts that indicate how the perceived economic burden placed on the community by its blind members has created a stigmatizing link between blindness and mendicancy in many very different historical contexts. While the blind man or woman endowed with the genius of Homer or Saunderson or connected like Tiresias, to the terrifying power of the gods and the dead, could inspire awe or fear in the sighted, in most cases, the blind individual in the pre-industrial world was seen as someone marked as outcast, condemned to misery and dependence.

In addition to the seer and the pitiful mendicant, one further representation of the blind person in 'otherness' has been established; that of the 'overcomer', the exceptional individual who battles adversity to achieve 'normality', and serves as an example and inspiration not only to those similarly 'afflicted', but to his or her sighted counterparts also. 'Progress' and the momentum of humanitarianism have apparently consigned brutal stigmatization to the past. In Stiker's account, whilst blind people, and others categorized as 'extraordinary', were once regarded as 'somewhere between beggar, monster and criminal', they are now no longer intrinsically associated with sin, fault, culpability, or with the anger of the gods. Yet, integration remains elusive. Like the medieval fool, the disabled person has the status of being 'cared for', integrated yet marginalized.<sup>4</sup>

With the development of feelings of sentimental paternalism towards 'the unfortunate' from the Victorian era onwards, blind people have come to constitute a 'difference' to be loved, encouraged and helped. Disability historians have now been prompted to identify how emotional, spiritual and moral projections have continued, through

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<sup>3</sup> Henri-Jacques Stiker, *A History of Disability* Translated by Willian Sayers. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 24-39. Originally published in Paris as *Corpses infirmes et sociétés*, Paris, 1982.

<sup>4</sup> Stiker, *A History of Disability*, 69.

such ‘well meaning’ objectification, to cloud attitudes and policy regarding disability.<sup>5</sup> Shirley Samuels has argued that sentimentality was a ‘national project’ in nineteenth century America in which the nation’s bodies were examined, and the language of sentiment to be found in the statements of British voluntarist educators of the blind suggests a similar impulse at work in Britain.<sup>6</sup>

Modernity may well have brought new, less overt processes of social exclusion, as the recent movement towards studying experiences of disability outside the institution is making ever clearer. Legislative improvements and greater protection in the letter of international manifestos have offered some consolation and encouragement. Britain’s 1993 Education Act has increased the responsibility of mainstream schools to ‘assess, identify and meet the needs of’ children with special educational needs.<sup>7</sup> Article 49 of the United Nations ‘Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Optional Protocol’, adopted by the General Assembly on 13 December 2006, requires nations to identify and eliminate obstacles and barriers and ensure that persons with disabilities can access their environment, transportation, public facilities and services, and information and communications technologies. Pupils with support needs are to be given equal access to education, in which appropriate materials, techniques and forms of communication are to be provided.<sup>8</sup>

Britain’s current legislature on disability and discrimination prohibits discrimination against disabled people in a range of circumstances, including employment, education, transport and the provision of goods, facilities, services and the exercise of public functions. The provision of adequate information and access to educational and recreational literature for the blind should fall within these prescriptions.<sup>9</sup>

For disability activists, however, the struggle is not considered over. In response, Longmore has written, ‘Access could have been limited to physical modifications in the personal living and work environments of disabled individuals. Instead, disability activists have pressed forward a broad concept of equal access that has sought to guarantee full

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<sup>5</sup> The work of Rosemarie Garland Thomson, Mary Klages and Shirley Samuel is discussed in the Review of Literature section below (Section 1.5).

<sup>6</sup> Shirley Samuels, *The Culture of Sentiment: Race, Gender and Sentimentality in Nineteenth Century America* (New York, Oxford; Oxford University Press 1992).

<sup>7</sup> Olga Miller, *Supporting Children with Visual Impairments in Mainstream Schools* (London: Franklin Watts, 1996), 5.

<sup>8</sup> United Nations, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Optional Protocol: Article 49. [Online] Available at <http://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/convention/convoptprot-e.pdf> Last consulted 2 October 2010.

<sup>9</sup> TSO, (1995). *The Disability and Discrimination Act (1995): Guidance on matters to be taken into account in determining questions relating to the definition of disability* (The Stationary Office, 2006).

participation in society'.<sup>10</sup> American historians have yet to focus on blind peoples' literature as a political issue as the history of its provision in the United States had a longer and less contentious development than in Britain. Federal government there has participated intensely, since the founding of the American Printing House for the Blind, in 1858, and the need for improvement in this sphere of social service is less keenly felt than in Britain's blind community, where two centuries of voluntarist control over publishing has left its mark.<sup>11</sup>

As the 'Project Libra' report on library facilities for the blind in Britain indicated in 1991, 'What is becoming increasingly important is that visually impaired people should, as far as possible, be given the same freedom of choice which seeing people have in determining what they want or do not want to read'.<sup>12</sup> The provision of literature is one the most effective counters to the experience of objectification and stigmatized exclusion and in contemporary Britain an acceptable quality of access to information has clearly not been obtained, as recent activism continues to demonstrate.

A recently published international study has shown that, in England, 59 per cent or approximately 17,600 children between the ages of five and 16 with visual impairments are educated in mainstream schools.<sup>13</sup> The system of providing their school books is described as 'complex, inefficient and outdated, resulting in inconsistencies in quality of materials produced for blind and partially sighted pupils'. After careful study of the centrally organized models of Spain, Denmark, Sweden and Canada, the report recommended a central agency. Regarding Scotland, it was suggested that a fully State funded coordinated national centre for production of material formats could resolve disparities in availability and quality.<sup>14</sup> While Scandinavian nations rely solely on the State for funding and delivery of services, the report notes the emergence elsewhere of private companies as competitors in a potentially lucrative market. The State is 'withdrawing' direct funding in some countries and moving towards the role of commissioner, approving textbooks and maintaining more distance.<sup>15</sup> Thus, Britain is not alone in its confusion over the appropriate role for the State today in providing printed and other materials for blind children and adults, but the growing tendency to turn to private solutions is likely to be most rapid there given the long tradition of active philanthropy in

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<sup>10</sup> Longmore, *The second phase*, 3.

<sup>11</sup> American Printing House for the Blind, *American Printing House for the Blind, Inc.: its history, purposes and policies* (Louisville, Kentucky: American Printing House for the Blind, 1966).

<sup>12</sup> Peter Craddock, *Project Libra: the provision and use of reading aids for visually impaired and other print handicapped people in UK public libraries* (Letchworth: British Library 1996).

<sup>13</sup> Olga Miller et al., *International models of provision of accessible curriculum materials* (London: IOE, 2008),

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 13-14.

providing for the education and welfare of blind people. It is therefore an appropriate moment to reexamine that long experience.

This work examines historical provision of literature for the blind person, focusing on the teaching of reading and the selection, printing and distribution of raised type publications. The emphasis is on the independent ‘direct act’ of reading texts, although some reference is made to the little evidence which remains of the practice of ‘reading to’ the blind person, which is another recognizable form of sharing literature, while the ‘Talking Book’ belongs to a period subsequent to this investigation. The development of writing, due to the paucity of evidence available, has not been examined in any depth.

At London’s Great Exhibition of 1851, panels were appointed to adjudicate on the ‘The Works of Industry of all Nations’. Class XVII of the thirty categories considered was ‘Printing for the Blind’ and the Jury’s Report proclaimed that, ‘The invention of printing for the blind marks a new era in the history of literature’.<sup>16</sup> The fact that this relatively obscure aspect of industrial technology was included shows an awareness of disabled persons’ needs rare in nineteenth century industrial culture, and that the pioneers’ efforts did not go unrecognized by their contemporaries. This public attention was important in driving improvement.

In tracing the evolution of technologies to enable the blind to enter the ‘world of the word’, an analysis of the introduction and reception of a number of raised types designed to enable them to read and write shows that very different notions of literacy spurred both the pioneers and later movers in the venture, who were strongly influenced by philosophical tenets and cultural beliefs which reflected diverse national sentiments and approaches towards the education of the poorer classes in general and the blind in particular.

In Britain, this far ranging undertaking eventually enabled a small section of the nation’s blind community to share in what was termed ‘a higher culture’, but many were long denied the benefits of what Richard Altick described as the ‘great democratization of reading’.<sup>17</sup> These private endeavours are appraised in the hope that the work presented here may give some indication of how the absence of state participation in providing publications for the blind came to be accepted for so long, and what the consequences have been.

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<sup>16</sup> Parliamentary Papers (hereafter PP) 1889 (xix) Royal Commission on the Blind, Deaf and Dumb and Others of the United Kingdom, Vol.2 *Appendix*, 414. Great Exhibition Jury Report, “On the Works of Industry”, (printed for the Commissioners).

<sup>17</sup> Richard Altick, *The English Common Reader: a social history of the mass reading public* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1998).

Criticism of voluntary provision came slowly in the twentieth century. In his report of a survey conducted in 1936, J.M. Ritchie, edited a report on a 1936 survey on blind education.<sup>18</sup> He noted one teacher's complaints of the 'unduly limited range of reading matter' and the 'grubby and illegible' texts.<sup>19</sup> Ritchie himself commented on 'the use of worn out books' and recommended that Britain should emulate the United States in supplying a greater range and better quality of reading matter'.<sup>20</sup>

The results of a survey on reading practices among blind and partially sighted adults in Britain published in 1991 by the RNIB suggested that 'the vast majority of current buyers or borrowers were satisfied with the provision of Braille and Moon books'.<sup>21</sup> This figure, however, is misleading since the survey also found that only three per cent of visually impaired people in Britain at the time were active Braille readers. When asked what their main sources of information were, the response was that 64 per cent relied on the radio alone. The radio supplemented by television served 63 per cent, while tapes or talking books were important to only 13 per cent of respondents. The Braille book was regarded by only one per cent as important.<sup>22</sup> This implicit argument that blind people no longer consider Braille important is a threat to autonomous intellectual life and damages the cultural interests of the blind reader and the visually impaired community, for whom the education of the young will suffer if the production of raised type publications is allowed to decline with the justification of a lack of wider public interest.

The 'Right to Read' campaign, carried out by the Royal National Institute for the Blind and the 'Right to Read Alliance', begun in 2004, has given detailed evidence of severe shortages in educational publishing. The progress of those visually impaired children now integrated in ordinary state schools is being severely hindered. Blind adults have direct reading access to only a very small part of the literature published in their society. To counter this, proposals are being more clearly formulated to enable blind children to enjoy a reasonable degree of equality of educational opportunity. Research conducted in 2004 established that three million people in the United Kingdom have print reading disabilities, and children in particular were adversely affected on a daily basis. Long delays in publishing and considerably higher costs, due to the inadequacy of government funding were the

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<sup>18</sup> J.M. Ritchie, ed., *The Education of the Blind: a survey* (London: College of Teachers, 1936).

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 247.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 251.

<sup>21</sup> Ian Bruce et al, eds., *Blind and Partially Sighted Adults in Britain: the RNIB Survey* (London: HMSO 1991, Vol. I.), 129.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 142.



principal causes, while the study indicated that the proportion of books available in accessible formats had actually decreased in the preceding five years.<sup>23</sup>

This study presents a critical account of the numerous systems proposed and developed to varying degrees before the Braille system prevailed. Although a number of technological inventions have threatened to displace Braille as the main source of educational and recreational literature, its usefulness has recently been defended. Georgina Kleege, in *Sight Unseen*, points out repeatedly that the Braille book remains the only means for a blind person to read without the need for electronic technology or a mediating voice such as that of the talking book.<sup>24</sup> Reaching a similar conclusion, Pamela Lorimer, who has produced the most detailed study to date on the technical development of tactile reading systems for the blind, maintains that Braille remains an indispensable educational tool, particularly for children with limited access to alternative forms of information technology.<sup>25</sup> As Olga Miller makes clear, learning Braille may be traumatic, a final recognition of blindness, but some children welcome Braille as ‘a relief from their struggle to use an inappropriate sighted medium’.<sup>26</sup> Evidence of the validity of continuing the use of Braille at a time when fewer blind people are learning the system also comes from the Project Libra surveys of public libraries in the UK. These refer to an ‘interesting’ emphasis on Braille, particularly valued for its information storage and retrieval potential, and to a demand for transcription services as well as the extension of active Braille publishing programmes in some public libraries.<sup>27</sup> This enduring value of Braille is further endorsed by Susanna Miller who discusses, from a psychologist’s perspective, the nature of haptic perception, where the blind person’s combination of inputs from touch and movement provide an active reading experience.<sup>28</sup> In the face of arguments that new technologies have rendered the demand for Braille so insignificant that the expense of its teaching, production, and dissemination is unjustifiable, Robert Altick reminds us that for the sighted the experience of reading is unique and no other medium can match the satisfaction derived from the printed page. By preserving ‘the heritage of print’ the reading habit can ‘be made to serve both the happiness of the individual and the strength of society’.<sup>29</sup> This is equally true where the blind reader is concerned.

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<sup>23</sup> ‘Right to Read Alliance’ [Online] Campaign website, 2.

<sup>24</sup> Georgina Kleege, *Sight Unseen* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

<sup>25</sup> Pamela Lorimer, ‘A critical evaluation of the historical development of the tactile modes of reading and an analysis and evaluation of researches carried out in endeavours to make the Braille code easier to read and write’. Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Birmingham, 1996.

<sup>26</sup> Miller, *Supporting Children*, 24.

<sup>27</sup> Craddock, *Project Libra*, 50.

<sup>28</sup> Susanna Millar, *Space and Sense* (Hove: New York: Psychology Press, 2008), Chapter 1.

<sup>29</sup> Altick, *The English Common Reader*, 375.

While the historical evolution of publishing for blind persons has a bearing on a contemporary problem, its conclusions are not presented as a 'lesson' since temporally different circumstances are never identical. Yet, there is a need to examine more closely certain issues of distributive justice that have considerable relevance in the framework of current academic conversations in the fields of disability studies, the history of literacy and the 'new' history of charity.

Two particular historical concerns pertinent to current issues pervade this research. The first is to gain a clearer understanding of reasons for the constant lack of government support in Britain, past and present, in providing publications for the blind community; the second is to contribute to evaluations of the record of British philanthropy in blind education, as reflected in the history of printing in raised type. This is particularly relevant at a time when governments are increasingly promoting charity activity as an alternative to their own assumption of responsibility in social provision.

The story of publishing for the blind reflects changing social attitudes towards disability and also offers insights into the creation of a Victorian literary canon as a response to emerging forms of literature through the selection of what was considered of 'cultural value' and suitable for publication. One aim has been to examine and discuss in context the publications chosen by as many institutions as possible, to create a more balanced view of what was considered the 'best' food for the mind in the light of the implications, identified below, that educators consistently ignored higher educational goals, provided little cultural stimulation and emphasized a utilitarian workshop-based education, which more often than not descended into exploitation.

The records of the institutions and charitable bodies suggest small, but at times significant, differences between English and Scottish approaches. Brief reference is also made to the priorities evident in raised print publishing in France, Germany and the United States by the later decades of the period studied.

Although a Royal Commission Report of 1889 estimated that one half of Britain's blind population could not read, a considerable amount of printed literature had by then been provided through the institutions, visiting societies and the British and Foreign Blind Association. Clearly, not all blind people in Britain were able to draw on such facilities, but it can be argued that a reading community did exist by the end of the century. This research will also attempt to identify mechanisms of control in this area of publishing, to ascertain to what degree these were in place by the close of the Victorian era, and to assess their legacy.

With a revised 'history of charity' beginning to take shape, further empirical clarification on the points above could prove useful in formulating a critique on the education of the blind, one of the most extensive spheres of nineteenth century voluntarist activity. This 'new history of charity', which took shape in the late 1990s, called for investigations into wider aspects of philanthropy, taking into account the dynamics of charity and giving more attention to gender contrasts and to less hierarchical acts of giving.<sup>30</sup> The voluntarist sentiment, however, remains relatively unexamined at a time when, as the authors' introduction to a recent work on charity agencies proclaims, 'Charity is back in business'.<sup>31</sup>

This work is intended to contribute to the field of 'critical disability studies' and the history of the education of the excluded. The polemical pioneering works in Disability Studies are now credited with having served one purpose by raising public awareness as a first step towards legislative change.<sup>32</sup> It is now widely argued that the time has come for disability studies to be more fully accepted as a critical area of social inquiry. Catherine Kudlick asserts that more rigorous academic studies in this emerging research setting can serve to enhance 'our understanding of citizenship, education, family, gender, politics, popular culture, social reform, and war, as well as in the evolution of ideas, values and beliefs'.<sup>33</sup> Undoubtedly, the role of historians in educational studies has been challenged in recent years by the adoption of pluralist approaches.<sup>34</sup>

In the study of the particular issue of the literary culture of those with visual impairments, historical research has a fundamental contribution to make. Furthermore, in the history of the book, the selections of those responsible for publications for the blind in a century when Britain's reading audience multiplied, are also of interest to those engaged in the examination of values in literature, in the formulation of a late Victorian canon, and in the secularization of educational literature in the nineteenth century. The restored hegemony enjoyed by Britain's philanthropists and charity organizations enables them to continue to exert their influence over the education, welfare and publishing materials of the nation's blind

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<sup>30</sup> Colin Jones, 'Some recent trends in the history of charity', in M. Daunton, ed., *Charity, Self-interest and Welfare in the English Past* (London: University College Press 1996), 51-63.

<sup>31</sup> D. Billis and M. Harris, eds., *Voluntary Agencies: challenges of organization and management* (Basingstoke: Macmillan 1996), 5.

<sup>32</sup> P. Longmore and L. Umansky, eds., *The New Disability History: American Perspectives* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 'Editor's Introduction', 2-3.

<sup>33</sup> Catherine Kudlick, 'Disability History: Why we need another "Other"', *American Historical Review*, 108 (3), 2003, 765.

<sup>34</sup> Gary McCulloch, 'Disciplines contributing to education? Educational Studies and the Disciplines', *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 50 (1), 2002, 100-119.

persons - offering an invaluable illustration of the power, be it positive or otherwise, of the legacy of what Frank Prochaska named 'the voluntary impulse'.<sup>35</sup>

## 1.2 Locating this work in the field of disability studies.

In 1982, Henri Jacques Stiker, in his above mentioned *A History of Disability*, wrote that Foucault 'has left a whole continent unexplored: physical disability'.<sup>36</sup> Stiker pointed out there had been too few in-depth studies, and only 'soundings' then existed.<sup>37</sup> In the two decades that followed, disability history attracted contributions from scholars of different disciplines introducing complex and contradictory perspectives. This short section is intended to outline some of their concerns and their possible relevance to this study. By 2003, writing in the *American Historical Review*, Kudlick had delineated this new terrain, and expressed the essential aims of its explorers, suggesting that work already accomplished by disability historians offered an invitation to 'think about disability as a key defining social category on a par with race, class and gender'.<sup>38</sup> Kudlick wrote that 'By examining variations in human behaviour, appearance, functioning and cognitive processing', and more crucially the meanings made of such variations, through new critical conceptualisations, methodologies and approaches the field had emerged from what she called 'the unglamorous backwaters of research', of interest only to professionals in special education and other vocational areas, to the heart of 'a greater project that will reveal disability as crucial for understanding how western cultures determine hierarchies and maintain social order as well as how they define progress'.<sup>39</sup> In her most recent work on nineteenth century literary accounts of the experience of disability, Kudlick refers to a new paradigm of 'Critical Disability History', which presents the disability experience as a minority experience, which can illuminate particular aspects of mainstream history as notions of disability are central to the creation of hierarchies, to changing ideas of beauty and fitness and to society's measurement of its own progress.<sup>40</sup>

The conception of a 'blind community' owes much to Harlan Lane's work on the history of America's deaf people. In his meticulously researched 1984 work, *When the Mind Hears*, Lane recounts the achievements of the pioneers in France and America through the

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<sup>35</sup> Frank Prochaska, *The Voluntary Impulse: philanthropy in Modern Britain* (London: Faber and Faber, 1988).

<sup>36</sup> Stiker, *A History of Disability*, 92.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>38</sup> Catherine Kudlick, 'Disability History: Why We Need Another', 764.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 765.

<sup>40</sup> Catherine Kudlick, 'Guy de Maupassant, Louis May Alcott and youth at risk: lessons from the new paradigm of disability'. *Paedagogica Historica* 45 (1-2) Feb-April 2009: 37.

narrative voice of Laurent Clerc, follower of Sicard, who refers repeatedly to his fellow deaf men and women as 'my people'.<sup>41</sup> Sign language was to be the uniting factor in their collective experience, as they grew into what Lane calls 'a linguistic and cultural minority with a rich and unique heritage'.<sup>42</sup>

Although the blind community has had no unwritten language of its own to bind its members, the common experience of multi-faceted exclusion offers a shared set of experiential reference points on which to found an imagined community. It is not as yet clear, however, if this notion of particular communities separated through impairment has been helpful to the 'disability 'movement'.

While this research did not begin explicitly as a 'disability studies' project, in its course, links opened and developed with scholars unreservedly committed to the Disability Rights movement, and under that influence, the project gradually became more oriented in that direction. This writer does, however, share the reservations of others in the field regarding the negative implications of the 'Dis' prefix in 'Disability Studies', as it encapsulates negative 'medical' ideas. As Simi Linton has pointed out, some disability historians have accepted this and prefer to reassign meaning rather than choose a new name for a body of work which is now seen to include a wide range of themes, revolving around the very wide definition of disability found in the 'Americans with Disabilities Act' of 1990. This encompassed 'physical, sensory and mental impairments, illnesses, congenital and acquired differences thought of as disfigurements or deformities, psychological disabilities: stamina limitations due to disease or its treatment; developmental differences; and visible anomalies such as birthmarks, scarring, and marks of ageing.'<sup>43</sup> Taking this comprehensive list as a demarcation of the boundaries helps to clarify whether a study may legitimately be termed 'disability history', a concern very often expressed by historians in the field regarding their subjects.

There have been calls for greater accuracy and clarity in the terminology of disability in recent Anglo-American analytical philosophy, which examines such concepts as health, normality, disease, discrimination, justice and equality. Questions of social justice in the allocation of resources are raised below in discussing the provision of literature for the blind, and this distributive dilemma is one of the ethical problems raised by the social

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<sup>41</sup> Harlan Lane, *When the Mind Hears: a tale based on fact* (London: Pelican, 1988 edition).

<sup>42</sup> Harlan Lane, *The Mask of Benevolence, Disability and the Deaf Community* (New York: Vintage Books, OUP, 1992), 4.

<sup>43</sup> Simi Linton, *Claiming Disability, Knowledge and Identity* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1998), 31.

philosopher David Wasserman, who has begun to explore salient issues in disability theory, such as ‘the significance of human variations for personal and social identities and for justice in the sharing of resources and the design of the physical and social environment’.<sup>44</sup> Steven Edwards, discussing what it is to be a person and what ‘disability’ means, sees the body a ‘site of narration’ and ‘an anchor for the ascription of personal identities’.<sup>45</sup> Edwards examines the distinctions in terms used by the World Health Organization in its 1980 definitions, wherein ‘impairments’ are said to be ‘any loss or abnormality of psychological, physiological or anatomical structure or function’, while a disability is ‘any restriction or lack (resulting from impairment) of ability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being’, and finds the above usages value-laden and unsatisfactory. Importantly, Edwards identifies ‘obstructions to the pursuance of self-conception’ and there is every reason to regard the absence of adequate provision of information, educational and recreational literature for the blind as such, both in the past and today.<sup>46</sup>

These semantic points and the ethical issues that underpin them are useful reference points for this and similar studies now being undertaken. Longmore and Lauri Umansky, in their 2001 introduction to *The New Disability History* indicate two distinct but overlapping waves of publications in disability history.<sup>47</sup> The first writings in this newly defined area of historical criticism, in the 1980s, were rooted in political science, policy studies and sociology and sought to provide a theoretical base for reform in areas such as education, medicine, public policy and urban planning; the second wave in the 1990s involved the liberal arts, which began to incorporate the study of disability and its representations, extending new approaches in social history to include marginalized groups.<sup>48</sup> This work draws on studies from both of these phases, because representations of blindness have been critical influences in blind persons’ constructions of identity and hence in their relationship to literacy. It is intended as a commentary on the historical processes of difference and exclusion, and a reminder that, while absolute parity of opportunity and enjoyment may never be attained in cultural life, there is a clear moral obligation to remove obstacles to ‘the pursuance of self-conception’, of which restricted access to literature is a fundamental example.

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<sup>44</sup> David Wasserman, ‘Philosophical Issues in the Definition and Social Response to Disability’. In Albrecht, G., et al, eds., *Handbook of Disability Studies* (London, Thousand Oaks, California: Sage 2001),: 219.

<sup>45</sup> Steven D. Edwards, *Disability: definitions, value and identity* (Oxford: Radcliffe, 2005), 123.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 145.

<sup>47</sup> Longmore and Umansky, *The New Disability History: American Perspectives*, 2-3.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.,13.

### 1.3 Theoretical and conceptual points

In disability studies, word choice has been a particularly sensitive matter, while the increasingly emotive use of certain terminology in other fields means that some conceptual clarification is beneficial. The terms in this work whose meanings have been subject to misunderstanding are 'blindness', 'charity', 'literacy', 'exclusion' and 'stigma'.

The words 'blind' and 'blindness' have been problematic for some researchers, since the word 'blind' has for centuries carried associations with stupidity, ignorance, prejudice, neglect and unawareness. Georgina Kleege, blind herself, shows in her auto-ethnographic account that, on the other hand, the term 'blind' has a positive power and resonance and is far preferable to recently derived alternatives such as the robotic designation of 'impaired'.<sup>49</sup> Contemporaneous sources examined do not permit finer distinctions either regarding the cause or the degree of sight deprivation. The absence of such 'standard' measurements from the period in question renders most quantitative exercises on Victorian statistics on 'blindness' invalid. In this study 'blind' is chosen as it carries a certain historical force and was used by blind people themselves without shame or embarrassment, and seems by far preferable to 'impaired' with its primary connotation of damage. 'Blind' is intended in this study simply to include all those needing a tactile system of raised type to read even simple passages.

'Charity' has been a highly contentious term since the publication of Gareth Stedman Jones's *Outcast London* in 1971 showed the self-interested machinations of the philanthropic classes confronted with the prospect of uncontrollable popular unrest.<sup>50</sup> Interpretations of the word have since acquired new shades of meaning, less pejorative than the blunt Marxist usage of the term, in the attempts of Frank Prochaska, Michael Dauntton, Gordon Phillips and others to restore a more palatable image to the 'givers'.<sup>51</sup> Contesting the criticisms of charity as 'a residue of a discredited Victorian liberalism', Prochaska argued that charity was not a rich-poor relationship with the wealthy fostering a subservient class, but was of a more spontaneous local and independent nature. On balance, he claimed, from 'the seemingly inefficient model that typifies voluntary action, the nation has gained innumerable moral and democratic benefits'.<sup>52</sup> In his broad work, however, Prochaska produced little detailed evidence to support this view where disability was concerned, and today's defenders of

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<sup>49</sup> Kleege, *Sight Unseen*, 3.

<sup>50</sup> Gareth Stedman Jones, *Outcast London* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1971).

<sup>51</sup> John Oliphant, 'Empowerment and Debilitation in the Educational Experience of the Blind in Nineteenth Century England and Scotland', *History of Education* 35 (1), January 2006: 47-68.

<sup>52</sup> Prochaska, *The Voluntary Impulse*, 27.

Britain's philanthropic heritage would have to wait for the publication of the admirably detailed work of Gordon Philips for more convincing empirical support for their claims.<sup>53</sup>

It is now widely argued that the nature of charity has changed in that government outsourcing mitigates the harsher, excluding effects for recipients. Nonetheless, greater caution is evident when the terms 'charity' and 'voluntarism' are used. This is also the case among American historians of disability, beginning to show an increasing awareness of the debilitating nature of the philanthropic process. Micro-studies of English charity, such as Peter Shapely's work on Victorian Manchester, confirm that 'charity and status were part of a vital correlation in urban power relationships'.<sup>54</sup> As an illustration of English charity at work, *The Christian*, in an article entitled 'Pity the Poor Blind' reported an event organized for their benefit in London in the winter of 1887 by a local philanthropist, one Mr. Holt:

On Friday afternoon, another company assembled at the Castle, appealing with pathetic power to the sympathies, on other grounds than the vast gathering of unemployed men a couple of days before. To an excellent repast there sat down no fewer than 1200 of the indigent blind, with their guides. Boys and girls could be seen guiding their grey haired father or mother to their seats. The meal was enjoyed in a leisurely manner, organ and hand bells and choir music being all available during that time.<sup>55</sup>

Following the meal, 'tender little talks' were given by such luminaries as Dr. Barnado and Reverend Henry Bright, and the East London Blind Choir sang several solos and choruses. Before leaving, each blind person was given a shilling to pay their guides who were presented by the host with an illustrated 'Message of Life'.<sup>56</sup>

Returning to the present, Francie Ostrower, suggests a distinction between 'philanthropy', positive and enriching as opposed to 'charity', a demeaning acceptance of the means to subsistence, but concludes that American elite philanthropy, often 'superficial and frivolous' remains a sphere for social advancement and the accumulation of prestige, and serves to consolidate a shared social status.<sup>57</sup> Sharon Snyder and David Mitchell adopt a still more critical stance in their work on the cultural locations of disability. Describing charity as a confidence game, in their chapter entitled 'Masquerades of Improvement' they assert that it is 'the grease that turns economic divisions between wealthy and poor into a complementary

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<sup>53</sup> Gordon Phillips, *The Blind in British Society: Charity, State and Community c.1780-1930* (Aldershot: Ashgate 2004).

<sup>54</sup> Peter Shapely, *Charity and Power in Victorian Manchester* (Manchester: Chatham Society, 2000), 4.

<sup>55</sup> *The Christian*, 3 February 1887.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Francie Ostrower, *Why the Wealthy Give: the culture of elite philanthropy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995), 134.



benefit for givers and receivers alike'.<sup>58</sup> The disabled body, in their view, was a foundation on which nineteenth century charity could ground its interventions on the 'needy'.<sup>59</sup> In what they call the 'science of alms', there is no place for enjoyment.<sup>60</sup>

Such historical criticism has come to affect how blind people perceive the charity process today. In an influential paper, Paul Longman attacked 'conspicuous contribution' in the charity telethon pioneered by the veteran comedian Jerry Lewis. For Longman:

on one level of meaning, telethon donation is a collective rite designed to enable Americans to demonstrate to themselves that they still belong to a moral community, that they have not succumbed to materialism, that they are givers who fulfill their obligations to their neighbors. On another, it fortifies class boundaries, providing the otherwise invalidated middle class with 'scraps' of the same status as the big givers, while reinforcing the image of the disabled as helpless and incomplete.<sup>61</sup>

Mitchell and Snyder subsequently described the telethon as a 'contemporary cultural ritual where the economically able garishly donate in public venues to help disabled people and bolster their own renown'.<sup>62</sup>

Occupying a position more towards the middle ground where charity is discussed, Thomas Haskell observes how historians have had a tendency to 'migrate to extremes' on the subject. Rather than embracing mechanistic social control theories, or regarding post 1750 shifts in moral responsibility as a new configuration of class interests reflecting the hegemony of a rising class, Haskell suggests charity is more aptly seen as a process of both deception and self deception, in that the philanthropic class probably believed unquestioningly in its own altruism and the benefits it conferred.<sup>63</sup> With this increasing focus on the charitable perspective as a negative cause in the process of exclusion, an understanding of this variation in ways that the term is employed is important in the reading of the research questions and the documentary evidence produced later in this work.

The word 'literacy' has itself come under similar scrutiny in recent academic discourse. The International Standing Conference on the History of Education held in Umea,

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<sup>58</sup> David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder, *Cultural Locations of Disability* (Chicago: Chicago University Press 2006), 52.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>61</sup> Paul Longmore, 'Conspicuous Contribution and American Cultural Dilemmas: Telethon Rituals of Cleansing and Renewal'. In Mitchell, D. and Snyder, S., eds., *The Body and Physical Difference: Discourses of Disability* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 135.

<sup>62</sup> Mitchell and Snyder, *Cultural Locations*, 41.

<sup>63</sup> Thomas Haskell, 'Capitalism and the Origins of the Humanitarian Sensibility'. *American Historical Review* April 1985. 90 (2), 339-361.

Sweden, in 2006 was devoted to the history of technologies of literacy and their many applications, and numerous definitions of the concept were explored.<sup>64</sup> In most histories of literacy, the approach has been quantitative, based on the calculation of rates, which were in most cases measured by the ability of brides and grooms to sign their names in parish marriage registers. In this work the term 'literacy' is intended as the ability of the blind person to read simple texts in raised type. The evidence examined is from the records of educators and the publications and listings of institutions and societies. The blind person's capacity to write, using one of the various forms ranging from wooden writing frames with strings or wires to mechanical devices, is not central to the theme of this study. Although given little attention below, it could well be a rich terrain for micro-studies in the future, where sources permit.

The highly emotive term 'exclusion', along with its working opposite 'inclusion', has appeared ever more frequently in discourse on disability. To render more intelligible the complex processes involved, Rivaud and Stiker have identified a number of modes of exclusion inscribed in society's power relationships.<sup>65</sup> 'Exclusion through elimination or abandonment' as practised in Sparta and elsewhere in the ancient world, appeared to have been a distant memory until, as Norbert Elias reminds us, the thin veneer of the civilizing process was shattered by the Nazis, while in our own times eugenicist impulses have resurfaced in proposals for genetic screening of the unborn.<sup>66</sup> In 'exclusion through discrimination', a particular group is singled out and put to one side, its rights restricted. This might be said to reflect the long experience of confinement shared by institutionalized disabled people. It is a part of the human condition that we are all targets for unjust treatment but disabled people are indisputably more so. In the 'medical' or 'deficit' model, disability is a 'pathology' and the 'incomplete' disabled person is excluded until corrected or restored, only after having been seen as willing to conform or align and so deserving of 'normality'. Stiker and Rivaud further describe a 'conditional' exclusion where in exchange for work and conformity, for example, a degree of inclusion is offered. This type of progressive exclusion perhaps describes best the status of the post-institutionalized blind person in industrialized western societies at present, where right to access has ostensibly been achieved, but the right to equal cultural opportunities and an identical quality of life remain distant aspirations.

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<sup>64</sup> See the conference proceedings in *Paedagogica Historica*, 'Special Issue: Technologies of the World: Literacies in the History of Education', 44, (1-2), February-April 2008.

<sup>65</sup> Jean Francois Rivaud and Henri-Jacques Stiker, 'Inclusion / Exclusion'. In *Encyclopedia of Disability* Albrecht, G., ed. (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2006), 496-511.

<sup>66</sup> See the series of Norbert Elias's works on 'The Civilizing Process' *State formation and civilization* Translated by Norman Jephcott. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1982.) First published in German in 1936.

Access to literature is an important element in achieving these goals and is thus relevant to discourse on exclusion.

The term 'stigma' has been defined by Lerita Coleman as 'a humanly constructed perception . . . constantly in flux and legitimizing our negative responses to human differences'.<sup>67</sup> With disability as the 'master status', dominating self- image, the disabled person's undesired 'differentness' can hinder his or her development of potential, resulting in a negation of the value of literacy by both providers and blind readers. Coleman points out that much remains to be discovered regarding the relationships between the economic climate, perceptions of scarcity and stigmatization. In this work 'stigma' refers to that special insidious kind of crude, internalized social categorization that devalues people.

In searching for a more accurate word to locate the disabled person in society, the concept of 'liminality', imported by the anthropologist Robert Murphy, has been much referred to recently and seems preferable to the more rigid designations of 'outcast', 'excluded', 'stigmatized'. Murphy, a professor of Anthropology at Columbia University, described the body as 'a set of relationships' as he chronicled the slow onset of his own impairment in *The Body Silent*.<sup>68</sup> Murphy became increasingly aware that disability was 'an amorphous and relativistic term', as he experienced at first hand the effects on his identity of what Goffman called 'the total institution'.<sup>69</sup> In a paper written with colleagues, Murphy suggested that the disabled have an undefined status, being neither ill nor unwell, neither socially active and alive nor socially expunged or removed.<sup>70</sup> The authors, some 25 years after the appearance of Goffman's work on stigma and 'spoiled identity', claimed that their participant-observer research among paraplegic and quadriplegics in New York showed their physically impaired subjects to be in a liminal state, 'caught and fixated in a passage through life that has left them socially ambivalent and ill-defined, condemned to a kind of seclusion no less real than that of the initiate of the puberty rites of many primitive societies'.<sup>71</sup> For Murphy and his colleagues, Goffman's category of the stigmatized is unsatisfactory in that 'it is so inclusive that it loses boundary and specificity of content'.<sup>72</sup> 'Liminal' people are marginal to society, poised to enter, yet still outside it boundaries, and without clear status,

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<sup>67</sup> Lerita M. Coleman, 'Stigma: an enigma demystified' in Davis, L.J. ed., *The Disabilities Studies Reader* (New York, London: Routledge, 1997 edition), 221.

<sup>68</sup> Robert Murphy, *The Body Silent* (New York: Holt, 1978), 99.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>70</sup> Robert Murphy, Jessica Sheer, Yolanda Murphy, and Richard Mack, 'Physical Disability and Social Liminality: A Study in the Rituals of Adversity', *Soc Si Med.* 26 (2), 1988: 235.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

their difference emphasized by their invisibility and by their passivity as recipients of rehabilitating services, and above all charity. The concept of liminality is socially constructed and therefore malleable rather than rooted in and fixated in biology, as in the medical model of disability, that prevailed from the mid-nineteenth to the late twentieth century. In locating the blind person in society, both ‘stigma’ and ‘liminality’ are valuable interpretive tools, and one need not exclude the other.

#### **1.4 Research questions**

The first question framing this study is ‘To what degree have perceptions of blind people shaped views on their educability over time, and affected notions on the value of literacy to them?’ To answer this, it is necessary to identify significant turning points in the way blind people were generally regarded and how these affected educational attitudes and practice, before examining the evidence of changes in the extent and nature of literature provided.

The second question addressed is ‘Who were the most important British pioneers in responding to the challenge of ‘inventing’ literacy for the blind?’ What influenced them in their quest and what was their particular contribution to the project? Here, the examination of the few existing secondary sources must be supplemented by a study of private journals, contemporaneous publications, conference proceedings, diaries and internal records of institutions and associations. Empirical evidence of publication figures for the respective types can help to ascertain their influence at different stages.

The third question pertains to recent debates on the history of philanthropy. ‘Did private charity fail in educating and offering literature to Britain’s blind community?’ The legacy of the principal actors and agencies in the charitable past must be evaluated independently to avoid simplistic blanket judgements. The ‘Battle of the Types’ must also be considered as an example of the effectiveness, or otherwise, of contending individual efforts in resolving the common problem of offering blind people the swiftest and most fruitful path to literacy. In doing so, we must take into account not only the judgements of nineteenth century observers, but also those of researchers and activists on library provision today.

The fourth question is somewhat broader and can only be answered with a higher degree of subjectivity. ‘Do the voluntary and local government initiatives begun in the 1860s represent “a wave of improvement”; when and why did the ‘wave’ begin and end, and what characterised these ventures?’ Did they actually improve the situation of those they were intended to benefit? This requires a detailed examination of the impact, both immediate and enduring, of these separate initiatives on blind people themselves, once again using external

commentaries in journals, newspapers and conference proceedings, government reports, both published and internal institution and association records and the testimonies of witnesses to the Royal Commission, including those 'from below'. The contemporaneous opinions of blind educators and publishers on the responsibility of the State are also relevant to this issue.

The fifth question discussed is whether the revolution in popular literacy created by the democratization of reading in nineteenth century Britain passed by the blind reader? This entails research on the declared aims and claims of the providers of educational and recreational literature. It also calls for an empirical account of what was made available both to the private reader, the pupil within the institution and the blind person visited by the Home Teaching Societies.

## Methods

This is an empirical study in that quantitative evidence in the form of statistics on the teaching of reading, publications lists, sales figures, and library holdings are included. Equal if not greater weight is given to the observations, judgements and recommendations of commentators at the time, and the frequent use of direct quotation reflects the importance attached to the analysis of the use of language as a key to understanding thought. The section below indicates, meanwhile, ways in which the processes of selection and presentation employed in this research reflect the influence of recent discourse on the essential nature of the historian's craft.

With the broadening of educational studies to include a wider range of interpretative disciplines, it is now customary for historians to identify and justify their 'methodology'. To some, this runs counter to a tradition of emphasizing specificity of content and the attainment of a certain elegance in writing, while leaving conceptual underpinnings implicit, for the reader to recognise or discover by pursuing references. Conscious of these tensions, John Lewis Gaddis, indicating his distaste for pedantic 'scientific' explication, produced an analogy with the Pompidou centre in Paris 'which proudly places its escalators, plumbing, wiring and ductwork on the outside of the building, so that they are there for all to see'.<sup>73</sup>

While concerns have been expressed recently that the prevailing tendency is, in Susan Harter's words, 'to put the methodological cart before the conceptual horse' most historians would probably agree that there is value in articulating the ideas that guide them rather than

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<sup>73</sup> J. L. Gaddis, *The Landscape of History: how historians map the past* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), XI.

leaving them implicit and possibly ill defined.<sup>74</sup> Many, however, are reluctant to accept the increasingly rigid parameters imposed by the more pragmatic social sciences. ‘Method’, ‘model’ and ‘theory’ are now loaded terms. In Stephen Schlossman’s view, the first of these words has come to mean for historians, ‘the framing of novel questions that spur identification of untapped or little-explored databases so as to establish new lines of inquiry into the past’, rather than adherence to approved, analytic techniques.<sup>75</sup> This emphasis on the framing of the question owes much to the influence of Hayden White, who proposed that the historian’s questions determine the narrative tactics to be used in the construction of his or her story, and in the arrangement of events into a ‘hierarchy of significance’. The historian must respect the conventional requirements of chronology, plausibility and authenticity, but allow his or her creativity and imagination to come into play in the selection and interpretation processes.<sup>76</sup>

Perhaps as a result of the limited participation of eminent scholarly outsiders in its early phase, historical studies on disability long remained in obscurity. Paul Longmore has noted continuing hostility from some established academics who assert that the disability project ‘lacks rigor, validity and wider intellectual significance’ and that its research is a form of identity politics promoting ‘the parochial political agenda of a narrow interest group’.<sup>77</sup> Such criticisms led Longmore to convene the conference on ‘Disability History and Theory’ held in San Francisco in 2008, which aimed to establish links with other strands of research and to introduce new methodological perspectives to the field.<sup>78</sup>

At this gathering it was clear that in the ‘alpha-male approach’, where one theorist is pitted against another, Michel Foucault emerged in disability history as the most frequent point of reference. Apart from having proposed the notion of an ‘Age of Confinement’ Foucault also advanced some seminal ideas on the processes by which institutions can internalize disciplining processes - in ways that have been recognized in the experience of the excluded in the West.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Susan Harter, ‘The Challenge of Framing a Problem: what is your burning question?’ In M. Conrad and M. Serlin, eds., *Sage Handbook for Research in Education* (London: Sage, 2006), 332-3.

<sup>75</sup> S. Schlossman, ‘Discovering Unheard Voices: explorations in the history of education, childhood and social justice’. In Conrad and Serlin, eds., *Handbook for Research*, 197.

<sup>76</sup> Hayden White, *Metahistory: the historical imagination in nineteenth-century Europe* (Baltimore, London: Johns Hopkins 1973), 7ff.

<sup>77</sup> Longmore and Umansky, *The New Disability History*, 8-9.

<sup>78</sup> Held San Francisco State University, July 31-August 2, 2008.

<sup>79</sup> Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: a history of insanity in the age of reason*. Translated by Richard Howard (New York: Pantheon, 1965), see Chapter 2 on ‘The Great Confinement.’

While Foucault's valuable insights into interpersonal cultural politics both in the institution and beyond have informed this study, it would be misleading to regard this work as a strictly Foucauldian reading of a chapter in Britain's history of the cultural exclusion of disabled people. More accurately, it was originally inspired by Foucault's vision and way of raising issues that cannot be ignored, but the present writer has made concessions to particular empirically founded approaches which Foucault eschewed himself.<sup>80</sup>

Certain distinctions made by Gaddis between the approaches of the social scientist and the historian have been of particular value in framing this study. The former needs to separate independent from dependent variables and breaks the object of study into parts so as to generalize about the past and forecast or influence the future. In contrast, the historian assumes the interdependency of variables while valuing the specification of components, considering the ecological whole, rejecting reductionism and rarely claiming applicability for the findings beyond specific times and places.<sup>81</sup> In the chapters that follow, parallels are drawn between the shortcomings and failures of British publishing for the blind community today and those of the nineteenth century, but nowhere is it suggested that solutions applicable then might be exactly suited for the current situation, although the resonance of past debates can be heard today.

In the increasingly harsh academic struggles to obtain positions, funding, influence and prestige, the historian, to compete with those whose research appears to offer more tangible conclusions, must make adjustments to the scientific paradigm. Pierre Bourdieu places historians in a space where they must respect the rhetoric of what he calls 'scientificity', giving the impression of rigour or profundity, if only to gain the social profits associated with conformity to scientific appearances. While they still place more emphasis on the quality of the insights in their writing, they are obliged to accept the compulsory attributes of this 'scientificity'.<sup>82</sup>

In deference to this notion, the body of work presented below includes quantitative evidence, benefiting in places from the Victorian passion for statistics, particularly in the collection of data by the Royal Commission in its four years of visiting institutions and societies across Europe.<sup>83</sup> Its findings have been particularly useful in giving some empirical

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<sup>80</sup> C. Jones and R. Porter, eds., *Reassessing Foucault: Power, Medicine and the Body* (London: Routledge, 1994), 'Editors' Introduction', 5-9.

<sup>81</sup> Gaddis, *The Landscape of History*, 62-63.

<sup>82</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Homo Academicus: placing historians in academe* (Oxford, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), 29-30.

<sup>83</sup> M.J. Cullen, *The Statistical Movement in Early Victorian Britain: the foundations of empirical research* (Hassocks: Harvester Press, 1975).

substance to discussions on the growth of publishing, the secularization of literature and the curriculum and the quotidian use of the various raised types. Words, however, and the changing use of language by educators and administrators observable in direct quotation, have certainly been accorded more significance. The exceptional detail in the verbatim records of interviews with witnesses, contained in the 'Minutes of Evidence' attached to the Royal Commission's *Report*, affords us the benefits of an early form of oral history. An attempt has been made to draw attention to particularly revealing terms used by the actors in the story, without burdening the narrative with the statistical word analyses of corpus linguistics.

In Norman Denzin's view, we have entered a time of critical conversations 'on democracy, race, gender, class, nation, states, globalization, freedom and enquiry'.<sup>84</sup> The historical researcher, who once sought to discover a stable truth, has the different task of 'interpreting phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them'.<sup>85</sup> As the term 'conversation' suggests, the historian now presents evidence to persuade the reader to shift his or her perspective on an issue broader than the specific event or matter under scrutiny. This task the historian carries out in a manner different to his earlier counterparts, who regarded the reader more as a judge to be won over by the weight of 'solid' evidence to agree with a specific conclusion. This study reflects the trend towards less 'certain' conclusions, moving away from the more adversarial concept of academic discourse reflected in such phrases as 'defending' one's thesis, towards an approach designed to promote interactive discourse on more than one plane.

The dominance of the scientific metaphor of "triangulation", using data from different sources and different methods for corroboration, so often presented as the ultimate strategy to endorse the conclusions of quantitative research, has now been disputed. With the ever more prevalent view that the nature of reality is socially constructed and all enquiry value-laden, Denzin and Lincoln suggest that the crystal is a better guiding metaphor for the qualitative researcher, since crystals grow, change and alter, reflect the external and cast off different colours, patterns and arrays.<sup>86</sup> This has been by far the most useful analogy in guiding this work, and it is the first response offered to the reader who might bemoan the absence of harder conclusions and neater answers to the questions posed in this study.

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<sup>84</sup> Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln, eds., *Strategies of Qualitative Inquiry* (London: Sage, 2nd edition. 2003) Introduction, 3.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.



While there is a need for further case studies of experiences and representations of disabling experiences, disability historians need to engage more meaningfully with scholars in other fields in the quest for more satisfactory interpretive paradigms. To do so, conversations on methodologies are needed. As the German sociologist Norbert Elias once observed:

beyond a certain point in the accumulation of material facts, historiography enters the phase when it ought no longer to be satisfied with the collection of further particulars and with the description of those already assembled, but should be concerned with those problems which facilitate penetration of the underlying regularities by which people in a certain society are bound over and over again to particular patterns of conduct and to very specific functional chains.<sup>87</sup>

As will be indicated below, the frame of reference of this study owes much to Elias's insights, rarely mentioned in disability history. In *Exploring Disability*, Colin Barnes and his co-authors referred briefly to Elias's well known notion of "The Civilizing Process".<sup>88</sup> Stiker and Rivaud introduce Elias's binary of the 'established' and the 'outsider' which has had significant influence in British sociology. In neither case, however, was there further elaboration.<sup>89</sup> Elias's idea of a 'civilizing process' describes the development of a heightened sense of embarrassment, shame and repugnance in a society's public behaviour.

Victorian history has demonstrated that shame and embarrassment were prime factors in motivating those determined to resolve social problems. Oliver MacDonagh's examination of the steps involved in nineteenth century social reform confirmed that public exposure of a situation, such as the abuse of children in the workplace or in prostitution, would eventually produce a consensus that it was 'intolerable'.<sup>90</sup> In Elias's terminology, a 'threshold of repugnance' was crossed.<sup>91</sup> One such shift was reflected in European societies' changing perceptions and treatments of blindness. In *The Court Society*, another early study, Elias showed how royalty set examples in attitude and behaviour to the classes below. The latter in an early phase imitated the class above, to which they aspired to belong.<sup>92</sup> The evolution of the western philanthropic tradition generally reflected this pattern so that the creation through royal patronage of the first institution for the blind in Paris, and the early presence of royalty

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<sup>87</sup> Norbert Elias, *State Formation*, 1992, 288.

<sup>88</sup> Colin Barnes et al, eds., *Exploring Disability* (Cambridge, Oxford: Polity Press, 1999), 64-65.

<sup>89</sup> Rivaud and Stiker, 'Inclusion/Exclusion'.

<sup>90</sup> Oliver Macdonagh, *Early Victorian Government* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1977).

<sup>91</sup> Norbert Elias, *State Formation and Civilization*, Part Two, Section 6: 293ff. for discussion of the concept of thresholds of repugnance, shame and embarrassment.

<sup>92</sup> Norbert Elias, *The Court Society*. (Dublin: University College Press, 2006 edition).

and aristocracy in the subsequent history of blind welfare and education in Britain also lend force to Elias's thesis. In his conceptualising of the 'habitus', the way in which individuals become themselves and engage in practices, Elias offered, like Foucault, insights into the inner disciplining of the personality.<sup>93</sup> It is this inner process that plays such a large part in the cultural self-stereotyping that Robert Scott identified as a critical element in 'the making of blind men'.<sup>94</sup>

Thus, the insights that underpinned this work and guided the present writer were not provided by a single theorist. While Foucault's concepts stirred the original impulse to examine the experience of one excluded community, Elias's work on the 'court society', exploring the dynamics of philanthropy, was equally influential. Bourdieu's identification of patterns of control in cultural production certainly has great relevance in the history of raised type publishing and his observations have considerable relevance to this study. The example of empirical rigour in the work of Gareth Stedman Jones on Victorian London is a constant reminder to the historian of the need for statistical substance, which some qualitative researchers often appear to deny. Numerical evidence is therefore provided wherever possible in discussing publication and reading patterns throughout the work. Yet, while numbers have their value, the extensive use of quotations in this work reflects the critical importance of language. Words are the most precious indicators of the thoughts of our predecessors on, for example, 'difference', 'charity' or the State. They are by nature open to myriad interpretations, but it should be remembered that numbers, in most cases, are no less so.

## 1.6 Sources

Historians of disability have been charged with neglecting empirical consistency and producing inadequate data to support their claims. To rectify this, the widest possible range of primary sources has been consulted in constructing this critical narrative. The history of publishing for the blind in Britain in the nineteenth century is a history of charitable activity. The logical starting point is the records of the teaching and practice of reading of the philanthropic institutions and associations themselves. Olive Checkland, in the introduction to her comprehensive *Philanthropy in Scotland*, indicated the problems encountering researchers seeking primary materials for studies on such bodies. Annual Reports, when available, must be read with an awareness of the publishing body's need to stimulate interest

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<sup>93</sup> See R. van Krieken, 'The organization of the Soul: Elias and Foucault on Discipline and the Self'. In E. Dunning and S. Menell, eds., *Norbert Elias*. (London: Sage Vol.1, 2003), 135-154.

<sup>94</sup> Robert Scott, *The Making of Blind Men* (New York: Russell Sage, 1969).

and generosity, and to reassure patrons of its success.<sup>95</sup> Such mission statements probably overemphasize the religious emphasis to please subscribers, but descriptions of curricular activities and publications can prove of great value to the historian nonetheless.

The first two blind institutions established in Britain, Liverpool (founded in 1791) and Edinburgh (1793) have been the most diligent in retaining their annual reports, minute books, committee reports, record books, legacy listings and visitors' books, but, in common with almost all later foundations, they discarded their bulky texts in raised type, and very little manuscript correspondence remains.<sup>96</sup> This is unfortunate since, as Gary McCulloch reminds us, important characters have been 'lost' or moved away and what is usually left is the dry official account, often written anonymously. Such records, written to form an institution's memory, often justify decisions, inflate successes, or mask inadequacies.<sup>97</sup> Many of these nineteenth century annual reports from Liverpool, Edinburgh and several other establishments, have nevertheless provided useful, concrete information on reading classes and publications used, and the current reorganization of the RNIB's Stockport archive will make a wider range of listings available to researchers in the future.

Fortunately, a considerable amount of other evidence remains, albeit scattered and incomplete, that has helped substantiate the present writer's account of the great endeavour to enable the blind to read and write, whose tensions and debates have spanned two centuries and are still unresolved.

The documentary trail for the history of modern raised type begins in France at the archives of Haüy's Parisian institute and leads on to the museum at the birthplace of Louis Braille at Coupray. Since those sources have been so competently examined by Pierre Henri, Pamela Lorimer<sup>98</sup> and Zina Weygand,<sup>99</sup> this study is more concerned with British approaches to publishing for the blind, and focuses instead on the British pioneers, institutions, associations and educators involved in promoting literacy.

In examining the contributions of Britain's pioneers of publishing, the earlier chapters of this study draw on their published works and private journals and references in the above mentioned types of institutional record to their work. Annual reports and minute books offer

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<sup>95</sup> Olive Checkland, *Philanthropy in Victorian Scotland: Social Welfare and the Voluntary Principle* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1980), 2-3.

<sup>96</sup> See Appendix A for brief descriptions of the most important institutions for the blind built in Britain.

<sup>97</sup> Gary McCulloch, *Documentary Research in Education, History and the Social Sciences* (London, New York: Routledge Falmer, 2004), 43-44.

<sup>98</sup> Lorimer, 'A critical analysis', Chapter 2.

<sup>99</sup> Zina Weygand, *Vivre sans voir: Les aveugles dans la société française, du Moyen Âge au siècle de Louis Braille* (Paris: Creaphis, 2003).

evidence of their influence on the teaching of reading. Reference is made to the books of the pioneering Scot James Gall, and, for the first time, to his handwritten diaries held at the National Library of Scotland. Gall's daily observations offer a window on the daily routines and preoccupations of a Scottish Christian philanthropist, and capture the spirit of public altruism and private competitiveness pervading the world of blind education. John Alston, active as Treasurer of the Glasgow Asylum and inventor of one of the types used by blind people from the 1830s, wrote on his work in the publications of the Glasgow Asylum. In Scotland, Edinburgh journals, such as the *Edinburgh Review* and bodies such as the Royal Society of Arts took an early interest in the development of raised type, and occasional reference is also found in the newspapers.

Amongst the other material originating outside the institutions, the Abbé Charles-Louis Carton left an invaluable record in his report to the Belgian Ministry of the Interior of his visit to Britain in 1837. The Jury Report on publishing for the blind produced for the Great Exhibition in 1851 gives us a balanced account of developments up to that time, which can be read in conjunction with several reports by E.C. Johnson on the state of publishing which appeared from the early 1850s. The growing concern about the waste and duplication in publishing in different raised types is reflected in discussions found in the transactions of The National Association for the Promotion of Social Sciences, the national press and the 1889 report of the Royal Commission, and in the proceedings of conferences held in Britain and Europe from the 1870s.

This study makes reference to previously disregarded criticisms advanced by mid-century commentators on blind education, such as the Belgian Hyppolite van Landeghem and his wife, found in pamphlets and journal or newspaper articles. Later chapters examine ventures that gave an impetus to blind education and publishing in the later part of the nineteenth century.

Worcester College made the first attempt in Britain's to offer a more elevated form of blind education to blind children. Its archives, however, are significantly reduced. As far back as 1938, Mary G. Thomas expressed her frustration in producing her book on the college since the founders had little time or opportunity to write about their work, 'They established no archives. The records they left are for the most part embodied in the rather arid contents of Minute books. No survivors of the earliest days are left to tell the tale'.<sup>100</sup> The school archive still, however, offers annual reports, founders' correspondence, prospectuses

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<sup>100</sup> Mary G. Thomas, *The First Seventy Years: Worcester College for the Blind 1866-1936* (London: National Institute for the Blind, 1938), vii. (hereafter 'Worcester College').

and internal publications such as *The Venture*, of which several copies remain. The Royal Commissioners also left an account of a visit to the school while a valuable reference, recently found in the memoirs of a college servant to blind former students studying at Oxford, is included below.

The story of the British and Foreign Blind Association, previously given only the most perfunctory treatment, is enriched by the availability of the private journal of Thomas Armitage, its co-founder and inspiration. Its early annual reports and internal committee records offer new insights into the first attempt by blind men to assert their own priorities in publishing. The Royal Normal College, founded by Armitage and the American Francis Campbell was the first project to offer a first rate music education to blind children of every social class. Miscellaneous documents, largely related to its administration are held at the London Metropolitan Archives, but the fullest account of the origins, aims and ongoing work of the college is found in Francis Campbell's extended testimony to the Royal Commission, recorded in its Minutes of Evidence. The School Board of London embraced its obligation to educate disabled children under the 1870 Education Act for England and Wales. Committee records and miscellaneous documents, including newspaper clippings and correspondence from the board's short life, held at London's Metropolitan archives, reveal much about this short lived but significant experiment. The Royal Commission's Minutes of Evidence once again offer the verbatim accounts of the protagonists in this venture. These revealing interviews foreshadow the publications of oral historians in the twentieth century, such as the testimonies of twentieth century institutional childhoods collected by Humphries and Gordon.<sup>101</sup> Sally French produced many similar first hand accounts of disabled peoples' experience.<sup>102</sup> Their work reflects the influence of the 'testimonio' school, described by William Tierney which seeks to give voice to the silenced / excluded / marginalized groups still engaged in group or class struggle, shedding the role of the disengaged observer.<sup>103</sup> While the chronological frame of this thesis precludes the use of specifically gathered oral testimony, the Minutes of Evidence published with the Royal Commission Report of 1889 offer verbatim accounts of interviews with a considerable range of those involved with blind education and publishing. Their roles ranged from humble visitors to the blind to the patrician figures of Thomas Armitage and the Bishop of London. The context of their interview

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<sup>101</sup> Steve Humphries and Pamela Gordon, eds., *Out of Sight: Childhood and Disability 1900-1950* (Plymouth: Northcote House, 1992).

<sup>102</sup> Sally French, ed., *An Oral History of the Education of Visually Impaired People: Telling Stories for Inclusive Futures* (Lewiston, NJ, Lampeter, UK: Edwin Mellen Press, 2006).

<sup>103</sup> William G. Tierney, 'Undaunted Courage: Life History and the Post-Modern Challenge'. In Denzin and Lincoln, *Strategies*, 292-318.

settings may have been intimidating to some of the respondents, outnumbered by a seemingly condescending panel of those deemed social ‘superiors’, yet their voices, though lacking the fiery rhetoric of the ‘testimonio’, often express a certain ironic defiance and a willingness to give answers that the commissioners were not always pleased to hear.

The Victorian passion for statistics is nowhere more evident than in the Royal Commission’s appendices where curriculum choices, raised type selection and almost every aspect of institutional life are tabulated. Discussions on the role of the State in education and publishing, recorded in detail in the Minutes of Evidence, are examined for the first time, and offer an intriguing background to the bare recommendations of the Report.

The reports of the conferences on the education and welfare of the blind held in Britain and Europe from the 1870s, of which a good number remain available, are another resource that has been completely disregarded. These gatherings were a forum for the leading figures in Europe to exchange their ideas, and are a useful reflection of the conflicting attitudes then prevailing.

In examining the spread of publication in the closing decades of the nineteenth century, the British and Foreign Blind Association’s internal committee records provide detailed accounts of selections made and books and pamphlets published. Evidence of some local library provision of books for the blind also exists at the London Metropolitan archive. Unfortunately, documents relating to the birth of the Scottish Braille Press, under management less conscientious in the preservation of archive materials, are no longer available to the researcher. This has proved a serious obstacle to the completion of the project as originally intended and has, regrettably, narrowed the scope of enquiry, although Scotland features prominently in the early chapter on pioneers of raised print forms and in the account of the development of home teaching societies.

### **1.7 Ethical issues in research**

Disability researchers are particularly conscious that certain ethical points must be considered. David Bridges has focused on a number of such considerations in his above mentioned collection of essays.<sup>104</sup> One fundamental issue is the possible infringement of human rights in the process of research or publication. Secondly, there is the question of whether publication will cause harm or suffering or endanger others. Here, McCulloch has

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<sup>104</sup> Bridges, *Fiction under Oath*.

included the creation of embarrassment to those discussed as an ethical consideration.<sup>105</sup> Bridges suggests furthermore that the researcher must ask whether any vulnerable individuals or groups of people are exploited, and whether the research requires the manipulation of participants.<sup>106</sup> Consideration should also be given to the circumstances under which data is collected and to the sharing of the fruits of research. Where there is value to the community affected by the enquiry, copies of the published findings should be given to participants by researchers, who often neglect to do so, since they are more concerned with their own profit or professional advantages, or because their interest has shifted to a subsequent project.

In examining histories of exclusion, the eternal issue of the historian's neutrality acquires particular importance. In the 'qualitative revolution' that has transformed the social sciences recently, rarely is reference made to historians who anticipated some of its central concepts. Long before post-modern thinkers made explicit the inseparability of the observer from the observed, scholars had accepted Collingwood's recognition of the inseparability of the past from the historian's present.<sup>107</sup> The wave of post-modern questioning of the nature of objectivity has by now established that there is no definitive objective 'truth' to be found and presented by a completely detached observer. In disability studies, the background of oppression obliges the researcher / author to drop artificial postures of neutrality as Jane Martin and Joyce Goodman suggest is the case in writing on women's history.<sup>108</sup> When the blind community is perceived as a deprived, exploited and marginalized minority, a certain inclination to emotional involvement and advocacy is understandable.

The role of the 'outsider' in disability studies has been questioned forcibly at times. As Bridges notes, disempowered groups may resent the intrusions of 'outsiders', claiming that the latter can neither understand nor represent an experience they have not shared, and regard it as an act of disrespect and intrinsically disempowering for an outsider to presume to articulate their views: 'when others speak for you, you lose'.<sup>109</sup> James Charlton has been the most vocal adherent to this line, insisting that disabled people have had enough of pity and need to take control and responsibility, 'without and in spite of others', making less reference to suffering, lameness and deformities.<sup>110</sup> Kindness and charity from outsiders may 'bind up

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<sup>105</sup> McCulloch, *Documentary Research*, 49.

<sup>106</sup> Bridges, *Fiction under Oath*, 131-2.

<sup>107</sup> See R. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (Clarendon: Oxford University Press, 1946), 231-249.

<sup>108</sup> Jane Martin and Joyce Goodman, *Women and Education 1800-1900* (Basingstoke: MacMillan Palgrave, 2004), 14.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

<sup>110</sup> James I. Charlton, *Nothing about us without us: Disability Oppression and Empowerment* (Berkeley, CA and London: University of California Press, 1998), 129.

the wounds' but underpins their control.<sup>111</sup> Charlton's points have some relevance and implicitly include all 'non-disabled' academics, but there is a strong case for bringing different perspectives to a conversation where emotional capital has been so heavily invested. Since 'insiders' are not themselves free of prejudice and bias in their selection of arguments it is questionable whether they can legitimately exclude the participation of outsiders, as long as the latter respect ethical constraints.<sup>112</sup> If an outsider's research is valid and can enhance the understanding of the researcher, the community and the wider public it may even influence policy positively. A community that excludes outsider research can create a dangerous isolation and become self-referencing in its discourse.<sup>113</sup> Despite a period of employment in the publications department of the Royal National Institute for the Blind, my own position is that of an 'outsider'. I have no recognized 'impairment' and thus no claim to having shared the experience of disability, but I am deeply conscious that all of us are in a condition of being 'temporarily able-bodied'. When I worked beside blind colleagues I was made aware that, within what seemed from the outside a harmonious community living through a shared experience, a deep dense of stratification and a multiplicity of social tensions existed. I began this study as an attempt to understand their origins and to explain them, first of all to myself.

My intention has been, and will remain, to disseminate the findings of this study in the most appropriate academic conference forums and publications that might further promote research and, however indirectly, influence policy adjustment that will remove or mitigate some of the inequalities described in this work. I have elicited suggestions from those involved, regarding further destinations for the work, and I have provided copies of publications that have emerged from this body of findings to institutions and individuals who have helped and participated and will continue to do so. Copies of the final version of this study will, similarly, be offered to contributing participants and organizations that have helped bring it to completion by granting access to archives, supplying information, or making an intellectual contribution.

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>112</sup> Bridges, *Fiction under Oath*, 135-7.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 145.



## Chapter 2 Review of literature

Selections from the relevant existing literature are reviewed below in relation to the research questions underpinning this project. The topics and themes discussed in these works are far ranging since the notable expansion of disability studies since the 1980s has involved its once isolated historians in a number of relevant debates in the social sciences. Certain studies from histories of minorities, in particular from feminist writers, from the 'new history' of charity and from the fast evolving body of research on the history of the book have proved pertinent to the present project. The section begins with a short overview of writing on blindness, tracing the emergence of a critical literature on a subject where anodyne paternalistic publications that praised individuals and institutions unreservedly were once the only source of information.

### 2.1 A short historiography of blindness

In 1936, J.M. Ritchie described the development of blind welfare and education as 'a little known field of social endeavour in the life of the nation'. It is clear that very little scholarly research had been undertaken by then, or indeed until the 1960s, to remedy this shortcoming.<sup>1</sup> Ritchie did comment, in his overview, on the paucity of government provision for blind education, noting that British government grants to educational institutions for book buying and paper amounted to less than one third, per capita, of those in the United States. He observed dispassionately that 'children in schools for the blind have not at their disposal anything like the wide range of reading which is open in schools today to children with sight' and suggested copying the American example of supplying books in decent condition.<sup>2</sup>

Most of this earlier writing, with the exception of the factual work of P.F. Skottowe on *The Law Relating to the Blind*, published in 1933, emanated essentially 'from within'.<sup>3</sup> Such histories were usually published by societies and institutions, who called on individuals so closely involved with their cause that they would not depart from the standard theme of self-congratulation. These efforts often took the form of small books to commemorate an anniversary. A typical example was published by The Association for Promoting the General Welfare of the Blind, likening its expansion to the growth of the mighty oak from a humble

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<sup>1</sup> J. M. Ritchie, *A Survey*, xi.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 252.

<sup>3</sup> P. F. Skottowe, *The Law relating to the Blind*, (London: Butterworth, 1933).

acorn.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, Liverpool's Catholic Blind Asylum and School's sponsored a description of its 'great and noble work'.<sup>5</sup> A detailed consideration of such publications is scarcely necessary since they are disappointingly alike in their approach and content, their titles revealing their simple purpose of describing, with numerous biblical analogies, the individual or organizational overcoming of adversity. The works of Ishbel Ross,<sup>6</sup> June Rose<sup>7</sup> and J. C. Colligan<sup>8</sup> are further examples of such 'histories'.

The more detached approach and greater depth of D.G. Pritchard's *Education and the Handicapped*, which appeared in 1963, marked a shift in tone from earlier works.<sup>9</sup> From his base at Liverpool University, the author made some use of primary sources, predominantly documentation from the Liverpool school, and offered a less flattering account of developments. Pritchard made some interesting, more objective points on the shortcomings of institutional education, but little reference to either the specific issues in blind education or broader educational trends in society. In what might be seen as an interim period between the bland, self-congratulatory works of commemoration and the subsequent, increasingly theoretical and polemical approaches to describing and evaluating the experience of disability, a number of historians produced general, teleological accounts of the development of welfare and education for the disabled. Some of the most thoroughly researched of these were doctoral dissertations which never saw publication, indicating an indifference to their subject matter on the part of mainstream academic publishers that was to prevail until well into the 1980s.

P.H. Butterfield's unpublished 1970 doctoral thesis, 'The Evolution of Special Education, 1893-1939', offered a solid framework for developments and remains a useful reference point, particularly for its detailed chronology of administrative change.<sup>10</sup> Another useful monograph from that phase which traces the steps by which the state redefined its

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<sup>4</sup> Association for Promoting the General Welfare of The Blind, *From the Acorn To the Oak; the story of one hundred years' growth from darkness to light* (London: 1954).

<sup>5</sup> The Catholic Blind Asylum and School, Liverpool, *The century of a great and noble work, 1841-1941* (Liverpool, 1946).

<sup>6</sup> Ishbel Ross, *Journey into Light, the story of the education of the blind* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1951).

<sup>7</sup> J. Rose, *Changing Focus: the development of blind welfare in Britain* (London, 1970).

<sup>8</sup> J. Colligan, *A Long Journey: an account of the Royal National Institute for the Blind* (London: AAWB, 1969).

<sup>9</sup> D.G. Pritchard, *Education and the Handicapped, 1760-1960* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963).

<sup>10</sup> P.H. Butterfield, "The Evolution of Special Education, 1893-1939". Unpublished PhD thesis, University of London, 1970.

responsibilities in law towards the disabled, is a dissertation by C. K. Lysons on the history of social legislation for the blind and deaf in Britain.<sup>11</sup>

In America, Frances Koestler's, *The Unseen Minority* appeared in 1973, offering a detailed overview of blind education and welfare developments in the USA.<sup>12</sup> Perhaps the most useful analytical work from the period was Michael Monbeck's early attempt to identify characteristic attitudes towards blindness.<sup>13</sup> He listed some of the common perceptions of blindness and their effect on blind people, describing the tendency of the sighted to fear, avoid and reject blind people or simply to regard them as miserable and dwelling in a world of constant darkness as helpless, maladjusted, useless, beggars and fools in most cases. Monbeck also pointed out the way in which the blind could be deemed worthy of sympathy and pity and how the blind 'overcomer' is idealized and presented as an example to the young, both blind and sighted. Monbeck introduced psychological insights into the discourse on discrimination, referring to Milton Rokeach's work on the behavioural/cognitive components of attitudes, defined as 'a relatively enduring organization of beliefs around an object or situation'.<sup>14</sup> He also made reference to Allport's notions of classification based on impressions derived from empathetic responses to appearance, emotions and perceptions.<sup>15</sup> Monbeck made a distinction between empathy, where one attends to the feeling of another, and sympathy, where one attends to the suffering of another, but the feelings are one's own.<sup>16</sup> Where the blind are concerned, Monbeck speaks of 'pity' as the 'spontaneous empathetic reaction of a normal, that is non-disabled, person towards one who is "handicapped" which is usually out of proportion to the limits imposed on an individual by blindness'. In this stereotyping of the blind person as weak and dependent there is an over-emphasis on loss and an exaggeration of similarities in the classified group which obscures individuality.

From the 1970s, with a new urge to apply the themes of class struggle, exploitation and exclusion to the experience of the outcast and the disabled in both American and British society, more polemical critiques on disability appeared. The Union of the Physically Impaired against Segregation (UPIAS) was founded in Britain in 1972 and was to have a strong influence in the United States, where the Independent Living Movement, from its

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<sup>11</sup> C.K. Lysons 'The Development of Social Legislation for Blind or Deaf Persons in England, 1834-1939'. Unpublished PhD thesis, Brunel University, 1973.

<sup>12</sup> Frances Koestler, *The Unseen Minority: a social history of blindness in America* (New York: David McKay, 1976).

<sup>13</sup> Michael Monbeck, *The Meaning of Blindness: attitudes towards blindness and blind people* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973).

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 99.

small beginnings in the late 1960s, came to flourish in the later 1970s.<sup>17</sup> As Sharon Snyder and David Mitchell point out, 'The British discourse on disability both preceded and substantially influenced US models'.<sup>18</sup> The UPIAS manifesto, 'Fundamental Principles', created a clear distinction between an 'impairment', a physical reality which was not in itself 'disabling', and 'disability' which was deemed a notion created by society. This basic concept underpinned what was termed 'the social model' of disability. Its binary opposite was the medical model, said to have emerged in the mid 1850s, removing morality and sin as perceived causes of disability and creating a deficit model of incompleteness and pathology. This 'medical' model was demonized for having endorsed the arbitrary categories by which 'experts', on an individual basis, assigned to the impaired the role of victim in a personal tragedy.<sup>19</sup> For adherents to the social model of disability, the confrontation was extended towards all those who, even passively, condoned the separation and exploitation of disabled persons and accepted the inequities they experienced, offering only debilitating sympathy.<sup>20</sup> A founder member of UPIAS; Paul Hunt presented twelve personal accounts of disability in his *Stigma: the Experience of Disability* (1966), which announced an early challenge to 'able-bodied theory' (built on the able / disabled binary) and was to become one of the sustaining texts of the movement.<sup>21</sup>

Through the works of committed writers like Jane Campbell and Michael Oliver, the 'social model' was established as the replacement for the 'medical model' with its pathology based framework, and awareness grew of 'a massive infrastructure of complex, confusing and dependency-creating services' which were failing to serve the real needs of 'passive and disempowered disabled people'.<sup>22</sup> The institution was regarded as the most disadvantageous site of conflict for disabled people, and two writers in particular, Erving Goffman and Michel Foucault, were thought to articulate most effectively the rejection of its 'disabling role' in the life of those confined.

Along with the physical exclusion that confinement entails, the stigmatization of 'disability' was denounced overtly and with considerable emotive force. The main thrust of the disability activists' argument was that impairment itself was not the debilitating factor;

<sup>17</sup> Jane Campbell and Michael Oliver, *Disability Politics: Understanding our past, changing our future* (London, New York: Routledge, 1996), 15.

<sup>18</sup> Mitchell and Snyder, *Cultural Locations of Disability*, 6.

<sup>19</sup> Colin Barnes and Geoff Mercer, *Exploring Disability* (Cambridge: Polity, 1999).

<sup>20</sup> See Gareth Williams, 'Theorizing disability'. In Albrecht, *Handbook of Disability Studies*, 123-144.

<sup>21</sup> Paul Hunt, *Stigma: The Experience of Disability* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1966).

<sup>22</sup> Campbell and Oliver, *Disability Politics*, 44.

this came in the form of the physical, psychological and cultural obstacles presented in society.

The effect of economic change in history on the role of the disabled was first emphasized by Vic Finkelstein, who explained the persistence of utilitarian approaches to blind education in Britain in a schematic, Marxist-inspired materialist history of impairment. Finkelstein described a first phase of economic development, prior to industrialization, in which the disabled were involved in the production process and consequently enjoyed a higher degree of inclusion in society. Their exclusion from employment came in a second phase, with the growth of industrial capitalism and the increasing shift from cottage to factory. For Finkelstein, a third, post-industrial phase will eventually bring liberation through enhanced technology for disabled people, but the results of industrialization thus far have on balance been negative.<sup>23</sup> With their growing exclusion from the capitalist economy, blind people became potentially burdensome, and according to Deborah Stone, the problems posed in the management of community and national resources created a distributive dilemma. To identify just recipients of assistance distinctive categorization was considered imperative, and the negative effects of this process included further stereotyping and stigmatization. Stone's argument was in harmony with Foucauldian notions of classification and the social construction of excluded groups, and was to make *The Disabled State* one of the main reference points of the Disability Movement.<sup>24</sup> Following Stone, Rosemarie Abel subsequently traced how blind people acquired a separate identity for the purpose of social policy provision and made clear that registration had clearly negative consequences for their training and education.<sup>25</sup>

Harlan Lane, writing in the late 1980s on the historical experience of deaf people, proposed a 'minority group' model. In the face of an endemic and deep-seated animus towards disabled people in most cultures of the world, empowerment could best be effected by redefining disability positively as a source of identity instead of shame or inferiority. Lane argued that the long years of exclusion from participation in theory or policy debate required immediate political participation as a corrective measure.<sup>26</sup> On this question of political involvement, Barnes and others expressed the fear that the 'incorporation' of 'Disability

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<sup>23</sup> Vic Finkelstein, *Attitudes and Disabled People* (New York: World Rehabilitation Fund, 1980).

<sup>24</sup> Deborah Stone, *The Disabled State*, (Basingstoke, London: MacMillan, 1984). Chapter I.

<sup>25</sup> A.R. Abel, 'Identification of the Blind 1834-1968: a study of the establishment of the Blind Register and the registration process'. Unpublished PhD thesis, University of London, 1987.

<sup>26</sup> Harlan Lane, 'Academic Debates and Political Advocacy: The US Disability Movement' in Barnes et al, eds., *Disability Studies Today* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2002), 171.

Studies' into the university curriculum and the sphere of academic discourse might have a neutering, de-radicalizing effect on its content. Reminding the reader of one usage of the term 'academic' as 'of theoretical interest only, with no practical application' they concluded 'If this is what we are to become, then there is no doubt in our minds that we have failed those who have brought us here: disabled people and their organisations'.<sup>27</sup>

Among academics critical of the polemical works produced by activists in the field, Brendan Gleeson was perhaps the first to condemn much of their writing on disability for its 'brevity, lack of empirical substantiation, theoretical underdevelopment and reification'.<sup>28</sup>

As a consequence, there have been calls for greater rigour and conceptual analysis in discourse on disability. For instance, Iris Young's claim that people with disabilities were engaged in a continuous battle against the 'five faces of oppression' - exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence - has been met with a critical response that might not have been forthcoming in an earlier phase.<sup>29</sup> Nancy Fraser replied in *The New Left Review*, that Young's model of an oppressed minority with a collective identity was not just a celebration of a collective difference, but also a denial of difference.<sup>30</sup>

In his *Geographies of Disability* (1999), Brendan Gleeson analyses these five faces to see which relate to the experience of the disabled in industrial societies, and argues that, 'disability is, like gender and race a bivalent collectivity possessing all of Young's five elements of oppression'.<sup>31</sup> For Gleeson, cultural empowerment is the most effective means for disabled persons to counter what he terms 'disability oppression', and suggests a new formulation of social justice, an 'enabling justice', centred on a socially codified guarantee that all individuals and collectivities are to have their basic needs fulfilled. These needs are not only material but also regard socio-cultural participation, and the notion of cultural respect is critical to this.<sup>32</sup> Hence, a denial of access to self fulfillment through access to information is in stark opposition to the principle of enablement.

With more theoretical flaws now indicated in the early work of the 'Disability Movement', some of its own leaders have called for a change of focus and a refinement of earlier driving imperatives. Tom Shakespeare in his essay, 'The Social Model of Disability'

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<sup>27</sup> Colin Barnes, Mike Oliver and Len Barton, 'Disability, the Academy and the Inclusive Society' in Barnes et al., *Disability Studies Today*, 257.

<sup>28</sup> Brendan Gleeson, 'Disability Studies: a historical materialist view', *Disability and Society* (1999) 12 (2), 186.

<sup>29</sup> Iris Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, N J: Princeton University Press, 1990).

<sup>30</sup> Nancy Fraser 'A rejoinder to Iris Young' *New Left Review* 273 May/June 1997, 66-70.

<sup>31</sup> Brendan Gleeson, *Geographies of Disability* (London: Routledge 1999).

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 146-7.

acknowledges that the social model was effective politically, instrumentally and psychologically in the beginning in that it helped raise self-esteem and instilled courage for the battles to come, but he now argues that it neglected the individual experience of impairment and assumed oppression, while making too crude a distinction between the medical, 'impairment', and the social, 'disability'. In conclusion, he finds the social model to be a 'blunt instrument for explaining and combating the social exclusion of the disabled' and even 'a barrier to further progress'.<sup>33</sup> Shelley Tremain, similarly, sees the social model's separation of bodily impairment and a disabling society as artificial and now regards the sharp distinction between the two models as a 'chimera'.<sup>34</sup>

The current project in 'critical disability history' is to engage in more nuanced work to enhance understanding of the representations of disability that have shaped contemporary experiences of disability, notions of educability, and current policies and practices. In addition to this new body of work, this study draws on three other still distinct fields of academic enquiry. The connections to some works cited below may not seem direct, but the links are valid and serve in the metaphor of the crystal, where no single interpretative theory suffices to explain the complex interplay of forces involved. The first body of work is from the history of charity, wherein institutions for the blind were long regarded as the pinnacle of Victorian philanthropic success. The second is the history of education, where accounts and theories of 'special' education have been under ever more intense scrutiny. The third is the history of the book and the growth of literacy. Here the spread of publications for blind readers and the selection of texts provided for them tell us much, both about this new audience and about Victorian canons and cultural hierarchies.

## 2.2 Blindness and alterity

The first research question framing this project regards the realization of the blind person's educational potential and how the equating of blindness with a condition of difference or 'otherness' delayed this.

Michel Foucault's *Madness and Civilization* transformed Anglo-Saxon approaches to studying disability, and has generated numerous studies on exclusion. Foucault traced the steps by which entire groups were classified and set apart from society, beginning with the incarceration of the leper in the leprosarium. Once leprosy faded as a social danger, the poor

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<sup>33</sup> Tom Shakespeare, 'The Social Model of Disability' in Davis, *The Disability Studies Reader* 2006, 199-200.

<sup>34</sup> Shelley Tremain, 'On the Government of Disability: Foucault, Power and the Subject of Impairment' in Davis, *The Disability Studies Reader* 2006, 191.

were the next targets, and later, with the arrival of the defining medical ‘expert’ empowered to label and divide, came the turn of the ‘insane’.<sup>35</sup> The institutionalization of disability has been seen as a final stage in that process, and considerable reference has been made to Foucault’s concepts in what have often been blanket condemnations of the confinement of ‘the Other’. His ideas have been applied to studies of the dynamics of power and the mechanisms of imposing an internal discipline on the subject, through the patient or inmate’s formulation of self constraints, resting on his conviction of his or her own incapacity or limitation.<sup>36</sup> Foucault’s focus on the self-disciplining effects of the institution, and on the classification of difference by experts, clearly struck a chord with disability historians, as it had earlier with most American literary critics. The latter, in Camille Paglia’s analogy, took the Frenchman’s path in the unquestioning manner of new born ducklings following the first moving object that they see.<sup>37</sup>

This adoption of the Foucauldian perspective has led to an excessive concentration on confinement and self debilitating processes. In Bredberg’s essay entitled ‘Writing disability history: problems, perspectives and sources’, he points out that ‘Disability history has mistakenly focused on the institution and thus sustained the depersonalised and institutionalised representation of disabled people that its authors undoubtedly deplore’, and calls for more reference to biography, literary scholarship and classical studies.<sup>38</sup>

Indeed, unhappy at the narrow parameters of disability studies, Stiker, in his 1997 edition of *A History of Disability*, expressed his regret that little of interest had been injected into the debate since the first edition in 1982. With the spotlight relentlessly focused on Foucault, earlier American theorists have not received much attention in the new wave of critical disability studies. Erving Goffman’s *Asylum*, published in 1961, described the characteristics of the ‘total institution’ and its ‘processes of mortification’ which deprived the individual of any degree of command over his world, sublimated his or her wishes to the interests of the establishment, and induced unsustainable levels of stress.<sup>39</sup> Thomas Cutsforth, writing on the plight of the blind in American society in the 1930s, anticipated many of Goffman’s points in his condemnation of the institution, lamenting that the blind man, well

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<sup>35</sup> Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, Chapter 2.

<sup>36</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, (New York: Random House, 1995 edition), Part Two: Section 2 ‘The Gentle Way in Punishment’.

<sup>37</sup> See transcript of her speech at M.I.T. ‘Crisis in the American Universities’ 19 September 1991. [Online] Available at <http://gos.sbc.edu/p/paglia.html>. Last consulted: 7 November 2010.

<sup>38</sup> E. Bredberg, ‘Writing Disability History: problems, perspectives and sources’, *Disability and Society* 14 (2), 189-201: 142.

<sup>39</sup> Erving Goffman *Asylums: essays on the situation of mental patients and other inmates* (New York: Anchor, 1961), 3-43.



into the twentieth century remained, along with the penitentiary convict, engaged in medieval handicrafts; and alone in 'keeping up the fight against steel and steam.'<sup>40</sup> Cutsforth, however, has found no place in the recent historiography of institutionalism. Robert Scott's *The Making of Blind Men* was one of the earliest books to describe the 'spoiling' of the blind person's social identity. His work reflected the influence of Goffman's anti-institutional stance by stressing the debilitating effect of confinement, and contending that there was nothing inherently weak in the blind man. Using Goffman's terminology, Scott described blindness as a 'stigma' that created 'a series of moral imputations about character and personality' and branded its bearers as inferior physically, psychologically, morally and emotionally.<sup>41</sup>

It was Goffman who had pointed the way to Scott, and other explorers of the concept of stigmatization, in his *Stigma: Notes on the Management of a Spoiled Identity* (1963). There, he described how an assigned mark becomes linked to an attitude that negatively views its bearer. This leads inevitably to negative self perception and vulnerability when the object's awareness of discrimination sets in, making him or her feel that he or she has no positive qualities at all, intelligence included.<sup>42</sup>

The legacy of stigmatizing attitudes formed and expressed in earlier times has opened up a new strand in the history of perceptions of otherness and a new variation of scholarly studies on the representations of blindness that both create and reinforce stigma. The present study indicates that, in the case of the ordinary blind person, stigmatization has been a potent historical factor and has had a profound effect on conceptions of educability, both on the part of the educator and the subject. This has directly affected ideas on the necessity and value of literacy where blind people are concerned. Such stigmatization of the 'burdensome, mendicant blind' clearly shaped attitudes in Victorian Britain, as was made very clear in the conclusion of the Royal Commission's *Report* in 1889 that the state should finally play a part in their education, so as to 'dry up a minor stream which must ultimately swell to a great torrent of pauperism'.<sup>43</sup>

Whether blind people have been perceived as an alien parasitic presence, an undeservedly stigmatized and excluded minority, or an ambiguous presence in a state of liminality, they have been placed in an imagined social realm of 'otherness' in which their

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<sup>40</sup> Thomas Cutsforth, *The Blind in School and Society* (New York: Appleton, 1933), 64; see the same author's article 'Personality Crippling through Physical Disability' *Journal of Social Issues* 4 (4), 1948, 62-67.

<sup>41</sup> Scott, *The Making of Blind Men*, 24.

<sup>42</sup> Erving Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall), 1963.

<sup>43</sup> RCBD, *Report*, Para. 7.

cultural needs as individuals have been denied, ignored, misinterpreted or overlooked. Confirmation of that 'otherness' is found in the visual arts. Mosche Barasch's examination of paintings demonstrated the 'demonization' of the blind in early Christian thought, where the condition was equated with darkness, ignorance and spiritual laziness.<sup>44</sup> Nicholas Mirzoeff examined later French painting to establish how shifts in perceptions of blindness have evolved from the time when, in the late eighteenth century, the blind were seen as 'pre-civilised' beings who required the assistance of the state to render them human'.<sup>45</sup> More recently, the work of Rosemarie Garland Thomson on contemporary photography continues to enrich our understanding of current perceptions of the disabled person as the 'other', and its relevance extends beyond the boundaries of this study.<sup>46</sup>

The early providers of education to blind people spoke of them as 'unfortunate beings', and the idea that they were weaker, dependent and needing to be consoled and rescued long persisted. This enduring perception must be recognized as an underlying factor in the history of literary provision.

### **2.3 On the Enlightenment and educability**

The French Enlightenment is generally regarded as a highly significant moment in the history of blindness. Among critical scholars of disability, differing perspectives on its legacy have emerged. In a positive reading, Diderot's assertion that the 'common blind person' was not inherently inferior, either intellectually or spiritually, opened a new era in their education, and stimulated a quest to provide them with a means to read. Some, however, attribute to Enlightenment rationalism the introduction of processes of classification and the beginning of the incarceration of blind people in institutions, both negative factors in the longer term. Certainly, the original impulse, which came from late eighteenth century Paris, to emphasize education with a literary component over training is a necessary reference point for this study, although not the centre of its focus.

Robert Heller's article on the education of the blind in the Enlightenment, which appeared in 1979, reflected an essentially positive view of the rationality it brought to social

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<sup>44</sup> Moshe Barasch, *Blindness: The History of a Mental Image in Western Thought* (New York, London: Routledge, 2001), 94-97.

<sup>45</sup> Nicholas Mirzoeff, 'Blindness and Art' in Davis, *Disability Studies Reader*, 2006, 389.

<sup>46</sup> Rosemarie Garland Thomson, 'Seeing the Disabled: Visual Rhetorics of Disability in Popular Photography' in Longmore and Umanski, *The New Disability History: American Perspectives*, 335-374. See the same author's *Extraordinary Bodies: figuring physical disability in American culture and literature* (New York, Chichester: Columbia University Press, 1997).

problems.<sup>47</sup> He identified two treatises of particular significance. The first was Diderot's famous 'Letter on Blindness' which appeared in France in 1749.<sup>48</sup> The second was written by the blind Scots poet and essayist Thomas Blacklock.<sup>49</sup> Heller saw these essays as marking a new era in the treatment of the blind when ancient prejudices and stereotypes were dispelled, and an irresistible cycle of improvement began. A detailed, more objective account of the events in Paris that led to the foundation of Valentin Haüy's Institution des Jeunes Aveugles in 1784 became available with the French publication in 2003 of Zina Weygand's history of blindness in French society. Weygand describes Haüy's inspiring encounter with the blind pianist Maria van Paradis, his tenure as Director of the Institute and his fate thereafter.<sup>50</sup> While Haüy remained as Director at his institute, Paris was the centre for the publication of a wide range of works. But, after his fall from grace early in the nineteenth century the initiative passed to Britain, and British historians have taken up the account.

## 2.4 On British pioneers

As the nineteenth century progressed, numerous systems were introduced for the purpose of enabling the blind to read and Britain became the centre for this competitive wave of innovation. By mid-century over twenty variants of raised type existed and Braille had few advocates on the British side of the Channel.

For those seeking to reconstruct the narrative of the development of raised and embossed type in Europe the only available secondary sources were, for long, the bare factual descriptions of the technological innovations in outline histories such as Wagg's 1932 *Chronological Survey*.<sup>51</sup> Henri's hagiographical study of Louis Braille offered a narrative with little critical comment.<sup>52</sup> William Moon's autobiography was primarily concerned with trumpeting his own achievements.<sup>53</sup>

Through the work of Pamela Lorimer, we now know many more details of the systems of the British pioneers who responded to the challenge of imparting literacy to the

<sup>47</sup> Robert Heller, 'Educating the Blind in the Age of Enlightenment: growing points of a social service'. *Medical History*, October 1979, 23 (4), 392- 403.

<sup>48</sup> Denis Diderot, *Lettres sur les aveugles a l'usage de ceux qui voient* Published in French in 1749, translated as *An Essay on Blindness: In a Letter to a Person of Distinction* (London: R. Dymott, 1773).

<sup>49</sup> Thomas Blacklock, 'Blindness' In *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Edinburgh: Balfour, 2nd. edition, 1778), 1188ff.

<sup>50</sup> Zina Weygand, *Vivre sans voir*, 317-320.

<sup>51</sup> Henry J. Wagg, *A Chronological Survey of Work for the Blind* (London: Pitman , 1932).

<sup>52</sup> Pierre Henri, *La Vie et L'oeuvre de Louis Braille: Inventeur de l'Alphabet des Aveugles* (Paris: Presse Universitaires de France, 1952).

<sup>53</sup> William Moon, *Light for the Blind: a history of the origin and success of Moon's system of reading for the blind* (London: Longman, 1875 edition).

blind.<sup>54</sup> Lorimer's work remains the main reference point for the detailed comparison of technical innovation, but there is much more evidence from primary sources to consider on notions of literacy and the complex application of innovation to benefit the blind reader. The present work sets out to explore more deeply the ways in which their approaches were shaped by religion, utility, and notions of a higher culture.

The diaries of James Gall offer vivid descriptions of the first British attempt to introduce raised type, at Edinburgh in the 1830s, which met with little enthusiasm from either the administration or the pupils themselves. It could be seen as significant that these efforts were made in Scotland, where Scots Calvinist philanthropists felt earliest what John Feather has described as 'the power of the printed word to effect the moral improvement of the working classes'.<sup>55</sup>

While printing remained in private hands in Britain, the question arises as to whether selfish rivalries produced wasteful duplication in the absence of the guiding hand of the state or whether, as Phillips and Prochaska in his work on 'the voluntary impulse' suggest, the apparent chaos of philanthropic publishing encouraged innovation and choice.

The extensive reports of E.C. Johnson from the 1850s, the records of the British and Foreign Blind Association, the detailed observations of the Royal Commission findings published in 1889 and the papers contributed to the numerous conferences held in the last three decades of the nineteenth century offer evidence of contemporary concerns and judgements, which is examined in Chapter 5.

## **2.5 On charity and the blind**

One of the central arguments of this work is that the stigmatizing effects of charity have had a negative effect in the blind person's construction of identity and this is in significant part attributable to the tradition of voluntarist control of education and publishing for the blind in Britain. With the increased current interest at present in harnessing the energy and resources of philanthropy to education and welfare projects to facilitate withdrawal on the part of the State, historical accounts of the reputed achievements of charity require closer examination.

Distinct shifts have taken place in assessments of the success of philanthropy in British history, particularly in the Victorian years. The comfortable consensus that enlightened individuals emerged from an increasingly compassionate middle class to resolve every manifestation of social suffering, was long fed by tales of worthy Evangelical crusades.

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<sup>54</sup> Lorimer, 'A critical evaluation'.

<sup>55</sup> John Feather, *A History of British Publishing* (London: Routledge, 1988), 129.

Kathleen Heasman, in *Evangelicals in Action* (1962), claimed that three-quarters of voluntary charitable organizations in the latter half of the century could be regarded as 'Evangelical in character and control'.<sup>56</sup> Ian Bradley wrote shortly afterwards that Evangelicals 'taught their countrymen the principle of generous giving to charity and provided a large and voluntary labour force of middle class ladies'.<sup>57</sup> The question of women's status in organisations and the exact nature of their work were left unexamined. The appearance of Gareth Stedman Jones's *Outcast London* in 1971 showed philanthropy, and particularly the work of the Charity Organisation Society, in an altogether less favourable light. The latter organisation's moralising and its parsimonious treatment of the unemployed suggested that charity was a controlling device to be used in class confrontation and repression. Jones's subsequent work showed how philanthropic activity increased whenever threats to social stability were perceived, reinforcing the idea of charity as an implement of social control.<sup>58</sup> This notion of social control was to become a dominant concept, among British social historians. John Hurt began to portray the history of education, in which charity featured prominently, as the site of barely disguised class struggle.<sup>59</sup> In his later venture into writing on disability, *Outside the Mainstream* (1998), Hurt focused less on class polarity.<sup>60</sup>

The 1998 publication of Frank Prochaska's *The Voluntary Impulse*, provided the impetus for a revival of more positive historical judgements on charity.<sup>61</sup> Prochaska described a surge in voluntary activity that transformed Victorian society, assigning a fashionably important role to women, as he had done in his earlier study of gender and philanthropy in nineteenth century England.<sup>62</sup> The revival of interest and belief in loosely defined 'Victorian values' in the 1980s shaped a receptive climate for a historical approach that elevated the role of charity and diminished the necessity for state intervention if it could be proved that robust local individual effort had proved sufficient. American historians also felt more comfortable with this emphasis, and works such as Schlossberg's *The Silent Revolution and the Making of Victorian England* dusted off the early arguments presenting Evangelicals as the drivers of

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<sup>56</sup> Kathleen Heasman, *Evangelicals in Action* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1962), 13.

<sup>57</sup> Ian Bradley, *The Call to Seriousness* (London: Cape, 1976), 123.

<sup>58</sup> Gareth Stedman Jones, *Outcast London*. See also his *Languages of Class: Studies in Working Class History, 1832-1982* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 1983.

<sup>59</sup> John Hurt, *Elementary Schooling and the Working Classes, 1860-1918* (London: Routledge, Kegan and Paul, 1979).

<sup>60</sup> John Hurt, *Outside the Mainstream: a history of special education* (London: Batsford, 1988).

<sup>61</sup> Prochaska, *The Voluntary Impulse*.

<sup>62</sup> Frank Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1980).

individualistic social reform.<sup>63</sup> The State's reluctance to participate more actively in guaranteeing an equitable distribution of resources in providing reading materials for the blind is discussed in the chapters below and may have some bearing on further historical re-evaluations of nineteenth and twentieth century philanthropy in British culture, and implications for future policy making.

Case studies of the Victorian blind institutions and organizations such as the visiting societies have much to contribute to the 'new history of charity', which grew from the Neale Colloquium held at London University in 1993. There, Colin Jones expressed a shared sense among the participants that while 'grand narrative' approaches were now obsolete and 'social control theories' too simplistic, there was a danger of historians 'drowning' in particularistic micro-studies.<sup>64</sup> Jones stressed the need for more flexible models to explain the dynamics of the charitable interface, suggesting a more Foucauldian approach to studying the subtle, shifting dynamics of knowledge, expertise and power.<sup>65</sup> Such interpretative frameworks have already been adopted by historians of education, and new methodologies have been introduced, including those underpinning recent oral histories.

The institutional setting for educating the blind clearly shaped the uses of literacy. Their early publications such as Annual Reports and internally held records, such as Minute and Visitors' Books were not used by commissioned writers of institutional histories before Pritchard consulted those of the Liverpool School in producing his *Education and the Handicapped* in 1963.<sup>66</sup> In Britain, the building of urban institutions proceeded at a remarkable pace once the early examples of the Liverpool School (1791) and the Edinburgh Asylum (1793) had been established. The British institution was undoubtedly conceived in a far more utilitarian spirit than that of Paris. At Liverpool, little or no attention was given to teaching reading for several decades.<sup>67</sup> It was only in the late 1820s that James Gall began his battle to provide religious reading material in raised type at the Edinburgh school. Religion was deemed the only suitable literary material for the 'unfortunate' pupil-inmates. This was perhaps to be expected since Egil Johansson has demonstrated the Christian roots of western mass literacy; in eighteenth century Sweden it was mandatory for every citizen to show the ability to read the Bible and failure to do so would mean exclusion from Holy Communion and denial of the right to marry. Religion was for centuries regarded as a matter for 'the

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<sup>63</sup> Herbert Schlossberg, *The Silent Revolution and the Making of Victorian England* (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2000).

<sup>64</sup> Jones, *Some Recent Trends*, 52.

<sup>65</sup> Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*. Chapter 2.

<sup>66</sup> Pritchard, *Education and the Handicapped*.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

voice, ear, heart and memory' where common folk were concerned.<sup>68</sup> The evidence examined in this study demonstrates the shift towards providing religious consolation in the form of the printed word in educating the blind pupils, and indicates how strong the emphasis on religious texts remained as education and publishing services expanded.

The publication of Gordon Phillips's detailed history, one of the first dedicated exclusively to the evolution of blind welfare and education in Britain, went against the prevailing tendency, in that it represented a revival of the pre-Foucauldian humanitarian reading of institutional efforts. Phillips, alone among recent scholars working on disability history, maintains that the legacy of the blind institutions has been evaluated superficially and that it is mistaken to condemn them uniformly as they showed far greater openness and flexibility than they have been given credit for. Thus, his argument runs, their continued survival proves their strength and their enduring value to society.<sup>69</sup>

In sharp contrast, since the rebirth of advocacy in the early 1970s it has become the new orthodoxy to view the voluntary organizations and institutions as 'a web of confusing and alienating bodies, creating dependency and passivity'.<sup>70</sup> Historians have begun to find documentation of ruthless treatment of blind people within the institutions.<sup>71</sup> In Anne Borsay's book on British policies towards the disabled since 1750, she expressed the widely held view that these have created an almost uninterrupted history of exclusion' wherein 'Blind and deaf institutions depressed the expectations of all their pupils irrespective of their social background'.<sup>72</sup> Borsay, convinced that divisions of labour, class and gender were the products of modernity and capitalism, holds that the institutions that these developments spawned, adopted divisive practices that have accentuated gender and class differences among disabled youths and, in the longer term, perpetuated the poverty of working-class pupils.<sup>73</sup> The work of Felicity Armstrong proposes a less schematic approach to disability history. Her studies on the 'evolution and nature of special education' have gained attention both for her suggestion that the rhetoric of charity can mislead and for the doubt she casts on the sincerity of the 'voluntary impulse', with its claims of a heightened humanitarian awareness. Humanitarian discourse, Armstrong argues, was often employed 'to usher in and

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<sup>68</sup> Egil Johannson, 'Literacy Campaigns in Sweden', *Interchange* 19 (3-4), 135-162, 137-40.

<sup>69</sup> Phillips, *The Blind*.

<sup>70</sup> Campbell and Oliver, *Disability Politics*, 44.

<sup>71</sup> For detailed reference to incidents of violence and examples of exploitation and repression, see John Oliphant, *The Early Education of the Blind in Britain c.1790-1900* (Lewiston, N.Y., Lampeter, UK, Edwin Mellen Press, 2007), 157-159.

<sup>72</sup> Anne Borsay, *Disability and Social Policy in Britain since 1750: a History of exclusion* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 97.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 207.

embellish policies of removal and confinement as part and parcel of the special education project'.<sup>74</sup> This debate seems likely to be extended as further case studies appear on disability education in its numerous forms. The previously mentioned oral histories collected by Humphries and Gordon and Sally French are examples of case studies from the twentieth century with authentic, fallible narrators whose accounts can show the changing perceptions of the educability of the blind person, both child and adult, and thus reveal from the periphery aspects of British educational culture's utilitarian nature and enduring sense of hierarchy.

The Victorian critics of blind institutions are given more attention in this work than heretofore. The observations on the cultural impoverishment of Britain's blind citizens found in the work of John Bird, Hyppolite van Landeghem and his wife, E.C Johnson and B.G. Johns are examined to identify more clearly the unexpectedly wide range of contemporaneous attitudes to voluntarism and institutionalization.

The fact that charitable organizations retained control of printing with no government subsidies or other involvement has been exemplified, by Prochaska as an indication of the diversity, energy and creativity of voluntarism. The evidence of confusion, duplication and waste that resulted from this uncoordinated private initiative, described by contemporaries as 'The Battle of the Types', is studied through primary sources to determine whether the institutions entrusted by their communities to educate blind people were as exploitative, parochial and utilitarian as their critics suggested. This is intended to bring new evidence to the wider debate on the merits of philanthropy outlined in the secondary sources mentioned.

## 2.6 'Improvement'

Chapter 6 of this work examines certain initiatives that emerged in the last third of the nineteenth century which reflected the ameliorative ethos driving some of the leading figures in blind education and publishing. Their endeavours affected the higher education of blind students, the extension of publishing, music training, the integration of blind children in board schools, the establishment of a network of conferences on blindness, and the attempt to involve the State more directly in both schooling and the funding of publications.

The insistence of charity institutions on retaining control of blind persons' institutional and cultural experience may be viewed as a crucial element in the creation and maintenance of what disability activists would later term 'a disability industry'.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Felicity Armstrong, "The Historical Development of Special Education: Humanitarian Rationality or 'Wild Profusion of Entangled Events'?" *History of Education*, 31 (5), 2002: 437-56, 444-5.

<sup>75</sup> Campbell and Oliver, *Disability Politics*, 44-45.



Alternatively, this convoluted tale of how publishing for the blind came to develop could just as easily be read as an example of what Felicity Armstrong, using Foucault's memorable description, calls 'a wild profusion of entangled events'.<sup>76</sup>

The optimistic view of the improving potential of the charitable institution is exemplified in Gordon Phillips's work, which rests on the premise that the durability of the schools and workshops is proof of society's respect for their ability to respond to change over two centuries. A more critical response was expressed in the present author's 2007 work on the institutional experience of blind people in Britain, which emphasizes the prolonged neglect of the need for cultural stimulation, which was sacrificed in the pursuit of developing self sufficiency in the workshop. The extensive evidence of the Royal Commission is examined in considerable detail below to see if that particular criticism with regard to publishing and the teaching of reading is valid.

The founding of Worcester College in 1866, to provide 'a higher culture for the blind', has been referred to in certain general histories as a turning point in the education of people with disabilities, yet no critical examination of the work of the college has been attempted. Mary G. Thomas in her account published in 1938, and later centenary histories of the school also, offer celebratory descriptions and proclaim the achievements of the former pupils at the ancient universities, but the college records offer much more to discuss.<sup>77</sup> The documentation on its foundation that remains, its early annual reports and internal correspondence and its curriculum and publications reveal the extent of faith in the model of English education for the elite, the sanctity of the classical curriculum and the value of athleticism which drove the quest to provide 'a higher education for the blind'.

While an exhaustive international history of publishing for the blind remains to be written, there is sufficient evidence from the period of achievements in France, Germany and the United States, where government was involved in publishing from the outset, to suggest that earlier, more active participation from the British state might have created a healthier pattern for subsequent growth by the end of the nineteenth century.

In this history, Thomas Rhodes Armitage's British and Foreign Blind Association, founded in 1868, may be regarded as a more significant advance than the venture at Worcester, given that it was the foundation for today's Royal National Institute for the Blind. In Armitage's case, there is a considerable amount of material available, some unpublished, which offers a more complete portrait of the man and his work than is given by Mary G.

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<sup>76</sup> Felicity Armstrong, *The Historical Development of Special Education*, 437.

<sup>77</sup> Mary G. Thomas, *Worcester College*.

Thomas.<sup>78</sup> Armitage's proselytizing began to have an effect by the start of the 1870s. He dedicated himself increasingly to issues of blind education and welfare, and by his death in 1890, his efforts had left a remarkable imprint. Although Armitage might today be considered elitist and excessive in his commitment to the doctrine of self-help, his work in promoting literacy for the blind through the British and Foreign Blind Association has ensured his place in the cultural history of the nation. Armitage was a leading figure on the Royal Commission on the Blind, Deaf and Dumb and Others. This sat from 1885 and its far reaching report of 1889 provides a unique insight into the condition of the blind not only in Britain but in Europe and North America also. Armitage's writings illustrate the difficulties faced by blind people, even when privileged, in asserting greater control over their own culture.<sup>79</sup>

Another venture that helped in galvanizing blind education was the Royal Normal College at Norwood. Inspired by the blind American Francis Campbell, this was intended to be the first centre to offer a first rate musical education to the blind. Contemporary sources, such as the Royal Commission *Report* and the internal records of the school, currently held at the London Metropolitan Archive, offer fuller insights into the work of the college and the attitudes of its founder and teachers towards the musical education and employment of the blind.

The school board 'revolution' that followed the 1870 Act is a subject that has attracted a vast body of researchers.<sup>80</sup> Brian Simon wrote, 'The School Boards were directly elected *ad hoc* bodies that controlled all local schools except church schools'.<sup>81</sup> Like many educational historians, Simon saw the Board Schools as 'peoples' schools', whose introduction of higher grades to which all pupils might aspire, represented 'a rejection of the concept of different forms and levels of education for different classes'.<sup>82</sup> The Act placed a responsibility on local education authorities to include blind and deaf and dumb children in ordinary schools, and in cities where this responsibility was acknowledged and acted upon, the boards were a further factor to consider in discussing the notion of late nineteenth century progress in disability education. Gordon Phillips implies that the board schools had little impact in terms of educational improvement, 'the gains of common schooling were seen to lie more in the development of character and discipline than in intellectual attainments'. A

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<sup>78</sup> Mary G. Thomas, *The Royal National Institute for the Blind 1868-1956* (Brighton; Brighton Herald 1957).

<sup>79</sup> RCBD, *Report*.

<sup>80</sup> An extensive bibliography of publications on the work of the school boards, including many regional microstudies, compiled by the History of Education Society may be found at <http://dll.ex.ac.uk/hoebibliography/index.php> (Last consulted 04/03/2010).

<sup>81</sup> Brian Simon *Education and the Labour Movement 1870-1920* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1974), 147.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

detailed examination of the archives suggests that, at least in Glasgow and London, there is reason to think otherwise.

Historians of disability have largely ignored two other factors contributing to change in the closing decades of the nineteenth century. The first is the rapid development of the international conference as a format to exchange ideas and forge links between educators and institutions. This work introduces discussion from the proceedings of these gatherings which have not been considered in their own right as a feature in the evolution of modern education and welfare provision.

The second is the Royal Commission on the Blind, Deaf and Dumb and Others of the United Kingdom, which is usually mentioned merely as a prelude to discussion on the State role in disability history. While Anne Borsay and others have made reference to the ‘Preliminary Remarks’ of its *Report*, the wealth of material contained not only in the concise expression of attitudes in the recommendations, but in the accounts of visits to blind institutions in the *Appendix* and the verbatim records in the *Minutes of Evidence* of interviews with witnesses, from every rank of society, connected to the education and welfare of the disabled was largely neglected prior to the present study.

## **2.7 The democratization of literature and the blind reader**

Chapter 7 addresses the question of whether the great democratization of literature, first made evident by Richard Altick and Jonathan Rose, passed by the blind reader. Their work, and subsequent related research on what was read by the sighted, provides a framework for discussion of the content of literature published for the blind and its availability both within and beyond the walls of the institutions. The records of publishing associations, institutions, visiting societies and libraries provide material for discussion. Since the State chose to remain distant from publishing ventures for the blind, developments in that field may be seen as a product of philanthropic action. The present debate in Britain and beyond regarding the respective roles to be played in the future by state and charity in publishing in alternative formats makes this historical experience relevant.<sup>83</sup> The urgency of the question is brought into sharp focus by the “Right to Read” campaign, begun in 2003, which indicates that Britain’s visually disadvantaged reading public has been less well served by its essentially private library services than its counterparts in France, Germany or the US, where

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<sup>83</sup> Miller et al, *International Models of Provision*, 3-5.

government has traditionally played a far greater part in the publication and distribution of reading materials.

Where the history of blind peoples' literacy is concerned, the voluntarist record in education and publishing indicates both the positive and negative aspects of an absent state. For the institutions, a certain amount of data, examined in Chapter 7, is available to test Phillips's assertion that voluntarism had on balance effected improvement through reform by the end of the nineteenth century. He has argued that through earlier admission, better training and regular examination and higher expenditure on books and equipment, improved literacy was reflected in higher levels of intellectual attainment among children in institutions. We shall never know if this improvement might also have been maintained in an integrated system.

While we await an exhaustive international history of publishing for the blind, there is sufficient evidence from primary sources of achievements in nations where government was involved in publishing from the outset, to suggest that more active early participation from the State in Britain might, by the end of the nineteenth century, have created a healthier pattern for subsequent growth.

## Chapter 3 Changing perceptions of blindness in European society and the invention of literacy for blind people

### 3.1 Ways of seeing disability

This short chapter indicates a critical phase in the perception and treatment of disability, when the educational potential of blind persons was made evident to a wider circle and responses to this discovery took shape, beginning with the opening of the first school for the blind in Europe. As was mentioned earlier, the narrative of this development in France has been described most competently by Zina Weygand and Pamela Lorimer offers a highly detailed account of subsequent technological innovations, but a brief reference to the treatment of blind people in history and to what changed in eighteenth century Paris is an essential counterpoint to the British experience described in the chapters below.

The collection of essays edited by Gary Albrecht in the first volume of the *Encyclopedia of Disability* focused on disability in the ancient world and emphasized its numerous forms of exclusion.<sup>1</sup> One of the most interesting perspectives on the representation of disability, which is of more immediate relevance, is found in Mary Klages's chapter on 'The Semiotics of Disability' in her work, *Woeful Afflictions*, which appeared in 1999.<sup>2</sup> This has had a profound impact on subsequent explorations, complementing the studies of Rosemarie Garland Thomson on how visual rhetoric influences the way modern America imagines disability and disabled people.<sup>3</sup> In tracing the protracted historical shifts, Klages found that for the Greeks blindness was often compensated by gifts of prophecy or favours from the gods, whereas in the Bible blindness represented the most grievous affliction, useful in analogies on God's light and as an opportunity for the performance of miracles. In the Middle Ages, Klages suggests, blindness was still seen as punishment but also as a site for pity, charity and amusement. Evidence of the latter can be found in an account offered by a French writer of an event in medieval Paris where four blind men, dressed up in suits of armour and wielding staves, were shut up with a very large pig in the lists at the Hotel Armagnac, the animal being the prize of the blind man impaling it. They struck each other

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<sup>1</sup> G. Albrecht, ed., *Encyclopedia of Disability*, (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2006) Volume 1, Chapter 1.

<sup>2</sup> Mary Klages, *Woeful Afflictions: Disability and Sentimentality in Victorian America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 1999).

<sup>3</sup> Rosemarie Garland Thomson, 'Seeing the Disabled: Visual Rhetorics of Disability in Popular Photography' in Longmore. and Umanski., *The New Disability History: American Perspectives*, 335-74.

with 'huge blows', to the great amusement of the crowd, and the reviewer commented 'Natural human feeling seems scarcely to have been invented'.<sup>4</sup>

It was a similar public humiliation of blind people as a source of amusement in the same city centuries later which is said to have shocked and inspired Valentin Haüy. At St. Ovid's Fair, he witnessed blind men in ridiculous costumes wearing huge cardboard spectacles as they engaged in a parody of reading before a mirthful crowd. Haüy, as the story goes, resolved in that moment to enable blind people to read in reality. Mary Klages's point is that the idea of disability, 'the body exotic' could be pitiable and even amusing and the late nineteenth century freak shows carried this over into the modern period. But more relevant to the current 'reading' of disability is what she calls the 'sentimental semiotic system', rooted in moral philosophy's emphasis on emotional empathy, which makes the disabled body a natural sign interpreted as suffering and misery.<sup>5</sup> Blind people in this process, children in particular, have been objectified as recipients of charity and associated with dependence. This process underpinned the notion that confinement offered protection and security to the weak. On his first visit to the Paris institute for the blind, Samuel Howe, the doyen of American blind education, saw its children being continually petted and caressed.

In her examination of the annual reports of the Perkins Institute at Boston, under Howe from the 1830s, Klages identified an attempt to move discourse on blindness away the rhetoric of charity and benevolence to that of market economics, which might create a less dependent individual.<sup>6</sup> By 1849, however, in Klages's reading, Howe was resigned to the fact that blind students would forever be seen as objects of charity rather than becoming recognized as competent, self-sufficient adults.<sup>7</sup>

As David Snyder points out with regard to attitudes towards disability, 'one epoch's beliefs continue to inform the practices of succeeding generations'.<sup>8</sup> The findings of this study suggest strongly that the insidious power of charity, masked by the rhetoric of benevolence, has perpetuated debilitating stereotypes of disability which, in the case of the blind reader, have blunted aspirations, withering the sense of cultural entitlement and even the desire to press for a full enjoyment of 'the right to read'.

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<sup>4</sup> Anonymous, *National Review*, X, (XIX), (London: Chapman and Hall, January 1860), 77.

<sup>5</sup> Klages, *Woeful Afflictions*, 10-14.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

<sup>8</sup> David Snyder. 'Foreword' to Stiker, *A History*, viii.

Standard histories of blindness have begun with the earliest endeavours to provide a system whereby the blind person could engage in the act of reading. Chevigny and Braveman mention that in 1517 Francisco Lucas of Saragoza raised letters carved on thin wooden tablets. In 1550 Cardano in Parma produced another system while Rampazetto in Rome also cut letters in wood to be read by touch. Harsdorffer in his *Deliciae mathematicae* described a way of teaching blind people to write with a stylus on wax covered tablets.<sup>9</sup> There is no evidence, however, that links these attempts to later developments in raised type, nor to any drive to extend literacy and education. We do know that French educators esteemed Nicholas Saunderson, (1682-1739), the blind mathematical genius and holder of Newton's Chair of Physics at Cambridge University, who invented a peg board with groups of cells of nine holes each. His bust features in an illustration of an early Parisian essay on blind education and he is known to have served as an inspiration to those in the following century who strove to invent literacy for the sightless.<sup>10</sup>

Contemporary historians now differ on the relevance of the philosophical investigations of the period. Simon Hayhoe stresses the importance of the 'Molyneux Problem' in stimulating intellectual interest among European thinkers in the consciousness of the blind person.<sup>11</sup> Mary Klages instead dismisses this early discourse as irrelevant 'armchair speculation'.<sup>12</sup> William Molyneux of Trinity College Dublin, in 1668, on learning of cases where the removal of cataracts had restored vision began a correspondence with Locke. The two discussed the ability of a person blind from birth to recognize and name distinctive geometric forms on regaining sight. Bishop Berkeley disagreed with Locke, arguing that what one saw with the eye was merely the inference, not the essence, of a thing and the 'Molyneux Problem', stirred interest among later philosophers engaged in theories of sense perception, including Descartes and Voltaire.<sup>13</sup> For a time, the cognitive capacities of those who regained sight after cataract surgery were closely observed. In all probability, however, such interest was sporadic, and the debate too rhetorical and abstract to link to the development of any practical methods of imparting literacy until the 1780s.

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<sup>9</sup> Hector Chevigny and Sydel Braveman, *The Adjustment of the Blind* (New Haven: Yale University Press 1950), 105-7.

<sup>10</sup> See Appendix I.

<sup>11</sup> Simon Hayhoe, *God, Money and Politics: English attitudes to Blindness and Touch, from the Enlightenment to Integration* (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing 2008), 21.

<sup>12</sup> Klages, *Woeful Afflictions*, 14.

<sup>13</sup> Michel Morgan, *Molyneux's Question: Vision, Touch and the Philosophy of Perception* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

Beyond stimulating a broader interest in blindness and speculation on the nature of perception, the earlier philosophical arguments and the experiments of physicians and oculists probably had little direct effect. William Paulson went so far as to suggest that the early *philosophes* were not interested in blindness per se, but in undermining the doctrine of innate ideas.<sup>14</sup> It was not until the latter years of the French Enlightenment, specifically in the wake of the writing of Denis Diderot, that blindness became sufficiently demystified for the idea to gain acceptance that the ‘common’ blind people were not intellectually and spiritually inferior. With proven strength of memory and capacity for abstract thought, their right to share in the benefits of literacy then became clear and a wave of interest in helping them to share in the fruits of enlightenment arose in late eighteenth century Paris.

### 3.2 Paris

Outside a small circle of philosophers, the debate over Molyneux’s problem may have been of an inaccessible nature but it did indicate that the problem of blindness merited more discussion and the blind person more respect, Diderot set out to meet blind individuals, introducing human observation into his own enquiry. As a translator of English, he had also read Saunderson’s *The Elements of Algebra*, published with an autobiographical ‘Preface’ and was clearly impressed by the ingenious use made of marked tablets and rulers in calculations. Saunderson became, through Diderot, one of the inspirations for French efforts to raise the aspirations of the blind.

The historian of medicine, Robert Heller, as stated earlier, believed Diderot’s *Lettre sur les Aveugles a l’usage de ceux qui voient*, published in France in 1749, should be regarded as one of the ‘growing points’ of a modern social service, for its advancement of the idea that the common blind man or woman was capable of an independent intellectual existence.<sup>15</sup> Influence is never easy to evaluate in the history of ideas, but it is certain that the last three decades of the eighteenth century saw an intensification of efforts to enable blind people to share in the broader cultural benefits brought by literacy.

In Paris the bridge was crossed between the more abstract realm of philosophical enquiry and the future development of education for the common blind person in the meeting between the blind pianist Maria Teresia von Paradis and Valentin Haüy, and it was there that the universal system for teaching the blind to read and write was born.

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<sup>14</sup> William R. Paulson, *Enlightenment, Romanticism and the Blind in France* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1987), 16.

<sup>15</sup> Robert Heller, *Educating the Blind*, 392-3.



Valentin Haüy (1745-1822) was born in Picardy, but attended university in Paris. A passionate linguist, he had helped businessmen with their foreign correspondence, and began to specialize in deciphering old manuscripts. Working both in French and foreign languages, he became interested in languages as codes. It is said that Haüy had long sought a means to include the blind in the world of the word, before the opportunity arose to gain royal patronage. Several versions exist of the experience that Haüy underwent on that aforementioned visit to the Café des Aveugles in 1771 during St. Ovid's Fair which was to drive him in pursuing his cause. The consensus is that it was the spectacle of twelve blind men from the Quinze Vingts institution dressed up in ugly gowns and long pointed hats with masks, scraping on violins and a cello that drove him across his own threshold of repugnance.<sup>16</sup> Frances Koestler recounts how his indignation on seeing those blind men so grotesquely costumed, turned instantly to determination to create a universal language for the blind.<sup>17</sup> Haüy's interest in disability and its effects on learning was not, however, born of this episode. He had worked at the Abbe l'Epeé's school for the deaf and dumb, which opened in 1860, where he gave practical help in teaching the manual alphabet and in developing speech capacities and Stiker emphasizes the connection between the two pioneers in that their objective was to provide entry to the common cultural and social heritage of their fellow citizens in that 'They sought to educate those afflicted with radical incapacity and classified in a kind of sub-human category'.<sup>18</sup> The ensuing developments in France suggest that Haüy's was a rather different notion of literacy to that which was to prevail among early British educators of the blind.

Maria Teresia von Paradis, born in Austria, blind from the age of two, received the finest musical education and became a protégé of the Empress Maria Teresa, who was impressed with a performance that she gave at the age of eleven. The blind child learned several languages, history and geography from her tutors, and Wolfgang von Kempellen, renowned for his mechanical inventions, taught her to read and created for her a small writing device which allowed her to print letters to her many correspondents. This provides a further example of the role of private tutors in promoting literacy in the eighteenth century.<sup>19</sup> On her travels as a successful performer she encountered Johann Ludwig Weissenberg of Mannheim in 1783, who offered her his writing machine, relief maps, playing cards and calculating

<sup>16</sup> Haüy, 1800, quoted in Lorimer, 'A critical analysis', 3.

<sup>17</sup> Frances Koestler, *The Unseen Minority*, 397.

<sup>18</sup> Stiker, *A History of Disability*, 106-107.

<sup>19</sup> Anne-Marie Chartier, 'Cultural perspective on literacy teaching and methods for young readers'. In *Paedagogica Historica*. 44 (1and 2) February-April 2008,14-15.

tables. The following year, von Paradis played before Marie Antoinette at Versailles, a performance that opened the salons of Paris to her. An article appeared in *Journal de Paris* and this led to a visit from the intrepid Haüy; a meeting with significant consequences.

Miss von Paradis showed Haüy both de Kempellen's press and Weissenberg's maps. For Zina Weygand, it was not only the technological key to offering literacy to all the blind that she passed on to Haüy, but the living proof that a capable blind person, given appropriate education, could find fulfillment in a career and play a complete role in society. Up to then, these efforts to impart literacy to experience of a 'higher culture' had been confined to the elite, and Weissenberg had indeed refused to condone publications on his work.<sup>20</sup>

Another name should be included in the record of this turning point on the road to literacy for the blind; a M. Fournier, in Paris in 1783, 'cut punches and struck matrices in which type were cast and printed from'.<sup>21</sup> The latter procedure was funded by M. Rouillé de l'Etrang, Treasurer of the Philanthropic Society in Paris, which was to feature so prominently in the establishment of the Institution Royale des Jeunes Aveugles shortly afterwards. This suggests that Haüy was not a lone crusader beating at the door of reluctant benefactors.

At his institute, Haüy set up a paper press for embossing, using quite large, well separated italic characters. Despite the difficulties posed by the turbulence of revolution and its aftermath, it was Frenchmen who first pointed to the development of literacy as the way forward, recognizing a new noetic terrain for the blind person. The Parisian vision of an opening the world of learning and music to the blind of all social classes, owed much to Haüy, and represented a notion of literacy for cultural engagement, that was only embraced much later, and even then within a narrow social spectrum, across the Channel in Britain.

Not all historians have been so generous in their appraisal of Haüy's legacy, however. Mary Klages points out that it was he who first associated blindness with dependence and asylum care.<sup>22</sup> This charge is partly contradicted by the existence of the Quinze-Vingts, founded by Louis IX in Paris. This royal foundation for the 'fifteen score', or 300, offered board and lodging for a basic fee, but the residents were not confined and were free to go begging in the daytime. Haüy's inmates were allowed to marry, in contrast to British institutions, and 14 did so during his time as Director.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Weygand, *Vivre sans Voir*, 317.

<sup>21</sup> R.H. Blair, 'On a Uniform System of Printing for the Blind' in National Association for the Promotion of Social Sciences, *Transactions 1868* (London: TNAPSS, 1869), 410.

<sup>22</sup> Klages, *Woeful Afflictions*, 29.

<sup>23</sup> Stiker, *A History of Disability*, 107.

On closer examination, the Paris Institute's approach may have been tempered at times by utilitarian considerations, particularly in the aftermath of the revolution, and under the direction of Dr. Sebastien de Guillié from 1816 to 1821, but it remained an inspiration to other nations throughout the nineteenth century. The illustrated frontispiece of de Guillié's essay on the instruction of the blind suggested that he would carry the torch passed on by Haüy. In the drawing, one sees a blind young man reading while a young woman writes on a frame. They are surrounded by Corinthian columns, harps, and texts, and a figure of Saunderson on a pedestal, suggesting that they have now entered the higher realms of culture in the Arnoldian sense of acquiring familiarity with the best that has been thought and written. A Latin inscription, "Fillii vestri antem beati oculi, quianunc vident", welcomes them to the world of the literate.<sup>24</sup> The Institute under de Guillié, however, experienced a less progressive phase during which Charles Barbier's offer to share his system with the pupils was summarily rejected. The resignation of de Guillié was followed by the appointment in 1821 of Alexandre René Pignier, described enthusiastically by Weygand as the institute's 'second founder'.<sup>25</sup> Pignier was to remain in that position until 1840.<sup>26</sup> Religion and music returned to the heart of his curriculum. Pignier received Charles Barbier in 1823 and was convinced that his *écriture nocturne* would be of great value to the pupils. At the time, Louis Braille was 14 years old.<sup>27</sup> Barbier's interest was to develop a means of sending short messages on the battlefield without torches or lanterns betraying positions to the enemy. Although his system of punched coded messages was conceived for military use, Barbier had a deep interest in exotic languages, and in 1824 submitted a paper to the Academy of Sciences entitled 'Essai du noctographie chinoise et persane'. It was his method that Louis Braille, who had entered the institution as a ten year old child in 1819, was to perfect into the system that bears his name.<sup>28</sup> Henri offers technical details of Barbier's system, which consisted of a grid made up of 36 rectangles, each representing one of the phonetic sounds into which he divided the French language. A frame Barbier had devised also made writing possible for the more able students.<sup>29</sup> In 1823 the Academie des Sciences praised Barbier's writing system for its ability to 'speak to the fingers', and he was understandably displeased

<sup>24</sup> See Appendix B. Sebastien De Guillié, *Essay on the Instruction and Amusement of the Blind* (London Sampson Low, Marston, reprint of an anonymous translation privately printed for Richard Phillips in 1819), Frontispiece.

<sup>25</sup> Weygand, *Vivre sans Voir*, 317-20 explains the circumstances.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 322.

<sup>27</sup> Henri, *La Vie*, 9-10.

<sup>28</sup> Weygand, *Vivre sans Voir*, 337-38.

<sup>29</sup> Henri, *La Vie*, 44ff.

when the adolescent Louis Braille suggested certain improvements. Conscious that the world may owe a greater debt to Barbier than has been acknowledged, Pamela Lorimer makes a detailed technical comparison of the two systems. Her conclusion was that, although Barbier created an interesting innovation, he was, being sighted, less aware of certain flaws. In Barbier's system, punctuation was omitted and no spaces were left between words. More of a code maker than a linguist, as Lorimer points out, Barbier's system did not allow for a flexible and imaginative use of language, and made translation well nigh impossible. Louis Braille, through to the 1830s experimented continually with his abstract system of dots and had also made the transcription of music notation possible. In 1837 the first printed book in Braille appeared, and samples of the Lord's Prayer were sent to Philadelphia, the Scottish institutions and every institution on mainland Europe.

In a well balanced and supported assessment of the individual contributions made by Haüy, Barbier and Braille, Lorimer credits the first for his belief in the educability of the blind, for opening the first school for their education, for discovering a versatile means of tactile print, and for pioneering the printing of embossed material. Although sighted and unaware of tactile difficulties, Barbier's innovation was to use points, rather than follow the Roman alphabet as others had done and were to continue to do afterwards. Braille owed the concept of an abstract or arbitrary system to Barbier, but his adjustments to the size of the cells and his use of alphabetically correct spelling instead of phonetic sounds can justify the term 'invention' rather than 'modification'.<sup>30</sup>

When Pierre Armand Dufau became director in 1840, he turned to other emerging methods from Edinburgh and Philadelphia for over a decade before the Paris institute definitively adopted Braille in 1854. But before the Paris conference of 1878 voted to promote Braille as a universal system, and the U.S. resistance was overcome in 1917, bitter rivalries were to emerge among proponents of contending systems. Britain experienced 'The Battle of the Types' while North America had its own 'War of the Dots', as rival systems were promoted by their inventors, whose notions of the purpose of literacy for the blind were often quite different to Haüy's.

In their writing on the development of ideas, historians have often waxed lyrical on the virtue of French thought. Julius Siegel, for example, suggested stark contrasts with a stubborn and pragmatic neighbour:

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<sup>30</sup> Lorimer, 'A critical evaluation', 27.

In France, during the Enlightenment, *l'esprit philosophique* precipitated a complex of intellectual activities which illuminated the whole second half of the century: this spirit elicited new concepts and theories relating to the problems of language and its transmission, new epistemological speculations about those unfortunate enough to be deprived of their senses, namely the deaf and the blind. In England, on the contrary, religious zealotry, political conservatism, a stereotyped social philosophy, and a basically utilitarian methodology of education inhibited the creative and speculative thinking that might have occurred there.<sup>31</sup>

Recent research has shown that where the education of the blind was concerned, French innovators were far from united in their mission, and there was little evidence of enlightened camaraderie. As Chevigny observed, 'Schools and other institutions devoted to elevating the blind from their earliest days developed a curious psychology. Each soon isolated itself from the others and became secretive about its methodology'.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, Samuel Howe had remarked after his fact finding trip to Paris, 'There is a ridiculous attempt at mystery – an effort at show and parade- which injures the establishment in the minds of men and sense'.<sup>33</sup>

In the chapter that follows, an examination of Britain's responses in educating the blind tests the substance of Siegel's general observation.

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<sup>31</sup> Julius P. Siegel, 'The Enlightenment and the Evolution of a Language of Signs in France and England' in *Language and the History of Thought*, Streuver, N., ed., (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 1995), 91-110.

<sup>32</sup> Chevigny, *The Adjustment*, 110.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

in England deserve to be taken as a model for the establishments to be formed in other countries, and 'their origin, as well as their management, do much to honour the country'.<sup>108</sup> British cities appeared to share Carton's enthusiasm and the blind institution gained a place in the social imagination where it symbolized the highest of Christian aspirations.

Some voices of dissent can be found, nonetheless. Reverend B.G. Johns, writing in the *Edinburgh Review* in 1854, spoke of the blind as an 'alien nation' within Britain, numbering perhaps 30,000. Concerned at their apparent cultural isolation, Johns pleaded for support in the efforts to make them literate. For the illiterate blind child, he wrote, 'Bodily pleasures become his main thought; he becomes selfish, silent, reserved, nervous, timid, opinionated and discontented.'; the literate blind child by contrast 'reads his chapter in St. John or *Robinson Crusoe*; he plays chess or dominoes, works a sum in Long Division, or writes a letter home to his mother which she can read with her eyes and he with his fingers'.<sup>109</sup>

The absence of literacy was seen at the heart of the problem by others too. E.C. Johnson identified the lack of 'food for the mind' as a critical factor in the debilitation of the blind. In 1860, addressing his plea to the Editor of *The Times*, he wrote:

Blind men of all ages and from all walks of life are shut out from the ordinary pursuits and excitements of daily life. Their industry is crippled by competition with the seeing; their literature is limited from the very nature of tangible typography and by the paucity of books, while their ordinary tone of thought is fettered by the unconquerable feeling of dependence which besets them at every turn and drives them back to the sad consciousness of their affliction whenever they attempt to go it alone.<sup>110</sup>

Other aspects of institutional education were also becoming subject to criticism. Considerable resources had been made available, emotional investment had been high, yet there was a growing awareness that all was not as subscribers to institutions within communities had hoped.

The earliest and perhaps most influential critic of blind education as it had evolved was John Bird, a Member of the Royal College of Surgeons, who in his essay on 'The Present Neglected State of the Blind' condemned the 'exile' institutions as 'mischievous' in

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<sup>108</sup> Carton, *The Establishments*, 38.

<sup>109</sup> Later published as B.G. Johns, *Blind People, Their Works and Ways* (London: John Murray, 1867).

<sup>110</sup> E. C. Johnson, *The Blind of London* London: 1860

alternatives derived, but there is no record of its use in any English school, with the possible exception of Worcester College (for Ancient Greek, Mathematics and Music), until 1872.

Lorimer claims to have made a chance discovery of the first known tactile means of communication in Britain. John Casson, blind himself, patented a 'panogram' in 1813, which he described as 'a method of teaching the Blind by means of Tangible Characters to write or read languages, Arithmetic, Music, etc'. This device was a mahogany box containing 300 small identical cubes. The six surfaces of each one could be turned to four different positions, enabling the representation of 24 letters.<sup>5</sup> Only one example of the panogram has ever appeared, but its existence suggests that the need to create a tangible reading and writing system in Britain was felt earlier than previously thought.

Another attempt indicating the motivation and ingenuity applied to this challenge was the use of a knotted string alphabet believed to be of Mayan inspiration, at the Edinburgh Asylum. Seven large knots representing A, E, I, M, Q, U and Y were made in a length of string while the other letters were represented by a small single knot at a certain distance from a larger knot.<sup>6</sup> The Gospel of St. Mark was 'written' using this method, but the effect of the discovery was probably only to emphasize the need for a print system. This search began in earnest when Alexander Hay came into possession of a book printed by de Guillié in Paris in 1820 in large Roman letters, which were believed to aid the blind who had lost their sight after learning to read, by enabling them to recognize familiar shapes. Another advantage of the Roman system was that it was considered easier for the sighted person to learn and thus share in the act of reading. Hay, however, did not care for the bulky Roman form and devised his own set of 'arbitrary' letters; the latter term is used in contradistinction to the term 'Roman' in the sense that they bore no resemblance to the alphabet of the sighted. An example of his code was sent to the Society for the Encouragement of the Arts in Edinburgh for their approval. The society members were intrigued and, in 1832, announced a competition with a gold medal and 20 sovereigns to be awarded to the winner. The aim was 'To investigate what form and size of letters and characters, and what number of these should be adopted, with a view to constructing a general alphabet for the blind in Great Britain and Ireland; and secondly, the best and cheapest method of printing such letters or characters in relief, so as to render them most easily and accurately distinguishable by the touch'. There were 21 entries, 14 of which were from Edinburgh and one from America. The arbiter, Reverend William Taylor from York praised the 'zeal and diversified industry' of the

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<sup>5</sup> Lorimer, 'A critical evaluation', Chapter 3.

<sup>6</sup> *The Edinburgh Advertiser*, 15 June 1827 reports a demonstration of the device.

entrants.<sup>7</sup> In 1832, on first examination, the committee indicated a preference for the arbitrary system, but the medal, 'For the best communication on a Method of Printing for the Use of the Blind' was not awarded until 1837. In the intervening years, the work of James Gall at the Edinburgh Asylum, using a Roman system, inclined the judges towards that form since the blind person depended on teachers, parents and friends to help them in their endeavours to read.<sup>8</sup> Gall's own system did not win; the committee remarked unfavourably on its lack of capitals and the difficulty found by readers in keeping their fingers on the page. In the end, the prize was awarded to a Dr. Fry of Bristol, whose simple Roman form appealed to the sighted Reverend Taylor.<sup>9</sup> There was little recognition of the value of offering a higher degree of autonomy to the reader which a faster and less bulky system, as Braille was already able to do. Some years later, the Jury of the Great Exhibition of 1851, with the advantage of hindsight, was able to point out that Fry had been awarded the medal for 'inventing' a system that had been widely used in Philadelphia since 1833, illustrating the lack of international communication between innovating societies and institutions in the field. Contrary to the wishes of the organizers, Fry's was never to become the single prevailing form, and the competition simply encouraged yet more diversity, as individuals strove to attain the prestige awaiting the inventor of a standard system.

The two most significant versions of the Roman type in the wake of the competition were to be developed in Scotland and the work of James Gall in Edinburgh and John Alston in Glasgow will be discussed in Section 4.2 below.

Another arbitrary system was that created by Thomas Lucas, a shorthand teacher who opened his own school in Bristol in 1830 at the age of 66, after his system had been rebuffed by others. Lucas claimed it could be mastered in three months and Pritchard maintains that 'Lucas played a brief but effective part in the production of literature for the blind'.<sup>10</sup> Abbé Charles-Louis Carton of Bruges visited his school on his tour of British institutions in order to compile a report for his government, but only observed there one unimpressive student using the system with some difficulty.<sup>11</sup> Lucas moved to London before his death and his books, nonetheless, were extensively used by the London Society for Teaching the Blind to

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<sup>7</sup> Royal Society of the Arts in Scotland, *Report by a Committee on the Best Alphabet and method of Printing for the Blind* (Edinburgh, 1837), 2. See Appendix C for examples of types submitted.

<sup>8</sup> Royal Society, *Report*, 5.

<sup>9</sup> Great Exhibition, *Jury Report*, 71.

<sup>10</sup> Pritchard, *Education and the Handicapped*, 47.

<sup>11</sup> Charles-Louis Carton, *The Establishments for the Blind in England: a report to the Ministry of the Interior and of Foreign Affairs*. (Bruges, 1838. London 1895), 38.



Read and many volumes of his Bible were transcribed and appear in the collections of institutions examined later in this study.

A peripheral figure in this narrative is James Hadley Frere, whose embossed arbitrary code was intended to challenge Lucas's. Frere declared his aim to be that 'the power of reading Scriptures may be imparted to two classes of person, the Blind and the uninstructed adults, who must otherwise, for the most part, be deprived of that privilege'. Frere's method, as explained in the Preface to his 1840 publication was based on a phonetic system and he provided a shape for each of 26 sounds and signs for long and short vowels. The boustrophedon system was used, wherein the first line reads from left to right, but then a curved line guides the finger to the following line, which is then read from right to left. This made it unnecessary to retrace the whole line just read or to then drop the finger to the following line, thus saving time and space between lines. Little literature was produced in Frere's system other than the New Testament, the four Gospels, which sold for seven shillings each, and a few Acts from the Bible.<sup>12</sup> One surviving publication is *A Short Grammar for the Use of the Blind Scholar*, a copy of which was donated to the Liverpool School in 1858.<sup>13</sup>

William Moon's work, in contrast to Frere's, was to have a significant and sometimes controversial impact on the literary culture of the blind. In 1840, by the age of 21, Moon was completely blind. He had wanted to be a minister of the church, but in his new circumstances he learned the Frere code, and immediately set about making his own amendments. Moon prided himself on the simplicity of his system, claiming it could be taught to 'the dullest pupil' in ten days and that once he had taught his method in an hour to German youths in Cologne.<sup>14</sup> On a visit to Paris with his son in 1861, Moon learned that many of the blind persons institutionalized could not read Braille.<sup>15</sup>

In common with Frere, he used the boustrophedon method, but on the returning line, where Frere had inverted the shapes as if reading in a mirror, Moon kept them the same. Frere used a single sign to represent a sound, his being a phonetic system. Moon used a full orthography, making his version better for children who needed to learn to read and spell, and for adults who had learned to read when sighted. As it was not possible to modify all alphabetical shapes for easy touch reading, he used a few arbitrary shapes; his priority throughout was simplicity of touch, as he had the older reader with less sensitive fingertips in

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<sup>12</sup> Frere, *The Art of Teaching to Read*, 1-3.

<sup>13</sup> Liverpool School Management Committee, *Minutes*, 7 August 1858.

<sup>14</sup> William Moon, *Light for the Blind*, 13.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

mind. Encouraged by his success, Moon found, through experiment, a way of making far cheaper stereographic plates for printing, which could be used again.

Sir Charles Lowther, whose mother had brought books from France in his childhood, met Moon in 1853 and was to become a most generous patron, donating over 9,000 books in Moon type in five years in Britain alone.<sup>16</sup> The popularity of Moon in the institutions owed much to its simplicity, but that very popularity has often been regarded as an obstacle to the historical development of Braille and a cause of the animated 'Battle of the Types' which continued throughout the nineteenth century.

Moon's books, like those of Alston and Gall were relatively bulky, and lacked Braille's easy adaptability to Music and other languages, yet as will be seen in the analysis of collections below, Moon's type played a critical role in the history of literature for the blind, especially for the older readers who were the intended beneficiaries of the work of the visiting societies that flourished from the middle of the nineteenth century. Later referred to as Dr. Moon, as the recipient of an honorary degree from the University of Philadelphia, his system has survived to the present, although its use is confined to older readers. 'Moon Magazine', a weekly Moon newspaper was started in 1924 and remained popular into the mid 1950s.<sup>17</sup>

The importance of Gall's work in Edinburgh and the educational efforts of John Alston at the Glasgow Asylum might suggest that Scotland's alleged superiority in the field of public education extended to the provision of literature for the blind. On a separatist impulse it has been suggested that there were significant differences between the English and Scottish experiences of philanthropy, even in the case of disability,<sup>18</sup> Closer examination suggests that the similarities were stronger than the differences and, as Checkland's seminal work on philanthropy in Scotland indicates, the processes at work in society there were not fundamentally different from those of her southern neighbour. The common pattern was that charismatic individuals and societies explored new possibilities and promoted their causes, looked for gaps, moved directly, and later acted to provide experience and data for the state, over which philanthropists then acted as watchdogs.<sup>19</sup>

Meanwhile, an equally inaccurate 'optimist view' has developed in histories of education and literacy, founded on the notion that Calvinism placed a school in every village

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>17</sup> Mary G. Thomas, *The RNIB*, 61.

<sup>18</sup> See Iain Hutchison, *A History of Disability in Nineteenth Century Scotland* (Lampeter, Lewiston, NJ: Mellen Press, 2007).

<sup>19</sup> Olive Checkland, *Philanthropy in Victorian Scotland*, 318-9.

and the State acted in the educational field long before other nations. Callum Brown argues that 'we should not exaggerate Scotland's educational prowess, and that this emphasis on education had much to do with 'imposing a compulsory culture of conformism' and 'inculcating acquiescence'.<sup>20</sup> Rab Houston, in his work on Scottish literacy and identity, states that Scotland's educational aspirations and performance may have waned around 1900 but at the start of the nineteenth century, it was 'a palpably better educated country than England'.<sup>21</sup> He warns, however, of the dangers of national and regional generalization, showing that the difference in literacy rates between the Scottish highlands and lowlands was far greater than those between Southern Scotland and Northern England. Thus forewarned against making nationalistic and other generalizations, we must examine the next phase in the development of tactile printing. At this point, the focus shifts to Scotland, while the Paris institute under Pignier and then Dufau entered a long period of deliberation over the Braille system.<sup>22</sup>

The Edinburgh Asylum, founded in 1793, saw the first significant British attempt to provide a tactile reading system. It proved to be Scots philanthropists who felt earliest and most strongly what John Feather described as 'the power of the printed word to effect the moral improvement of the working classes'.<sup>23</sup>

James Gall, the pioneer of embossed typography for the blind in Britain was evidently motivated by the wish to fulfill the common Protestant aspiration that everyone should have independent access to the Word of God. Gall was working on a code for tactile reading before the Society of Arts contest was even conceived. He entered the competition, as mentioned earlier, but did not win. In 1827, he produced *A First Book for Teaching the Art of Reading to the Blind*, believed to be the first book produced in the English language for the blind. This was a rough volume in high relief made from wooden types. Over the subsequent decade, Gall's Roman type, evolved to consist of 26 configurations chosen from those he considered best for touch. In Lorimer's technical analysis, Gall's system had little to recommend it as a standard system, and was soon superseded by Alston's in Glasgow.<sup>24</sup> Gall's books describing his endeavours and his personal enthusiasm and proselytizing, nonetheless, did much to keep the issue of publishing for the blind in the public domain.

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<sup>20</sup> C. G. Brown, *Religion and Society in Scotland since 1707* (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press 1997), 73-4.

<sup>21</sup> R.A. Houston, *Scottish literacy and the Scottish identity: illiteracy and society in Scotland and Northern England, 1600-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 4.

<sup>22</sup> Weygand, *Vivre sans Voir*, 337-8.

<sup>23</sup> Feather, *A History of British Publishing*, 129.

<sup>24</sup> Lorimer, 'A critical evaluation', Chapter 3, page 4.

Gall's pioneering path was not an easy one. His diary records that as early as May 1832, he was 'Preparing writing frames for Mr. Wood of the Blind Asylum in New York'.<sup>25</sup> In July of that year he wrote that one book was completed and 'sent this day to press'.<sup>26</sup> This was Gall's Gospel of St. Matthew, and two years later he was to write, 'this arduous and important object was at last attained and this first portion of the Bible which was ever printed for the blind or which was ever capable of being read by them was happily completed'.<sup>27</sup>

It is, perhaps, Gall's 1834 publication that gives us the most valuable insights into the thoughts of a pietistic nineteenth century Christian benefactor. He appealed to the benevolence of his fellow members of the respectable classes to help to 'remove at least a part of this mass of misery, by providing them with the amelioration and blessings of a permanent literature'.<sup>28</sup> Gall saw a role for himself in that the French had apparently abandoned the quest for improvement in providing literature for the blind. He claimed that 'For thirty years at least prior to 1826 or 1827, the arts of reading and writing by the Blind had been at a standstill'. He found that progress had not moved beyond 'an italic alphabet that pleased the eye but was no good to the touch and a clumsy mode of capital retention'.<sup>29</sup> This French abandonment of the pursuit of better forms of raised type he attributed to a certain fading of interest in a fickle public; 'There is no people in the world so much under the dominion of fashion as the inhabitants of Paris'.<sup>30</sup> He praised the simplicity and easy tangibility of arbitrary type, but wondered who could teach it, as the blind were 'a scattered presence in society, often insulated and concealed from the public eye'.<sup>31</sup> In his *Historical Sketch*, Gall indicated that he thought what was selected for publication should be for improvement, rather than enjoyment. Predictably, the Bible was given priority in his prescriptions, 'Learn above all things to use your Bible as a moral instrument for your direction in duty'.<sup>32</sup> The Bible, he argued, was a tool to be used to prepare for eternity, and provided a standard for unity among Christians.<sup>33</sup> Biography should be intended chiefly for a

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<sup>25</sup> James Gall, *Diary* Vol. I., 1831-35 Entry 42, Thursday 31 May 1832.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, Entry 384, July 24, 1832.

<sup>27</sup> James Gall, *A Historical Sketch of the Origin and Progress of Literature for the Blind: and practical hints and recommendations as to their education*. Edinburgh: James Gall, 1834, 13

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 11-12.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 271.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 288-89.

moral purpose and History, likewise, should be dedicated solely to the cause of morality, its content forming 'a correct and imitative picture'.<sup>34</sup>

In recognition of his devotion to his cause, Gall soon afterwards gained permission from the Management Committee of the Edinburgh Asylum to engage some pupils there in his experiments, but convincing the workers and pupils to participate in this innovation proved a protracted and frustrating experience. Gall felt that the blind needed persuading to exert themselves for their own benefit. The Asylum's practice had long been to use outside readers, both volunteer and paid, to read aloud the Scriptures and other edifying material both through the hours of labour in the workshop and at mealtimes. The pupils and inmates, who appeared to have enjoyed this service, were far from enthused at the idea of learning to read for themselves. This form of reading aloud by an individual to a group was a common practice throughout the nineteenth century among the working classes, as Jonathan Rose has shown.<sup>35</sup> An internal committee of the asylum, prompted to intervene by a frustrated Gall, reported that, 'the first difficulty arises from the Blind themselves, who have exhibited anything but alacrity in verifying the use of these books'.<sup>36</sup> The committee acknowledged reasons for their reluctance, 'Given the cold, damp, voluminous texts, the problems of the flattening of the letters and the dulling of their fingers, it is not to be wondered at therefore if the blind should feel a partiality for the oral method of imbibing knowledge and amusement'.<sup>37</sup> Gall could not refrain from expressing his frustration with the intended beneficiaries of his scheme:

And first we say that the blind pupils in an institution have no right to object to any system of education which the directors prescribe, under the idea that their inclinations, their privileges or their rights would be thereby invaded. They are not there by their own will, nor are they supported and trained merely for their own amusement.<sup>38</sup>

Gall persevered and soon afterwards perfected his alphabet and began to use metal sheets. In 1832, he printed his *Gospel of St. John*. When Abbé Carton reported to the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs he observed of Gall's works, 'Religious instruction is conveyed not merely

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid. 263 -264.

<sup>35</sup> Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 2001). Rose gives numerous examples of groups of workers who met to engage in this form of literary experience.

<sup>36</sup> Edinburgh Royal Blind Asylum and School, *Minute Book of Directors*, 1835-49, 35.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>38</sup> James Gall, *Account of the Recent Discoveries which have been made for Facilitating the Education of the Blind* (Edinburgh: James Gall, 1837), 211-212.

by oral information but also books in raised or embossed characters. It is pleasing to reflect on the comforts and advantages which will be derived by those deprived of the blessings and delights of vision and who, in their dark and solitary hours will be enabled to acquire information independently and hold communion with their God in the perusal of his holy Word'.<sup>39</sup>

Gall's diary, which he began on his twenty-sixth birthday, 8 January 1809, is a valuable record of the life of a philanthropic Edinburgh gentleman. His accounts of his church duties, charity dinners with hospital governors and meetings with those involved with the education of the 'deaf and dumb', show that his interests were far ranging, but it was the cause of the blind and their need for literature that was his first concern.<sup>40</sup> The tone of his first work, published in 1834 was urgent. He claimed, 'the Blind are the most wretched, the most helpless, and what is not generally attended to, the most ignorant of all human sufferers'.<sup>41</sup> Warming to the rhetoric of pity, Gall wrote that 'the Blind are doomed to pine and grope through life in a dawnless darkness of interminable night'.<sup>42</sup> He appealed to his fellow citizens to 'remove at least a part of this mass of misery by providing them with the ameliorations and blessings of a permanent literature'.<sup>43</sup> He evidently believed that he was destined to lead the venture.

Gall chose to persevere with the Roman type, although he was aware of the simplicity and advantages in tangibility of the arbitrary system. By using his modified Roman form, with fretted embossing, Gall boasted that an able blind learner could learn his system in as little as 15 minutes, and that a sighted reader could 'with five minutes trial' be able to peruse both the books and the writings of the blind with ease'.<sup>44</sup> The diaries abound with letters of praise from grateful pupils and collaborators. The entry for 13 August 1835 records the arrival of the gift of an 'Oxford Pocket Bible' and a letter from pupils in the Belfast Institution conveying their 'deep sense of the unbreakable benefits you have conferred upon us – we can now Read and Write. Our solitary comforts, which were formerly employed in brooding over our deprivations can now be spent in drawing holy comforts from the word of life; so that to us who sat in darkness, light is shining up'.<sup>45</sup> The guiding hand of the Belfast

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<sup>39</sup> Carton, *The Establishments*, 107.

<sup>40</sup> James Gall, *Diary 1809-1835* Vol. I.

<sup>41</sup> James Gall, *A Historical Sketch*, 11.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>45</sup> James Gall, *Diary*, 13 August 1835.

children's teacher may be detected in this fulsome epistle, but Gall clearly cherished such praise, affixing the original letter to the appropriate page in the diary.

Posterity, in the form of the 1851 Great Exhibition Jury's *Report*, records that Gall played an important role in maintaining the momentum of improvement in developing tactile print systems when French educators appeared to have lost their way. The report confirmed Gall's role in developing literacy for the blind, saying that his letters were 'clear, sharp, permanent and a great improvement on Haüy's and Guillié's'. Over the next two decades, the Jury recounted, it was Great Britain and the United States that led in developing new forms of tangible print, and this was due in great part to his labours.<sup>46</sup>

Treasurer of the Glasgow Asylum in the 1830s, John Alston is remembered not only for his modifications to earlier Roman systems, but for his pointed criticisms of the inadequate training and minimal education provided by most institutions at the time. His curricular innovations deserve more credit than he has been given by Iain Hutchison, who through the lens of contemporary anti-institutionalism, makes the point that the Glasgow Asylum, 'governed by a comprehensive moralistic ethos' under his direction 'saw blind people as a problem to be addressed, faulty mechanisms to be successfully adapted and repaired in the most expedient way possible'.<sup>47</sup>

As regards typography, Alston saw expense as a great obstacle to the dissemination of his literature for the blind. He noted that the Roman type had more appeal for British institutions so he adapted Fry's system, improving the size and sharpness of the type. A dynamic fundraiser, Alston embarked on an ambitious programme of publication; public demonstrations of reading took place in 1838 and 1841 and by 1840 all the Scriptures had been printed.<sup>48</sup> His books were sent to the Philadelphia institute, where a very similar system was in use. By his death in 1846, the Bible had been printed in 19 volumes. While religious instruction remained at the heart of Glasgow's curriculum, Alston was keen to establish the value of educating the blind in other matters. The ear, he claimed was 'the vestibule of the soul' and the blind were 'rational immortal beings capable of all the enjoyment which others feel in the cultivation of their moral and intellectual powers'.<sup>49</sup> Arithmetic, Geography and Astronomy, a particular interest of Alston's, were taught in novel ways; the principles of the

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<sup>46</sup> Great Exhibition, *Jury Report*, 416.

<sup>47</sup> Hutchison, *A History of Disability*, 113-4.

<sup>48</sup> Lorimer, 'A critical evaluation', Chapter 3, page 5.

<sup>49</sup> John Alston, 'Statements of the Education, Employment and Internal Arrangements Adopted at the Asylum for the Blind, Glasgow.' Included in *The Glasgow Asylum for the Blind, Ninth Annual Report* (Glasgow, 1836), 6.

latter subject were made clear by moving wooden balls representing the planets around a wooden board at floor level.<sup>50</sup>

It was, however, the question of which raised print system to adopt, rather than a possible expansion of the curriculum, that was to dominate debates in blind institutions and societies from the 1840s.

### 4.3 The British institution: a philanthropic challenge

The setting in which literacy developed both determined and reflected the aspirations and practice of educators of the blind. Their contending choices of types indicated differing perspectives on the goals and value of literacy but they were also influenced by the nature of the charity organization whose money was to be spent. Economy was a prime consideration; if collections had been begun with one type, change was considered unsettling and expensive. It is therefore important to bear this in mind when evaluating the achievements of individuals, institutions and societies.

In contrast to Haüy's *Institut des Jeunes Aveugles*, which opened in Paris under royal patronage in 1784 and continued as a state foundation after the revolution, it was private initiative that drove Britain's urban gentry to embark on a wave of charitable activity that saw an institution for the blind created in every major city by the 1850s. The British institution had a markedly more utilitarian nature than Haüy's original establishment, and a pattern was soon established where life centred on the workshop and the chapel. Extensive studies have been carried out on the place of charity in English society. W.K. Jordan examined the period 1480-1660.<sup>51</sup> David Owen continued the study to 1960.<sup>52</sup> Both works showed in considerable empirical detail the nation's conviction that private effort should be the first response to challenges to the harmony of society, and the preferred means to overcome obstacles to its development. As Brian Harrison points out, by 1860, London alone had 640 charities which raised as much annually as the entire Poor Law expenditure for England and Wales.<sup>53</sup> He suggests that this rejection of the state was instinctive rather than theoretical, in that

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>51</sup> W.K. Jordan, *The Charities of Rural England, 1480-1660* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1961).

<sup>52</sup> David Owen, *English Philanthropy, 1660-1960* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1961).

<sup>53</sup> Brian Harrison, *Peacable Kingdom: Stability and Change in Modern Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon 1982), 227. Chapter V 'Philanthropy and the Victorians' is a revised version of his influential article of the same title published in *Victorian Studies* in June 1966.



nineteenth century philanthropists simply 'disliked interference from London and favoured a personal bond between deprived and privileged'.<sup>54</sup>

It was in the city of Liverpool that institutional education for the blind began in Britain. Edward Rushton, a poet and bookseller who is said to have witnessed an outbreak of ophthalmia on a slave ship in his childhood in the Caribbean, is regarded as the leading figure in the venture, which had its beginning in meetings of the local philosophical society. Margaret Simey, in her history of the city, sees the project as part of an attempt to make Liverpool the new 'Athens of the North'.<sup>55</sup> Rushton first suggested a benefit club for the 'indigent blind' in 1790. In an open letter to the *Liverpool Mercury* in September 1790, Rushton spoke of the need for a school 'to offer hope to the sightless being whose loss has no compensations, his long, long night no brightness, and whose mind can not be cheered by the expectation of returning light'.<sup>56</sup> A Churchman, Reverend Henry Dannett, gathered support in the city and together they drew up a 'Plan', expressing their aims. The first of these was 'to furnish the blind with employment which may prevent them from being burdens to their family and community or at least render them less burdensome'. This employment was intended to be of a type which would 'gently engage the mind without fatiguing it', while the third aim was to "supply this neglected class of our fellow creatures with such a portion of religious knowledge as may reconcile them to their situation and teach them to be easy and contented".<sup>57</sup> The uncertainty felt by the early institutions about their role is evident in their choices of name. While Liverpool's Protestant establishment named itself 'school', its Catholic counterpart in the city was called an 'asylum', as was Edinburgh's leading institution at its foundation. Thomas Anderson, Master of the York school was later to make the distinction that the 'asylum' should be a place of education and employment where the blind remained resident, while the 'school' would keep its 'pupil-inmates' for a set period of time and then discharge them.<sup>58</sup> In the first decades of institutional activity, however, no such distinction was observed.

In effect, as Simey suggests and the earliest records confirm, the Liverpool school began less as an asylum and more as a training centre. A local doctor, Dr. J. C. Lettsom,

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 258.

<sup>55</sup> Margaret Simey, *Charity Rediscovered: A Study of Philanthropic Effort in Nineteenth Century Liverpool* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1992), 19-20.

<sup>56</sup> Edward Rushton, Open Letter. *Liverpool Mercury* 22 September 1790.

<sup>57</sup> Reverend H. Dannett, *Plan* Liverpool, 1 December 1790. Mss. Thomas Bickerton Papers. Liverpool Public Library.

<sup>58</sup> Thomas Anderson, *Observations on the Employment, Education and Habits of the Blind* (London: Simpkin Marshall, 1837), 13.

observed approvingly that Liverpool began without a residential facility, 'The charity does not separate the poor from their families and destroy the dearest and most tender connections'. In 1794, the School had 18 blind inmates, whose average age was 39.<sup>59</sup> The entry age was raised to 12 from eight in 1803 as an economy in 1803.<sup>60</sup> The published rules show that as late as 1856, boys were not accepted until 14 years old, girls until 12.<sup>61</sup> The tendency to admit older pupils, as at London's School for the Indigent Blind where upper age limits were removed in 1812, suggests that the education of blind children was not always the priority for these early establishments, and the teaching of reading even less so.<sup>62</sup>

The themes of darkness, misery, rescue and redemption were reiterated by the press in its reports on the Liverpool School. The *Imperial Magazine* pointed out the rewards that might accrue to those prepared to stretch out the hand of charity to assuage 'the lamentable wretchedness' of the blind', assuring the potential benefactor that 'he may repose upon his pillow under the soothing conviction that whilst offering up at that sacred shrine the perishable riches of this world, he lays up for himself those substantial treasures in the next'.<sup>63</sup>

Hayhoe remarks on the fast growth of institutions for the blind in port cities, such as Liverpool, which had founded Britain's first, and Bristol, mentioning Roy Porter's observation on their high incidence of diseases, like syphilis, associated with decadence. Liverpool's patrons Hayhoe described as 'Unitarian and Anglican socialites' while Bristol Asylum had Quaker origins.<sup>64</sup> The latter, was started in 1793 by Mr. Fox and Mr. Bath, members of the Society of Friends.<sup>65</sup> Both sets of patrons, however, shared the view that hard repetitive work had intrinsic ethical value and would bring the blind person closer to salvation.

Similar aims were expressed in other institutions' mission statements. The general rules of the Yorkshire School for the Blind, founded in 1833, and dedicated to the memory of William Wilberforce, reflect the same concern with religion and industry. Rule no. 1 stated that 'the object of the institution is to give the pupils such instruction as may enable them to obtain a livelihood; attention being, at the same time, paid to their moral and religious education'. Rule 40 stipulated that the pupils should assemble every morning at 8.30 to hear a

<sup>59</sup> Liverpool School Management Committee, *Annual Report* 1875, 3.

<sup>60</sup> Liverpool School, *Annual Report*, 1804, 2.

<sup>61</sup> Liverpool School, 'Rules' in *Annual Report*, 1857.

<sup>62</sup> School for the Indigent Blind, St. George's Fields, Surrey, 'Rules', *Annual Report*, 1813.

<sup>63</sup> 'On Liverpool's School for the Blind', *Imperial Magazine* Vol. I, (Liverpool, 1819).

<sup>64</sup> Hayhoe, *God, Money and Politics*, 60-61.

<sup>65</sup> Wagg, *A Chronological Survey*, 9.

portion of Scripture read by the Master, join in prayer and commit to memory verses from the Psalms or other religious lessons. At 7 p.m. each evening they were to assemble to do the same. Rule 41 obliged the pupils to attend public service each Lord's day, with the master at the church of St. Olave or at the cathedral, or at a place of the parents' choice. Rule 42 decreed 'Times of Industry' to be 'from Nine A.M. to Half-past Twelve, and again from Two P.M. to Half-past Five O'Clock', at which times they would be engaged in basket making, weaving, music and other arts taught at the school. In the summer months there was to be an additional hour for industrial work from 7 to 8 a.m.'. <sup>66</sup>

While Rushton's rhetoric, echoed in other early institutions may have proclaimed offers of solace to all, freer spirits were not always welcome, and the archival evidence suggests an atmosphere of moralizing constraint and repression. The Management Committee at Liverpool decreed that 'if any of the blind carry on a clandestine courtship or marriage without the consent and approbation of the committee they shall be immediately dismissed', and one Elizabeth Barrow was the first to be removed for marrying secretly and sent to her husband's parish. <sup>67</sup> Dismissals for idleness were recorded for James Boucher, described as 'an Irishman, a strolling fiddler', and for John Keen, 'an Irishman, and an idle ballad singer who soon tired of Industry and returned to his former occupation'. <sup>68</sup>

The school's 'Visitors' Book', less guarded than annual reports issued primarily to satisfy existing and potential subscribers, reveal the existence of a 'bread and water table' used for those missing Sunday service or falling asleep in church. <sup>69</sup> There is a record of pupils locked in the beer cellar for a week for refusing to be washed or not wearing shoes instead of clogs. <sup>70</sup> A later example is recorded of two boys being flogged for insolence. <sup>71</sup>

Little on record remains to explain why this stark model of the institution was so suddenly and so widely regarded as the appropriate site for the disabled. The rapidity with which the idea was adopted was indeed remarkable. Following Liverpool and Edinburgh, Bristol had an institution open to both sexes from 1793, Norwich opened one in 1803, the Jewish Blind Society created another in London in 1819, and Exeter and Manchester had opened their own schools by the end of the 1830s. <sup>72</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Yorkshire School for the Blind, *Annual Report*, 1833, 3-4.

<sup>277</sup> Liverpool School Management Committee, *Record Book 1793-1805*, 5.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Liverpool School, *Visitors' Book* Entry for October 21, 1824.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., December 21, 1825.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., November 22, 1848.

<sup>72</sup> Wagg, *A Chronological Survey*.

Those engaged in disability studies have been swift to associate this trend with what Michel Foucault termed the 'Age of Confinement', interpreting the 'incarceration of the disabled' as a natural step to follow the confinement of the poor and then the 'insane' across Europe in the seventeenth century. The great majority have judged the confinement of the disabled in highly negative terms. Anne Borsay condemned the role of institutions in creating an almost uninterrupted 'history of exclusion' wherein 'Blind and deaf institutions depressed the expectations of all their pupils, irrespective of their social background'.<sup>73</sup> Gordon Phillips, as mentioned earlier has argued that the legacy of these institutions is more positive, as their very survival suggests. Certainly, contemporaneous discussion on the most satisfactory means to confront the social challenge represented by blindness in the humanitarian mode saw the institution as the kinder alternative to vagrancy and destitution. Thomas Blacklock, in his 'Essay' had spoken of the need of the sightless for protection from 'the herd of mankind and its wanton malignity which eternally compels them to impose upon the blind'.<sup>74</sup> Along with this instinct to protect came an impulse to foster moral elevation. The Edinburgh Asylum, founded shortly after Liverpool's School, boasted in its 1829 Annual Report that its inmates had been

... reclaimed from habits of idleness and inactivity, and often of vice, to industry, sobriety and useful exertion...the asylum now presents to every visitor the spectacle, than which none can be more delightful to a philanthropic mind, of a multitude of individuals labouring in common under a severe and melancholy deprivation yet living together in cheerfulness and contentment.<sup>75</sup>

After his tour of British institutions, in the 1830s, Carton concluded 'The blind person imbibes courage in the company of other blind people, and soon loses it when isolated'.<sup>76</sup> The institution was soon legitimated, endorsed by royal approval in the case of Liverpool where the Prince of Wales visited in 1806 and continued his patronage after his accession to the throne. Morris has described the way in which donor groups were organized in public forms of philanthropy from the late eighteenth century with committees and elections of both officers and beneficiaries by subscriber votes. Where royalty was not available to provide active or titular patronage, the urban upper middle class stepped in, usually from the ranks of industrialists, bankers and successful merchants. Urban elites regarded charity activity as

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<sup>73</sup> Borsay, *Disability and Social Policy*, 97.

<sup>74</sup> Blacklock, *Encyclopedia*, 1190.

<sup>75</sup> Edinburgh Asylum, *Annual Report*, 1829, 4.

<sup>76</sup> Carton, *The Establishments*, 13.

helpful in their perpetuation, and strengthened their 'fragmented and uncertain identity'.<sup>77</sup> In Norbert Elias's interpretation of the genesis of modern philanthropy, the bourgeois strata of society, in its eighteenth century rise, assimilated the thinking and behaviour of the aristocracy and invested money in obtaining honour and prestige; the new form of the public institution for the blind afforded another way to do so.<sup>78</sup> As Peter Shapely's work on philanthropic endeavours in nineteenth century Manchester has shown, 'Charity and status were part of a vital correlation in urban power relationships'.<sup>79</sup> He points out that of the Manchester elite in 1850, 26 out of 52 charity leaders were educated at either public school or the ancient universities or at London University.<sup>80</sup> Brian Harrison, in his extensive studies of Victorian philanthropy claims that 'the gulf between aristocracy and middle class is central to the philanthropic story' and how the tension between the two often pervaded the organization of charity. Harrison also notes how philanthropic activity reflected particular denominational interests, with Anglicans focusing in most cases on the slum parish, Catholics on local communities and non-Conformists on elementary educational initiatives and the Temperance movement.<sup>81</sup> The blind person's 'rescue' from mendicancy and spiritual despair was a cause common to each of the above. A pattern of provision was set and Britain saw a rapid expansion of these monuments to philanthropy. By 1860, 27 institutions had been opened, and in 1871, 53 were functioning, supported entirely by voluntary contributions and self-generated income. Urban communities were reassured by the illustrious patronage and the self-congratulatory annual reports produced which stressed the religious well being and progress towards self-sufficiency of their charges. Local poets, like William Colquitt in his 'Description of Liverpool' indicated the high degree of sentimental pride felt in the community:

The airy workhouse in spacious form  
Fit to relieve the poor from want and storm  
A beautiful Asylum too is raised  
Where the blind are maintained and eased.<sup>82</sup>

Another proud inhabitant of the city, Henry Smithers declared that 'sons of Britain' were 'in acts of Samaritan charity pre-eminent among nations; there is not an ill to which suffering

<sup>77</sup> R. J. Morris, 'Voluntary Societies and British Urban Elites' *Historical Journal* XXVI (1983), 101-2.

<sup>78</sup> Norbert Elias, *The Court Society* Translated by Edmund Jephcott. (Oxford: Blackwell 1983), 64.

<sup>79</sup> Peter Shapely, *Charity and Power in Victorian Manchester* (Manchester: Chatham, 2000).

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>81</sup> Brian Harrison, *Peacable Kingdom*, 230.

<sup>82</sup> William Colquitt, 'Description of Liverpool' in *Poems* (Chester: W.C. Jones, 1802), 32.

humanity is exposed but finds in Great Britain its asylum'.<sup>83</sup> Once again, the sentimentality identified in attitudes towards blind people acted as a driving force in shaping their image of dependency, weakness and living in need of the protection of the beneficent sighted.

Evaluations of the record of the nineteenth century institutions are rendered complex by the fact that the objects of their mission included a wide range of ages and conditions. Records suggest the emphasis in most institutions turned more towards educating blind children as the century advanced, emphasizing the objectives of the 'school' rather than the 'asylum'.<sup>84</sup> Degrees of visual impairment among pupils admitted to the early establishments are also impossible to ascertain. No legal or administrative definitions of blindness existed and differing use of the term 'blind' makes comparative exercises highly subjective. The entry requirements for the York school in 1833, for example, stated that 'No candidate shall be admitted who has a greater degree of sight than suffices to distinguish light from darkness'. Rule 10 also stipulated that no one could be admitted 'who is incapacitated by weakness of intellect or otherwise from learning to obtain a livelihood'.<sup>85</sup>

In her earlier mentioned analysis of the Perkins Institute's Annual Reports over several decades, Mary Klages traced a significant shift from the terminology of charity and benevolence to that of the market, as the administration sought to change the disabled body from an object of despair into an engine of productive labour.<sup>86</sup> This tendency is perhaps even more pronounced in the publications of nineteenth British voluntary institutions for the blind, which soon after their founding made less reference to the emotional force of suffering and more to the language of costs, profit and loss.

Clearly, a visit to an early blind asylum was an emotional experience. Carton observed that in some institutions, 'there are notices requesting the visitors to abstain from all useless expressions of astonishment at what they see, and of pity for that great number of beings deprived of sight in whose presence they find themselves'.<sup>87</sup> Visiting the confined blind probably remained a popular holiday activity, since the Yorkshire School, in the 1870s, began to charge visitors at Whitsuntide a fee of one penny.<sup>88</sup> In its nature, the institution elicited sentimental responses, both from its administrators and its visitors. The first report of the Birmingham Institute refers to the 'afflicted class of our fellow creatures'. To alleviate

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<sup>83</sup> Henry Smithers, *Liverpool, Its Commerce, Statistics and Institutions* (Liverpool: Thos. Kaye, 1825), 12.

<sup>84</sup> Thomas Anderson, *Observations*, 3.

<sup>85</sup> Yorkshire School for the Blind, *General Rules* (York, 1833).

<sup>86</sup> Klages, *Woeful Afflictions*, 40-43.

<sup>87</sup> Carton, *The Establishments*, 39.

<sup>88</sup> Yorkshire School for the Blind, *Annual Report*, 1875, 4.

their suffering it was decreed that the most important object of the institution was the reading of the Holy Scriptures.<sup>89</sup>

In examining the Victorian culture of sentiment, the imagery of disability in the nineteenth century Protestant hymn, abounding in analogies of darkness and light, deserves a study in itself. John Lettsom was moved to describe the 'beautiful and interesting' verses of hymns sung in the school chapel at Liverpool, one of which promised the blind that

Every sigh and every tear  
All in full lustre shall appear  
Recorded in the Book of Heaven.<sup>90</sup>

The chapel at Liverpool was said to be an exact replica in its dimensions of the temple of Zeus-Pan Hellinus on Aegina. Such was its importance to the institution that, when the railways came to Liverpool and the school was obliged to move to Hardman Street, the Management Committee dismantled the structure stone by stone so as to take it to the new site. Its records show the managers' concern was not only that the students would be unable to continue to receive 'those religious impressions, which in their dark and afflicted condition must prove their best and purest consolation', but also that the school might otherwise have to replace the chapel with 'an edifice incommensurable and unworthy of the town'.<sup>91</sup> Wagg also mentions that, in 26 years, the chapel had generated an estimated £12,000 in income from donations.<sup>92</sup>

If the chapel was the heart of the early institution, funds from the workshop became ever more its lifeblood. Indeed, it might be said that the language of industry was present from the outset in the declarations of the founders. In his 'Charities of London', published in 1810, Highmore reflected that 'whoever enables a blind person without any excess of labour to earn his own livelihood does more real service to him than if he had pensioned him to a greater amount'.<sup>93</sup> Subsequently, the first institutions embraced this notion with such great enthusiasm that Carton felt the English, by the late 1830s, had gone too far in emphasizing self-sufficiency. Manual labour he approved of since the idea was not to make 'savants' of blind children, but Carton felt Edinburgh struck a better balance between the over-intellectual

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<sup>89</sup> Birmingham General Institution for the Blind, *First Report* 1848, 2.

<sup>90</sup> John Lettsom, *The Blind: Hints designed to promote Beneficence, Temperance and Medical Science*, Vol. 2. (London: Sampson, Low and Marston, 1801, 1894), 7.

<sup>91</sup> Liverpool School, Papers, File 1818-1873 'Correspondence on Proposed Move to Hardman Street Site, 1849-50. 'Appeal' March 1850.

<sup>92</sup> Wagg, *A Chronological Survey*, 26.

<sup>93</sup> A. Highmore, *Charities of London: Pietas Londinensis*, (London, 1810), 609.

approach adopted in Paris education and the rudimentary artisanal training he had seen in England.<sup>94</sup>

Schools were proud to declare to their subscribers that the pupils in their charge were being trained as useful self-sufficient individuals. Thomas Anderson referred disparagingly to the 'showy, knick knack and unsubstantial style of those asylums on the continent,' whose educational ideas he regarded as 'nonsense, empty gasconade and discreditable quackery'.<sup>95</sup> The 'Plan' for the St. George's School for the Indigent Blind in south London, emphasizing 'useful industry' was that from ten to 18 years old, the pupils would be instructed in basket making, spinning, knitting, weaving, and doormats, the workshop keeping them employed from 7 a.m. until 6 p.m. in summer and from 8 a.m. till dark in winter.<sup>96</sup>

When the asylum, started in 1793, was made the subject of an 'improving' Act of Parliament, receiving royal assent in 1832 it was declared that 'the objects of the said Charity are taught and employed in several useful Trades and Occupations, and formed to habits of Industry and good Order, whereby, and by means of religious Instruction, their Affliction is alleviated and their Condition so improved as to render them useful members of society'.<sup>97</sup>

The Glasgow Asylum for the Blind's Annual Report for 1837 showed that, while pupils paid fees to board, their labours in the workshop, making twine, baskets, mattresses and doormats produced £2,472 in sales and a profit of £71.13s.,4d.<sup>98</sup> Phillips, curiously, states there was 'little evidence of a labour imperative' in the institutions at the time, but he remains alone in that view.<sup>99</sup> Faced with overwhelming numbers of references to the virtues of industry and the published schedules of workshop hours and times of prayer, D.G. Pritchard felt compelled to conclude that early British institutions offered 'virtually no education in the usual sense...of reading and writing there was none'.<sup>100</sup> He cited the London School for the Indigent Blind's affirmation that its 'sole object was to instruct the blind in a trade'.<sup>101</sup> Pritchard also pointed out the irony of the Hull Institute having to seek a new form of production when Durham Gaol's workshop undercut their price for making ship fenders.<sup>102</sup> This was a notable example of the process Thomas Cutsforth once denounced whereby 'the

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<sup>94</sup> Carton, *The Establishments*, 9.

<sup>95</sup> Anderson, *Observations*, 46.

<sup>96</sup> 'An Account of the School for the Indigent Blind, St. George's Fields.' *Plan*. (London: Printed at the Philanthropic Reform, 1800).

<sup>97</sup> 'An Act for Better Governing and Regulating an Institution in the City of Bristol. 2 Will. IV 1831-2.

<sup>98</sup> Glasgow Asylum for the Blind, *Annual Report*, 1838.

<sup>99</sup> Phillips, *The Blind*, 44-45.

<sup>100</sup> Pritchard, *Education and the Handicapped*, 30.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.



blind man and the penitentiary convict are alone in keeping up the fight against steel and steam'.<sup>103</sup>

Little imagination was shown in finding variations in industrial training. Basket making, weaving, rope and mat making and cane chair making and repair were standard throughout the nineteenth century, while Edinburgh boasted mattress making was a task suited for even 'the dullest inmate'.<sup>104</sup> The blind school workshop duplicated the routines and emulated the atmosphere of the commercial world outside. Carton noted that wage cuts were imposed for idleness in Edinburgh, and late comers were fined at York.<sup>105</sup> For females, even musical talent could not always offer an alternative to the workshop. At Birmingham the Committee was reluctant to let girls continue the pianoforte, being 'confirmed in the opinion that cane seating is the most reliable source of occupation for females.'<sup>106</sup> The British reputation for industrializing blind education was remarked on by Johann Moldenhawer, the great Danish educator, who said 'We do not wish to make our blind people only 'factory hands, as in Britain where division of labour is the chief feature'.<sup>107</sup>

Educational aims in Britain were apparently set lower from the start. The founders of Britain's schools for the blind, from Liverpool onwards may have been loosely inspired by Haüy's institute, but their educational aims were clearly dissimilar. Haüy's venture had been built on his book, while at Liverpool there is no record of a British person reading raised type before 1820; nor is there any evidence of a British institution declaring as its aim that blind pupils should be literate for at least a decade after that.

#### 4.4 Victorian critics

Nowhere in the early general works celebrating the achievements of British institutions for the blind, do we find a single allusion to a small but significant group of their critics, some of whom were blind themselves. Encountering their few publications, we learn that not everyone stood bound in admiration as institutions on the voluntarist model expanded up the end of the 1850s. In the 1830s, Carton had remarked on the less than intellectual atmosphere prevailing in England. He suggested at the time that the Edinburgh asylum, where James Gall's forays into printing had begun, struck the best balance in its aims between learning and utility. By the end of his visit, however, he had concluded that, 'the institutions for the blind

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<sup>103</sup> Cutsforth, *The Blind in School and Society*, 64.

<sup>104</sup> Oliphant, *The Early Education of the Blind*, 141-3.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Birmingham Institution, *30th Annual Report, 1876-77*, (Birmingham, 1877), 6.

<sup>107</sup> Charity Organisation Society, *The Training of the Blind*. Appendix IX 'Extracts from the Report of the First European Congress of Teachers of the Blind.' (London, 1876), 49.

in England deserve to be taken as a model for the establishments to be formed in other countries, and 'their origin, as well as their management, do much to honour the country'.<sup>108</sup> British cities appeared to share Carton's enthusiasm and the blind institution gained a place in the social imagination where it symbolized the highest of Christian aspirations.

Some voices of dissent can be found, nonetheless. Reverend B.G. Johns, writing in the *Edinburgh Review* in 1854, spoke of the blind as an 'alien nation' within Britain, numbering perhaps 30,000. Concerned at their apparent cultural isolation, Johns pleaded for support in the efforts to make them literate. For the illiterate blind child, he wrote, 'Bodily pleasures become his main thought; he becomes selfish, silent, reserved, nervous, timid, opinionated and discontented.'; the literate blind child by contrast 'reads his chapter in St. John or *Robinson Crusoe*; he plays chess or dominoes, works a sum in Long Division, or writes a letter home to his mother which she can read with her eyes and he with his fingers'.<sup>109</sup>

The absence of literacy was seen at the heart of the problem by others too. E.C. Johnson identified the lack of 'food for the mind' as a critical factor in the debilitation of the blind. In 1860, addressing his plea to the Editor of *The Times*, he wrote:

Blind men of all ages and from all walks of life are shut out from the ordinary pursuits and excitements of daily life. Their industry is crippled by competition with the seeing; their literature is limited from the very nature of tangible typography and by the paucity of books, while their ordinary tone of thought is fettered by the unconquerable feeling of dependence which besets them at every turn and drives them back to the sad consciousness of their affliction whenever they attempt to go it alone.<sup>110</sup>

Other aspects of institutional education were also becoming subject to criticism. Considerable resources had been made available, emotional investment had been high, yet there was a growing awareness that all was not as subscribers to institutions within communities had hoped.

The earliest and perhaps most influential critic of blind education as it had evolved was John Bird, a Member of the Royal College of Surgeons, who in his essay on 'The Present Neglected State of the Blind' condemned the 'exile' institutions as 'mischievous' in

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<sup>108</sup> Carton, *The Establishments*, 38.

<sup>109</sup> Later published as B.G. Johns, *Blind People, Their Works and Ways* (London: John Murray, 1867).

<sup>110</sup> E. C. Johnson, *The Blind of London* London: 1860

themselves.<sup>111</sup> This theme of exile was taken up by the Belgian Hyppolite van Landeghem and his wife, who wrote as Mrs. Hippolyte van Landeghem, in their publications in the 1860s. In his *Charity Misapplied*, Van Landeghem argued that ‘homes’ for the blind were ‘an infamous desecration of the name of humanity’s most sacred institution’.<sup>112</sup> He distinguished between two kinds of charity, ‘pharisaical charity, which degrades both recipient and giver, and the charity taught by Christ, which, calling forth exertion and gratitude, elevates the mind and brings into play all the higher powers of the soul’.<sup>113</sup> This institutions’ failure to ‘elevate the mind’ was at the heart of his grievances, and their notion that literacy was of minor importance perpetuated an unhappy situation.

With greater eloquence and specificity than her husband, Mrs. Van Landeghem sought to expose the inadequacies, or worse, of the institution. She maintained that none of the eminent blind people in society were educated in these ‘exile schools’.<sup>114</sup> In the course of her work she raised the question of who benefited the most from the institutions in material terms. Her analysis of the 1857 accounts of the Indigent School for the Blind, ‘the wealthiest and largest in the kingdom’, showed that the work of the blind pupils largely subsidized the salaries of officials ‘who are totally unfit to educate the blind’, and called for government to interfere and ‘put to an end the infamous practice of making a market out of our calamity’.<sup>115</sup> Anticipating the later concept of the self-fulfilling educational prophecy, the writer expressed an even greater concern over the way that sighted educators were ‘in the habit of coupling deprivation of sight with mental and physical incapacity’. In her view, ‘Those few observers who have studied the wants and capabilities of the blind man are fully convinced that when he is fairly admitted to the rights of a social being, and allowed to exercise his facilities according to their bent, he does not often fall below the average line of intelligence and usefulness’.<sup>116</sup> Pleading for the opening of ‘those spacious “Oubliettes” into which mistaken charity has forced those sightless citizens’, Van Landeghem, in an early call for State involvement, pointed out that ‘Our continental neighbours have been quick to see and acknowledge the evil consequences of “exile training” for the four sensed’.<sup>117</sup> Reference was made to a little known experiment in integrated education in communal or district schools,

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<sup>111</sup> John Bird, ‘Essay on the Condition of the Blind’, in James Wilson, *Biography of the Blind*, (Introduction to 1854 edition).

<sup>112</sup> Hyppolite van Landeghem, *Charity Misapplied: After Twelve Years Experience in an Exile Institution* (London: Privately printed 1862).

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, vii

<sup>114</sup> Mrs. Hyppolite van Landeghem, *Exile and Home* (London: Privately printed, 1865), 199.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 202-4.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, viii.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, ix.

whereby six classes for the 'elevation of the Blind, the Deaf and Dumb and the weak of intellect' were opened by the *Conseil Municipal* of Paris, and to Belgium where, in 1836, every blind and deaf and dumb child was given the right to state education in ordinary schools.<sup>118</sup>

Thus, awareness was slowly spreading that visual impairment did not diminish intellectual curiosity and criticisms had also emerged of the failure of institutions to enable the blind to gain later self-sufficiency and above all financial independence. Their shortcomings, in this particular regard, were amply demonstrated by independent studies and in particular by the Royal Commission Report of 1889, but are not the central to the concern of this study.<sup>119</sup> What is relevant is the strength of belief in the voluntarist way revealed in the Commissioners, who had assembled considerable evidence of educational shortcomings over four years, yet declared their faith in concluding that there should be no interference with voluntary bodies which had, in their eyes, done good work in the education and training of the blind.<sup>120</sup>

Gordon Phillips made the sanguine observation that the effects of 'social isolation may only be speculated upon'.<sup>121</sup> Today, in the absence of audio records of the voices of the isolated, we still have the testimonies in print of those most closely involved in their care. The cultural inadequacies of institutional life were becoming increasingly clear as was made evident in Samuel Gridley Howe's extraordinary volte-face in his speech to inaugurate a new school for the blind in Batavia, New York State in 1866. To the consternation of his audience, Howe said that 'no class has suffered so much from a lack of wisdom in the guidance of charitable emotions as the blind have suffered and do suffer', being thrust into 'a community where everything goes by clockwork and steam'.<sup>122</sup> He stressed the blind child's need for 'the ties of kindred, of friendship and of neighborhood' and suggested that residential schools generally were indiscriminate in receiving too many pupils, perhaps because they were paid by number.<sup>123</sup> Koestler observed that little heed was given to Howe's warning and such schools continued to be built. By the turn of the century there were 17,

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 9-10.

<sup>119</sup> See Oliphant, 'Empowerment and Debilitation', 85-86 on accusations of incompetence, exploitation, and allegations of corruption.

<sup>120</sup> RCBD, *Report*, Para. 253

<sup>121</sup> Phillips, *The Blind*, 112-3.

<sup>122</sup> Koestler, *The Unseen Minority*, 407-8. Koestler quotes from Howe's *Batavia Address September 6, 1866* (Boston: Walker, Fuller, 1866).

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

another 12 were established in the next two decades and in 1972, only one of the 55 residential schools in existence was less than half a century old.<sup>124</sup>

The British institutional setting offered more in the way of ‘clockwork and steam’ than it did in the way of cultural stimulation and certainly was not devoted to imparting literacy to its pupils until well into the second half of the nineteenth century.

Undoubtedly, the curriculum and activities offered by voluntary institutions expanded in the last decades of the century to include the government standard subjects, prompted by the success of the school boards, and there were such innovations as swimming, gymnastics and typewriter training; State inspectors, delighted by the introduction of the latter, remarked approvingly that nine machines were constantly in use at York.<sup>125</sup> Female pupils seemed to benefit particularly from curricular innovation, where once they had been seen as unpaid servants helping with domestic duties. At St. George’s, in their 1886 examination, the girls showed an ‘intelligent knowledge of English history, Biography, geography and spelling’.<sup>126</sup> The emphasis in the distribution of resources, however, was still not on promoting literacy.

Back on New Year’s Day 1840, in Edinburgh, James Gall had written in his diary that ‘The Blind call for more books; their call must be answered.’ The following chapters examine how the providers of their education responded to that plea.<sup>127</sup>

#### **4.5 Literacy and blindness: the British institutional perspective**

Given that in Britain, as Owen Chadwick reminds us, ‘education in the nineteenth century was essentially religious education’ it was to be expected that churchmen would play an important part in urging that the blind person should be taught to read, and that religion should provide the subject matter.<sup>128</sup> Egil Johansson points out that, for a long time, religion was a matter ‘for the voice, ear, heart and memory’, and praying and singing were considered sufficient before individual access to the word of God through the printed word came to be seen as essential.<sup>129</sup> In the early phase of the British institutions, this was the case at Liverpool and elsewhere, as school management bodies were content to let an oral culture prevail.<sup>130</sup> Hymn singing and sermons played a large part in chapel life and the scriptures

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 409.

<sup>125</sup> Yorkshire School, *Annual Report*, 1900, 7.

<sup>126</sup> St. George’s School, *Annual Report*, 1886, XIX.

<sup>127</sup> James Gall, *Diary*, January 1, 1840.

<sup>128</sup> Owen Chadwick, *The Victorian Church* (London: Black, 1966), Vol.I, 37.

<sup>129</sup> Egil Johansson, ‘Literacy campaigns in Sweden’ *Interchange* 19 (3-4) Fall-Winter 1988, 140ff.

<sup>130</sup> The York School’s Master would still read to the pupils in the evenings after supper. Yorkshire School for the Blind *Annual Report* 1875, 10.

were read to the pupils to provide that consolation. Early annual reports offer abundant descriptions of a rigorous adherence to timetables that emphasized religious practice. Britain's philanthropic institutions were convinced that the scriptures offered the blind the best means of consolation, but they were usually offered to pupils and workers in an oral context through sermons, participation in hymn singing, and the passive experience of having chosen texts read to them as they toiled or ate their communal meals. At Edinburgh's Asylum, later to be the first British institution to print the Gospels, 'family worship' took place morning and evening and Saturday afternoons and Monday mornings were devoted to collective readings and explanations of the scriptures, to catechism and 'general moral and religious exhortations'.<sup>131</sup> Glasgow held 'family worship' at 6.30 a.m. and again at 7 p.m. The Old Testament was read in the morning, the New Testament in the afternoon, and psalms and hymns were learnt by rote.<sup>132</sup> Some asylums, such as Birmingham and Edinburgh allowed a freedom of choice in the place of worship, while insisting on attendance, wherever it was to be.

These hours devoted to religious activity, early morning prayers, Sabbath Day exercises, and hymns suggest religion was seen to have intrinsic value in the humanitarian vision of blind education. In Paolo Freire's terms, the early Victorian institutional definition of literacy for the blind, however passive, was 'Christian, civilizing and consciousness-raising at a time when illiteracy was ever more closely associated with ignorance, indolence and poverty; the illiterate individual was 'diseased' and 'lost' and words, here religious words, were to be the "blood of salvation"'.<sup>133</sup>

In the first phase, the British institutional priority was in most cases to furnish the blind with employment to prevent them from being burdens to their family and community. The managers' clear doubts regarding the blind person's educability led them to consider the teaching of reading futile. Whereas Haüy's Parisian publication records reflect Walter Ong's conception of literacy wherein the printed word offered a key to enlightenment in the broadest terms, this notion was only developed much later and even then was restricted to an elite in Britain.<sup>134</sup>

<sup>131</sup> Edinburgh Asylum, *Minute Book*, 1834, 6-7.

<sup>132</sup> John Alston, *The Asylum for the Blind, Glasgow: Statement of the Education, Employment and Internal Arrangements at the Glasgow blind asylum Glasgow* (Glasgow: privately printed, 1836), 18ff.

<sup>133</sup> Paolo Freire, *The politics of education: culture, power and liberation* (Hadley, Mass.: Bergin and Garvey, 1985), 8.

<sup>134</sup> For a discussion of Ong's observations on the 'presence' of the word, see W. Ross Winterowd, *The Culture and Politics of Literacy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

After this long resistance to encouraging literacy, the teaching of reading skills was slowly accepted as an addition to the daily routine. Where efforts were made to do so, the first being those described above at Edinburgh in the early 1830s (Section 4.2), the predominant purpose was to enable a reading of the scriptures, in line with the Calvinist view that all should have direct access to God's words.<sup>135</sup> 'The General Laws' of Birmingham's General Institute in the 1850s decreed that the instruction of both sexes should 'include reading of the Holy Scriptures'.<sup>136</sup> Liverpool School's annual report for 1852 made no mention whatsoever of educational activity.<sup>137</sup> That for 1865, in contrast, mentions that 50 of the 67, 'all the pupils capable of learning', were able to do so.<sup>138</sup> The amended rules, by 1888, stated that every physically capable male was to learn reading for one hour daily.<sup>139</sup> The Bristol Asylum in 1888 reported on the most recent State Inspector's visit which recorded that the school now offered educational courses including reading, writing and ciphering and 'nearly all the subjects taught in an ordinary elementary day school'.<sup>140</sup>

By the end of the century, many were now beginning to see literacy as of critical importance in integrating what Reverend B.G. Johns had earlier described as an 'alien race' within the nation, and shared his fear of the blind returning to society either illiterate or without books, from their schools and asylums, 'to the workhouse, the labourer's cottage, the crowded attic of the artisan, or even a workshop of their own'.<sup>141</sup> The duplication of so many religious texts by these innovators, however, suggests that religion remained inextricably linked to the introduction of literacy in the minds of the providers. This emphasis, decreed by voluntarist bodies, set a pattern that was to have a prolonged effect on the provision of literature for the blind in Britain. Sentiment and objectification shaped notions of educability, and reinforced images of weakness, dependency and passivity and the accompanying misconception that religious texts alone could bring consolation.

In the last two decades of the nineteenth century, larger, more prosperous institutions, under pressure from state inspection, allocated more resources to expanding the curriculum and promoting literacy. A British visitor to the Paris institute in 1882 observed that five literary teachers were available for the boys, and five teachers of trade.<sup>142</sup> Although this

<sup>135</sup> On the oral nature of religious teaching see Egil Johannsen, *Literacy campaigns*, 135-162.

<sup>136</sup> Birmingham Institution, *Eleventh Annual Report*, 1858, 2.

<sup>137</sup> Pritchard, *Education and the Handicapped*, 45. Here he asserts that there is no evidence of reading being taught before 1862 at Liverpool.

<sup>138</sup> Liverpool School, *Annual Report*, 1866, 2.

<sup>139</sup> Liverpool School, *Annual Report*, 1888, 6.

<sup>140</sup> Bristol Asylum or School of Industry for the Blind, *Report for 1887* (Bristol, 1888), 9.

<sup>141</sup> B.G. Johns, *Edinburgh Review*, 63.

<sup>142</sup> *Progress* March-April 1882, 93.

balance was not as favourable in the utilitarian British establishments, both internal and Inspectorate reports show an accelerated change from around that time.

In the chapters that follow, examples from publication records make clear how religious literature continued to constitute the bulk of texts printed in Britain, in contrast to France and the United States, where a far greater range was available to the blind reader, thanks largely to the active support of the State.



## Chapter 5     ‘The Battle of the Types’ in institutions and visiting societies

### 5.1 The freedom of choice

With no clear agreement on the best form of raised type to be adopted, and no State presence to coordinate developments or guarantee the teaching of reading or the provision of publications to blind people, what developed as a consequence was one of Victorian Britain’s most interesting examples of the benefits and dangers of unbridled philanthropic effort in addressing a newly perceived need in society.

As early as 1827 the desirability of a common system of raised type had been foreseen in the announcement of the Edinburgh Royal Society of Arts Gold Medal competition. Yet, developments in subsequent decades decreed that this aim was, by the 1860s, still further away from fulfilment. While a consensus that religious literature best served the needs of the blind reader appeared firm until the close of the nineteenth century, individuals, private institutions and societies seeking prestige and economic gain competed stubbornly for decades to have their own form of raised type accepted as universal. Until the emergence of the British and Foreign Blind Association, forerunner of the RNIB, in the late 1860s, decision making on the type to be chosen was squarely in the hands of the sighted.

With several contending options available, the choices made by British institutions depended often on their connections with specific individuals, but also reflected their particular notion of the cultural needs and learning capacities of the blind persons in their charge. Gordon Phillips argued that the charitable organizations which controlled the education of the blind were ‘open to change’ and that the introduction of tactile reading was a sign of this ‘openness’.<sup>1</sup> Yet, given the slow, confused and wasteful progress in their provision of literature for the blind, ‘the Battle of the Types’ in Britain is more accurately seen as mostly a consequence of rivalries among obdurate philanthropic organizations, in which egoism and economic motives invariably played a part. Those engaged in this struggle in Britain were unrelenting in their determination to resist the formation of any central coordinating body, such as the US Printing House in Louisville, Kentucky, which had been established in 1858.<sup>2</sup> This absence of a single controlling body in the provision of literature has been defended by some historians of charity as one of its positive features. In Frank Prochaska’s defence of nineteenth century voluntarism in England, in which he challenged the socialist presentation of charity as a residue of discredited Victorian liberalism,

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<sup>1</sup> Phillips, *The Blind*, 83.

<sup>2</sup> American Printing House for the Blind, *The American Printing House for the Blind Inc.*, 2.

duplication served 'a useful function as a source of change as well as of choice and variety'.<sup>3</sup> Prochaska saw this aspect of voluntary effort for the blind as one of the most successful examples of the power and effectiveness of decentralized charity and a symbol of the triumph of the philanthropic spirit in the second half of the nineteenth century, 'For in the diversity and principled rivalry, the love of the ad hoc remedy, and seemingly inefficient muddle that typify voluntary action, the nation has gained innumerable moral and democratic benefits'.<sup>4</sup>

The competition to produce a universal system of raised type may appear in hindsight as one such 'ad hoc' remedy, but for most detached contemporary observers the negative consequences were clear. In 1870, *The Times* denounced 'the present Babel of types' and referred to 'the present scarcity and costliness of books' which denied the blind 'a share in one of the best heritages of humanity, from which they are now almost entirely debarred'.<sup>5</sup>

The introduction to England and Scotland of the various tactile print systems has been described in the preceding chapters (3 and 4), and, given the fragmented nature of primary source material prior to 1850, and prior to the comprehensive historical summary of the state of printing compiled at the time of London's Great Exhibition, the incomplete records of the institutions are our only source of information on the subsequent progress of the various competing methods.

In examining these institutional archives for the first half of the nineteenth century, the annual reports and other internal publications of the Liverpool School, England's earliest, offer little mention of any interest in educational activity. The Liverpool School's acquisition of volumes in the system devised by James Frere, promoted by 'The London and Blackheath Association for embossing the Scriptures in various languages and for teaching the Blind to Read on the Phonetic System', is recorded in the school's *Minute Book* in 1838.<sup>6</sup> The school's annual reports, however, from 1847 through to 1889, continue to neglect education and focus on the institution's Rules, clothing and other needs, and the acknowledgement of subscriptions. In 1886, the report for the previous year stated that 'all pupils capable of learning are taught to read by means of a raised type' without specifying which, and that 50 of the 67 pupils could then read.<sup>7</sup> The report for 1888 shows that the Rules, by then, included a provision that, 'every physically capable male has to learn to read for one hour daily'.<sup>8</sup> Once again, the choice of type was not recorded, but the 1900 report listed the Braille books

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<sup>3</sup> Prochaska, *The Voluntary Impulse*, 89.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> 'Literature for the Blind' *The Times* 3 January 1870.

<sup>6</sup> Liverpool School, *Minute Book*, 7 August 1838.

<sup>7</sup> Liverpool School, *Annual Report*, 1866, 2.

<sup>8</sup> Liverpool School, *Annual Report*, 1888, 6.

donated, suggesting that Braille was by then one of, if not the predominant, means of instruction.<sup>9</sup>

Carton, one of the earliest chroniclers of blind institutions mentioned Edinburgh as the most advanced establishment in the provision of literature. There, he found the Psalms and Gospels produced by James Gall, in his own type.<sup>10</sup> Gall's personal influence in the city ensured the continued use of his type, but by 1852, the holding of works in four different types is noted in the managerial report.<sup>11</sup>

Thomas Anderson, Master of the York institution, had also toured widely in the 1830s, and remarked on the 40 books held in the library of the institute at Paris. He also observed, 'It is a striking feature of our own institutions that they are all the result of private charity, while those on the Continent are supported wholly or in part by their respective governments', and stated that he was not himself averse to State help if it was 'an aid' rather than 'a dependence'.<sup>12</sup> At Edinburgh, where James Gall had been pursuing his aim of introducing his type to the asylum despite what Anderson described as 'the extreme dislike of the blind to reading by the finger', his impression was that the pupils 'were in mental cultivation raised far above their condition'. Anderson was perhaps ahead of his time in suggesting that *Robinson Crusoe*, *Pilgrim's Progress* would be excellent additions to the biblical works then available.<sup>13</sup>

Further evidence that the initiative had passed to Scotland in the 1830s can be found in the records of the Glasgow Asylum, whose eleventh annual report, in 1838, offered descriptions of publications by the Treasurer, John Alston, described as an 'ardent and persevering friend of the blind'.<sup>14</sup> At an annual public examination, the pupils exhibited their reading skills using the elementary books produced at the institution's press, and a music book. With a somewhat theatrical gesture to prove that his students could read unprepared, Alston broke the seal on printed copies of Locke's commentary on the Bible before his students read aloud to an audience of potential benefactors.<sup>15</sup> The *Report* recorded that Alston's print was also used in the early days at the Yorkshire School for the Blind, and that

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<sup>9</sup> Liverpool School, *Annual Report*, 1900, 24.

<sup>10</sup> Carton, *The Establishments*, 110.

<sup>11</sup> Phillips, *The Blind*, 78.

<sup>12</sup> Anderson, *Observations*, 2.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 43-44.

<sup>14</sup> Glasgow Asylum for the Blind *Eleventh Report by the Directors* 1838, 3.

<sup>15</sup> *Scottish Guardian*, 10 May 1838.

he had even shipped 150 volumes to Philadelphia, including ten full copies of the New Testament and multiplication tables.<sup>16</sup>

In his general history of 'special education', John Hurt concluded that however bitter their rivalry, the inventors of different scripts were in agreement that religious literature for the blind had priority. He pointed out that England's concentration on works of religious instruction caused its educators to 'lag behind' France and Germany. As evidence of this Hurt claimed, rightly, that while Paris had, from 1832, published grammars, dictionaries and authors' compendiums, Britain had no books on methods other than primers in various scripts.<sup>17</sup>

Thus, English emphasis before 1840 remained firmly on religious solace, as can be seen in the first publication of Birmingham's Institute, which expressed its intention in imparting literacy:

Religious instruction is conveyed not merely by oral information but also books in raised or embossed characters. It is pleasing to reflect on the comforts and advantages which will be derived by those deprived of the blessings and delights of vision and who, in their dark and solitary hours will be enabled to acquire information for themselves and hold communion with their God in the perusal of his holy Word.<sup>18</sup>

This first Report of 1848 stated that 'several of the pupils are now able to read with ease the Gospel of Salvation', apparently using the Lucas type, in which form a handsome grant of books had arrived from the London Society in Queen's Square.<sup>19</sup>

Through the 1850s, the Birmingham school's reports make no specific reference to raised types other than Moon, which had been used with great success by visitors in the city. The local Home Teaching Society appears to have been linked with the institution, and through the 1870s, while no specific mention is made of curricular innovation or the gaining of literacy among its pupils accounts are given of the success of outdoor teachers using the Moon system. In subsequent years, little priority seems to have been given to recording the advancement of literacy; acknowledgement of donations such as the Reverend Brown's mince pies and plum cakes and a local merchant's 70 lbs. of pickled pork received more

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<sup>16</sup> Glasgow Asylum *Report*, 1838, 2.

<sup>17</sup> John S. Hurt, *Outside the Mainstream: a history of special education* (London: Batsford, 1988).

<sup>18</sup> Birmingham Institution, *Annual Report*, 1848, 'Laws', 4.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-5.

space.<sup>20</sup> Only in the annual report for 1880-1881 do we find a reference to Braille, described as being 'only recent in England' and a major factor in the 'very marked and highly satisfactory' progress of the pupils. Indeed, so impressed was the management by the results of Braille teaching that Moon was to be used henceforth 'only by the dull fingered'.<sup>21</sup>

Prior to the emergence of William Moon's system, the principal method used in England was probably that devised by Lucas in Bristol around 1835. A relatively cheap arbitrary system, (as explained in section 4.2), the Lucas type was based on Byron's system of stenography, and printing began at Bristol. In 1838, in St. John's Wood, London, the Society for Teaching the Blind to Read was born. It soon flourished and set up its own school, which felt bound by its founding charter to use the Lucas system predominantly through to the end of the century. By 1871, the Lucas system was also in use in at least seven schools, including Exeter, Bath, Birmingham and Nottingham.<sup>22</sup>

The records of other leading institutions emphasize the accidental nature of choices made in adopting a raised type. The Yorkshire School for the Blind had used lower case Roman types at the start, and it was not for over twenty years that it added the teaching of Moon.<sup>23</sup> The school's Manager, Anthony Buckle, visited Denmark in September 1877, where he found Braille and Roman types had been used in harmony since 1858.<sup>24</sup> On his return, Braille was introduced and a year later, the management wrote 'The Braille point type we find in all our school work to be invaluable, and it is now a source of wonder to us how the Education could have been carried on without it'.<sup>25</sup>

As institutions stumbled forward on their separate paths to providing the key to literacy for their blind charges the one sustaining conviction shared by the proponents of the different systems was that each was involved in a civilizing process. The following sections chart the swing of the pendulum as the choices of institutions and societies changed.

## 5.2 The Great Exhibition

It was, on the one hand, an indication of the degree of satisfaction felt with progress made in providing means for the blind person to read that London's Great Exhibition in 1851 included a section on Printing for the Blind; on the other, it was an opportunity to point out that all was

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<sup>20</sup> Birmingham Institution, *Annual Report*, 1877-1878, 53.

<sup>21</sup> Birmingham Institution, *Annual Report*, 1880-1881, 6.

<sup>22</sup> Mansfield Turner and William Harris, *A Guide to the Charities and Institutions for the Blind*, (London: 1871).

<sup>23</sup> Yorkshire School for the Blind, *Annual Report*, 1838, 3.

<sup>24</sup> Yorkshire School for the Blind, *Annual Report*, 1878, 3-4.

<sup>25</sup> Yorkshire School, *Annual Report*, 1880, 6.

not as it could have been.<sup>26</sup> The authors of the *Report* on this section of the Exhibition introduced their account with the following pronouncement:

The great and increasing attention that is paid to the intellectual and moral instruction of this unfortunate class is one of the distinctive features of the progress of our age. A few years ago printing for the blind was considered only a curious or doubtful experiment, but it is now established beyond all question that books are true sources of profit and pleasure to them.<sup>27</sup>

In their conviction that the invention of printing for the blind marked ‘a new era in the history of literature’, the Jurors provided a brief but detailed ‘historical sketch of its origins’ and progress before commenting on its present state.

Notwithstanding the triumphal note struck in its opening statement, the Jurors’ *Report* put forward important criticisms. It offers the first comparison with developments in America, pointing out that in 1836, by which time the Edinburgh Society of Arts had still not decided to whom its Gold Medal should be awarded, there were two active printing houses for the blind in the United States. One of these had already published the whole of the New Testament in a cheap form (in common lower case letters) while the other had produced the four Gospels in Roman characters. Indeed, when the Edinburgh panel, on 31 May 1837, awarded the Society’s Medal to Dr. Fry from London for his ‘invention’, no one on the British side of the Atlantic was aware that this exact alphabet had been in use in Philadelphia since 1833. In a further admonishment of British parochialism, the jurors’ report remarked that the late John Alston (deceased 20 August 1846) had been under the illusion that his was ‘the first Bible ever printed for the blind’, when the work had been done long before in Boston, whose collection was already available far more cheaply, ‘Had he expended the same energy and money in producing other valuable books, and exchanged them with the Boston and Philadelphia institutions as he was urged to do, the three institutions would have been greatly benefited by the large outlay and the blind of both countries would have had a great increase to their library’.<sup>28</sup>

Broadening its sphere of reference, the jurors noted the trend toward standardization elsewhere, even before the advent of Braille:

In France, Belgium, Prussia, Austria, Switzerland, Sweden and the United States, the Roman lower case alphabet is used. In most, if not all of these countries, the

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<sup>26</sup> RCB, *Great Exhibition Jury Report*.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 413.

<sup>28</sup> *Great Exhibition, Jury Report*, 418.

Institutions for the Blind are supported and partially controlled by Government, and perhaps this is the reason why, in all of them, the same system of typography prevails.<sup>29</sup>

With a consensual pattern already established, it was easier for the above mentioned countries to convert to Braille when its advantages became apparent. The jurors then went on to provide tabular listings of the publications available at the time, with abundant examples of the duplication they so deplored. Unfortunately, a quantitative analysis of their respective sales did not fall within the scope of their enquiry, and they remarked only that the printing of Roman type appeared to be in a state of stasis, while, 'the books in arbitrary characters seem to be increasing and gaining public favour'.<sup>30</sup> Generally acknowledged as foremost among these was the Lucas system, on account of its simplicity and the ease with which it could be read by touch. The St. John's Wood base for Lucas publication was at the time highly active and said to be improving the system steadily.

Religious subjects at this junction still dominated British choices when selections were made for publication and offer the most direct means of comparison. In 1851, the entire Bible could be bought from the Perkins Institution Press in six volumes for £3, 6s., 1d., while Alston's Glasgow version, sold for £7, 10s. The choice in purchasing the New Testament was wider. The Boston version was in four volumes and retailed for 16s, 6d, compared to Glasgow's Alston version at £2. The recently completed Gospels produced in Lucas type, sold at £2 to non-subscribers. In Frere the cost was £1, 3s, 6d, while a version was offered in the new Moon type for £4, 3s, the higher cost of the latter being attributable to its greater bulk.

Perturbed at the publishers' continued determination to proceed on their different paths with no evidence of any intention of cooperation among them, the Jurors wrote, 'There are now five entirely different systems of typography in use here, and vigorously pressed upon the benevolent public. The unfortunate blind are thus deprived of the advantages they might have if uniformity of typography were adopted. This diversity of opinion is causing great injustice to them, and the Jury cannot but urge upon the parties concerned the speedy adoption of one system throughout the country'.<sup>31</sup> Their own conclusion was that Howe's system, though 'not perfect' had fewer demerits than any other, and was thus to be

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 419.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 420.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 419-20.

recommended as a uniform type, but ‘any of the five principal systems now used in England is better than so many’.<sup>32</sup> The response of the providers is examined below.

### 5.3 ‘The unfortunate bone of a very unseemly contention’

We do not know how widely the jurors’ report may have been disseminated, and the general consciousness of the state of blind education and welfare was probably governed more by sentiment than science. Popular publications such as *Household Words*, struck a chord with an increasingly sentimental middle class public. In its pages, Charles Dickens had written in 1854 of his encounter with Laura Bridgman at the Massachusetts Institute, where she studied under the tutorship of Samuel Howe.<sup>33</sup> In that account, published anonymously, Dickens confirmed the idea of the blind person living in a world of absolute darkness, a theme he took up again a piece for the same journal, entitled ‘At Work in the Dark’, in which he described Elizabeth Gilbert’s workshop:

There was in this room much to suggest to us that, though a sunbeam quivered on the floor, the whole space was, except to the visitor, pitch dark. It is, however, darkness without gloom.<sup>34</sup>

Dickens described two ladies reading to the blind in this room and recorded that the library consisted of 150 volumes, which were read in turns by 50 voluntary readers. It did not escape the author’s notice that these books were printed in six or seven systems. Chess sets and writing frames were provided, and he was prompted to suggest a museum for the blind, with stuffed beasts and birds.<sup>35</sup>

For a more scientific account of the ‘Battle of the Types’ in the 1850s, we are indebted to the enquiries of Edmund C. Johnson. In his *Tangible Typography*, published in 1853. Johnson argued that ‘the capability of the Blind to receive instruction, in fact of being really educated’ had already been fully proved in England’s institutions, but that there remained much to be done to fulfil their educational needs. He continued, ‘They at once need a literature of their own, of a particular kind which at present does not exist’.<sup>36</sup> Their books Johnson described as ‘few in number, deficient in variety and not procured without difficulty,

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Anonymous, ‘Blind, Deaf and Dumb: Three Graces of Christian Science’ *Household Words* 1854 Vol. IX February 18 - August 12, 317-320. See also Elizabeth Gitter, *The Imprisoned Guest: Samuel Howe and Laura Bridgman, the Original Deaf-Blind Girl* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2001).

<sup>34</sup> Anonymous, ‘At Work in the Dark’. *Household Words* 1859. Vol. XIX. Dec. 4 - May 28, 321.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 323.

<sup>36</sup> Edmund C., Johnson, *Tangible Typography or How the Blind Read* (London: Whitaker, 1853), 7.



even at large expense', and he claimed that blind people were 'still almost without works of interest or amusement'.<sup>37</sup> Unnecessary duplication and a lack of empathy with the cultural needs of the blind person were the root causes of this less than satisfactory situation. Johnson criticized the negatively competitive atmosphere prevailing as 'the author of every successive "best plan" too often starts with an attempt to decry all other systems; ABC and D are pure fallacies, but his the royal garden road. In the usual pattern, subscriptions are raised, printing presses set up, the Scriptures sold, a school may be set up and one more system of arbitrary type is added to a list already too long'.<sup>38</sup> In Johnson's analysis, the only significant types in use in Britain and Europe at the start of the 1850s were Lucas, Frere, Moon, Braille and Carton, Alston, 'Alston modified', the 'American' system and the French alphabetical.

The Lucas system, despite the difficulties presented by its arbitrary form and its tricky abbreviations, prevailed at the headquarters of the London Society for Teaching the Blind to Read at St. John's Wood by reason of its charter, mentioned earlier. Frere was not commonly found, except where prior investment had persuaded institutions to persist with it. According to Johnson, the fast growing popularity of Moon type, 'a voluminous and expensive system', was attributable to the dynamism of its inventor, 'a man who by industry and talent has raised himself to the position of Master in the Brighton School'. By 1851, Moon had published the Lord's Prayer in Irish Gaelic, Italian and Chinese, as well as a number of geographical maps.<sup>39</sup> Johnson observed, with consternation, that the Paris institute under Dufour had stopped printing in lower case Roman and was turning to Braille. Johnson regarded the latter type as a system of dots whose abbreviations made it an inferior system to the one developed by the aforementioned Abbé Carton in Belgium. Johnson was probably influenced by his visit to Carton's Institution des Sourds Muets et des Aveugles in Bruges, where he found his host to be 'famed, hospitable, knowledgeable', and the establishment to be the best managed that he had seen. Its pupils apparently read books and wrote easily in Flemish and French, with one girl even reading English. Carton's system was described as closer to Roman than Braille and 'so easy as to deserve introduction into the English schools'.<sup>40</sup> Like Carton himself, Johnson spoke highly of Alston's Roman letters. The three men shared the belief expressed by Johnson that arbitrary characters, however ingeniously constructed, threw unnecessary obstacles in the way of the blind. Alston had created two alphabets, to cater for differing sensitivities of touch; the modified version was smaller, clearer and less bulky.

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>39</sup> Johnson, *Tangible Typography*, 16-21.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 25-6.

In Britain, the Roman system clearly held sway in this decade, and Johnson quoted from a letter from York's Superintendent, Beverley R. Morris declaring it 'amply sufficient for all practical purposes' and with advantages unobtainable in other systems.<sup>41</sup> Drawing on his correspondence, Johnson also presented claims from Matthew Semple, Glasgow's Superintendent who wrote, 'Our (Alston's) system is the best and is better adjusted for general use than any arbitrary character'.<sup>42</sup> B.G. Johns, Chaplain of St. George's, believed the Roman type chosen at his institution 'must resemble as nearly as possible the type in ordinary use among those who have eyesight'.<sup>43</sup> Johns remained an obdurate opponent of Braille for years to come.

Johnson's own conclusion was that the general adoption of any system based on arbitrary characters 'would be most undesirable on every ground', expressing his view that 'The Blind are already a peculiar and isolated race. But the adoption of an arbitrary system would render them more isolated than ever, by shutting them entirely out from the help of those who have eyes, unless acquainted with stenographic abbreviations'.<sup>44</sup> This supported the commonly held view that a blind person required a sighted intermediary in learning raised type and would thereafter benefit from the sighted being able to share the same texts. This notion would not be effectively challenged in Britain for another fifteen years at least. Johnson, nonetheless, showed an unprecedented openness to the idea of collaboration with America; he presented lists of all the books in print, both at Howe's Perkins Institution in Boston and at the Philadelphia Press, to show that 'American books are not only much less in bulk than any of the others, but are also much cheaper'. It was Johnson's opinion that the best way forward was probably a modification of the American system with the larger Alston type, so that many works 'of instruction and amusement', already available in America, would be easily and cheaply provided for the 'poor blind'. He pointed out that a 'fair and well chosen library already existed at the Boston press, which could easily be expanded for blind British readers of all classes'.<sup>45</sup>

It should be recorded that Johnson also turned his attention to the musical education of the blind in France, Spain and America and there found that a similar lack of harmony prevailed. His commentaries deserve the attention of future music researchers. In France, Johnson found the mode of musical instruction 'partly auricular, and partly by the embossed

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 33, Semple to Johnson 29 November 1852.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 47.

notation according to the system of Braille', but also found in use Rousseau's Style of Musical Notation, which was similar to a Roman system. In the United States, Cornelius Mahoney's embossed musical notation, which had Samuel Howe's unqualified support, was used in New York and Boston.

At the Paris Exhibition of 1867, Class 89 of the exhibits consisted of 'Apparatus used in Instruction of the Blind'. It fell to Johnson to prepare a Report to Parliament, which was duly published in 1868.<sup>46</sup> In his listing of the two main kinds of embossed printing, Johnson noted additions to those he had mentioned in 1853. These had been Lucas, Frere, Moon, French Braille, the American system (capitals and lower case), Alston in both versions and French alphabetical. At Paris, he added the Stuttgart series (dotted capitals), Amsterdam type (capitals of two sizes) Hungarian (capitals) and that of the Worcester Society (an alphabetical arrangement of capitals and lower case).<sup>47</sup> Thus, Britain was not alone in experiencing a divergence of opinions and duplication in a 'Battle of the Types'. Regarding the extent of usage, Johnson also made some observations of interest, confirming that Lucas, read primarily at the St. John's Wood base of the London Society for Teaching the Blind to Read, also was used at the Birmingham and Nottingham schools. Moon type was described as having 'numerous friends' and its foremost patron Sir Charles Lowther was the sole exhibitor of the type at Paris. Johnson reported that since he delivered his 1853 report, the Braille system had been adopted throughout the French and Swiss schools and in some German and Italian ones and that it had recently been introduced into Britain, remarking that the British and Foreign Blind Association of Cambridge Square had sent excellent specimens of Braille typography, while the celebrated blind traveller and author Viscount Cranborne had sent other examples.<sup>48</sup> At this juncture, a universal adoption of Braille in Britain seemed improbable, as Johnson's comment reveals: 'Although the lovers of Braille in Britain are few, their pretensions are great, and they tend to ignore the fact that the fullest literature for the blind in this country, America and Germany has issued from societies which advocate the employment of the ordinary type of the seeing or the Moon modification of the system'.<sup>49</sup>

In America, meanwhile, the Pennsylvania Society's 1870 *Report* concluded that the Boston Letter (capital and lower case) was to be the standard print of the nation, since its familiarity to the sighted made it easier to acquire. This was the first of the two most

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<sup>46</sup> E.C. Johnson, *Paris Exhibition, 1867: Report on the Apparatus and Methods used in the Instruction of the Blind*. (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1868).

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 5-6.

commonly expressed arguments against Braille at the time. The second was voiced explicitly by B.G Johns, whose experience as Chaplain of the School for the Indigent Blind, led him to believe that the system's 'fatal defect' was that 'the blind boy might master the complex system, but will be at a loss when his fingers harden and he can no longer read the mysterious symbols which will be incomprehensible to sighted friends or companions at home, who could help when the embossed alphabet is of the more familiar Roman type'.<sup>50</sup> In the same vein, Alston had always maintained that the teacher in an ordinary school, able to recognize the Roman type, could be of more assistance to the blind pupil, and that this was but one of the advantages of a system that was simple, practical and easily taught.

Johnson's Paris report offers a clear account of the state of printing for the blind just before the entry of Braille into the 'Battle of the Types' in Britain. It demonstrates that, in 1867, American books, some French, and those of the Worcester, York, Glasgow, Bristol, Stuttgart, Naples and the Dutch institutions were printed in alphabetical (Roman) style.

In 1868, Reverend R.H. Blair gave a paper to the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science. Introduced at the conference as Principal of the recently founded 'Worcester College for Blind Youths of Rank', Blair gave his own detailed account of the 'actual state of typography for the blind'.<sup>51</sup>

After sketching the customary short history of the earliest endeavours from Rampazeto's wooden blocks in 1575, Blair stated that, of the 16 specimens of type sent in to the Edinburgh competition forty years previously, only four were in his opinion, now viable options. Three of these, (Fry's, Gall's, and Howe's from Boston) were modified Roman types, Lucas was arbitrary. Blair regarded phonetic systems as a separate development, another variety of printing in relief. Frere he described as 'the father of the only phonetic system now living in this country' and dismissed the methods of Barbier in Paris and the New York Institute prototype as not worth describing, with the former being 'the least bad'.<sup>52</sup> Thus, while Carton's mixed system of dots and modified Roman prevailed in Belgium at this juncture, and Braille had, by slow steps since 1836, become universal in France, the British blind reader was, by circumstance, still obliged to read either Lucas, Frere, the Roman Gall type or the recently popular Moon system. Moon's system, in 1868, was said to have few friends abroad, except in Germany where it was deemed useful for those 'with very hard

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>51</sup> Blair, *On a Uniform System of Printing for the Blind*.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 411.

hands or old people'.<sup>53</sup> Blair reported that, further afield, the United States had its own contending systems in Howe's and the Philadelphian. Germany was almost entirely using the 'Lapidar Druckschrift' of Stuttgart, while Austria had a very small lower case Roman with capitals and Russia, Italy and Spain used forms of Roman.

In his comparison of the types, Blair pointed out that the argument should not be that the blind person can read but one type and no other without unnecessary difficulty, since 'the powers of the blind are sadly underrated'.<sup>54</sup> Of the arbitrary forms, Blair recommended Braille as the dotted characters were easy to decipher, and reading skill could be rapidly acquired. A further reason was that it could be written and the blind writer could read his or her own writing. Blair regarded the Frere system as being 'by almost common consent abandoned', and therefore not under consideration as a universal model. The Lucas system, despite its committed supporters' claims, Blair deemed 'the very worst of the tactile systems' on account of its 'numerous complications of contractions and barbarous violations of orthography'.<sup>55</sup>

Worcester College may soon afterwards have hastened the acceptance of Braille in Britain, but in 1868, Blair, as its Principal, still believed in the Roman type for general reading, declaring himself 'wholly in favour of that respectable and universally-used system of blind typography'. Citing America, Austria, Prussia, the Southern States of Germany Italy and Spain as countries embracing the system, he argued that it was the first one to give the blind a literature and 'holds its own in the world'.<sup>56</sup> Referring to a thorough examination of the merits of Moon by a Berlin committee, Blair agreed with its conclusion that Moon had no advantages over the Stuttgart Society's Roman type, and believed that, with very small modifications to the letters c, e and o, the very small type of Howe's system could be read without any difficulty, and since the bulk of existing literature was in the Roman characters, the arguments in favour of Lucas and Moon were diminished.

Blair attempted to add statistical support to his evaluation by sending out a questionnaire to every English institution and to the leading ones in France, Germany and America, asking how long their adopted system took their pupils to master and requesting them to time the reading of Chapter 17 of The Gospel of St. John twice over. The responses to the first question were predictably inconclusive as the rates clearly depended on the ability of the individual reader as much as the system. Although this was equally true for the second,

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 411.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 413.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 414.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 415.

Blair did discover that, in the average case, Howe's system could be read in 7 minutes 16 seconds. This was slightly faster than Lucas and over twice as fast as Moon.

The conclusion of Blair's paper, therefore, was that Roman type could be read with equal ease and speed, was already in use in most of the world, had no need for specially trained teachers and, in its very form, created a bond with the sighted helper-interlocutor. He wrote that 'on all grounds taken together, the Roman type is the one, and the only one eligible, for universal use, although on some particular ground, some other system may have an advantage'. He regretted that 'The blind are at present the unfortunate bone of a very unseemly contention' and expressed the hope that they may eventually be able to 'reap the blessings of real light'.<sup>57</sup> At this point it seemed highly improbable that Worcester College would play any part in the promotion of Braille soon afterwards.

In the decade following Blair's address, the 'Battle of the Types' grew more intense. The appearance in *The Times* of its article, 'Literature for the Blind' provoked discussion on a wider scale.<sup>58</sup> In a tone highly critical of those so far entrusted with the provision of literature, it declared, 'It is, we fear, inevitable that the blind should be cut off from any unassisted knowledge of current or ephemeral literature'. This unhappy conclusion was attributed to the existence of two camps supporting Braille and Moon respectively and the fact that 'The rivalry between the two systems has kept the existing embossed literature within the narrowest bounds'. While the Bible was published in four different systems, not a line of Shakespeare had been transcribed, and of the English classics, only *Pilgrim's Progress* and *Robinson Crusoe* were available, although the Hull Institute held a part of *Paradise Lost* in Moon type. The newspaper believed that evidence from the United States, Missouri in particular, showed Braille to be the logical choice, and claimed that Worcester College had been mistaken in opting, at that time, for Roman type. This condemnation of 'the present Babel of types' led the writer to suggest that, with the recent foundation of the British and Foreign Blind Association, run by blind men themselves, there might be some hope for improvement.<sup>59</sup>

The race for supremacy continued, and in 1875, a second edition was published of William Moon's *Light for the Blind*.<sup>60</sup> From small beginnings in Brighton, Moon's crusade to establish the pre-eminence of his system gathered strength, helped greatly by the patronage of Sir Charles Lowther and by the phenomenal expansion of home teaching societies as the

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 418.

<sup>58</sup> *The Times*, 3 January 1870.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> William Moon, *Light for the Blind*.

average age of blind people rose with the decline of smallpox and increased life expectancy. The earliest of these visiting societies was the Indigent Blind Visiting Society, founded in London in 1834 'to raise the spiritual, social and physical condition of the blind of London'. It employed blind agents as missionaries, readers, counselors and almoners for the city's blind. By the time the Royal Commission reported in 1889, there existed 55 associations and missions to the blind. These functioned mainly to visit and teach them to read and write, assist them to obtain work and afford them general relief and help. The commissioners listed the principal types used by the visiting societies in alphabetical order; Alston or Roman, Braille, Lucas and Moon. These societies' blind members and others visited numbered 11,640, but the estimated number of uneducated blind people was 261 of school age and 2,825 over school age.<sup>61</sup> The commissioners also reported that, in the mid-1880s, the London Home Teaching Society for the Blind visited 2,210 blind people in London, of whom 1,493 were listed as able to read Moon Type.<sup>62</sup> In the account of its history given by a later Secretary to a conference in 1902, the latter society had begun when one Mrs. Graham of Clapham 'moved with pity for the sad condition of the blind of London devised a plan for cheering and assisting them'. Faced with a choice of 23 embossed types in its lifetime, the London Home Teaching Society had 'faithfully adhered to Moon' and at the start of the twentieth century, 565 of its 1,056 registered readers could read Moon only.<sup>63</sup>

William Moon's own society began in 1855 and had opened 59 branches within fifteen years.<sup>64</sup> It was in Scotland that the societies multiplied most intensively. Edinburgh established its first Home Teaching Society in 1857, and struck an adversarial note from its first report in declaring, 'If there was a doubt in the minds of some persons over the superiority of Moon's system for adults, it has now been dispelled', and claiming that 40 adults were already reading in the city.<sup>65</sup> Its subsequent report, for 1860, claimed the number of readers among the adult blind served by eight societies in Scotland had trebled, from 123 to 376.<sup>66</sup>

By the early twentieth century, 3,240 of the estimated 4,000 blind people in Scotland were being visited, and each of the ten leading societies and missions based in the country

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<sup>61</sup> RCBD, *Report*, Para. 68.

<sup>62</sup> RCBD, *Report*, Para. 163.

<sup>63</sup> Miss E. Bainbridge, 'Home Teaching Societies for the Blind'. *Report of the Conference on Matters Related to the Blind held at Church House, Westminster. April 1902* (London: Farmer and Sons, 1902), 193-199.

<sup>64</sup> J. Frew Bryden, 'Societies and Missions for the Blind in Scotland 1857-1908' in *Outlook for the Blind*, Vol. 1-2, 1908, 95-96.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.* 101.

had its own free lending library. Moon, despite the advance of Braille in the institutions, was to retain its importance for the 'outdoor' blind reader. In 1905, the BFBA authorized its own publication in Moon Type for the first time, indicating its recognition of its value to a certain type of reader, and that there was wish to see its use disappear, and in 1908, the 19,000 volumes in the 10 libraries were still divided between Braille and Moon.<sup>67</sup>

In England, William Moon made many tours in his lifetime and noted the very satisfactory growth of his system. In 1862, he visited the West of England, Scotland and Ireland and found Liverpool's Home Teaching Society flourishing, with 432 blind people visited and some fast readers registered.<sup>68</sup> Evidence of Sir Charles Lowther's largesse was found in Yorkshire, his home county. There alone, Lowther donated 3,294 volumes to societies, with another 5,047 elsewhere in Britain, and 1568 to the US and Australia, making a total of 9,909 in five years.<sup>69</sup> The 1875 edition of Moon's book contained an appendix which listed 'the works published in Dr. Moon's Type for the Blind.' This now considerable body included 60 sections of the Bible, with several sermons and psalms, along with catechisms and numerous works on religious themes; *Pilgrim's Progress* for example was classified as a religious work. The poetry section also had a religious theme. The educational list had 12 entries, including works on Astronomy, Spelling Books and Primers. There were over 20 'Tales and Anecdotes' with such titles as 'Sabbath Breaking' and 'Jesus met in Todmorden Vale' and a lengthy list of Memoirs, including those of James Watt, Sir Richard Arkwright, Josiah Wedgwood and Lord Nelson. Also transcribed were Queen Victoria's account, *First Visit to Scotland*, and *Dr. Moon's Labours for the Blind*. Biblical works in Moon type were already being offered for sale in Danish, Hindustani, Dutch, Ningpo, Arabic, Bengali and several other languages.<sup>70</sup>

Despite the Moon Society's considerable efforts, local branches reported an unsatisfied hunger for literature among the visited. The Aberdeen Society's *Annual Report* for 1884 recorded that, 'Besides the Scriptures, historical and biographical works are eagerly sought after and I regret that we are unable to meet the demands of friends in this respect'.<sup>71</sup> The smaller Dumfries and Galloway Mission to the Blind, begun in 1881, held 450 books in its second year of existence, and noted that 12 volumes had been added in Braille, the first

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 95-96.

<sup>68</sup> Moon, *Light for the Blind*, 34.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., Appendix, 171-177.

<sup>71</sup> Aberdeen Town and County Association for Teaching the Blind at their Homes, *Fifth Annual Report* (Aberdeen: G. Cornwall, 1884), 8.



acquisitions other than in Moon Type.<sup>72</sup> At the Scottish Outdoor Blind Teachers' Union second annual conference, held in June 1883, it was claimed that of nearly 3,000 blind persons in Scotland, only some 500 were in asylums, but missions to the outdoor blind were 'everywhere except the Orkneys'. Nearly half those visited were said to read raised type, principally Moon's.<sup>73</sup> Glasgow's representative spoke of 4,362 volumes circulated to the blind, of which a third were the Scriptures. The city's society library numbered 1,627 volumes, 'nearly all Moon's'.<sup>74</sup>

There is a suggestion that the visiting societies may have sometimes seen themselves as an alternative rather than a service supplementary to the institution. The Edinburgh Society, founded on and loyal to Moon's system 25 years after it began, spoke against confinement and 'incarceration' which broke the 'beautiful sanctity of human relationships, and should really only be applicable 'for crime, contagious diseases or insanity'.<sup>75</sup>

The findings of the Royal Commission discussed below (Section 6.6) give more quantitative evidence on the extent of use of the contending systems, but the surviving annual reports of the societies and missions for visiting the blind suggest that Moon continued to be regarded as more suitable for their work with the older blind person. The Royal Commissioners may on balance have regarded Braille as best for those who lost their sight early in life, but accepted the consensus in the visiting societies that Moon type was 'especially suited to the aged'.<sup>76</sup> They arrived at their overall judgement with the visiting societies in mind; 'It would no doubt be convenient in theory to have one universal type for the blind, but it does not seem likely to be generally adopted as there seems a considerable feeling in favour of Moon's type in which a comparatively large literature exists'.<sup>77</sup>

The late nineteenth century saw a decline in the influence of Moon, with institutions opting increasingly for Braille and visiting societies devoting resources to the latter to supplement but not replace Moon. The Royal Commission *Report* stated that visiting societies, in their dissemination of literature were still using various types, the leading ones being, in alphabetical order, Alston or Roman, Braille, Lucas and Moon.<sup>78</sup> When the existing 59 visiting societies and missions were asked which type they used, Moon was their choice in

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<sup>72</sup> Dumfries and Galloway Mission to the Blind, *Second Annual Report* (Dumfries, privately printed, 1884), 5.

<sup>73</sup> Scottish Outdoor Blind Teachers' Union, *Second Annual Conference Report* (Glasgow; privately printed, 1883), 17.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> Edinburgh Society for Promoting Reading amongst the Blind at their Homes on Moon's System *Annual Report* (Edinburgh; privately printed, 1884), 7.

<sup>76</sup> RCB, *Report*, Para. 183.

<sup>77</sup> RCB, *Report*, Para. 175.

<sup>78</sup> RCB *Report*, Para. 171.

48, Braille in 39 and a combination in 36. Some, like the Oxford Association for the Home Teaching of the Blind had no Braille at all in their library.<sup>79</sup>

In his own evidence to the Royal Commission, William Moon opened his remarks in typically assertive mode, stating that in Britain more books existed in his type than in any other. His declaration that ‘The sun never sets on our books, so widely have they gone into the world’, made it clear his ambitions were not confined to Britain, and he announced that works in Russian, ‘Hindostanee’ and nine Chinese languages were in preparation.<sup>80</sup> Moon claimed that he had taught a large number of the blind people at the Philadelphia Institution to read his type within a week, a feat which might have had something to do with his award of an honorary doctorate from the University of Philadelphia. Moon was pleased to inform the commissioners that an estimated 200,000 books a year in Moon type had been lent by libraries attached to the home teaching societies.<sup>81</sup> He was, however, less content that the Brighton Institution which he had founded had recently converted to Braille, saying ‘Why or wherefore I cannot tell you. I never go there now’.<sup>82</sup>

The Commission interviewed a particularly committed supporter of Moon in G.M. Tait, Secretary to the Home Teaching Society for the Blind, who had assembled statistics to support the claims of Moon as a universal type through a questionnaire sent to 70 institutional respondents. Tait claimed that of the total number of volumes held, 332,005 were in Moon, 1,334 in Braille and 485 in other types and argued that while Braille may be in the ascendant in Europe, the works in circulation there were not comparable to the British either ‘in circulation or execution’.<sup>83</sup> In his disparaging of Braille, Tait claimed that only ten manual labourers could be found capable of reading it and that for most of their peers the dotted system was ‘a mere nutmeg grater’.<sup>84</sup> This suggested for the first time in the discourse on the types that Braille was not for the blind working man, implying it was more suited to the soft handed scholars of Worcester College. Although the number of publications weighed heavily in favour of Moon, the shift to Braille in the last two decades of the nineteenth century was to have an effect on those in the Moon camp.

There was a defensive tone in the paper given by the daughter of its deceased inventor, Miss Moon, at the 1902 Westminster Conference on the need to preserve the type for the older reader. Her speech, asking that the achievements of the existing 80 home

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<sup>79</sup> RCBD *Appendix* 12, 215.

<sup>80</sup> RCBD, *Minutes of Evidence*, Q. 17505.

<sup>81</sup> RCBD *Minutes of Evidence*, Q. 17582.

<sup>82</sup> RCBD, *Minutes of Evidence*, Q. 17503.

<sup>83</sup> RCBD, *Minutes of Evidence*, Qs.803-806.

<sup>84</sup> RCBD, *Minutes of Evidence*, Q.807.

teaching societies be respected, was clearly given against the tide in favour of Braille.<sup>85</sup> The Glasgow mission, for example, held two Moon texts to every one in Braille in 1897, but by 1904, Moon volumes numbered 8,799 to 6,505 in Braille. Thus, the gap was closing even in the visiting societies, and the rise of Braille was even more pronounced in the institutions. The extent of this advance and its causes must now be examined.

It was the work of the British and Foreign Blind Association (examined in more detail in Section 6.2), that was to be the most instrumental element in altering the balance in provision. In a paper given at the Paris Congress of 1878, Thomas Armitage, the Association's driving force, observed that prior to 1868 Braille was not used at any institution in Britain, and was probably read by no more than a dozen people in isolation.<sup>86</sup> In his appraisal of the situation prevailing as he spoke, Armitage stated that by 1878 Reading was taught in all English and Scottish institutions, 'but some of the Roman Catholic institutions in Ireland have not advanced even to this point'.<sup>87</sup> Armitage remarked that the new Braille school books, printed on both sides with wide intervals, made reading pleasant and easy and predicted they would be widely diffused, but for the moment, most institutions used Moon for reading.<sup>88</sup> The impetus for the approaching demand for Braille would come in part from teachers themselves. When asked their preference at a London School Board conference on type, all but two of the blind teachers asked for Braille for both reading and writing; of these two dissenters, one wanted Moon, the other Roman. Armitage suggested that teachers should be encouraged to learn Braille by offers of higher remuneration or 'some honourable distinction'.<sup>89</sup> Clearly, the wider European acceptance of Braille had started to influence British educators. As noted earlier, Buckle of York visited Denmark in September 1877. There, he learned that Braille had been used and printed in Moldenhawer's Copenhagen school since 1858, and noted that the boys there were still as fluent as Worcester's in reading Roman type.<sup>90</sup>

The annual reports of certain institutions reveal the extent of duplication in reading systems and texts held. At the Halifax Asylum in 1879, the Managing Committee reported that different pupils were reading the Boston, Moon and Braille systems.<sup>91</sup> At York,

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<sup>85</sup> Miss Moon, 'The Need of More and Cheaper Literature for the Blind in Moon's Type.' *Westminster Conference 1902*, 125-30.

<sup>86</sup> T.R. Armitage, *On the Means Employed for Ameliorating the Condition of the Blind of Great Britain and Ireland* (London, 1878), 2.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>90</sup> Yorkshire School, *Annual Report*, 1878, 3-5.

<sup>91</sup> Halifax Asylum for the Blind Board of Managers, *Report*, 1879, 3.

similarly, Moon, Braille and Lower case type were in use simultaneously, but Braille was producing the most inspiring results.<sup>92</sup> The York school had a particularly strong link to Moon type, and was reluctant to abandon it as Sir Charles Lowther had contributed expansively to the library, and was still in the habit of giving each departing pupil a volume in Moon of the Bible and Psalms.<sup>93</sup>

In Scotland, meanwhile, the poignant story of Robert Edgar also tells us that Edinburgh's Asylum continued to use contending systems well into the 1870s. Edgar, a nine year old orphan described as 'totally blind and deaf and well-nigh dumb', distinguished those he encountered by touching their apparel. A doctor had once hurt him and the youth had ever since distrusted anyone who dressed in smooth textured clothes. Given the embossed Roman alphabet first, Edgar soon mastered that and afterwards learned all the systems held at the asylum; Moon's: Alston's: Gall's: Frere's: Braille and American. He is said to have converted to Christianity after reading the Scriptures in Moon. Edgar died at the asylum aged 16, in March 1877, and remains one of the most celebrated 'overcomers' in Scotland's history of disability.<sup>94</sup>

It was in the two last decades of the nineteenth century that once indifferent institutions became convinced of Braille's value. The Birmingham Institution, in 1881, claimed 'very marked and highly satisfactory progress', for which the teachers were given credit. They were, it said, 'materially assisted by Braille reading and writing, which is only recent in England'.<sup>95</sup> Braille was also beginning to be used actively in musical education. The Bristol Asylum pupils in 1883 wrote out in Braille 21 copies of songs, and a further 21 copies of the first seven Beethoven sonatas, as well as various hymns.<sup>96</sup> By 1887, Henry Wilson was recommending that children be taught Braille reading and writing at home prior to entering a school for the blind.<sup>97</sup>

As the century drew to a close, institutions such as St. George's, where Reverend B.G. Johns had long been steadfast in his opposition, declared 'every pupil is taught to read and write in the Braille system' and three monthly magazines in Braille were subscribed to.<sup>98</sup> The annual report for the school in 1902 declared that the Braille system had been acquired

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<sup>92</sup> Yorkshire School Managing Committee, *Report* 1880, 4.

<sup>93</sup> RCB, *Appendix* 2, 32.

<sup>94</sup> G. McCulloch, *Story of a Blind Mute, an Inmate of the Royal Asylum and School – who died there 6th March 1877* (Edinburgh: Maclaren and MacNiven, 1877), 9ff.

<sup>95</sup> Birmingham Institution, *34th Annual Report*, 1880-1881, 6.

<sup>96</sup> Bristol Asylum, *Annual Report* 1884, 11.

<sup>97</sup> Henry, J., Wilson, *Information with Regard to Institutions, Societies and Classes for the Blind in England and Wales, December 1887* (London: privately printed. Undated. First Edition), 8.

<sup>98</sup> St. George's School, *Annual Report*, 1898, 25.

by 'nearly all the pupils' with a few 'dull' ones confined to Moon. The school had by then acquired an extensive library in Braille, which included the works of Dickens, Scott, Thackeray, and George Eliot along with volumes on Physical and Social Science'.<sup>99</sup>

Thus, by the end of the century, Britain's institutions were increasingly swayed towards Braille and the consensus that emerged was, for better or worse, to prove strong enough to present a united front against proposed American modifications when the time came to establish a common system for the world.

This process might have been smoother and more harmonious if the Royal Commission had offered other conclusions. Divisions on type choice among the commissioners remained to the end, with five in favour of Roman, including B.G. Johns, Buckle and the philanthropist W.J. Day. This clearly influenced their recommendation that, despite the convenience of having one type, it would be unfair on the supporters of others to discard them as no one system had been proved so superior as to be recommended as universal.<sup>100</sup>

Faced with such intensity in the arguments for the differing systems, the Commissioners decided that the safest course might lie in the vigorous defence of diversity and concluded, 'In fact it is useful for the blind to know all the leading types'.<sup>101</sup> More damagingly, the commissioners declared themselves opposed to any government subsidies for publication, thus legitimating voluntary control of publishing into the following century.<sup>102</sup>

Victorian charity efforts for the blind have been regarded by Prochaska and his followers as a tribute to the energy and altruism generated by 'the voluntary impulse', with its healthy elements of individualism and competitiveness. The publishing history of the St. John's Wood school, however, offers one more example of the illogicality of voluntarism. The Royal Commission found that the Lucas system, described as having very little demand and dying out was legally bound to continue to teach the system by its founding charter, despite the evident wish of its managers to abandon it.<sup>103</sup>

While the first British ventures to provide blind education and publishing were essentially private in nature, and British pioneers maintained the momentum for a long time in developing raised type, the inconsistency of provision led many to denounce charity's

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<sup>99</sup> St. George's School, *Annual Report*, 1902, 37.

<sup>100</sup> RCB *Report*, Para. 175.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, Para. 189.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, Para. 180.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, Paras. 176-177.

‘miserable failure’. Charity, in its essence, remains subject to the ebbs and flows in the impulses of the givers. The shadow of regional disparities, which state control could more easily balance, will always remain. While in southern England in the late nineteenth century, Braille may have been advancing towards acceptance as the principal type for all but the older reader, other parts of Britain suffered from the uncertainties and contradictions produced by ‘The Battle of the Types’.

In recognition of these imbalances the commissioners gave space at the start of the appendix to their 1899 report to a memorial from ‘The Industrial Blind of Scotland’, signed by representatives of the workers in the asylums of Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen and Dumfries. The memorial asked first that the future education of blind children be entrusted to the Board schools rather than the asylums, founded on the ‘injudicious and misguided efforts of a benevolent public’.<sup>104</sup> The memorial went on to ‘respectfully request’ the universal adoption of Braille for reading, writing, geography and music. The reason given, which deserves recording as a judgement ‘from below’, was that ‘the difficulties which have confined our education to the expensive, inefficient and faulty system as carried out in our asylum schools have mainly arisen through the want of one good system adapted to our special needs out of the many bad, competing systems’.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> RCBD, Vol.2 *Appendix*, 3-4.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

## Chapter 6 The improving impulse

The development of education and the growth of publishing for the blind were inextricably linked in the second half of the nineteenth century. In both fields, the 1860s and the decade that followed marked a significant phase, where progress and improvement seemed in the air. In education three remarkable experiments took place. One aimed to offer a passage to higher education, another sought to integrate the blind child in ordinary schools, and the third offered musical education at the highest level and trained blind teachers from every social class. In publishing, an organisation conceived and run by blind people sought to change the very nature of their provision of literature. This chapter describes these ventures and evaluates the substance of their legacy, and also discusses the position of the State through an examination of the work of the royal commission appointed in 1885.

### 6.1 Worcester College and the creation of 'a higher culture for the blind'

In the numerous general histories that have appeared on the English public school, which mostly chronicle its aims, achievements, shortcomings and idiosyncrasies with a barely disguised affection, no mention has been made of one of the most noteworthy educational projects of the Victorian years, described by a former master as 'a thrilling chapter in the history of mind'.<sup>1</sup>

Worcester College was established in 1866 to offer 'a higher education to blind males belonging by birth or kinship to the upper, the professional, or the middle classes of society'. It was born of the realization that the blind residential schools of the time offered no such opportunity for intellectual development. The college had a crucial role in promoting literacy for the blind and its academic success was highly influential in the choice made by other institutions to select Braille, which the College used for Music and teaching languages, from among the contending systems of embossed typography.

Our sources for examining its history, as elsewhere, are much depleted. Mary Thomas pointed out at a time when more evidence was available, 'The pioneers of the College were so occupied with getting on with the work to which they had set their hand that they had little time or opportunity to write about it. They established no archives. No survivors of the earliest days are left to tell the tale'.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Reverend H.J.R. Marston, 'The Mental Culture or Higher Education of the Blind'. *Westminster Conference* 1902, 15.

<sup>2</sup> Mary G. Thomas, *Worcester College*, vii.

The earliest record pertaining to the college is the publication of a paper given to the Society for the Advancement of Social Science at Liverpool in September 1858 by Reverend William Taylor to propose the establishment of 'a College where the blind children of opulent parents might obtain an education suitable to their situation in life'.<sup>3</sup> Taylor stressed the need for 'a college where blind children may acquire what is termed a Liberal Education and amongst those of their own station in society'.<sup>4</sup> Taylor spoke of an estimated 33,000 blind people in Britain and stated that, 'Out of these we may take one eighth as belonging to the classes whom we ought to educate to a high intellectual standard', concluding that it was 'the duty of the nation' to secure such an education for 2,000 blind youths each generation. To help in this, such patrons as Sir Charles Lowther were prepared to donate the books to create 'a Bodleian of blind literature'.<sup>5</sup>

As regards the type to be used, Taylor was adamant that 'the embossed common or Roman alphabet, as used in the schools at Bristol, York, etc., must afford advantages which no arbitrary characters can supply'.<sup>6</sup> Taylor met the clergyman R.H. Blair, then a Mathematics teacher at Worcester's King's School, and the latter agreed to be the first headmaster of the new college.<sup>7</sup> Donald Bell quotes from later correspondence between Blair and S.S. Forster, his successor as Head, which indicates their intention to include at the college 'a succession of seeing pupils drawn from homes of Christian feeling and refinement'. Ideally, these were to be sons of clergymen from the Worcester diocese.<sup>8</sup> This policy, presumably, would help to establish a suitably high academic standard, since the intention was in Blair's words, that, 'These boys should be educated on the lines of Public Schools'.<sup>9</sup>

This wish to elevate at least some of the blind community through higher education may be seen as part of a broader realization that the educational potential of blind children had been greatly underestimated, and the college was to play a significant role in raising, through exposure to a wider literature, the intellectual and social aspirations of blind people.

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<sup>3</sup> William Taylor, *On the Education of the Blind, especially those in the Opulent Classes and on the establishment of a college for them* (London: printed by John Taylor, 1859), 9.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 18-19.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas, *Worcester College*, 2.

<sup>8</sup> Donald Bell, ed., *An Experiment in Education: The History of Worcester College for the Blind, 1866-1966* (London: Hutchinson, 1967), 18, This correspondence has subsequently been lost, following several transfers of archive material after the sale of the RNIB headquarters at Great Portland Street.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.



For its founders, the obvious model for the proposed college was the English public school. In 1864, the Clarendon Commission had reported on the state of the 'nine great schools' and the nation was experiencing a second wave of public school building to offer the middle classes an education on the same lines as that provided by Eton, Harrow and the rest of the original examples. Nathaniel Woodard's vision of a middle class schooling for parents with smaller incomes, such as solicitors, was embodied in schools such as Lancing, where the desirable aristocratic traits such as 'honour, integrity and self-restraint could be cultivated'.<sup>10</sup> The original public schools by this time essentially offered an education for leadership in which Gary McCulloch has identified certain key characteristics; the schools aimed to offer a classical curriculum, character training to develop moral purpose, an experience of communal living and shared experience, and the inculcation of gentlemanly ideals of public service. Other features McCulloch notes are the limited social mobility in the school's class hierarchies, and their gender specificity, in that women were simply not admitted in the nineteenth century.<sup>11</sup>

Of the above defining features the most well known are the public school's emphasis on the learning of Greek and Latin and its character building through team sport. The former, according to the Clarendon Commission, was in great part dictated by the subjects of the university examinations at the ancient universities; Oxford typically tested its students with books in Latin and Greek, 'perhaps two Greek plays, the Georgics' and a translation from English into Latin prose'.<sup>12</sup> Honey points out that even Mathematical Wranglers had to show good Latin and Greek, but, above all, classics had intrinsic value as 'a guide in tastes, politics and morals'.<sup>13</sup> Training in classics was staunchly defended by the Headmasters interviewed. Moberley at Winchester argued that, 'All classical learning tells on a man's speech, it tells on a man's writing; it tells on a man's thoughts'.<sup>14</sup>

Sport was by the mid-nineteenth century assuming ever greater importance in public school life and in university recruitment. By the 1870s, dinner hours had been moved back at colleges to allow more playing time in the long summer evenings.<sup>15</sup> In the 1890s, Oxford's nine straight wins in the Boat Race had a marked effect on applications.<sup>16</sup> The development

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<sup>10</sup> J. R. deS. Honey, *Tom Brown's Universe: The Development of the British Public School* (London: Millington, 1977), 57.

<sup>11</sup> Gary McCulloch, *Philosophers and Kings: Education for Leadership in Modern England* (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 11

<sup>12</sup> PP Vol. XX 1864, Reports from Commissioners, *Public Schools and Colleges Report*, 34.

<sup>13</sup> Honey, *Tom Brown's Universe*, 128-30.

<sup>14</sup> Clarendon Commission, *Report*, 345.

<sup>15</sup> Honey, *Tom Brown's Universe*, 110.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

of sport at Worcester has little direct bearing on the central theme of this study, but as an indication of how the public school model was embraced in its entirety by the college, it is worth mentioning that a gymnasium was in place by 1870, with German instructors. It was believed that a shuffling gait reflected a shuffling character and an upright carriage indicated a frank, honest disposition.<sup>17</sup> By the time of the Royal Commissioners' visit, rowing, calisthenics, running, and soccer played with a wicker ball with a bell inside were regular features of the school day.<sup>18</sup> Worcester's founders felt this cardinal element of the model of education should be included even for blind pupils. The Royal Commissioners were so impressed on their visit to the college that they remarked in their report not only on the fine teaching of the classics but on seeing football played so vigorously and pupils 'walking on stilts with perfect fearlessness'.<sup>19</sup>

As Principal, Blair's wish to provide intellectual stimulus is evident in the surviving copies of *The Venture*, described as 'a quarterly magazine edited by the Pupils of the College of the Blind Sons of Gentlemen'. Paid for by subscription in advance, the magazine aimed to discuss matters of particular relevance to the blind, as well as articles of general and literary interest. The first issue appeared in May 1869 and immediately entered the debate on the types, recommending at this point the simplicity of Roman for reading, while adding 'But for the taking of private notes and keeping a diary, there is a system called "Braille's"'.<sup>20</sup> In the fourth issue, which appeared in January 1870, the choice of Roman type was again defended for its ease of learning, compared to Braille, and the 'matchless advantages of being capable of use in common by the blind and sighted'.<sup>21</sup> In the October 1870 issue, however, a shift towards a reconsideration of arbitrary systems is discernible. Referring to an experiment with a dotted system in New York, the editor pointed out that the average blind person would not be able to master such a system, 'These good gentlemen of New York have legislated for the compact and daily taught body to be found in institutions and forgotten the multitude in bye lanes and hedges'. Yet, when it came to meeting the need of the college's own elite student body, Braille was recommended strongly for writing, transcribing music, for mathematical formulae and above all for Latin and Greek composition, although not yet for general reading purposes. In a letter to *The Times*, responding to the newspaper's criticism of Worcester for choosing Roman type, Blair as its Principal, reiterated the reasons for his choice. It was easier

<sup>17</sup> *The Venture* (London: W. Macintosh, No.5, April 1870), 208.

<sup>18</sup> RCB, *Minutes of Evidence*, Qs.16542-16544.

<sup>19</sup> RCB, *Report*, Para.216.

<sup>20</sup> *The Venture*, No. 1, May 1869, 5.

<sup>21</sup> *The Venture*, No. 4, January 1870, 138.

509 *The Venture*, No. 7, October 1870, 309.

to teach, the sighted could read it and the blind person could teach it, saying ‘the blind man wants to be the instructor of his own household’. He pointed out that 22 out of 23 institutions contacted in the United States had retained the Roman type and argued that its faults lay not in the type itself, but in the numerous and confusing modifications carried out on it. Blair was even opposed to the use of Braille for writing because it would entail ‘two educations’; one for reading, and one for writing.<sup>22</sup> Donald Bell, consulting a source no longer available, traces the first use of Braille in the college to Greek classes, where it was adopted on the advice of an older pupil.<sup>23</sup> The records for the College for the 1870s are heavily depleted but contain an 1877 prospectus describing the curriculum. The subjects offered were Divinity, Bible History, English Grammar and Literature, Ancient and Modern History and Geography, Natural Science, Classics, Modern Languages, Reading (embossed) writing (Braille), Organ, Piano, Theory of Music; for Mathematics and Science, students were offered Arithmetic, Euclid, Algebra, Higher Maths and Chemistry. The College library held texts in Latin, French, German, Latin and Greek. The English texts were Roman, ‘American Roman’ and Moon, and it was observed that Dr. Moon was not yet producing ‘higher literature’.<sup>24</sup> For Music instruction, French books in Braille had been brought from Paris since, ‘The French are the only people who have as yet furnished anything at all adequate in the last named branch of study’.<sup>25</sup> Ancient Greek was the other field of study in which Braille was used at the College, ‘The printing of Greek words, which has during the last four years made considerable progress in this college is carried on in the French system, as most convenient in the execution’.<sup>26</sup> It was this association of Braille with more abstract academic studies at the College that helped legitimate its use in other institutions as they expanded their curricula later in the century.

The Worcester prospectus maintained that concentrating on reading a single type was ‘largely felt to be undesirable’ as the blind readers favored different types. It was for writing that the College endorsed the use of Braille; ‘Braille, lately introduced into this country, is by now indispensable as a means of thorough education – teaching to write with a pen or pencil is now generally abandoned as a waste of time’.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Letter from R. H. Blair in response to the article, ‘Literature for the Blind’. *The Times*, 6 January 1870.

<sup>23</sup> Bell, *An Experiment*, 20.

<sup>24</sup> Worcester College for the Blind Sons of Gentlemen, *Prospectus* 1877, 9 (London Metropolitan Archives: Worcester College archive. Box A 238 1877WCB).

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

In 1872, S.S. Forster had succeeded Blair as Principal and it was during his 19 years at the helm that the College was to establish its reputation for academic achievement. Forster was convinced that ‘Whatever standards of excellence are adopted among the seeing, the blind boy can reach and surpass – what he wants is opportunity, books, teachers and the means of getting within reach of them’.<sup>28</sup> The provision of books was the key to the success of the project; Forster stated these were ‘much fewer than would be believed’, and was to devote himself to expanding the library at Worcester. He saw the possession of texts as critical and rushed to produce half the Greek Testament because a pupil could gain an idea of a writer’s style only by the ‘actual sympathy’ that comes from direct reading, without an oral medium.<sup>29</sup> He was well aware that the blind pupil’s classical library was but a small collection compared to those available to the sighted student.

It was not only in classical literature that the college’s library was considered in need of expansion. The annual report for 1879 records the publishing in Greek of the *Epistle to the Philippians*, Cicero and Virgil, but also the production of *Tom Brown’s Schooldays*, ‘with the kind permission of Mr. T. Hughes, M.P.’.<sup>30</sup> The Speech Day program for 22 July 1880 suggests the cultural life of the College was of a world distant from all other institutions for blind children in Britain. Pupils performed piano solos, a play by Aeschylus and Moliere’s *Le Malade Imaginaire*, and recitations of the *Aeneid* followed.<sup>31</sup>

The adoption of Braille made a significant contribution, particularly in Music, Mathematics and Ancient and Modern languages, and the college increasingly felt it ‘a necessary part of our duty’ to supply new books in this type. The 1881 *Annual Report* shows that Braille additions to the library included Book V of *The Odyssey*, Sophocles’s *Oedipus Coloneus* and Aeschylus’s *Agamemnon*. Indeed, Braille dominated publication that year and the four Gospels were embossed by the college. Roman type was not abandoned, however, and was used for Macaulay’s essay on Warren Hastings.<sup>32</sup>

By 1882, Forster was able to state with confidence that, ‘The public school education which the boys receive conducts them, ultimately, if they wish, to the Universities’.<sup>33</sup> The College, unarguably, succeeded in this aim; by 1881, 13 pupils had gone up to university,

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<sup>28</sup> S.S. Forster, *What Shall We Do With Our Blind Boys? A plea addressed to the upper and middle classes* (London: W. Kent 1879), 10.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>30</sup> Worcester College, *Annual Report*, 1879, 5.

<sup>31</sup> Worcester College, *Annual Report*, 1880, 4.

<sup>32</sup> Worcester College, *Annual Report*, 1881, 12-13.

<sup>33</sup> Worcester College, *Annual Report*, 1882, 7.

where nine had graduated.<sup>34</sup> When he delivered an address at the Wilberforce School for the Blind at the York Conference a year later, Forster praised the educational efforts of the other institutions, and acknowledged that for Worcester it was a struggle to offer 'a good well-endowed college for Classical, Mathematical and General Literature', expressing the need for prizes, grants, scholarships and particularly printed books. Despite its shortages, he could boast that 'in our little corner of the vineyard', one in five pupils, 14 out of 65 the previous year, went on to university.<sup>35</sup>

Academic aspirations were high, with the prestigious professions of the Church, Law and Medicine the favoured goals. Bell's analysis of the social destinations of 403 students leaving the college in the next decade showed that 67 entered the Church, 37 practised Law, 15 Music, 19 were teachers, while 30 had taken up massage, 38 Commerce and only 14 were in manual occupations.<sup>36</sup>

References are found in the school's annual report of 1874 to A.W. Ranger, who matriculated in 1872 and obtained a First in Jurisprudence from Worcester College, Oxford. Edward Fawcett matriculated in 1874 at Queen's College, and D.L. Johnson took a Second in Jurisprudence at Worcester soon after Ranger.<sup>37</sup> That Oxford college's archives contain the 'Memoir' written by William Drake, a servant there from 1881 to 1946, in which he recalled:

We used occasionally to have a blind man in College. There was one who read Law who I think took the DCL degree or was given an honorary one. He went down recently and was much talked about, and had a very successful practice in London. His name was Dr Rainger, and he used to come up for Gaudys [alumni reunions].

The first blind man I remember living in College in the early [eighteen] eighties was one called Richardson, a big man with a beard. He used very often to lie in bed until tea-time. His breakfast used to be taken up and left in the fender to keep warm, and his lunch, which was cold, was taken up too. Later in the afternoon he would get up, eat his breakfast, and then, without leaving the table would consume his lunch. After that he would set off and walk to Dorchester, nine miles out of Oxford, all by himself, and would return to College before the gate closed at 12 pm. There were no motor cars in those days, and he never met with any accident from the horse traffic. Another blind man I had when I was on no.14 staircase was called Moll. He used to ride, but I cannot remember whether he rode in Oxford or while he was at home. He used to have a local boy of about fourteen to come and read to him for a few hours each day. Another very well known blind man was Rupert Cross who was very popular

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<sup>34</sup> Bell, *An Experiment*, 25.

<sup>35</sup> S.S. Forster, 'A Plea for the Higher Culture of the Blind'. An address delivered at the William Wilberforce School, York, July 1883. York: *Daily Herald*, July 17, 1883, 8.

<sup>36</sup> Bell, *An Experiment*, 67.

<sup>37</sup> Worcester College, *Annual Report*, 1884.

with everyone, and got as much out of College and Oxford life as anyone with their sight. He learnt to find his way about College without assistance, and was very fond of coming over to the Buttery in the morning after the night before. He read Law and took a first, and then BCL with another first and quickly got fixed up with a firm in Town.<sup>38</sup>

Forster remained personally involved in furthering the education of his departed pupils. His correspondence with the Gardner's Trust in 1883 shows his commitment to raising a £100 annual scholarship for one of his ex-pupils studying at St. Peter's College, Cambridge.<sup>39</sup> It would appear that the staff introduced a sense of friendly rivalry between the ancient universities. The 1884 *Annual Report* records the arrival of Mr. G. Laupmann, an old boy returning with a 2nd in the Cambridge Tripos to teach Mathematics, remarking that, 'Now the boys will be encouraged to turn to Cambridge as their university'. In the triumphal statements on the students' academic attainments it is never made clear if they were of those classified blind or the sighted pupils. In 1883 there were 22 blind and 11 seeing pupils in the first year, and the proportion was 19 to 10 in both the second and third years. These sighted pupils, according to the Reverend McNeile, were also guides, readers and playmates for the blind pupils.<sup>40</sup>

Whichever of its individual pupils attained success, the prestige of the school elevated the aspirations of the blind community, and won the respect of the eminent sighted. The Royal Commissioners concluded that Worcester stood alone in offering a higher education to those blind from childhood.

The fact that Braille was known to be used at the school helped the system to gain wider acceptance nationally, although a closer examination of the attitudes and practice of the teachers at Worcester reveal divisions on their personal choice of types. McNeile used New York Point for his personal reading and Braille for writing, but was for teaching Roman type at school as it reduced the barriers between the blind and the sighted.<sup>41</sup> S.S. Forster, in his evidence to the Commissioners maintained that there need not be a uniform type, but that every English boy should learn Roman type and no blind boy could be educated without Braille. For Forster, it was not beyond the capabilities of a clever boy to learn as many as four

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<sup>38</sup> William Drake, *Memoir*, (written c. 1949) Worcester College, Oxford, Archive DRA 1, 107-8.

<sup>39</sup> Forster to Gardner's Trust. 23 May 1883. Metropolitan Archives; 'Worcester College Correspondence'. acc/3006/c/1/005.

<sup>40</sup> RCBD *Minutes of Evidence* Q.16704.

<sup>41</sup> RCBD, *Minutes of Evidence* Q.16788.

types and he was adamant that there was no reason to discard any one of the existing ones in common use: Roman, Braille or Moon.<sup>42</sup>

It could, therefore, be said that those educators most closely involved with the development of an improved education for the blind child were not always blinded by partisan interest, but saw the merits of the different systems and the possibility of a complementary use for all three. Where it may have been accurate to speak of a 'Battle of the Types' in an earlier phase when Moon and his supporters aimed to sweep away all before them, by the close of the century, Braille, thanks partly to Worcester, had clearly become foremost among alternatives, and the next 'battle' would be on an international level to establish which of its suggested forms would prevail.

The Royal Commissioners concluded that the college itself was of too private a nature to deserve state subsidies, but it was deemed an excellent model for a government assisted secondary school for the blind which would prepare the most intelligent blind boys for university. This was never to materialize, and Worcester preserved that function into the twentieth century, helped by private scholarships.<sup>43</sup> Apart from fulfilling a role as a training place for a blind elite, Worcester contributed to the development of a better education for the ordinarily educated blind child, by raising the aspirations of students and teachers, and by indicating the value of Braille in education at a critical moment when the efforts of its rival systems' supporters might have condemned it to obscurity.

## **6.2 Thomas Armitage and the British and Foreign Blind Association: from 'unfortunate objects' to agents**

In identifying and evaluating the forces that produced a change in perceptions of the blind person's educability and need for literature, the work of Worcester College may be seen as one step forward on the path to elevating cultural aspirations. The driving energy of Thomas Armitage and his organizational legacy was probably of even greater historical significance. Founder of the British and Foreign Blind Association, forerunner of today's Royal National Institute for the Blind, Armitage's conception of blind people's rights and society's duties towards them did much to initiate profound change.

Four gentlemen assembled on 16 October 1868 at 33, Cambridge Square in London, the residence of Dr. Armitage. They formed themselves into a council and took the name, 'British and Foreign Society for Improving the Embossed Literature of the Blind.' Mr. D.

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<sup>42</sup> RCBD, *Minutes of Evidence*, Q.20372.

<sup>43</sup> RCBD, *Report*, Para. 262.

Connolly, W.W. Fenn and Dr. J. Gale were described as blind and Armitage as having defective vision. The object of the society was to enable intelligent blind people to examine the various embossed systems in use and recommend the one best adapted for general use.<sup>44</sup> What distinguished the group was the sense of agency manifest in their declaration that it should be blind people themselves who determined the future of their literature. A few years later, Armitage was to write that among the more intelligent of the blind the idea was gaining ground that this question ‘must not be settled *for* the blind, but *by* the blind themselves’.<sup>45</sup>

Among modern social scientists, it is increasingly recognized that the most effective antidote to the disabled person’s debilitating sense of stigma is the sense of participation and self-direction.<sup>46</sup> The essential recommendation of the Seeböhm Committee Report of 1968 was that participation should reduce the ‘rigid distinction between givers and takers of social services’.<sup>47</sup> It was therefore highly significant that the Executive Council should be made up only of members ‘unable to read by sight and with knowledge of at least three embossed systems and no pecuniary interest in any’.<sup>48</sup> The latter point suggests that, apart from the desire for prestige, economic motives were seen to be present in rival promotions of the contending systems at the time.

By May 1870, the committee had decided unanimously that Braille was best for the written character, but as at Worcester, it was thought premature to declare that Braille was best for general reading. It was stated that ‘something better’ might be devised for the printed character. Moon was judged acceptable, but in need of change, and not ideal as a uniform type.<sup>49</sup> The December 7 entry in the *Minute Book* records the resignation of Dr. Gale who had apparently been corresponding with William Moon.<sup>50</sup> Armitage’s paper read to the Society of Arts on 26 January 1870, indicates that no decision had as yet been made, but mentions an American experiment based in Missouri which demonstrated very favourable results for Braille. Howe’s Roman system, used in seven asylums by 664 people produced one third fluent readers, one third reading by spelling, and one third failing to learn to read at all. In contrast, of those in the Missouri sample using Braille, two thirds achieved fluency, one third

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<sup>44</sup> British and Foreign Blind Association, *Minute Book*, October 16, 1868- July 2, 1890, 1. (Mss. Held at RNIB archive, currently unclassified).

<sup>45</sup> T.R. Armitage, *The Education of the Blind, what it has been, is, and ought to be* (London,: British and Foreign Association for the Blind, 1871), 3.

<sup>46</sup> Colton M. et al, eds., *Stigma and social welfare: an international comparison* (Aldershot: Avebury, 1997), 93.

<sup>47</sup> PP Cmnd. 3703, (HMSO 1968) Report of the Committee on Local Authority and Allied Personal Services, 1. Contributor: Frederick Baron Seeböhm.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>49</sup> BFBA *Minutes*, May 5, 1870.

<sup>50</sup> BFBA *Minutes*, December 5, 1870.



read by spelling out words and no-one failed to learn to read.<sup>51</sup> In their search for the universal type, the committee set five criteria. First, the characters should be as clear to the touch as possible. The size should be small but not unrecognizable. Third, correct spelling should be respected. Fourth, the system should be open to means of shortening the reading process, and finally the character used in writing should, if possible, also be the printed character.<sup>52</sup> With the exception of the last point, Braille eventually was seen to match the criteria best.

From the society's first report the following year we learn that its name had changed to 'The British and Foreign Blind Association for Promoting the Education and Employment of the Blind' to reflect its extended aim. The patronage of the Queen was secured and the Bishop of London had become president. Of the 82 original members listed, only two were women. The first aim of the society remained 'the vexed question of the tactile alphabet'. Its first annual report pointed out the wasted costs of printing in five different alphabets, and condemned the ignorance of the proponents of the respective systems regarding their alternatives.<sup>53</sup> In his crusade to find a uniform type, Armitage in 1871 wrote of his urge to point out 'the utter state of confusion which exists', and reiterated the Society's conviction that 'the question must not be settled *for* the blind but by the blind themselves.<sup>54</sup>

The first report had also conveyed the committee's judgement that Braille was by far the closest of the existing systems to matching the needs expressed in their criteria.<sup>55</sup> In her efforts to trace the technical experiments of the BFBA in the 1870s, Pamela Lorimer found that barely any examples of its Braille production from the 1870s have survived. She describes in detail the Association's lengthy and meticulous comparison of the English Braille and the New York Point systems. As the 1875 *Report* recounts, little was published while the Committee was evaluating all the available systems in the first few years, and production was deliberately stopped for several months to allow for a fuller analysis of this new code (New York Point) from America.<sup>56</sup> The two systems were evaluated on the following criteria: space saving features: legibility: rapidity of writing: facility of correction: facility of learning: universality: music.<sup>57</sup> On the first point, the American system seemed to

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<sup>51</sup> Thomas Armitage, 'On the Modes of Reading in Use by the Blind and the Means of Arriving at Uniformity', *Journal of the Society of Arts*, January 28, 1886, 195-6.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> BFBA, *Report*, (London, J. Morton 1871), 2-4.

<sup>54</sup> Thomas Armitage, *The Education of the Blind; What it has been*, 12-13.

<sup>55</sup> BFBA *Report*, 1871, 3.

<sup>56</sup> Lorimer, 'A critical evaluation', Chapter 4, page 5.

<sup>57</sup> BFBA Executive Council, *Minutes*, July 1874.

have a slight advantage but Armitage felt its space between the letters was insufficient, affecting its legibility. New York Point was said to have a small advantage in rapidity of writing, while Armitage felt Braille was slightly easier to correct and was more easily learned. The fact that several European countries were already using Braille gave Braille the edge as a potential universal type and the same was true of Braille as a form of musical notation.<sup>58</sup>

It was in the late 1870s that Armitage became more exposed to European trends, through the conference system, and gained greater awareness of the increasingly wide use of Braille on the continent. In September 1878, he attended the Paris Conference and the following May, Armitage visited the Bruges Institute, where the Carton Type was still used in happy isolation.<sup>59</sup> The opening of British educators to European influences owes much to Armitage, whose own background was relatively cosmopolitan and privileged. Born in 1824, his father was described as ‘an ironmaster’ from Farnley near Leeds. Armitage spent four years at secondary school in Germany before studying at the Sorbonne. Medical training at King’s, and later Vienna followed. His promising career as a London surgeon was abandoned at the age of 36, as his sight was fading so rapidly. The surviving personal diaries reveal that he enjoyed country house life with its riding, shooting and party games. While preaching thrift, his journal suggests a comfortable lifestyle, and describes a typical European fact finding trip that included lunch on a friend’s yacht off the French coast, with a memorable dinner on land to follow.<sup>60</sup> By 1880, his international reputation as an expert on matters relating to the blind was well established, and one diary entry records a visit from the Tsar of Russia’s Chamberlain, Count Lobetsky, described as ‘a little, fat, rosy, intelligent man’ who was touring the blind institutions in England and sought information from his renowned host.<sup>61</sup> While the conveyer of most of the information on European practices to British educators, Armitage did not rush to enlist the Association in the newly formed International Society. In his report on the Paris Congress to the Executive Council, he recommended that the BFBA should take ‘a sympathetic interest’ but not join yet.<sup>62</sup> In his report on the Berlin Congress of the following year he relayed the news that Germany had recommended unaltered Braille as a uniform type for the nation’s institutions.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Lorimer, ‘A critical evaluation’, Chapter 4, pages 12-13.

<sup>59</sup> Thomas Armitage *Journal*, 12 September 1878. Armitage Papers RNIB Archive, PER/ARM/ 1

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 29 June 1880.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 5 April 1880.

<sup>62</sup> BFBA Executive Council *Minutes*, October 9, 1878.

<sup>63</sup> BFBA Executive Council *Minutes*, October 1, 1879.

Armitage's interest in foreign practice was not confined to the tangible types. In 1883 he reported to the Executive Council for the first time on the Saxon system of 'after care'. This was known as the 'fürsorge' system, begun in Dresden in the 1840s, wherein institutions guaranteed the sales of departed workers.<sup>64</sup> This project struck Armitage as particularly worthy of emulation, and a journal entry mentions pupils at Dresden who had left the institute and found self-sufficiency. One of them, 'Gerisch, a lively fellow' left the institute with a parting gift of 80 marks and had, within seven years, saved £30.<sup>65</sup> This 'after care' programme was dear to Armitage and was later to create a very strong impression on the Royal Commission when it toured European institutions for the blind.

The perceived 'Battle of the Types' was still to be resolved, however, and the promotion of Braille remained the Association's priority into the 1880s. In May 1885, the Council agreed to invite seven new corresponding members, from the United States, France and Germany, with a view to creating an atmosphere of international cooperation over the question of types.<sup>66</sup>

The increasing use of Braille in the institutions led Henry Wilson, in his 1887 guide to services for the blind, to describe the BFBA as 'very instrumental in perfecting the Education of the Blind and in advocating the Braille system, which is now being so widely adopted'.<sup>67</sup> In 1886, 30 German ladies were enlisted to write books in Braille.<sup>68</sup> The range of publications offered for sale was soon greatly extended. Fiction began to feature as suitable material for publication; *Treasure Island* was recommended for publication in 1889 and its transcription completed in 1890.<sup>69</sup>

The Royal Commission in its survey of publishing for the blind also credited the BFBA as the main proponent of the Braille Type, 'The books in the latter type (Braille) have been extensively printed and distributed by the British and Foreign Blind Association.'<sup>70</sup> When asked by the Commissioners if there had been much difficulty in inducing schools to take up the Braille system, Armitage replied, 'I found the greatest opposition. It has only been adopted within a comparatively few years'.<sup>71</sup> John Lancelot Shadwell, an original member of the BFBA Council recalled in his account to the Commissioners how the first task had been

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<sup>64</sup> BFBA Executive Council, *Minutes*, June 6, 1883.

<sup>65</sup> Armitage, *Journal*, July 1, 1883.

<sup>66</sup> BFBA Executive Council, *Minutes*, May 22, 1885.

<sup>67</sup> Henry, J., Wilson, *Information with Regard to Institutions, Societies and Classes for the Blind in England and Wales, December 1887* (London: Undated. First Edition.), 27.

<sup>68</sup> BFBA Executive Council, *Minutes*, March 4, 1886.

<sup>69</sup> BFBA Executive Council, *Minutes*, May 7, 1890.

<sup>70</sup> RCBD, *Report*, Para.174.

<sup>71</sup> RCBD, *Minutes of Evidence*, Q.10959.

to undertake an impartial evaluation of the types in use in 1868: Alston's Roman, a Worcester version of Roman, Moon, Frere, Lucas, Braille and New York Point.

An important point emerges in Shadwell's testimony, which suggests it is misleading to depict the BFBA as engaged in a battle with Moon. Shadwell stated that it was soon realized that Braille was the most suited, and that the use of other types should be discouraged, with the exception of Moon, which the Association always maintained had a value for those with hardened fingers. These were not exclusively the older readers but also those whose hands had been made 'hard and horny' through toil.<sup>72</sup> As Armitage pointed out in his evidence, it was the Roman type and not Moon that the Association was most anxious to see replaced by Braille. He attributed the opposition of the supporters of Roman to their being unable to 'shake themselves loose from the idea that because the Roman was best for the seeing, it must be the best for the blind'.<sup>73</sup> Armitage believed these were seeing teachers who feared the difficulties of learning Braille; Roman was by then only used in schools where the directors were sighted and 'where the blind have the choice, the Roman system is not taught'.<sup>74</sup>

Responding to some aggressive questioning from Edmund Johnson, a supporter of the Roman system, both Armitage and Shadwell pointed to the achievements of the Association. Speaking of the years 1866 to 1888, as far as Armitage was aware, only between 15 and 20 people knew Braille in Britain. Not a single school used it.<sup>75</sup> Shadwell, in his interview, remarked that 'Before the Association was established, nothing of any consequence had been printed for the blind except the Bible, and if the blind wished to consult any other book, it had to be read to them'.<sup>76</sup> By his reckoning, Shadwell claimed, 60 books other than the Bible had been printed by the BFBA and 400 copied by hand. Elsewhere, only Worcester was printing Braille, but this was only in Latin and Greek. In less than two decades, the BFBA had promoted Braille for schools so successfully that Shadwell could state with confidence that there was 'pretty general agreement among the societies in London as regards the superiority of Braille for educational purposes'.<sup>77</sup> Clearly no friend of Braille, E.C. Johnson, Shadwell's interlocutor, informed him that Roman was still used in Amsterdam and parts of Germany and parents found it easier to share reading experiences with their blind children when

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<sup>72</sup> RCBD, *Minutes of Evidence*, Q. 2788-2791.

<sup>73</sup> RCBD, *Minutes of Evidence*, Q.10978.

<sup>74</sup> RCBD, *Minutes of Evidence*, Qs. 10979-10980.

<sup>75</sup> RCBD, *Minutes of Evidence*, Qs.10994-10995.

<sup>76</sup> RCBD, *Minutes of Evidence*, Q. 2801.

<sup>77</sup> RCBD, *Minutes of Evidence*, Q. 2823.

Roman was used'.<sup>78</sup> To this, Shadwell replied that parents of blind children should really take the trouble to learn Braille.<sup>79</sup> In response to Johnson's claim that Moon was printed in 48 languages, Shadwell replied that there may be a lot of printing of Moon, but it was 'the Bible over and over again'.<sup>80</sup> Johnson concluded the session by insinuating that the BFBA was founded specifically for the propagation of Braille, a charge which Shadwell refuted.<sup>81</sup> This rivalry over different alphabets was probably one factor in the Commissioners' final recommendation that no State aid should be given to publishing, since supporters of one type would be loath to see another receiving subsidies. As an example of the absence of a spirit of cooperation among voluntarist institutions, Mary Thomas records the fate of the General Council formed at the prompting of the BFBA in 1884 to share information and resources. Ten institutions joined at the outset, including Worcester, Edinburgh, Birmingham, Glasgow, Liverpool, and Manchester. By 1899, five had withdrawn and by 1908, the Council ceased to exist.<sup>82</sup>

By the time the Royal Commission's *Report* appeared in 1889, Braille had been established as the type of the future. When Armitage died in Ireland the following year, the Bishop of London spoke at a service 'in his loving memory' and a choir of blind people sang.<sup>83</sup> *The Graphic* described Armitage as 'the chief promoter of the Braille system in this country'.<sup>84</sup> By the time of his death, the BFBA had a legacy of institutional power that ensured its influence over Britain's blind community to this day. His obituaries, curiously, gave more emphasis to his role as a founder and Chairman of the Royal Normal College and Academy of Music for the Blind, to which he is said to have donated a sum close to £40,000. His role in the development of the college and the imparting of musical literacy will be discussed in the section that follows.

Meanwhile, after his death, the work of the BFBA continued apace. By 1890, more women were involved as Braille writers. Thomas estimated that 160 volunteers, mostly ladies, had produced 80 titles in 160 volumes, including parts of the Koran and selections from synagogue prayers to show balance. In 1892, an Auxiliary Union of the BFBA was

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<sup>78</sup> RCBD, *Minutes of Evidence*, Qs. 2933-2934.

<sup>79</sup> RCBD, *Minutes of Evidence*, Q. 2946.

<sup>80</sup> RCBD, *Minutes of Evidence*, Q. 2957.

<sup>81</sup> RCBD, *Minutes of Evidence*, Q. 2966.

<sup>82</sup> Thomas, *The RNIB*, 21.

<sup>83</sup> *Church Review*, 7 November 1890.

<sup>84</sup> *The Graphic*, 15 November 1890.

formed with 333 members, all but 12 being women, and a Certificate of Braille Writing Proficiency was introduced in 1895.<sup>85</sup>

That year the committee agreed that the first three books of *Paradise Lost* and seventeen pieces of popular dance music were to be stereotyped, and the expansion in quantity and range of publications continued to the close of the century. As an indication of widening acceptance, the London Society for Teaching the Blind, ended its long resistance and began printing in Braille.<sup>86</sup> In 1885 the Edinburgh Asylum adopted the teaching of Braille to new students to the exclusion of all other systems.<sup>87</sup>

By the close of the century, the BFBA had established the advantages of Braille in the eyes of most educators of children and of a growing number dealing with the provision of literature for the adult blind in Britain. By expanding the scale and range of secular educational and recreational literature it had opened a new realm to the blind reader and built the foundation for a national system of provision with no direct assistance from the State. Had the momentum been maintained and the innovative spirit of the association's early years been more evident in the RNIB, its later incarnation, in the twentieth century, Britain's history of providing literature for the blind would have been significantly different.

As the new century dawned, the BFBA had to devote its attention to the struggle to establish British Braille as a universal type in the international sphere, in the face of American competition. That particular chapter in the history of publishing for the blind, although a compelling story, does not belong in the present work.<sup>88</sup>

### 6.3 The Royal Normal College

As part of the mid-century wave of progressive pedagogic activity, the Royal Normal College, created in 1871 by Thomas Armitage and Francis Campbell, deserves brief mention in this study, although its primary purpose was musical education and training. In pursuing this aim, a more elevated general education was offered to the blind child, with the same emphasis on excellence as Worcester College, but with a strong degree of egalitarianism.

On a visit to the Paris Institute, Armitage had been greatly impressed by the fact that 30 per cent of blind organists and piano tuners trained there were self-sufficient in later life.<sup>89</sup> Francis Campbell, a native of Tennessee, who lost his sight in childhood, had developed his

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<sup>85</sup> Thomas, *The RNIB*, 23-24.

<sup>86</sup> Wagg, *A Chronological Survey*, 73.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>88</sup> Lorimer, 'A critical analysis', writes from a British viewpoint. For an American perspective, see Robert B. Irwin, *As I Saw It* (New York: American Federation for the Blind, 1955), 36-39 and 51-52.

<sup>89</sup> Thomas, *The RNIB*, 17.

own methodology of music instruction when teaching at Howe's Perkins Institute. On his way home from studying at conservatories in Germany, Campbell called on Armitage in London.<sup>90</sup> The idea of an experimental school with an initial life span of two years was discussed. Premises were rented, a sum of thirty thousand pounds was soon raised, and the Duke of Westminster enlisted as President. By 1883, the College's future was assured and its rented property was bought.<sup>91</sup> The aim of the college was to focus on academic and musical instruction and there was, on principle, to be no manual training for industrial purposes. The early years were considered vital and, subsequently, the first British kindergarten for blind children was opened at the college in 1882.<sup>92</sup>

Campbell had an intense belief in the value of physical exercise to musicians, based on his own estimation that the blind person possessed 25 per cent less vitality than a sighted counterpart. Vigorous games, like 'Blind Man's Buff' and the use of Indian clubs were thought the best means of strengthening the piano player.<sup>93</sup> In the summer of 1883, every pupil started the day with a cold bath, boys drilled with rifles and rowing was introduced as an antidote to depression.<sup>94</sup> Gymnastics was compulsory and Armitage later donated a swimming pool.<sup>95</sup> In 1887, roller skating was introduced as well as a course of training for blind typists.<sup>96</sup>

It was music, however, which remained the strength and the main purpose of the college in the public eye. The College offered the best possible support to those with musical talent, whatever their social background. In response to insinuations that children from the working classes were less likely to benefit from the high level of instruction offered, Campbell, was adamant that 'even the very poorest, taken at the proper time can succeed'.<sup>97</sup> All pupils studied French and German and those who intended to specialize in singing learned Italian. There was a common course for four years and then came two years of more specialized learning. Both private institutions such as Henshaw's in Manchester and those School Boards educating blind pupils soon were clamouring to send their more musical charges to study there, under the scholarships offered by such bodies as the Gardner's Trust.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Koestler, *The Unseen Minority*, 402. See also Campbell's own account in RCB *Minutes of Evidence*, Q.10546.

<sup>91</sup> *The Times*, 10 May 1873.

<sup>92</sup> Wagg, *A Chronological History*, 61.

<sup>93</sup> RCB *Minutes of Evidence*, Qs.10555 and Q.10608.

<sup>94</sup> *Progress*, July-August 1883, 61.

<sup>95</sup> Wagg, *A Chronological Survey*, 61.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>97</sup> RCB *Minutes of Evidence*, Q 10725.

<sup>98</sup> RCB, *Minutes of Evidence*, Q.10585.

Overall, Campbell estimated, 80 per cent of the college's ex-pupils were financially independent.<sup>99</sup> The profession was not an easy one for even the most talented blind musicians, who were sometimes excluded from competitive auditions for posts as organists.<sup>100</sup> Royal Commission witnesses spoke of prejudice against employing blind organists and even of a clergyman in Dulwich who declared it was 'against the usages of the Church of England to have blind children in a choir'.<sup>101</sup>

The College records showed that of the 54 pupils followed who had left before 1880, 37 were 'thoroughly successful' and four 'not quite yet independent'. Of the rest, three were too old when admitted and two had 'vicious habits' before entering. Defending the high cost of his college compared to typical blind institutions in Britain, Campbell argued that it compared favourably with establishments for the seeing where similar advantages were given and proposed all institutions be open to annual official inspection by impartial Government Inspectors.<sup>102</sup> Indeed, when such inspection was carried out at Norwood in 1886, the team involved declared, 'We were delighted with all we saw at this excellent college which owes so much of its success to the very able and enthusiastic principal.'<sup>103</sup>

The Normal College benefited greatly over the years from the scholarships that paid for pupils from Board Schools and institutions to complete their education under Campbell. Henry Gardner's £300,000 Trust was originally intended for a music college but Armitage's intervention persuaded the High Court to divert the assets of the trust to the provision of scholarships to the Normal College for music students, and to pensions and conferences, on the grounds that another music college would be superfluous.<sup>104</sup> The Trust subsequently enabled institutions from all over Britain to send pupils to the Normal College.

The training of teachers was another significant activity which received official legitimation when its training section was recognized in 1897 by the Board of Education as Smith College.<sup>105</sup> Wagg estimated in the early 1930s that of the 130 pupils then resident 90 were training as shorthand typists, piano tuners, organists and music teachers and concluded that the college could be justly proud of its pupils' achievements music, literature and Law,

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<sup>99</sup> RCBD, *Minutes of Evidence*, Qs. 10866-7.

<sup>100</sup> RCBD *Minutes of Evidence*, Q 11142.

<sup>101</sup> RCBD *Minutes of Evidence*, Q. 11175.

<sup>102</sup> Francis Campbell, Letter to *The Times* 3 February 1880 London Metropolitan Archives; acc/ 3006/ y10/1.

<sup>103</sup> PP 1886 XXV (C- 4747) *Reports on the Education of the Blind*, 555 ff.

<sup>104</sup> Thomas, *The RNIB*, 20.

<sup>105</sup> HMI Committee of Council, *Report* 1896-7, 34.



as well as the educators it sent out from Britain to Australia, Canada, Burma, Ceylon and South Africa'.<sup>106</sup>

The College continued to set the highest standards for teachers and students after the departure of its founders, and remained a model for other educators to emulate.

Once again, Braille was at the heart of its success and the work of the blind teachers sent to work under Miss Greene at the London School Board accelerated much positive change beyond the sphere of musical education.

#### **6.4 The school boards and the discovery of the blind child**

The Education Act of 1870 was intended, in the words of its architect, W.E. Forster, to 'fill up the gaps' in voluntary provision.<sup>107</sup> In school board areas such as London and Glasgow where a new legal responsibility to offer schooling to blind children was recognized, educators of the blind were to play a part in one of the rare dynamic initiatives in England's unhappy educational history. Research on the London board schools has, until now, barely mentioned this aspect of their work, but it is clear from the evidence below that those involved regarded the achievements of the city's blind scholars and their teachers as one of its proudest achievements.

Following the first school board elections of November 1870, London was divided into ten electoral divisions and ad hoc bodies directly elected by secret ballot, 'controlled all local schools, bar the Church ones'.<sup>108</sup> The London board's schools were rooted in local communities and supported by the radical intelligentsia, with such figures as Annie Besant actively involved from the mid- 1880s.<sup>109</sup> They soon challenged pre-conceptions of the educability of the urban lower classes by entering children successfully for the higher grade examinations, thus rejecting, in Brian Simon's words, 'the concept of different forms and levels of education for different classes'.<sup>110</sup> Not without reason, the board schools have been eulogised as 'the people's' schools', and an extensive body of historical research by now exists on their work.<sup>111</sup> When the London Board began its work in 1871 barely two out of five children went to school at all.<sup>112</sup> After two decades, contemporaries like Sir Arthur

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<sup>106</sup> Wagg, *A Chronological Survey*, 48.

<sup>107</sup> Stuart Maclure, *A History of Education in London, 1870-1990* (Allen Lane: Penguin, 1970, 1990 edition), 16.

<sup>108</sup> Brian Simon, *Education and the Labour Movement*, 147.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

<sup>111</sup> See the History of Education Society online bibliography produced in collaboration with the University of Exeter. <http://dll.ex.ac.uk/hoebibliography/index.php> Last consulted 29 November 2010.

<sup>112</sup> Jane Martin, *Women and the Politics of Schooling in Victorian England* (London, New York: Leicester University Press, 1999), 9.

Conan Doyle were open in their admiration. When Dr. Watson, in *The Adventure of the Naval Treaty*, remarks on the board schools visible on the London skyline from their train carriage, Sherlock Holmes replies, 'The Board Schools . . . Lighthouses, my boy! Beacons of the future! Capsules, with hundreds of bright little seeds in each, out of which will spring the wiser, better England of the future'.<sup>113</sup>

One evident lacuna in the education of London's children was provision for the education of the child with disabilities, and the wording of the 1870 Act, in the eyes of the London School Board, left no doubt that it was responsible to intervene in this sphere. The Board's *Final Report* of 1904, recalled how, prior to its intervention, 'the blind as a class had been educationally neglected', and referred to the decision in 1872 to provide teaching for them.<sup>114</sup> The Board's sub-committee on blind and deaf and children was set up and three decades of intensive activity began. As a result, by 1903, a working special school system was ready to be turned over to the London County Council with 4,564 places in four residential schools, and 91 day schools with 268 trained teachers.<sup>115</sup>

Other cities and regions felt no such clear obligation to educate their disabled children. Some, like Leeds and Newcastle, saw ambiguities in the legislation and wrote to the authorities for clarification.<sup>116</sup> Other local boards never saw children with disabilities as a particular priority; Liverpool, perhaps diverted by its struggle with poverty and truancy, made no mention at all of schooling for disabled children in its *Report* on its work from 1885 to 1888.<sup>117</sup>

In London, by contrast, little hesitation was shown and in November 1878 the Board decided to advertise in the leading newspapers for a Superintendent for the instruction of blind and deaf children. At the same meeting it was agreed that McMillan's primer would be embossed for the blind. The advertisement appeared on November 27 for a female sighted teacher at a starting salary of £120, rising annually by £5 to a maximum of £150. In January 1879, the appointment was announced of Miss Greene, a teacher from the Royal Normal College recommended by Francis Campbell and Dr. Armitage.<sup>118</sup> By late 1884, Greene was

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<sup>113</sup> Arthur Conan Doyle, 'The Adventure of the Naval Treaty', (written 1889) in W.S. Baring Gould, ed., *The Annotated Sherlock Holmes* (London: John Murray 1968 Vol.2), 179.

<sup>114</sup> The School Board of London, *Final Report*, 1870-1904, Section on 'Defective Children', 180. Held at London Metropolitan Archives: SBL/1350-1351.

<sup>115</sup> Maclure, *A History*, 68.

<sup>116</sup> P.P Ed. 50 /9.

<sup>117</sup> The School Board of Liverpool, 'Report as to the Work of the Liverpool School Board during the three years ending November 25, 1888.' (Liverpool, 1889).

<sup>118</sup> London School Board, School Management Sub-Committee: Instruction of the Blind and Deaf and Dumb. *Minutes*, 36-42. Held London Metropolitan Archives, SBL 755-777, Vol.1.

assisted by five blind women teachers from the Royal Normal College and 133 blind children and infants were being instructed. Francis Campbell was asked to inspect and expressed his 'great satisfaction' with their work after he did so. He reported that the reading and writing were good and the pupils 'reason and think for themselves'.<sup>119</sup>

In its first phase, the London Board opted, wherever possible, to integrate the blind child in ordinary schools, for at least half of the day. An example of successful integration had come earlier from Glasgow in the late 1860s, where Alexander Barnhill's book on the work of Reverend Andrew McFarlane in the Gorbals was published in 1875. Barnhill was not against the blind institution per se, but was unequivocally in favour of ordinary day schooling for the blind child unable, for financial or other reasons, to be educated in a voluntary school, 'The day is near when the blot of the neglect of these children will be wiped away . . . The country will not tolerate the education of fifty per cent in institutions and leave the rest to grow up uncared for'.<sup>120</sup> Barnhill stressed the advantages of the blind child preserving contact with kind and loving parents and associating with seeing children to counteract feelings of isolation or despondency. In his view, if children in existing institutions were to depart for an education in ordinary schools, the considerable resources of the charitable establishments could be freed to benefit blind adults neglected at the time. Barnhill realized that this prospect could excite alarm in those with 'vested interests' who persistently adhered to established methods.<sup>121</sup>

London's initiative to integrate blind children soon gained momentum. In its *Final Report*, the London Board spoke of two distinct phases in its work for children with disabilities, at the time usually referred to as 'defective'. It described the first 20 years of activity for the blind child, from 1872, as an 'experimental phase', in which the first great difficulty to be resolved was that of types. Writing retrospectively, the report described the first peripatetic visits from members of the Moon Society and sometimes the Home Teaching Society, until in 1876, Moon was found to be unsuitable for blind children. Roman type was tried before the decision was made that Braille was to be used for both reading and writing. This came about with the introduction of day centres for initial instruction followed by integration with sighted children in ordinary schools. Miss Greene's appointment led to 'a slow but sure improvement of results', which coincided with the employment of blind teachers selected from the Royal Normal College and the integration of blind children in the

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 165.

<sup>120</sup> Alexander Barnhill, *A New Era in the Education of Blind Children or Teaching the Blind in Ordinary Schools* (Glasgow: Charles Glass 1875), 17.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 60-61.

most idealistic moment of the Board's life. A second phase ensued where, influenced by Inspectors and others concerned with expense, the difficulties of finding foster parents and the belief that better academic results could be obtained in segregation, the Board switched to the policy of placing its blind charges in residential institutions.

Evidence from the contemporary press, testimony to the Commission and even the measured praise of the early inspectorate reports offers the reader a sense of the excitement surrounding this board school venture into uncharted territory. Alice Westlake, a member of the London School Board Committee from its inception in 1876, described the education of blind children at the outset as 'exceedingly bad, about as bad as it could be', with children 'neglected altogether' before 1875.<sup>122</sup> This unhappy time she compared with the situation a decade later where, 'we have nothing now but trained cultivated teachers'.<sup>123</sup> This new arrangement, whereby children were studying all the subjects up to Standard VI (Reading, Writing, Arithmetic and Geography) presented no problems.<sup>124</sup> When Miss Greene was appointed, 33 children were under the Board, compared to 120 blind children 'at present educated by the State'. On types, Miss Westlake did observe that at the day centres to which the blind child was first brought by a visitor, teachers sometimes used the Moon system to obtain immediate results, but most of the Board teachers already preferred Braille, as its educational benefits were soon clear.<sup>125</sup>

In Mary Greene's own lengthy testimony she described her early experience with the London Board. Prior to her appointment, she had worked for eight years at the Perkins Institute and a further eight at the Royal Normal College under Francis Campbell. It was her firm belief that integration quickened the ambition of the blind child, who would, if sent too early to the institution, feel part of a separate and isolated class, not expected to do as others did.<sup>126</sup> When it came to books, at the time of her appointment, they were 'obtained from wherever possible'. Braille was 'in its infancy' in Britain, while Roman predominated. In contrast, in 1886 'almost all children read in Braille', Moon was used 'somewhat' and Roman type was excluded, as it was less easily read by the blind, not so easily learned at school and not suitable for writing.<sup>127</sup> For this, Greene admitted that the decision was made on her authority, and she stated her conviction that, for blind children, Braille offered the best means

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<sup>122</sup> RCBD *Minutes of Evidence*, Qs. 87-88.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, Q.100.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, Q.120.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, Q.141.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, Q.228.

<sup>127</sup> RCBD, *Minutes of Evidence*, Q.277.

for 'keeping up their intelligence through life'.<sup>128</sup> Greene believed Braille had enabled some entirely blind children to reach Standard V.<sup>129</sup> In the context of the 'Battle of the Types', Phillips conceded that the London Board Schools 'struck a decisive blow for Braille'.<sup>130</sup>

The schools' academic achievements, in which the choice of Braille had evidently played a part, led other cities to demand a similar approach to London's. There had been considerable variation in the responses of school boards across the country to both the 1870 legislation and that of 1893, and in his Inspector's Report, Reverend T.W. Sharpe observed that as late as 1897, 'Some school authorities have done little, perhaps from ignorance of their statutory duties and powers, but in the majority from apathy'.<sup>131</sup>

Popular concern was expressed in several cities. Glasgow's *Daily Mail* reported in January 1887 that the city's teachers were 'coming over to the idea of integration'.<sup>132</sup> The *Yorkshire Post* reported the delivery of a large petition drawn up in the city in 1890, and delivered to the School Board by four men from the United Institution for the Blind, Deaf and Dumb, urging the adoption of a policy similar to London's.<sup>133</sup> In Edinburgh the following year, 130 blind people signed a memorial praying 'that in future all blind children shall be educated with seeing children in ordinary Board schools, before beginning special industrial training when 14-16 years old'.<sup>134</sup> The response outside London was not always negative; the Commissioners reported that by 1899 Bradford, Cardiff, Sunderland and Glasgow had 'undertaken blind education', and in most cases the blind children followed the ordinary timetable with their seeing companions, and joined them at playtime too.<sup>135</sup> The Bradford School Board had built a special day school for the blind in 1898, where they were to be prepared for integration, as in London.<sup>136</sup>

Thomas Armitage had originally been in the ranks of the doubters on the London Board experiment, in contrast to the egalitarian Francis Campbell, but he was to report to the BFBA Council that the Board schools had improved by as early as 1879, and never commented negatively on their work again.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid., Q.305.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., Q332.

<sup>130</sup> Phillips, *The Blind*, 223.

<sup>131</sup> P.P. XXVII *Report of the Committee of Council on Education in Schools for the Blind and Deaf*, 1896-7 (1897). C808.

<sup>132</sup> *Glasgow North British Daily Mail*, 20 January 1887.

<sup>133</sup> *Yorkshire Post*, 13 July 1888.

<sup>134</sup> *Queen*, 31 March 1890.

<sup>135</sup> RCB, *Appendix 2*, Para. 48.

<sup>136</sup> Wagg, *A Chronological Survey*, 79.

<sup>137</sup> BFBA, Executive Council *Minutes*, 9 April 1879.

In its later years, particularly from 1895, the London School Board in general was subject to what Brian Simon calls ‘undermining’ with politically motivated caps on raising funds.<sup>138</sup> Its policy of integration of children with disabilities had never been without its detractors. Resentful of the expenses of integration, and probably of its unexpected success in helping blind children attain the Standards, as well as the difficulties of finding the necessary foster parents, these opponents were to prevail eventually. In the observations of the Inspectorate a bias towards the residential solution emerges after an initial flush of enthusiasm. In its 1886 report, J.G. Fitch expressed approval of the integrated blind children’s progress under Miss Greene’s blind teachers, remarking that they ‘read readily and fluently’ and that children in Lambeth answered with ‘more than average success when thought and intelligence were required’. He also noted how the presence of the blind child made him or her ‘an instrument of moral discipline for the school’.<sup>139</sup> Fitch acknowledged that year that ‘London worked well’ but it was recommended that in rural areas the blind child should be sent to institutions ‘for economy’.<sup>140</sup> By 1897 Reverend T.W. Sharpe reported that blind teachers needed monitors for reasons of ‘cleanliness’ and safety, and the institution was in general to be preferred to the ordinary school, with the possible exception of large population centres where the blind child had ‘a happy home’.<sup>141</sup> The human advantages of integration were, even for London, soon outweighed, however, by other factors in the eyes of the Inspectorate. Their 1903 report concluded ‘day schools for the blind cannot provide as efficient an education, especially for older children, as boarding institutions. The London School Board has acted very wisely in establishing two excellent boarding schools for the blind, to meet the need for advanced manual Training which the day centres could not furnish’. The Inspectors then went on to praise the new facilities in the segregated suburban institutions, singling out those with the most efficient workshops for particular praise. It was apparent that, despite the academic achievements of Worcester College and the Royal Normal College, it had never been the intention of the Inspectorate to let the blind Board School child rise too far. Fitch, the most sympathetic of them believed that after the Fourth Standard he or she should be directed towards useful training.<sup>142</sup> The Inspectorate certainly

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<sup>138</sup> Simon, *Education and the Labour Movement*, 159-160.

<sup>139</sup> PP 1886 XXV [c. - 4747] *Reports on Education of the Blind*. p. 556.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> PP 1897 XXVII [c. - 8608] Report of the Committee of Council on Schools for the Blind and Deaf 1896-97, p.397.

<sup>142</sup> HMI, *Report*, 1886, p. 568.

played its part in the move towards institutionalization, and was increasingly willing to lend its weight in the shift towards a renewed utilitarianism in the education of the sightless.<sup>143</sup>

The 1893 Elementary Schools Act (Blind and Deaf Children) compelled attendance at school for blind children from five to 16 years old and enabled the Board to place children in residential schools, using voluntary institutions until such places could be provided by the Board itself.<sup>144</sup> This policy shift remained contentious to the end. Even in 1904, the Board's *Final Report* remarked 'there is considerable difference of opinion as to the relative values of Day schools and Residential institutions for the Blind and Deaf'.<sup>145</sup>

Other British cities warmed to the idea of integrated schooling, and in the United States, Chicago was set to begin, in 1900, its own experiment in educating the blind child alongside the sighted, arguing that 'He does not differ from them in feeling, pleasures and purposes'.<sup>146</sup> Encouraged by Chicago's success, Cincinnati followed suit in 1905, Milwaukee in 1907 and New York and Boston in 1909.<sup>147</sup>

The institutional faction, however, wished Britain to take a different path. Ever the pragmatist, Henry Stainsby of the Birmingham Institution spelled out the advantages of the residential system to the delegates at the Edinburgh International Conference of 1905. As physical advantages he listed better feeding, clothing and habits, more sleep, better medical treatment, more gymnastics and less chance of contracting infectious diseases. Stainsby went on to cite the 'mental and educational' benefits of institutionalized education. These he claimed were better opportunities for 'classification' (an interesting choice of word to Foucauldians), the mental recreation provided, access to good libraries, constant and wholesome discipline, distance from harmful parents, more manual training and handicrafts, and greater exercise of self-reliance. In addition to the above points there was no need to travel and this made regular attendance and punctuality easier to achieve. To be fair, Stainsby also did list the benefits of day schools, such as parental attention and responsibility, and made vague statements about home being 'the natural training place' and there being 'no substitute for a good home'.<sup>148</sup> Stainsby had presented at an earlier conference a list of 'Professions and Trades Best Adapted for the Blind', in which manual trades predominated,

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<sup>143</sup> PP 1903 [1763] Board of Education, *Report of the Board of Education for the Year 1902-1903*, 43.

<sup>144</sup> London School Board *Final Report*, 180.

<sup>145</sup> London School Board, *Final Report*, 179.

<sup>146</sup> John B. Curtis, 'The Education of the Blind in the Chicago Public Schools', *Outlook for the Blind* July 1907, 37.

<sup>147</sup> Koestler, *The Unseen Minority*, 411-412.

<sup>148</sup> Henry Stainsby, 'The Education of the Blind under the Elementary Education (Blind and Deaf Children) Act 1893' in *Report of the International Conference on the Blind, Edinburgh June 19-24<sup>th</sup> 1905* (Glasgow: W. M. Hodge, 1905), 47-51.

including old favourites like chimney sweeping and basket making, and ‘innovations’ such as typing and ‘shampooing’ for girls, suggesting that literacy and the library were secondary considerations in his scheme for twentieth century blind education in confinement.<sup>149</sup>

This return to the residential approach was a clear step towards the century of exclusion that was to follow, and for many a betrayal of the principles once embraced by the Board.

The record of the School Boards in educating blind children may not have produced a lasting revolution in the education of blind children, but even Gordon Phillips, ardent defender of the voluntarist institution, acknowledges that their example ‘galvanised’ the private sector into improvement.<sup>150</sup> In the annual reports of certain institutions, we find mention of the pressure felt to match the examples set by the London Board. Liverpool School’s *Annual Report* for 1886 stated that ‘the condition of the elementary school could not be more satisfactory . . . the boys can compare favourably with any Board school’.<sup>151</sup> The construction of Liverpool School’s Wavertree Hall building was due within a few months of the publication of the 1888 *Report*, which observed, ‘Now that it is compulsory to educate blind children, more money is needed’.<sup>152</sup> These improvements consisted of earlier admission ages, suitably qualified teachers, higher levels of intellectual attainment, regular examination, and more books and equipment. This ‘spurt’ in activity on the part of the voluntary institutions may have been what induced the Commissioners to recommend that ‘subject to inspection, all the control of the internal domestic affairs should be left as heretofore with the governing bodies’, which were said to have done good work in the education and training of the blind’.<sup>153</sup>

The legislation of 1893 blurred the boundaries between state and voluntary provision, as a phase of ‘partnership’ began. London’s blind children subsequently entered the institutions, Elm Court and Linden Lodge, established by the newly constituted local authorities. The former housed 50 blind girls, with ten day pupils; the latter 40 blind boys with ten attending by day. The charity spirit apparently faded as local authorities entered the field, but the twentieth century residential institution assumed its form and continued, as

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<sup>149</sup> Henry Stainsby, ‘Professions and Trades Best adapted for the Blind’ in *Westminster Conference 1902*, 78-99.

<sup>150</sup> Phillips, *The Blind*, 262.

<sup>151</sup> Liverpool School, *Annual Report*, 1886, 2.

<sup>152</sup> Liverpool School, *Annual Report*, 1888, 21.

<sup>153</sup> RCBD, *Report*, Para. 208.



recent histories suggest, stigmatizing and diminishing the aspirations of the incarcerated generations of pupils to come.<sup>154</sup>

The blind institution, in the right circumstances, may have had empowering potential, as the Royal Normal College and Worcester demonstrated with talented children. For those considered less ‘gifted’, the utilitarian establishment in which most blind children were educated for most of the twentieth century is remembered by those with direct experience more for its capacity to debilitate. In contrast, the experience of the blind children educated in ordinary schools in the first phase of the London School Board had demonstrated what integration could achieve in both human and academic terms for the visually disadvantaged blind child, when skilful, well trained teachers, enjoyed a high degree of public support and used Braille as the medium of instruction. Unfortunately, the example was forgotten for most of the following century.

## 6.5 Conferences

Records of the conferences convened to discuss the education of the blind and deaf in Europe, in which even Britain’s phlegmatic educators of the blind participated, are another overlooked historical source introduced in this study. These gatherings reflected the general ameliorative ethos prevailing in the late Victorian period, which manifested in an urge to remedy social ills through the rational examination of problems. Statistics were one innovation found helpful in this; the organization of conferences, where information and ideas could be exchanged and debated, was another. In his opening address to the conference of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Sciences in 1858, William Cowper expressed his faith in a novel concept:

We may hope, by the collision of minds in a numerous conference, to draw upon the cold flint and steel of individual thought and individual feeling for those sparks of enthusiasm which, fed by the sympathy of numbers, may kindle a flame bright enough to light up the dark places of our land and clear enough to guide the steps of those who will descend into their depths to lead out into a purer atmosphere the degraded and the abject.<sup>155</sup>

The First Congress of European Teachers of the Blind was held in Vienna in August 1873 and of the 84 delegates present, only Buckle of York and Martin from Edinburgh were

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<sup>154</sup> See the earlier mentioned oral histories of Sally French and Humphries and Gordon stressing the inadequacies of the twentieth century institution in Britain.

<sup>155</sup> In G.W. Hastings, ed., *The National Association for the Promotion of Social Sciences Transactions 1858* (1859), Opening Address, 9.

British.<sup>156</sup> There had been occasions for educators to meet informally before then, as at the 1867 Paris Exhibition, and the 1871 London International Exhibition, on which E.C. Johnson reported extensively (see Section 5.3). The conference format, however, presented an opportunity to deliver papers reporting on developments in the speaker's nation or elaborating new proposals. It was also the first chance to meet prominent European figures such as Herr Johann Moldenhawer, the first Director of the Royal Institution for the Blind in Copenhagen. It was probably a salutary experience for Buckle and Martin to hear Moldenhawer comparing Britain's approach unfavourably to Copenhagen's, when he stated 'We do not wish to make our blind children only factory hands', condemning the typical British workshops as 'manufactories where division of labour is the first feature'.<sup>157</sup> Moldenhawer was a frequent participant at subsequent gatherings, and in writing his obituary, H.W.P. Pine, Superintendent of Nottingham's Midland Institution for the Blind, recalled their meetings at the York Conference in 1883, the first to be held in Britain. The two men met again at the Royal Normal College conference in 1890 and at Brussels in 1902.<sup>158</sup>

Thomas Armitage, as was to be expected, was also an enthusiastic participant at these gatherings and wrote in 1882, 'This is the Age of Conferences'. Noting in his diary a journey time of 22 hours by fast train from Dover, he went to attend the conference in Frankfurt that year in July, the fourth held by the Teachers and Friends of the Blind, who by then had agreed to convene every three years in a German town.<sup>159</sup> In his report on the Paris Congress of 1878, Armitage recounted that 150 delegates were present, and that the French government had participated fully. In his own paper to the congress, Armitage described the work of the London School Board, with its day centres used prior to integration and its blind teachers, recommending this as an approach to be adopted in other European cities.<sup>160</sup> He noted some antagonism expressed towards the idea of blind teachers from 'less enlightened seeing teachers'. Before concluding his paper, Armitage blew the trumpet for the BFBA, whose 'unrivalled' apparatus for the blind was being successfully exported, a far cry from the time, a decade previously, when England was 'one of the most backward countries as regards the education of the blind'.<sup>161</sup> The Yorkshire School for the Blind was the venue for the

<sup>156</sup> Charity Organisation Society, *Report of a Special Committee, on the the Training of the Blind*, (London: Longman's Green 1876) 47.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>158</sup> H.W.P. Pine, 'Obituary: Herr Johann Moldenhawer', *Outlook for the Blind*, No.43 (London: Gardener's Trust 1907).

<sup>159</sup> *Progress*, September-October issue, 1882, 48.

<sup>160</sup> Thomas Armitage, *Journal of the Society of the Arts*, November 1, 1878, 16-17.

<sup>161</sup> Armitage, *Society of the Arts*, 26.

Conference of Managers, Teachers and Friends of the Blind in July 1883, Britain's first such convention. While Armitage's address focused on the 'The Best means to be Adapted to enable the Blind to Maintain themselves', S.S. Forster delivered 'A Plea for the Higher Education of the Blind', a theme which Worcester representatives were often to stress on the conference platform in years to come. Herr Meijer, from Amsterdam spoke on 'The Sphere of Music in the Education of the Blind'.<sup>162</sup> A conference held in Birmingham in 1894 was particularly concerned with the age when schooling should take place, after the 1893 Act came into force in England and Wales.<sup>163</sup>

It is the conference sponsored by the Gardner Trust and held at Church House, Westminster in April 1902, 'On Matters Relating to the Blind' that offers the most interesting insight into the preoccupations of the protagonists in blind education at the end of a century of involvement. Reverend H.J.R. Marston of Worcester spoke on 'The Mental Culture or Higher Education of the Blind'. It was here that he described the history of Worcester College as 'a thrilling chapter in the history of mind', and reminded the delegates of its achievements in sending pupils on to the ancient universities.<sup>164</sup> Two papers were given the title, 'The Need for More and Cheaper Literature for the Blind', with Alfred Hirst rehearsing the arguments in favour of Braille and William Moon's daughter restating the enduring value of the Moon system. Pronouncing Braille to be 'the greatest gift which a benign Providence has made us', Hirst cited sales figures of the BFBA as rising from an income of £44 per annum in 1871-73 to over £2000 in 1897 alone, with 100,000 volumes of 'high class literature' published. Hirst drew attention to the high cost of posting Braille for those borrowing from lending libraries which had 'startled' the local blind communities he encountered, and his vociferousness on this issue may have helped stir pressure on the government to introduce special lower rates for embossed books and papers in the Post Office Act of 1908.<sup>165</sup> This robust champion of Braille, was able to boast of making a successful intervention in its favour when he arrived in Australia in 1881, 'just in time to prevent the adoption of one of the American types'. While there, he started a monthly Braille magazine in Adelaide the year after.<sup>166</sup>

<sup>162</sup> Wagg, *A Chronological Survey*, 191.

<sup>163</sup> *Report of the Conference Held at the General Institution for the Blind, Edgbaston, July 13-14, 1894* (Birmingham: Privately printed, 1894).

<sup>164</sup> H.J.R. Marston, 'The Higher Education of the Blind' in *Westminster Conference 1902*, 15.

<sup>165</sup> Alfred Hirst, 'The Need for More and Cheaper Literature for the Blind in Braille Type' in *Westminster Conference 1902*, 122.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

With an equal degree of commitment, Miss Moon spoke of the virtues of Moon type, which had ‘proved the possibility of teaching blind adults to read’ and had so created ‘a thirst for reading matter’. With 80 Home Teaching Societies then still functioning, and with most of their stock in Moon, she argued that it made little sense to abandon the system totally.<sup>167</sup> The tide, nonetheless, was surging towards Braille and attention was shifting towards the selection of an internationally agreed uniform type. In a highly technical paper on ‘A Uniform Braille System’ W.H. Illingworth, Head of Edinburgh’s School and Asylum, sought to explain the issue, and the infinite ‘quibbles’ over contractions. Francis Campbell and Armitage were in favour of creating an Anglo-American committee to find a universal form available to all the colonies too.<sup>168</sup>

Following discussion of Illingworth’s paper, the Uniform Braille Committee was formed at the Westminster Conference with 12 members. These, together with another 12 members appointed by the New Contractions Committee of the BFBA, formed the British Braille Committee. This, which included eight women, first met on May 9, 1903 to discuss three proposed grades of Braille. Grade I was ‘uncontracted’. Grade II, which most members supported was moderately contracted, and Grade III had many contractions and was intended for the proficient or advanced Braille user.<sup>169</sup> British Braille Grade II was eventually to prevail, helped by the argument that much of the literature in the Empire was already transcribed in that system, an outcome with which many Americans were far from happy.<sup>170</sup>

Entering the twentieth century in an international spirit of ‘progress’, delegates from the farthest corners of the world brought news of educational developments for the blind. The Manchester International Conference on the Blind in the summer of 1908 heard papers not only on ‘The Blind of Ireland’ and ‘The Blind of France’ but also Mr. Tadasu Yamamoto’s discussion of ‘The Past, Present and Future of the Blind in Japan’.<sup>171</sup> The 1914 Conference on the Blind held in London from June 18-24 attracted delegates from institutions in Australia, India, Brazil, Syria and China and representatives of the governments of Brazil and Imperial Russia. Mr. W. Percy Merrick gave a paper on ‘Esperanto for the Blind’.<sup>172</sup>

The 1905 International Conference on the Blind in Edinburgh produced an agreement to form a College of Teachers, an important examining body, which grew out of discussion at

<sup>167</sup> Miss Moon, ‘The Need for More and Cheaper Literature for the Blind in Moon’s type’. *Westminster Conference 1902*, 125-130:126.

<sup>168</sup> W.H. Illingworth, ‘A Uniform Braille System’, *Westminster Conference 1902*, 139.

<sup>169</sup> Edinburgh Conference, 1905, *Report*, Appendix.

<sup>170</sup> Irwin, *As I Saw It*, 51-52.

<sup>171</sup> Wagg, *A Chronological Survey*, 193-4.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 195.

the conference, and was functional by July 1908.<sup>173</sup> The chief mover in this initiative was Dr. Alfred Eicholz, appointed H.M. Chief Inspector of Schools by the Board of Education in 1901. The other critical point of interest at the conference to those tracing the foundations of the pattern of twentieth century blind education was the increasing divergence to be found in perceptions underpinning views on the future direction of blind education. This issue was brought into sharp focus by the reactions to discussion of the paper on 'The Higher Education of the Blind' read by W.H. Illingworth. The 1902 Act had used the term 'other than elementary' for post-elementary education and the notion of 'higher education' came into closer focus. Representatives from Worcester College had been using the term at conferences for some time to refer to their curriculum, which embraced Latin, Greek and Mathematics at an academic level of difficulty far beyond the decreed Standards of the Board of Education. In their reading of the term, preparation for the exams of the ancient universities was a significant responsibility for Worcester teachers. Illingworth wanted to see some of these loftier aspirations spread to other institutions and argued 'We want in these days of revolution in the educational world generally to get away from time worn platitudes and stereotyped ideas in regard to the methods of educating the blind'.<sup>174</sup> Eicholz added, a little ambiguously, that extended education should draw out '... faculties, powers or sensibilities which shall be of the greatest sense to him, as a compensation for the lack of sight'.<sup>175</sup> The Director of the Bradford Institution, W.H. Tate, was more specific:

The object of 'higher education' should be the highest possible development of the individual physically, mentally and morally and should be directed to such studies as tend to increase the number and variety of interests in life, to widen the outlook of the mind, to develop self-reliance and self-control and to create a noble type of character.<sup>176</sup>

Tate cited the blind teachers, churchmen and lawyers who had achieved success, and stressed the inspiration provided by Worcester College and by Francis Campbell, described as 'a man whom dukes, princes and kings are proud to call friend'. In Tate's view, Mathematics, Literature, History and Psychology should be taught, as well as Music, to all with 'taste, intelligence and a desire to learn'. Such teaching would produce well-balanced judgement and an energetic and powerful will, attributes which would make any person 'socially

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<sup>173</sup> Ibid., Appendix, 311.

<sup>174</sup> Edinburgh Conference 1905, *Report*, 94.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., 93.

agreeable and attractive'.<sup>177</sup> Another delegate, Mr. Norwood from the Yorkshire School, added that, besides drawing out the powers to make blind people self-supporting, it was important for educators to offer them the 'mental equipment to obtain for themselves in after life intellectual recreation'.<sup>178</sup>

In contrast to the above speakers Henry Stainsby of Birmingham, remembered as the co-inventor of an early Braille shorthand machine, believed 'higher education was more a matter of preparation for 'a profession, trade or handicraft ultimately used as a means of livelihood'.<sup>179</sup> Previously, in a paper given at the Westminster Conference in 1902, Stainsby had claimed a consensus existed among managers that certain professions were best suited to the working class blind. Foremost of these were basket making and brush and broom making, followed by piano tuning and mat making.<sup>180</sup> In later years, Stainsby came to be regarded as a pioneer in adapting to a changing labour market by instructing students in massage, office typing and operating telephones. At Edinburgh in 1905, R.W.P. Pine of the Nottingham Institute, which by then only educated blind pupils over sixteen, lent his voice to the utilitarian camp. Pine was the first Manager to apply to be recognized by the Board of Education as a Technical Institution entitled to grants under the Regulations, and his recommendations echoed those earlier issued by the Inspectorate in 1899. In addition to the perennial favourites, basket and brush making, woodwork and chair caning featured highly, along with piano tuning and typewriting. Pine cited cookery and, curiously, Shakespeare as suitable for girls while knitting could, he thought, be learned by both sexes.<sup>181</sup> This revealed a slightly less gender differentiated attitude to the Inspectors', who had listed as 'Subjects approved by Her Majesty's Inspectors 'as proper to be included in the "Course of Manual Instruction or Industrial training"' for girls only, Cookerywork, Laundrywork, Needlework, and Housework.<sup>182</sup>

The Edinburgh Conference of 1905, then, indicated two fundamentally contrasting approaches. Histories of twentieth century institutional experience suggest that the more 'practical' school of managers determined the path to be taken. The institutional practices described in the oral testimonies produced by Steve Humphries and Pamela Gordon were probably not isolated examples and should not be dismissed as Phillips has done as 'selected

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<sup>177</sup> Ibid., 105-106.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 93-97.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>180</sup> *Westminster Conference 1902*, 79-84.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 120.

<sup>182</sup> PP Dept. of Committee of Council on Education. *Report on Schools for the Blind and Deaf 1897-8* (1899). [c.-8985] XXIII Appendix VI, 25.

testimony of inmates who were, or considered themselves, maltreated'.<sup>183</sup> Their descriptions of delousing and numbering on entry, the bullying and overcrowding, the destruction of aspirations by lowly paid and untrained staff, the small details in their memories such as the enforced 'absolute silence' of the dining room of Elm Court, suggest that culturally impoverished managers imbued with the industrial spirit, who denied the importance of a wider literacy, were to shape blind education for the twentieth century.<sup>184</sup>

These conferences, held with increasing frequency, regarding the blind in Europe and Britain came to be seen in the late Victorian years as a means of reviewing developments and exchanging ideas among educators and administrators. For English delegates, the opportunity to learn of the role of the state in Germany and France probably stimulated the movement to involve the state in blind education in Britain, while the conferences at York in 1883, Westminster in 1902, and Edinburgh in 1905 had great influence in delineating future educational paths.

Voluntarism has been blamed, in one quarter or another, since the 1850s, for the maldevelopment of blind education and publishing, with the implication that a more active State might have changed the course of events. The following chapter examines the differing views on State involvement in furthering 'improvement' at the time.

## **6.6 The State bestirred: the establishment of the Royal Commission**

One of the most perplexing questions facing historians of Victorian Britain has long been the role of the State in confronting social issues. In both the teaching of reading and publishing a familiar pattern is presented, where the British government, in contrast to those of France, Germany and the United States showed a continued reluctance to be engaged, preferring to leave matters in the hands of voluntary agencies. Samuel Howe's observation on his return to America from a tour of European institutions in 1833 indicates that this dichotomy was apparent from the earliest stage:

The education of the blind may be divided into two classes, those established and supported by the governments, and those which owe their foundation and support to charitable efforts. The latter are far more useful than the former.<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>183</sup> Phillips, *The Blind*, 418.

<sup>184</sup> Humphries and Gordon, *Out of Sight*, 37-39.

<sup>185</sup> Samuel G. Howe, *Address of the Trustees of the New England Institution for the Education of the Blind* (Boston, MA: Perkins Institute), 1833, 8.

For most of the nineteenth century, the distinction between the two was clear cut and judgements could be, and often were, made on the achievements and shortcomings of the exclusively voluntarist provision that prevailed in Britain (see Section 4.5). In France, the state's responsibility had been established with the Revolution (see Section 3.3), while German states had long seen the provision of education and guarantees of work as a government's duty towards its blind citizens. With the increased contact with mainland Europe later in the century, particularly through conferences, examples of ideas and practice from other nations made clearer to a number of critics the inadequacies of Britain's voluntarist provision.

D.O. Hanswell, in 1874, asserted that 'the present arrangement of society is the direct cause of the bitter neglect and cruel opposition suffered by the blind'.<sup>186</sup> The nation provided only the workhouse to educate, employ or relieve the blind person. In Hanswell's view the voluntary system had failed since 'this want has been left to the exercise of private charity and most miserably has private charity failed'.<sup>187</sup> He was far from alone in feeling this, but it required the involvement of the influential Charity Organisation Society to make the call for government intervention more compelling. The Society had a complex and important role in blind welfare that has often been overlooked by denigrators who, following Gareth Stedman Jones, have commented adversely on its parsimonious and arbitrary manner of dealing with the destitute.

Founded in 1869 by C.S. Loch, formerly a High Court judge in India, the society originally known as 'The Society for Organising Charitable Relief and Repressing Mendicity' was opposed to spontaneity and sentimentality in almsgiving. Loch perceived his method as 'modern' in that 'the springs of charity lie in sympathy and religion and, one would now add, in science'.<sup>188</sup> Jane Lewis argues that the Charity Organisation Society, as it came to be known, sought to remedy 'insufficiency, particularism, paternalism and amateurism in the administration of philanthropy'.<sup>189</sup> Charity was only to be entrusted to professionals, for indiscriminate charity could bring 'demoralisation' since the recipient's nobler instinct to support himself and his family could be weakened.

At a Council Meeting in July 1874, the Society formed a Special Committee to consider 'what more could be done to promote the welfare of the blind and especially their

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<sup>186</sup> D.O. Hanswell, 'The Social Condition of the Blind' (A paper read to the National Sunday League in 1874) in Royal Normal College, *Essays*. (London: undated), 4.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>188</sup> C.S. Loch, 'Charity' in *Encyclopedia Britannica* (Edinburgh, 1910 edition), 860-866.

<sup>189</sup> Jane Lewis, *The Voluntary Sector, the State and Social work in Britain: the COS/ Family Welfare Association since 1869* (Brookfield, Vermont: Elgar 1995).



industrial training'.<sup>190</sup> This committee confined its investigation to London, and examined whether, and to what extent, the education of the blind should be funded from the rates and other government sources.<sup>191</sup>

In educational terms, the recommendations of its 1876 report contained what in retrospect seem advanced ideas, including a proposal for a scheme of general training from near infancy. The *Report* suggested parents of the blind should be given appropriate instruction. Home tutors should visit blind children under five years old and special preparatory schools should be opened where home tuition arrangements proved impossible. A year of special training was deemed necessary to prepare the blind child for entry to public elementary schools, where the report suggested they should mix with sighted children from the age of five.<sup>192</sup> A little over a century later, the Warnock Report was to arrive at similar conclusions, giving qualified support to the policy of early integration.<sup>193</sup> The COS report described McFarlane's experiment of integrating the blind child in ordinary schools in Glasgow, which began seven years previously, as a 'perfect success'.<sup>194</sup>

The committee hoped to induce the Council of the COS to 'urge upon the Government and the community at large, the necessity for enquiring fully into the subject of the treatment of the blind with the view of ameliorating their general condition and enabling them, instead of remaining isolated and neglected, to take their share in the life, and to become active, useful and happy members of society'.<sup>195</sup>

The COS report was one of the earliest effective examples of the use of statistics, a new aspect of the social sciences, to promote proposals for action. It intended that blind education should benefit from what M.J. Cullen called 'the powerful reforming brew of humanitarianism, class interests and statistics'.<sup>196</sup> Yet, although the realism and detailed, constructive proposals in the report were far sighted and commendable in many ways, the observations of the committee still rested on the concept that economic distress, even in the case of the blind, was the consequence of a lack of enterprise. This view underpinned much of the work of the Royal Commission of 1885-89, whose recommendations shaped the 1893 Act. By stressing industry and self-sufficiency, the C.O.S. report did not question the nature

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<sup>190</sup> Charity Organization Society. *The Training of the Blind*, 1876, 3.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-5.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.* 6-8.

<sup>193</sup> Department of Education and Science, *Report of the Committee of Enquiry into the Education of Handicapped children and Young People*. (Government document) H.M.S.O. May 1978. Cmnd. 7212.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, 12-13.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, 28-29.

<sup>196</sup> Cullen, *The Statistical Movement*, 135.

of the instruction offered to the blind and indeed legitimated the culturally limited vision of their education that was to prevail.

The long and complicated tale of how the Royal Commission came into being is told by C.K. Lysons in his earlier mentioned thesis, and not related in detail here.<sup>197</sup> One decisive factor in convincing the government to launch a royal commission was the pressure exerted by the British establishment. Elizabeth Gilbert, blind daughter of the Bishop of Chichester, had been employing blind workmen in their homes since 1854 and her network became 'The Association for Promoting the General Welfare of the Blind'. Queen Victoria commissioned brooms for her household and strong links with the aristocracy were forged. When the moment came for direct intervention on behalf of the disabled to secure State aid, Gilbert activated her contacts in the aristocracy. Lord Egerton of Tatton, campaigned initially for the deaf, while Hugh Lupus, 1<sup>st</sup> Duke of Westminster was more interested in the education and welfare of the blind.<sup>198</sup>

Several factors still militated against State involvement at that time. Since the 1830s, as Geoffrey Finlayson points out, voluntarist action characterized by individual choice and participation, personal independence, local control, freedom and flexibility was invariably considered preferable to compulsion and costs imposed by government.<sup>199</sup> At this juncture, the main points that deterred State involvement were indifference in society after the 1870 Act was passed, the fear of extra per capita costs in educating blind children falling on rate payers, the absence of direction in the letter of the Education Acts and the reluctance of the Education Board to compel all School Boards to act; all these combined to hinder advances on collectivist lines. Following renewed calls for State intervention at the York International Conference of 1883, the Duke of Westminster, in July 1884, convened a meeting of interested parties at Grosvenor House. It produced a unanimous decision that the government should be requested to appoint a Royal Commission on the Welfare of the Blind in Great Britain and Other Countries.<sup>200</sup> This was originally intended as an enquiry into the condition of the blind alone. The faction involved in promoting the education of the deaf began their organized pressure group later. With the change of government in June 1885, a Royal Commission was announced. Members were appointed in July and the first witnesses interviewed in December. A pressure group led by Lord Egerton of Tatton caused the scope of the commission's enquiry to be changed, in January 1886, to include 'the deaf and dumb

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<sup>197</sup> Lysons, 'The development of social legislation'.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid., 148.

<sup>199</sup> Geoffrey Finlayson, *Citizen, State and Social Welfare in Britain 1830-1990* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 413.

<sup>200</sup> Frances Martin, *Elizabeth Gilbert and her Work for the Blind*. (London: Macmillan, 1887), 57.

and such other cases as from special circumstances would seem to require exceptional methods of education'. Lord Egerton of Tatton took over as Chairman when, in the first year, the Duke of Westminster's influence waned and he became a frequent absentee. Thus, aristocratic 'guidance' was maintained. This 'pressure from above' undoubtedly helped to generate interest and accelerate developments when it came to involving the government in blind education.

The institutions themselves were far from united in their response to increased State involvement. The Commissioners frequently encountered the view, in meeting Management Committees, that State aid would kill philanthropy, 'the goose that laid the golden egg'. The Director of Henshaw's wanted there to be 'no interference with existing institutions which are not to accept State aid'.<sup>201</sup> In a similar vein, the Board of the Yorkshire School for the Blind announced that it would 'gladly welcome State aid in its work, provided it did not interfere detrimentally with the freedom of action or with the control of funds in its charge'.<sup>202</sup> The Commissioners believed 'there will still be room for the action of private benevolence which experience shows to be often stimulated rather than discouraged by State aid judiciously given'.<sup>203</sup>

The appointment of the Royal Commission marks a point where evaluation of the subsequent achievements of state and private sector becomes more complex in that many of the commissioners were drawn from the voluntary organizations and private institutions. Lester Salamon, whose work examines modern partnerships in public service between government and non-profit private organizations, suggests 'conflict' is too stark a term to describe the relationship between voluntarism and the state, even in the past.<sup>204</sup> As the body of research on Victorian philanthropy grows, it becomes increasingly apparent that philanthropists had divergent attitudes towards the state, which changed according to particular issues discussed. In the case of the blind community, a radical opposition to voluntarism was expressed when pressure was being exerted for a particular legislative concession, or when the State had disappointed. Thus, the paradigm of conflict is probably too rigid to apply here to relations between the State and voluntary bodies.

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<sup>201</sup> Liverpool School Archives, Papers. McCormick to Hull. 23 November 1889.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid. Buckle to Hull. 16 October 1889.

<sup>203</sup> RCB. *Report*, Para.14.

<sup>204</sup> Lester M. Salamon, *Partners in Public Service: government- nonprofit relations in the modern welfare state* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 260-263.

## 6.7 The Royal Commission findings and recommendations on education, literacy and publishing

The Commission was issued on 21 July 1885, and the original commissioners, under the chairmanship of the Duke of Westminster included the Bishop of London, the Members of Parliament Sir Lyon Playfair and A.J. Mundella, and three figures drafted for their expertise: T.R. Armitage, Francis Campbell and Edmund C. Johnson. On 20 January 1886, Lord Egerton of Tatton took over as Chairman and the scope of enquiry was extended to include the deaf and dumb and 'other cases as from special circumstances would seem to require exceptional methods of education'. In the subsequent four years there were 116 sittings held in London and visits were made to the principal schools and establishments for the blind and the deaf and dumb in Britain. The commissioners also visited Paris, Germany, Switzerland and Italy.<sup>205</sup> It was estimated that there were 1,710 blind children aged five to fifteen in England and Wales, of whom 1,544 were said to be attending school.<sup>206</sup> Their education and training took place somewhere among the 61 institutions for the blind. Of these, nine functioned only as resident schools, 23 were non-residential workshops, 26 combined school and workshop facilities and three were homes and asylums.<sup>207</sup>

The Commissioners' instructions were 'to investigate and report on the various systems of education of the blind, elementary, technical and professional, at home and abroad.' They were also to recommend 'the means by which education may be extended so as to increase the number of blind persons qualified for employment'.<sup>208</sup> As regards the imparting of literacy, two critical questions arose during the investigation. The first was the long debated issue of the search for a uniform type (also discussed in Chapter 5 above). The second was the role of state in financing and overseeing blind education in general and the provision of reading matter in particular. Given the commissioners' conclusions and their influence on future developments, an attempt to understand how these were reached is required.

Thomas Armitage, both a Commissioner and Secretary of the BFBA, was the first to visit European centres of education for the blind and to study systematically welfare provision in other countries. In the BFBA publication, *Progress*, he wrote approvingly of music education in the Paris Institute, which was mostly state funded.<sup>209</sup> In his report on the

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<sup>205</sup> RCBD, *Report*, Para.4.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*, Para.16.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*, Para. 33.

<sup>208</sup> RCBD, Vol.1, 3.

<sup>209</sup> *Progress*, March-April 1882, 96.

Frankfurt Congress of 1882, he was particularly enthusiastic about the system of after care in Saxony, describing Government training there as ‘much more perfect than in England’, pointing out that ‘Most government institutions, after a blind child has entered their walls consider themselves bound to watch over its welfare through life.’<sup>210</sup> When asked by the Commission in session if State money should be used in the education of the blind, he replied ‘I think it is most essential that they should’. He did not believe, however, that the State should pay for blind children to have particular classes, such as foreign languages. State aid, he felt, could be given for education to the schools or to support departed pupils in their work, as was done in Germany’.<sup>211</sup>

Witnesses from Scotland in general tended to believe in a fuller role for the State. William Martin of the Edinburgh Asylum, interviewed in December 1886, suggested the government should offer a special grant for technical apparatus, such as gymnasias and swimming pools, as well as supplying books, and then apply grants on a ‘payment by results’ basis. Martin also recommended establishing a special national education department to overlook the education of the blind.<sup>212</sup> Robert Meldrum, a missionary teacher for the Aberdeen Town and County Association, was a supporter of integration in early education, but only thought it necessary that a blind child should reach the Fourth or Fifth Standard.<sup>213</sup> Asked if the government should give grants for printing or for books for the blind, he replied, ‘I plead for that very earnestly . . . We want more books for the blind. I should like to repeat that unless something is done for the blind outside the institutions, the blind, as a class, are not helped’.<sup>214</sup>

With regard to the higher education of the blind, S.S. Forster, then head of Worcester College, believed firmly in State aid, which should be given in an annual grant subject to successful inspection.<sup>215</sup> Reverend N.F. McNeile, a vicar who taught at Worcester from 1867-1871, also was adamant that giving subsidies was ‘a very important thing for the state to do’.<sup>216</sup> He indicated three different ways that the State could help; contributing to the cost of the stereotyping done by the BFBA and the Moon Society: helping to lower the retail cost of books, and giving subsidies directly to teachers and learners.<sup>217</sup> In his evidence to the

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<sup>210</sup> *Progress*, September-October 1882, 53.

<sup>211</sup> RCBD, *Minutes of Evidence*, Qs.10913- 10919.

<sup>212</sup> RCBD, *Minutes of Evidence*, Qs.13910-13919.

<sup>213</sup> RCBD, *Minutes of Evidence*, Q.15939.

<sup>214</sup> RCBD, *Minutes of Evidence*, Qs. 15967-15969.

<sup>215</sup> RCBD, *Minutes of Evidence*, Qs 20316-20317.

<sup>216</sup> RCBD, *Minutes of Evidence*, Q.16811.

<sup>217</sup> RCBD, *Minutes of Evidence*, Q. 16811.

commissioners, William Moon, when asked if the State should subsidize school books for children, answered that it would be 'a great boon' but seemed to prefer the State to give money to provide free volumes to the lending libraries of the Home Teaching Societies, which were in general more favourable to his own type.<sup>218</sup>

It was Francis Campbell who was most eloquent on the subject of state involvement. In his memorandum on the role of the State in the United States, published as an appendix to the Commission's Report, he pointed out that 37 of the states of the union gave free education and maintenance to the blind, and also to the deaf and dumb. Campbell quoted from the Massachusetts Committee on Charitable Institutions which maintained 'All children have a right to instruction. The children of the rich are sure to get it, and the public is bound, alike by duty and interest, to see that none lack the means of attaining it'.<sup>219</sup> This egalitarian impulse drove American educators in the field to harness the resources of the State to a far greater degree than was thought desirable or possible economically in Britain. Campbell had brought this message with him across the Atlantic and remained true to its spirit in all his endeavours in Britain. In his evidence as a witness, Campbell spoke from the heart. Asked whether the cost of blind education should be borne by the State, his response was clear:

I certainly think it is. The blind have been looked at as a class depending on charity. It is one of the greatest burdens we have to bear. If the blind can be made a self-sustaining class, then it must be the duty of any Government to look into it. I think charity for the blind works badly in various ways. If their education is carried out by charity, it confirms the views of the public that the blind are a class dependent on charity. It is important to lift the education and training out of the charitable atmosphere.<sup>220</sup>

Campbell was insistent that there should be no class differentiation in the education of the blind. Boys and girls might be separated at first in centres for special attention before going to board schools or other primary schools. Subsequently, they could be separated according to their abilities, with music education one option, 'handicrafts' another and preparation for university a third. When asked if the government would be justified in training blind pauper children or those from the workhouse or 'the lowest class' in order to enable them to earn their livelihood, he replied, 'The State cannot afford not to do so'. Appealing to English pragmatism, he pointed out that if the alternative was supporting the blind pauper for up to

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<sup>218</sup> RCBD, *Minutes of Evidence*, Q.17501.

<sup>219</sup> Francis Campbell, 'Memorandum on the Education and Training of the Blind in the United States' RCBD *Appendix 17*, 236.

<sup>220</sup> RCBD, *Minutes of Evidence*, Q.10610.

fifty years in the workhouse or elsewhere, it would be cheaper for the State 'to say nothing of the humanity at all, to educate rather than pauperize'.<sup>221</sup>

Not all were united on the desirability of state subsidies. Shadwell of the BFBA was against state subsidies for raised print literature of any sort, despite their expense preventing many blind people from purchasing any.<sup>222</sup> While the Reverend Marston acknowledged the extremely high cost of raised type, complaining 'You may get an Agamemnon for sixpence, but it costs me a sovereign for a copy', he made the following response when asked if the State should offer grants, 'I have never thought of that. I am not a great believer in State intervention in any of these things myself'.<sup>223</sup>

One of the most obdurate in his resistance of state intervention was Mr. W. Harris, Honorary Treasurer of the Leicester Association for Promoting the General Welfare of the Blind. Harris believed that the 'Battle of the Types' was far from over, and the advantage enjoyed by Braille was ephemeral. He pointed out that the demise of Alston and Frere types had soon followed the deaths of their inventors, presumably implying that when Braille's great champion Armitage died, the use of the Braille system would, similarly decline.<sup>224</sup> It was, he concluded, premature for the State to give subsidies to printing until one type was established as uniform. Furthermore, he argued, voluntary contributions to various charities for the blind had reached £110,000 in one year, and this flow would be interrupted if donors knew the state would be providing in their place.<sup>225</sup>

Although witnesses and commissioners were not unanimous on the question of State aid, the majority of informants had been favourable. Given the evidence of failure in the voluntarist system that emerged in the course of the Commission's enquiries, it is difficult to understand how certain conclusions were advanced in the final recommendations of their report. The report itself, on some points echoed faithfully the testimony of its witnesses. G. M. Tait of the Home Teaching Society had estimated that only 155 of the 389 blind adults he examined made a living the occupations they had been trained for.<sup>226</sup> Tait recounted how some former students of 'the highest colleges of the land' came down to begging, Royal Normal College students were playing music for coins in the streets.<sup>227</sup> George Barnes, a blind basket maker and a witness before the Commission, blamed poor teaching above all

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<sup>221</sup> RCBD, *Minutes of Evidence*, Q.10614.

<sup>222</sup> RCBD, *Minutes of Evidence*, Q.2904.

<sup>223</sup> RCBD, *Minutes of Evidence*, Q.16582.

<sup>224</sup> RCBD, *Minutes of Evidence*, Q. 16341.

<sup>225</sup> RCBD, *Minutes of Evidence*, Q.16347.

<sup>226</sup> RCBD, *Report*, Para. 62.

<sup>227</sup> RCBD *Minutes of Evidence*, Q.482.

else for the failure of many who followed his own trade.<sup>228</sup> The Commission's more extensive surveys seem to emphasize that the institutions, for all their fine words on the 'usefulness' of their training, had sent forth adults neither self-sufficient nor with cultural interests; 5848 blind persons were questioned and 4605 continued to need charity in some form, while 3282 earned nothing.<sup>229</sup>

As a general principle, the *Report* called for State aid, but it was made very clear that it would not be a total system to replace the voluntarist network and the institutionalism it stood for. The idealist sentiment that 'the blind boy with a healthy body and brain ought to have the same chances as his seeing brother' was expressed.<sup>230</sup> It was, however, a more alarmist note that the Commission employed for rhetorical impact:

The blind, the deaf and dumb and the educable class of imbeciles form a distinct group, which if left uneducated, become not only a burden to themselves, but a weighty burden to the State. It is the interest of the State to educate them, so as to dry up as far as possible the minor streams which ultimately swell the great torrent of pauperism.<sup>231</sup>

Following Francis Campbell's reasoning, it was suggested that paying for a few years of education was in the long run preferable to the blind person spending a lifetime in idleness or dependent on charity.

The most important recommendations, which were a brutal disappointment to the emerging radical movement among blind workers, concerned control of the management of institutions and publications. On the first point, inviting Radical accusations of showing class affinities, the Commissioners stressed 'The sole object of legislation should be to extend the usefulness of the institutions and their endowments without prejudicially interfering with the owners or privileges of the existing governing bodies'.<sup>232</sup> Should this not be clear enough, they added, 'We recommend that, subject to inspection, all the control of the internal domestic affairs of such institutions should be left as heretofore with the existing governing bodies'.<sup>233</sup> The Commissioners did record that blind workmen had expressed the view that what was learned in the institutions was 'more for the pecuniary benefit of the institution than for themselves', but concluded that the British institutions were 'generally well managed'.<sup>234</sup>

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<sup>228</sup> RCB *Minutes of Evidence*, Q.5137.

<sup>229</sup> RCB *Report*, Para.66.

<sup>230</sup> RCB *Report*, Para.93.

<sup>231</sup> RCB *Report*, Para. 7.

<sup>232</sup> RCB *Report*, Para.253.

<sup>233</sup> RCB *Report*, Para.208.

<sup>234</sup> RCB *Report*, Para.204.



One factor, apart from respect for institutional wealth, may have further influenced the Commission was the possibility pointed out by Francis Campbell that if the institutions were to be run by government appointees, political shifts in power could have a disruptive effect.<sup>235</sup>

Where publication for the blind reader was concerned, there was no clear support for one type to become universal, although it was observed that Braille was gradually gaining ground and seemed likely to supersede the others among the young and intelligent of all ages. With five 'expert witnesses' standing against Braille – Reverend B. G. Johns, Buckle of York, the philanthropist W. J. Day, the aforementioned Mr. Harris of Leicester and Reverend McNeile – no open judgement could be made in its favour and this persisting indecision appeared to inhibit any attempt to make subsidies available for printing.<sup>236</sup> The Report acknowledged 'It would no doubt be convenient in theory to have one universal type for the blind, but it does not seem likely to be generally adopted as there seems a considerable feeling in favour of Moon's type in which a comparatively large literature exists'.<sup>237</sup> It was admitted that 'if the Government were to supply books gratis or at reduced prices it would no doubt tend to uniformity of type but to regard one type as having any inherent value over others is ridiculous. . . Moon, Braille and Alston should be subsidized equally. We do not, however, recommend that any such subsidy should be given by government'.<sup>238</sup> The Commissioners had decided 'In this country, the printing for the blind is in private hands and we think it must be left as it is now, to private enterprise'. Nor did they think it fit to recommend that the Education Department should make grants of books, although their cost could be taken into account when grants were awarded'.<sup>239</sup>

The long awaited Royal Commission *Report* left a trail of disappointment in its wake. It provided sufficient evidence of the praise and enthusiasm elicited by the work of school boards, London's in particular, to suggest that integration was not an untried or failed option and had widespread popular support. Academic results, once Mary Greene and her blind teachers had made Braille the London Board's principal medium of instruction, raised educator's estimations of what the working class blind child might achieve, and enabled many to further their studies in Music at the Royal Normal College. There is no simple answer to the question of what destroyed the climate of optimism and confidence regarding

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<sup>235</sup> RCBD, *Minutes of Evidence*, Q. 10741.

<sup>236</sup> RCBD, *Report*, Para. 187.

<sup>237</sup> RCBD, *Report*, Para.175.

<sup>238</sup> RCBD, *Report*, Para., 180.

<sup>239</sup> RCBD, *Report*, Paras.238-239.

the integrated education of blind children and transformed their experience to that of general pessimism and despair expressed by many educated in the twentieth century institution.

The Commission did nothing to strengthen external authority, leaving charity organizations in control of State funding to come, although subject to inspection. The *Blind Advocate* felt that class loyalties were at the heart of this choice to let developments be handled locally. The huge capital resources of the institutions were mentioned. Powerful figures in the Commission held positions in or had links with independent, privately run institutions. Campbell and Armitage had founded and continued to guide the Royal Normal College. The Bishop of London was chairman of the Gardner's Trust. E.C. Johnson had been a long standing governor of St. George's, and Admiral Sotheby was Chairman of the General Welfare Association. The School Boards had no representatives on the Commission, although the work of London's seemed to be approved highly. The home teaching societies were also unrepresented and the Charity Organization Society, which had been the first to call for the creation of the Commission, had no members called as witnesses.

Although it clearly acknowledged that integrated schooling could be successful in the right hands, the Commission was not committed to ensuring its continuance, since the expense of making it obligatory in rural areas would be too great. The choice was made a local one. School boards could decide to educate blind children in an ordinary school, set up new schools, as the London School Board chose to do, or use the voluntary institutions. Henceforth, charitable institutions would receive funding from the government, which trusted them to carry out architectural improvements and curricular reforms.

In 1890, an Act governing Scotland's blind and deaf people was passed, followed by a similar one for England and Wales in 1893. Disabled children were to be educated compulsorily from five to 16 years old under this legislation. The Elementary Education (Blind and Deaf Children) Acts imposed on school boards a requirement to identify and organize their schooling and contribute to its cost through rates. The children could be sent to private or public schools and Boards could, as was mentioned, build their own schools, such as Linden Lodge and Elm Court in London. The Education Department inspected all schools used for blind children and distributed grants. Few school boards chose to create or maintain their own infrastructures and the voluntary institutions lowered their entry age, some with reluctance. By 1896, the urge to integrate children in ordinary schools to liberate facilities for training workshops had faded among once interested voluntary institutions and approximately 80 per cent of all blind pupils were residential. Phillips suggests that the institutions did not want expensive new School Board structures and Eicholz in particular felt the concentrated

atmosphere of the residential institution was more likely to produce better trained wage earners.<sup>240</sup> There is some sense in his suggestion that School Boards were reluctant to spend a large part of their budgets on building day schools that would meet the standards of the inspectorate for uncertain numbers of students and that their parsimony, and or apathy, persuaded them that sending their charges to voluntary institutions was the most convenient solution.<sup>241</sup>

Evaluating the impact of ‘the State’ on the development of blind education at the close of the nineteenth century is more complex than at first appeared. On a positive note, State legislation in 1870 and 1893 unarguably raised the number of blind children under instruction. The 1870 act prompted school boards to undertake the integration experiment that captured the imagination of so many in the nation, creating a new sense of opportunity. It was local government funding that employed Miss Greene and her fellow blind teachers advancing the cause of Braille and enabled the achievement of excellent scholastic results and immeasurable social benefits. On the other hand, the royal commission’s failure to recommend State involvement in institutional management or support for publishing appears in retrospect a lost opportunity to maintain the beneficial momentum generated by the initiatives described above. No State establishment ever replaced Worcester College, which remained unashamedly elitist for decades afterwards. The voluntarist suburban institutions, preferred by government inspectors from the 1890s and subsidized by local authorities banished the idea of integrated education for blind children for some seventy years afterwards. Furthermore, the commissioners’ decision to recommend leaving publishing in private hands had unfortunate repercussions as the zeal of the early years of the BFBA faded and the complacency of its later incarnation, the Royal National Institute for the Blind, resulted, in the longer term, in the failures and shortcomings in the provision of literature denounced by present day campaigners.

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<sup>240</sup> Phillips, *The Blind*, 252-3.

<sup>241</sup> Phillips, *The Blind*, 254.

## Chapter 7 A revolution passed by?

This section examines to what degree the positive changes in blind education and publishing outlined above enabled blind people to share in the literary experience of their sighted counterparts. First, a reference framework is provided through an overview of recent studies in the history of literacy. There follows a description of the development of publishing for the blind in alternative formats with particular emphasis on the work of the BFBA., whose annual reports, committee records and sales lists lend empirical substance to the narrative. The provision of children's literature is examined and evidence, albeit fragmented, of the holdings of institutional and public libraries is introduced for the first time. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the significance of the little known *Blind Advocate*, a journal founded by blind working men, as a vehicle of protest.

### 7.1 The democratization of reading: the expansion of publishing in Britain

In the years that have passed since Walter Ong and others pioneered analyses of the contrast between orality and literacy, broad studies have appeared on the effects on societies of the advent of literacy, while numerous monographs and micro-studies have been produced on its significance to particular regions and communities. John Feather wrote in 1988 that Britain in the eighteenth century saw an unprecedented growth in demand for the printed word which marked 'the final stages of the transformation of Britain into a print-dependent society'.<sup>1</sup>

Robert Altick's seminal work, *The English Common Reader* traced the emergence of a mass reading public and his findings led him to declare 'Never before in English history had so many people read so much'. Further research inspired by Altick examined the extent of printing, the selections made in publications, the reception of these works in the new working class audience, as well as the technologies involved. The growth of newspapers, working men's reading groups, the processes through which novels reached their public, such as serialization, circulating libraries – all came under the scrutiny of academics intent on developing 'a history of the book'.

In the light of this new body of research findings, some now challenge the claims of the early writers on the history of publishing, questioning whether any such seismic change in popular culture occurred. With ever more detail issuing from this wave of industry, the development of the reading public was described in less bold terms, with Harvey Graff

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<sup>1</sup> Feather, *A History of British Publishing*, 129.

stating 'Literacy by itself is now seldom conceptualized as independently transformative'.<sup>2</sup> As mentioned earlier, Rab Houston re-examined the legendary achievements of Scottish readers in their 'allegedly fluid and egalitarian society', and found that certain hyperbolic claims had to be modified on regional grounds; there was little difference between Scotland's levels of literacy and those of the North of England, while Holland and Sweden probably enjoyed as high a rate, and the Scottish Highlanders exhibited significantly less ability in reading.<sup>3</sup>

Laying such nuanced qualification aside, Feather and others undoubtedly provide abundant evidence of a remarkable diffusion of knowledge, and the creation of a new 'audience' with a hunger both for the classics and for the emotional stimulus provided by the writers of the day. By the end of the eighteenth century, the British book trade was a recognizable modern and competitive publishing industry. Its subsequent development was accelerated by population growth, the railways and the postal service, an expanded educational system, and technological improvements in typesetting.<sup>4</sup> Newspapers enjoyed unprecedented popularity; by 1870 Liverpool had five daily papers and Exeter had three.<sup>5</sup> Increased school attendance followed the 1870 Act, and the market for educational publishing grew dramatically.<sup>6</sup>

It was, however, the shift in the mode of reading that Altick regards as critical to the appearance of an 'an unknown public' ready to participate in the 'age of the novel'. For many Victorians, ideas on literature were shaped for a long time by utilitarian doctrines set down in the first three decades of the nineteenth century, when reading was not regarded as a source of intrinsic pleasure. The edges of this rigid framework gradually softened and open enjoyment of literary works once seen as devoid of interest and 'value' became socially acceptable.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, the point may have been reached in certain sections of the working classes where reading became so widespread that, as Ruth Weir puts it, 'a great disgrace is attached to not being able to read'.<sup>8</sup>

Feather believed that books, by offering a new way of escape and relaxation, came to dominate popular entertainment until the music hall and popular spectator sports diverted the

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<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Harvey J. Graff, 'Introduction' in *Literacy and Historical Development: a Reader* Harvey, J. Graff, ed., (Carbondale: South Illinois University Press, 2007), 3.

<sup>3</sup> Rab Houston, 'The Literacy Myth? Illiteracy in Scotland, 1630-1760'. In Graff, ed., *Literacy and Historical Development*, 198-199.

<sup>4</sup> Feather, *A History of British Publishing*, 129-132.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 164.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 144.

<sup>7</sup> Altick, *The English Common Reader*, 136.

<sup>8</sup> Ruth Weir, 'Philosophy, cultural beliefs and literature' *Interchange* 21 (4), 24-33.

attention of the urban working classes.<sup>9</sup> The research of Jonathan Rose on the reading among the British working classes provides ample evidence that there was a popular awakening in the reception of literary works, which was by no means restricted to the ephemeral and sensational new writing that appeared in the Victorian years. He traces the spread of fiction from the early nineteenth century, a time when some Scottish libraries banned fiction altogether, before Walter Scott bestowed respectability on the novel.<sup>10</sup> Rose produces evidence of how the early enthusiasm for literature found among Scottish weavers in the Lowlands and the workers of the North of England spread to other parts of the nation. The publication of *Waverley*, the world's first best selling novel in 1814, was seen by Rose as a turning point, and he notes that, within a decade, 85 of the Dunfermeline Tradesman's Library's collection of 290 volumes were fiction.<sup>11</sup> Examining Mayhew's observations on the London poor in the 1850s, which described workingmen buying from second hand stalls volumes of *Tom Jones*, *Robinson Crusoe* and the work of the Lowland poet James Thomson, Rose discerned three phases in the life of a book. New issues were the 'dernier cri'. Before long they became regarded as banal. Then, after some time, they came to be re-evaluated as 'antique'. Thus, the early nineteenth century poets were not yet cheap enough to be bought by the lower classes observed by Mayhew in the 1850s. This time lag affecting the reception of literary works is relevant to the experience of blind readers as will be seen in the section that follows on choices for publication made on their behalf.<sup>12</sup>

In the excitement of describing this popular embrace of the previously unattainable treasures of British literature there are dangers of making generalizations that disregard geographical diversity. As W.B. Stephens has warned, 'regional lacunae in the narrative of progress' certainly exist.<sup>13</sup> Nonetheless, it would not be inaccurate to call this new engagement of previously excluded classes in literary culture, as described by Feather, Altick, and Rose, a revolution.

Shakespeare, as Rose points out, enjoyed a genuinely broad based audience both in print and on the stage; Radicals and Chartists derived enjoyment from his work, and at theatre performances the pit and gallery were full. At Birmingham's Theatre Royal, between the 1840s and the 1870s almost 30 per cent of the performances were of his works.<sup>14</sup> In

<sup>9</sup> Feather, *A History of British Publishing*, 158.

<sup>10</sup> Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life*, 116.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 116-117.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>13</sup> W.B. Stephens, *Education, Literacy, and Society 1830-1870: the geography of diversity in provincial England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), 268.

<sup>14</sup> Rose, *The Intellectual Life*, 122.

discussing the 'age of the novel', Feather describes the growth of the bookshop and the expansion of circulating libraries, and notes how serial publication enabled the poor to engage in the experience of reading such novelists as Wilkie Collins and Dickens, often through shared newspapers.<sup>15</sup> Although not all scholars would agree on the essential importance of books in expanding knowledge, in that consciousness can be raised without them, the range of literature available in quantitative terms deserves to be stated: approximately 100 new titles a year appeared up to 1,750, by 1825 the number had risen to 600 odd, but by the end of the nineteenth century an estimated 6,000 new books entered the British market annually.<sup>16</sup>

In 1863, Charles Knight's 'Library of Classics' appeared, and soon afterwards, John Dicks offered *Waverley* for 3d. and two Shakespeare plays for a penny. From 1883, Routledge's 'Universal Library' offered volumes at a shilling each, and Cassell's 'National Library', sold from 1885, was priced at 3d. when bound in paper and at 6d. for the cloth edition.<sup>17</sup> The wealth of choice available to the reader included the daily and Sunday press, whose accounts of crime made exciting reading and the sensational 'penny dreadfuls', whose pleasures David Vincent believed offered 'an important incentive for gaining the tools of literacy.'<sup>18</sup> In Vincent's analogy, the poor were led from 'a narrow courtyard paved with morally uplifting fables and religious texts to a fairground of noise and colour'.<sup>19</sup>

The opening of this garden of delight was not met with approval in certain quarters. In their 'battle for the hearts and minds of the working classes', as Feather calls it, the printed word was believed by the philanthropic class to have great power to effect moral improvement.<sup>20</sup> This was important at a time when auto-didacticism was perceived to be a source of nourishment for the threatening Radical movement.<sup>21</sup> Religious tracts were the most overt means of conveying the chosen Christian messages on the virtues of self-sufficiency, obedience, temperance and industry. Between 1840 and 1850, the Religious Tract Society issued over 23 million publications in Britain alone. By 1850, the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge was producing four million items a year.<sup>22</sup> The

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<sup>15</sup> Feather, *A History of British Publishing*, 150-158.

<sup>16</sup> David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery, *An Introduction to Book History* (New York, London: Routledge, 2005), 133.

<sup>17</sup> Rose, *The Intellectual Life*, 128-131.

<sup>18</sup> David Vincent, *Literacy and Popular Culture in England 1750-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 204.

<sup>20</sup> Feather, *A History of British Publishing*, 160-62.

<sup>21</sup> Rose, *The Intellectual Life*, 20-21.

<sup>22</sup> Vincent, *Literacy and Popular Culture*, 94-95.

Victorian novel was not condemned unequivocally. As Feather points out, it was not regarded solely as entertainment, but potentially ‘held a high moral purpose exemplified in the work of George Eliot or the political and social function best seen in Dickens’.<sup>23</sup>

In her discussion of Pierre Bourdieu’s ideas on education for literacy, Monica Heller presents literacy as a practice ‘embedded in the interested construction and legitimation of social difference and social inequality’. Resources for acquiring literacy can be seen as the key to the production and reproduction of social difference and social inequality, and in this account, the bourgeoisie’s achievement has been to exercise control over production, distribution and attributions of value while convincing all concerned of the natural ‘rightness’ of the unequal distribution of those resources. When the provision of literacy education for the blind person is examined in the section that follows this idea has a certain resonance.

Jonathan Rose mentions the case of J.R. Clynes, who served as Home Secretary in the Labour government after 1929 and was a leading figure in the National Union of General and Municipal Workers. As a youth, Clynes was almost sacked by his foreman for reading *Paradise Lost* during his break at the mill. He later became aware of the power and value of words when he was employed by three old blind men who paid him 3d. a week to read the newspapers to them.<sup>24</sup> Those three were certainly not alone among the sightless in their hunger for information, and it is important to examine the range and the nature of what was available to them, and many others like them, to read independently, and to what extent the blind community’s lives had been touched by this transformation in literary culture.

## 7.2 That the blind may read

In the relatively recent ‘discovery’ of Stiker’s ‘unexplored continent’ of disability history, little has been said or written of ventures to offer the ‘gift’ of literacy to the blind. Through the records of publishers, institutional libraries and the visiting societies, incomplete as they are, some insight can be gained into the degree to which blind persons were able to engage in this revolutionary phase in the history of the word, when, from the 1830s, reading was first seen to offer intrinsic pleasure to the lower social classes and far more literature became popularly available. The blind person, considered barely educable in the utilitarian atmosphere of the institution, or his or her outdoor counterpart limited to the reading matter chosen by a visiting society, was in most cases denied the privilege of engaging in this form

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<sup>23</sup> Feather, *A History of British Publishing*, 160.

<sup>24</sup> Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life*, 26.



of popular recreation, and the emphasis placed by the providers on the uplifting, the instructional and the useful has cast a long shadow over the development of blind publishing.

In the earlier chapters of this work, the paucity of literary provision in the institutions was made clear, and it was shown that what was available to the blind reader, both within institutions and through home teaching societies was predominantly religious in nature. Those entrusted with the management of most voluntary institutions were in harmony with the founders of the Liverpool School who believed that consolation was the main aim. This religious emphasis was uniform at a time when those early institutions that did encourage reading relied on the type that had been developed within their walls; Alston's at Glasgow, Gall's at Edinburgh (See Section 4.5 above). As the shift from orality to print became more pronounced, and publication expanded, religion held its place in the selections made. As was suggested above, the founding of the British and Foreign Blind Association in 1868 gave an impetus to the development of publishing for the blind that was to produce a leap in the scale of production. A satisfactory quantitative analysis of sales has proved difficult since many records are lost to us, but some figures below can give us an indication of what was produced and for whom. Information on the selection of what was to be published is similarly far from complete, but enough survives to offer some insights into the Victorian canon.

In the analytical paradigm designated largely by Pierre Bourdieu, the literary canon has become both the site and the stake of contention for different groups wanting to rearrange it along lines more favourable to their own interests and agendas'.<sup>25</sup> In the case of publishing for blind people, control was at first firmly in the hands of voluntary institutions, usually founded by Churchmen and grounded in a local society with Christian roots. By tracing the later publication of secular literature we can learn more about how contemporaries perceived value in different works, and the projected ideas of what was considered suitable and why for the blind person.

In February 1868, as Elizabeth Gitter discovered, Samuel Howe wrote to Charles Dickens, who had visited the Perkins Institute in 1842, asking him to underwrite the cost of one of his novels in raised type:

The blind want something to gladden their hearts. They have had lugubrious food enough: they want happier views of this life. They want some books which set forth the truth that God has made the great staple of enjoyment so to abound in all

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<sup>25</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature* (Cambridge: Polity 1993), 19.

possible conditions of humanity, that those who will be virtuous and kind can get a share of it, in spite of all obstacles and infirmities.<sup>26</sup>

Howe recommended *A Christmas Carol* as happy, uplifting, short and therefore cheap, but Dickens chose *The Old Curiosity Shop*. Gitter suggests that Dickens's memory of Laura Bridgman, Howe's deaf and blind protégé, shaped his delineation of Little Nell, the book's protagonist, and directed him to the themes of isolation, enclosure, personal transformation and spiritual rescue.<sup>27</sup> In providing less 'lugubrious food', the publication of secular literature was made easier in the United States through the guaranteed funding from Congress of the American Printing House for the Blind in Louisville, Kentucky from 1879. There, originally, the interest accrued from a perpetual trust fund was used for books and tangible apparatus to be delivered free to tax supported residential schools for the blind.

In Britain, by contrast, publishing remained in private hands and it was by happy accident that Thomas Armitage and his blind colleagues came to be involved through the British and Foreign Blind Association. As might be expected from an association which had the Lord Bishop of London as its President and ten bishops as Vice-presidents, religion was not neglected. Once Braille had been decided on unanimously as the character system to be adopted, 'Advent Hymns', along with 'John Gilpin' was the first publication to be marketed, with members paying two-thirds of cost price.<sup>28</sup> In his evidence to the Royal Commission, John Shadwell described how the earliest selections made beyond religious subject matter were generally history and poetry, particularly Gray, Wordsworth and Cowper, and travel and stories.<sup>29</sup>

It must be remembered that in quantitative terms, the Moon type, much in demand from the Home Teaching Societies, was more widely read in the 1870s and 1880s. In the 1875 edition of William Moon's *Light for the Blind*, there is a full list of works published in the author's invented system. No such convenient list exists for Braille. Moon acknowledges the generosity of Sir Charles Lowther, who had by then given nearly 10,000 volumes to free lending libraries for the blind.<sup>30</sup> Many of the books were stereotyped by 'benevolent individuals', and anyone who wished have a particular chapter of the Bible, hymn, or other 'worthy work', stereotyped could do so by paying, from 1s.6d to 2s.6d, depending on page size in English, and slightly more in a foreign language. In the 'English List', 83 texts were

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<sup>26</sup> Elisabeth, A. Gitter, 'Laura Bridgman and Little Nell' in *Dickens Quarterly* Vol.8 no.2, June 1991, 78.

<sup>27</sup> Gitter, *Dickens Quarterly*, 76.

<sup>28</sup> BFBA Executive Council, *Minute Book*, November 30, 1870.

<sup>29</sup> RCBD, *Minutes of Evidence*, Q.2800.

<sup>30</sup> Moon, *Light for the Blind*, 170.

Gospels and Books from the Bible and 30 more publications were listed separately under 'Chapters and Psalms'. *Pilgrim's Progress* was included with prayers in the 30 'Religious Works'.

The poetry section consisted mostly of hymns, such as 'Abide with Me' and *Bull's Hymns* in three volumes. A dozen 'Educational Works' were listed, with *A History of England* in four volumes, a biblical dictionary, grammar and spelling books and a volume on astronomy. 'Tales and Anecdotes' contained 25 works, including 'Blind Beggar', 'Sabbath Breaking', 'Jesus met in Todmorden Valley', 'Yeddie's First and Last Communion', and 'Destruction of a Madrid Inquisition'. The 'Memoirs' list ran to over 50 titles. British heroes were well represented; Captain Cook and Lord Nelson featured, but the inventors and captains of industry were even more present: Stephenson, Watt, Arkwright, Metcalf and Wedgwood were listed. Peter the Great, George Washington, Benjamin Franklin and Garibaldi were the only foreigners whose biographies appear. The best selling journal of Queen Victoria on her trips to the Highland was available in three volumes, and the catalogue was completed modestly by 'Dr. Moon's Labours for the Blind'. Publications in 23 Languages were available, including Norse, Judeo-Spanish, Gaelic, Armeno-Turkish and Tahitian, but these were not numerous, and were without exception biblical in nature. Thus, the frequently heard criticism that Moon, at least until much later in the century, concentrated excessively on producing religious material was not without substance.<sup>31</sup>

The collection held by the Leicester Institute showed a typical balance of interests in the 1880s. Of the 293 volumes, held in Moon Type, 85 could be termed 'religious' in content, 79 were biographical, 46 Poetry, 41 'Tales', and 82 were considered 'of general educational interest'. In addition, 71 books in Braille and 25 in Roman Type were retained.<sup>32</sup> Leicester's capital investment in Moon Type volumes, not uncommon by any means, was one example of a problem that delayed the evolution of a common system of type for the blind, in that the existing collections in Moon would be wasted if the pupils were not taught to read that type. In his evidence to the Royal Commission, G. M. Tait stated baldly that in the battle of numbers, Moon type was unquestionably the victor; Moon publications could be measured in thousands, Braille in hundreds. In home teaching societies and workshops he claimed 29, 935 volumes of Moon were in use with 2, 517 used in schools. For Braille, instead, the figures

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<sup>31</sup> This criticism was heard often in the evidence given to the Royal Commission, found in the Minutes of Evidence, by witnesses favourable to Braille.

<sup>32</sup> Leicestershire Institution for the Blind, *Annual Report*, (1872), 24-25.

were 621 and 803 respectively. This comparison suggested, although this was not Tait's intention, that Braille was aimed at the younger, faster learner.<sup>33</sup>

The publication of Braille was entering a period of dynamic expansion. The original journal of the BFBA, *Progress* mentions some of the earliest selections made by the BFBA Executive Committee. The July 1883 edition records the transcription of Volume 4 of *Outlines of World History: The Roman Empire*. This retailed for four shillings, as did an edition of Mendelssohn's *Songs. As You Like It* and *King Lear* were also made available that year.<sup>34</sup> In 1885, *Romeo and Juliet* was added to the Shakespeare section of the catalogue, selling in two volumes for ten shillings.<sup>35</sup> By that year, the Association was firmly allied to the cause of spreading Braille throughout the Anglo-Saxon world, and beyond. Another issue of its journal in 1885 mentions a Scottish missionary running a small school for the blind in Peking, where 'the Chinese blind are almost all either beggars or fortune tellers', who found Braille to be 'wonderfully well suited for the complicated Chinese language'.<sup>36</sup> By 1890, according to Mary Thomas, there were 160 sighted volunteers and 65 paid blind Braille copyists producing books by hand for the BFBA, mainly to loan to Braille sections of public libraries.<sup>37</sup> The National Library for the Blind had humble beginnings in Hampstead in 1882 but was soon to generate a great demand for Braille works. It is discussed in the section that follows.

The question of State aid arose frequently in the 1880s, and the journal *Progress* suggests that Armitage and his colleagues believed it should be forthcoming in some form to help the blind. The financing of boards school classes was one suggestion, grants for former pupils of institutions was another idea, along with support through buying their work.<sup>38</sup> Publishing was not suggested as an area for general government action, and the BFBA Executive Council *Minutes* tell us that from 1886, there were 30 German ladies being trained to write books in Braille.<sup>39</sup> This harnessing of voluntary effort was more in tune with the Council's ideas on cultural provision, and by the following year, *Progress* could boast that the library was increasing, with 45 unpaid seeing ladies and 'a few blind gentlemen' writing Braille books from print. Considerable enthusiasm was expressed for this arrangement, 'The possibility of thus obtaining an extended literature for the blind is one of the many great

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<sup>33</sup> RCBD, *Minutes of Evidence*, Q. 452.

<sup>34</sup> *Progress*, July-August 1883, 45 and 61.

<sup>35</sup> *Progress*, July-August 1885, 47.

<sup>36</sup> *Progress*, March-April 1885, 34.

<sup>37</sup> Mary Thomas, *The RNIB*, 50.

<sup>38</sup> *Progress*, January-February 1886, 17-18.

<sup>39</sup> BFBA Executive Council, *Minutes*, April 4, 1886.

advantages of the Braille system'.<sup>40</sup> The BFBA held over 350 volumes by 1893, including the Hindustani alphabet, an Arabic dictionary, Genesis and the first chapter of Colossians in Welsh, while the musical section by then contained Strauss, Haydn and assorted collections of madrigals. At Worcester meanwhile, S.S. Forster had long since published Homer, Xenophon and Horace in Braille.<sup>41</sup>

In November 1889, as mentioned earlier, it was decided to transcribe *Treasure Island*, and this was available to the public by May of the following year.<sup>42</sup> In February 1896, the first three books of *Paradise Lost* were chosen to be stereotyped.<sup>43</sup> The Association's continued effort to bring more fiction to the blind reader is evident in its decision to subsidize *Pickwick Papers* in 1900.<sup>44</sup> The following year, 1901, the Minutes record that the BFBA planned to stereotype *Alice in Wonderland*.

In his discussion of the late Victorian canon, Jonathan Rose defends the value of the conservative element in what was established as desirable reading for the working classes. He produces biographical evidence that many prominent activists of the early twentieth century drew inspiration from Aristotle, Xenophon and *The Iliad* as much as from the socialist canon.<sup>45</sup> Rose also warns against over emphasizing the dichotomy between 'high' and 'low' culture in categorizing audiences.<sup>46</sup> While the Protestant austerity of Moon's lists may have little appeal to the modern reader, the publications of the BFBA also appear at first to lean towards the works established as 'worthy'.

The strength of feeling against some of the material produced to profit from this new popular engagement with literature among the sighted must not be underestimated when evaluating the selections made for the blind. As the popular audience expanded, Altick notes how observers were distressed by the apparent decline in the serious purpose of reading, and it was felt the working classes were reading 'the wrong things, for the wrong reasons and in the wrong way'.<sup>47</sup> Edward G. Salaman expressed the middle class liberal's distaste for this development very clearly. He condemned 'pandering to the popular palate' by mercenary journalists, whom he thought 'wrote down to' the working class.<sup>48</sup> Salaman believed that 'The

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<sup>40</sup> *Progress*, March-April 1887, 15-16.

<sup>41</sup> BFBA, *Twelfth Report* (1893), 4.

<sup>42</sup> BFBA Executive Council, *Minutes*, May 6, 1890.

<sup>43</sup> BFBA Executive Council, *Minutes*, February 2, 1896.

<sup>44</sup> BFBA Executive Council, *Minutes*, November 2, 1900.

<sup>45</sup> Rose, *The Intellectual Life*, 123-128.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 371.

<sup>47</sup> Altick, *The English Common Reader*, 368.

<sup>48</sup> Edward G. Salaman, 'What the Working Classes Read', *Nineteenth Century* Vol. XX (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, July 1886), 108.

instruction imparted through the Board School has not superinduced any large amount of readers except in a shape contemptible and worthless', and that 'neither the newspaper nor the novelette contains any element calculated to carry peace and contentment to the workingman's door'. He felt the 'mental poison' of the penny novelette had a particular effect on women, and in another article in the same volume of *The Nineteenth Century*, 'What Girls Read', he compared what was available to the girl reader with the options of her male counterpart. In Salman's view, Alcott, Dodge, Beal, Owen, Sewell, Holmes, Meade and Yonge could not match the excitement of writers regarded as for a male readership such as Reid, Henty, Kingston, Stables and Edgar, and girls' reading matter was in general too 'goody goody'.<sup>49</sup> To point out young females' dissatisfaction with the literature they were expected to read, Salman cited results from a questionnaire sent to over 2,000 readers of both sexes. Of the 1,000 responses from girls, 330 named Dickens as their favourite author, 226 chose Scott. Kingsley had 91 votes and Shakespeare 73. At the lower end of the table, Mrs. Gaskell and Lewis Carroll scored 5, Tennyson 9 and Bunyan 11. Scarcely a vote was gathered by anyone considered a 'girl's' writer.<sup>50</sup> As an example of what was considered appropriate for young blind females in blind institutions, St. George's *Annual Report* for 1905 records that the girl pupils were still being read to, with Wilkie Collins's *Woman in White* and Rider Haggard mentioned as popular choices.

In Salman's judgement, which probably did reflect the views of many belonging by rank or education to his own social stratum, *Penny Illustrated* enjoyed 'well merited popularity with every class'. The *Sunday Times* was 'admirably conducted' but 'not purchased to any great extent by the working classes', and the *Referee* likewise was not considered a workingman's paper. Salman pronounced 'The *People* must carry off the palm as the Conservative weekly intended for the people', while *Reynold's* was dismissed as 'intolerant', 'republican' and ludicrous in its extravagance'. *Leisure Hour* and *Sunday at Home* were approved of for their religious content and other popular publications such as *Great Thoughts*, *Tit-Bits*, and *Rare Bits* escaped criticism.<sup>51</sup> Salman had a high regard for *Girls' Own*, which started in 1880, among the publications aimed at the girls' market. He mentioned how its readers had raised £1000 for 'underpaid London girls of the working classes' at the suggestion of the Countess of Aberdeen.<sup>52</sup> Salman's overall conclusion was that 'With one or two exceptions, the popular literature which finds its way into the homes of

<sup>49</sup> Edward G. Salman, 'What Girls Read' in *Nineteenth Century* Vol. XX, 515.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 527.

<sup>51</sup> Salman, *What the Working Classes Read*, 111-113.

<sup>52</sup> Salman, *What Girls Read*, 520.

the labourer and artisan has not yet sunk to the low and vicious level of much of that born in New York and Paris'.<sup>53</sup> He believed nonetheless that the aim of the guiding classes should still be to place unread 'literary gems' – here he mentions Shakespeare, Dickens, Scott, and Lytton - in the hands of the 'sons of toil'.<sup>54</sup>

Fictional publication before 1900 was only one of the aims of the BFBA in expanding its range of publications. The Association's listings of available fictional works in embossed type in its Annual report for 1899-1900 show the work of only 12 authors. The list includes *Pickwick Papers*, *The Prisoner of Zenda*, Jerome K. Jerome's *Three Men in a Boat*, H.G. Wells's *Stolen Bacillus*, and no fewer than eight works by Sir Walter Scott. The list of 'Stories for Children' is longer, and is included for comparative purposes in the section that follows. Geography, Greek and Latin volumes for the schoolroom are well represented. There are also a few Hebrew, Hindi and Urdu texts as well as works in Arabic and Foo-Chow, but these are all Primers or religious texts. The range of music published is remarkable, probably as a result of the Armitage's connection with the Royal Normal College. The poetry listing includes all the recognized best sellers of the period; selected works by Scott, Byron, Tennyson and Longfellow were available to the blind reader alongside 13 of Shakespeare's plays.<sup>55</sup>

Shortly afterwards, as Wagg records, the BFBA, which had been creating Braille books at the workers' and volunteers' homes, acquired a press, and production accelerated from 1902 onwards.<sup>56</sup> A more eclectic range of groups began to use the printing services of the BFBA to propagate their message. The *Braille Review* began in 1903, as did *Hampstead Magazine*, which the Association printed in Braille for the London Society for Teaching the Blind to Read. The Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge (SPCK) started *The Mission Field*, a monthly magazine in Braille in 1904, and in the same year, a Miss Grimwood of Hove launched the *Braille Packet*, with literary, philosophical and scientific content.<sup>57</sup> In 1906, a Braille edition of the *Daily Mail* appeared, and soon became the *Braille Mail*.<sup>58</sup> The BFBA started its own *Braille Literary Journal* in 1911, suggesting that a sophisticated audience of a certain size existed.<sup>59</sup> The year 1914 saw the first publication of

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<sup>53</sup> Salman, *What the Working Classes Read*, 114.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

<sup>55</sup> BFBA, *Annual Report*, 1900, 32-37.

<sup>56</sup> Wagg, *A Chronological History*, 88.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 91-93.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

the *Light Bringer*, a quarterly in Braille produced by a lodge of The Theosophical Society.<sup>60</sup> Donations to residential school libraries were increasingly in Braille. A gift of over 70 volumes given to the Liverpool School in 1900 by a woman benefactor, included Shakespeare, *Aladdin*, *The Little Mermaid* and *Thumbelina*.<sup>61</sup> In his earlier mentioned address to the Westminster Conference in 1902, Alfred Hirst boasted of the size of his personal library, most of which was obtained from the BFBA. Hirst refers to Oxford University's planned creation of a library for blind students, but the present writer's efforts to confirm its existence in later years have produced no trace of such a collection. Hirst does, however make two important qualifications in his optimist account. First, he points out the expense of borrowing from the new National Library for the Blind in Hampstead, and secondly the cost of postage, which 'startled blind people of lesser means'.<sup>62</sup> The consensus however, was that Braille had revolutionized the provision of literature for the blind person. In a letter to the Secretary of the Gardner's Trust in 1907, A.W. Ranger, the Head of Worcester College wrote, 'P.S. By the bye, have you seen the Sixpenny Gospel of St. John? A perfect triumph in the way of providing literature for the blind. I never thought I would live to see such a production at such a price'.<sup>63</sup> With rival types defeated, and Moon resigned to a secondary role in the blind publishing revolution, the thoughts of the BFBA Executive Committee turned to more distant fields. Twenty volumes were sent to a Mr. Yoshimoto in Japan, pamphlets in Indian languages proliferated, and W.R.W Gardner's Coptic alphabet developed in Cairo was given the Coptic Patriarch's seal of approval.<sup>64</sup>

As the volume and capacity of production expanded, thanks to the novel use of electric presses and steam heated drying for Braille paper the selection of works to be published required more focused attention. The BFBA Executive Council, in February 1904, appointed a Technical and Book Committee with four members, including Henry Stainsby.<sup>65</sup> Unfortunately, the minutes of this Special Committee have been lost. We do learn from subsequent Executive Council Meetings that the Selection Committee was given responsibility in using funds for specific purposes, such as map making or Science publications in later years. This committee was the forerunner of today's RNIB Publication

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 122.

<sup>61</sup> Liverpool School, *Annual Report*, 1900, 24-25.

<sup>62</sup> Hirst, *Westminster Conference 1902*, 120-122.

<sup>63</sup> Ranger to Wilson, 6 February 1907. Worcester College, *Correspondence*, London Metropolitan Archive: Worcester College Papers.

<sup>64</sup> BFBA, *Minute Book 1902-1906*, 102-3.

<sup>65</sup> BFBA, *Minute Book 1902-1906*, Entry for April 12, 1904.



Selection Sub-Committee of the Standing Committee for Publications and Development.<sup>66</sup> This meets twice a year and has 15 members who have the arduous task of selecting from published texts a smaller proportion than their Victorian predecessors, on account of their relatively fewer resources.

In her work celebrating the achievements of the RNIB, Mary Thomas spoke of the importance of this selection of what was to be transcribed into Braille. As a general rule, 'books of only limited appeal' are not printed in Braille. It was only in 1938 that 'Pandas', a series of limited editions of light fiction selling for sixpence a volume, was published. The Institute's Publication Special Committee for educational books had long been governed by the policy of publishing only 'good' literature, but in Thomas's account, by the 1950s the criterion had come closer to 'good of its kind' and embraced thrillers as well as philosophical treatises. In its judgements, the selection committee was guided by book reviews, public demand and the wishes expressed by readers.<sup>67</sup> In view of the imperfect RNIB record of provision, the question of the desirability of such centralized charity control is raised in the criticisms of library development below (Section 7.4).

The energies of the Executive Committee in the first decade of the twentieth century were diverted by the issue of changing the form of Braille itself to accommodate new criticisms and the need to secure British Braille's hegemony in the global expansion of publishing to come. Pamela Lorimer devotes a chapter of her thesis to the technical discussions that took place after the establishment of the British Braille Committee. This grew from a New Contractions Committee set up by the BFBA in 1899, and published its recommendations in 1902.<sup>68</sup> The British Braille Committee first met on 9 May 1903, and proposed three levels or Grades of Braille.<sup>69</sup> By 1905, British Braille had been systematized and a uniform code adopted and divided into two levels. Grade I or Basic Braille spelled out each word. Grade 2 used 197 space saving contractions or abbreviations for common words.<sup>70</sup> Its last recorded meeting was held in March 1905, and the British Uniform Type Committee was not convened again until 1916. Lorimer documents the protracted struggle over points of spacing and capitalization with the American Braille authorities, and concludes happily that by the early 1930s, 'after a century of endeavour, the English speaking peoples on both sides of the Atlantic were united in having a code similar enough for an increase in

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<sup>66</sup> Schauder, D.E and Cram, M.D., *Libraries for the Blind: an International Study of Policies and Practices* (Stevenage: P. Peregrinus, 1977), 31.

<sup>67</sup> Thomas, *The RNIB*, 52.

<sup>68</sup> BFBA, *Minute Book 1902-1906*, 41.

<sup>69</sup> Edinburgh Conference, 1905, *Appendix*, 'British Braille Committee Report', 123.

<sup>70</sup> Koestler, *The Unseen Minority*, 96.

the exchange of books, and any further code alterations could be decided together in a spirit of harmony'.<sup>71</sup>

By the start of the twentieth century, the Battle of the Types had been largely resolved, technical innovation meant that production was set to enter a new prolific phase and a selection committee was in place to offer the blind reader what was considered enriching material. Inevitably, class based differences in access to raised print literature existed but the platform was there for a far wider and more eclectic range of literature to be produced in the twentieth century. By its close, blind activists in Britain were adamant that this promise had not been fulfilled.

### 7.3 Literature for the blind child

The period of 'improvement' discussed in the preceding sections may be said to coincide loosely with the 'golden age of children's literature', or at least with its early flourishing. This section examines whether blind children shared in this new treasure of the literary experience, establishing where possible when the most popular works of the genre became available to them.

As early as 1853, as Peter Hunt discovered, Charles Dickens had warned 'In a utilitarian age, of all other times, it is a matter of grave importance that Fairy tales should be respected' since a nation 'without fancy' could never gain or hold 'a place in the sun'.<sup>72</sup> Considerable effort was expended by educators and administrators to see that the sighted child of the working classes might share in the wealth of imaginative literature that emerged thereafter, and this section examines the little evidence of what was provided for the blind in this respect. Early observers of this new genre struck an optimistic tone. Mrs. E.M. Field, in 1890, spoke of a great improvement of the class of books in tone and literary value' since the 1830s and '40s when most children would encounter only simplified versions of the scriptures.<sup>73</sup> In a chapter entitled 'A Young Victorian's Library', Amy Cruse claimed those whose childhood fell within the second half of the nineteenth century were 'lucky young Victorians' and 'prime favourites of that department of Dame Fortune's establishment which is charged with the distribution of books'.<sup>74</sup> The author cited with evident approval a reading list left by James Wilson, Canon of Worcester Cathedral, for his own family's benefit. The

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<sup>71</sup> Lorimer, 'A critical evaluation'. Chapter 6, page 2.

<sup>72</sup> Charles Dickens, 'Frauds on the Fairies' in *Household Words* Vol.8, No.184, (October 1853) 97-100, quoted in Peter Hunt, *Children's Literature: the development of criticism* (London, New York: Routledge, 1990), 25.

<sup>73</sup> E.M. Field, *The Child and his Book: some account of the history and progress of children's literature in England* (London: Wells, 1891), 316.

<sup>74</sup> Amy Cruse, *The Victorians and their Books* (London: George Allen and Unwin 1935), 286.

modern layman would recognize several of his recommendations. As might have been anticipated, *The Bible* and *Pilgrim's Progress* were in first place; *Gulliver's Travels*, *Robinson Crusoe*, the later Scott, *Swiss Family Robinson* and Maria Edgeworth's *Tales* followed.<sup>75</sup>

Although some of the works regarded today as children's 'classics' were adult books abridged and simplified, Hunt argues that the modified versions match the distinguishing features of a children's book. This is generally shorter, dialogue and incident are emphasized over description and introspection, child protagonists are the rule and a moral schematism is often found. Magic, fantasy, simplicity and adventure are other common elements.<sup>76</sup>

In their essay on children's literature from 1850 to 1890, Briggs and Butts mark 1850 as a watershed, a point where a society was evolving that was more sensitive and responsive to children's needs at a time of economic and demographic growth. The works of the subsequent decades included much moralizing; as an example Anna Sewell's *Black Beauty* (1877) drew attention to the plight of London's numerous cab horses, but the literature that appeared was remarkable for its vast range of themes. The 'cruelty, violence and amorality' of the Grimm Brothers' *Tales* stirred debate in the 1850s on their suitability for children, but the blind child was not to have the opportunity to read them independently until well into the following century.<sup>77</sup> Hunt lists the works of the period that he considers the most significant and gives their publication dates, starting from *Oliver Twist or The Parish Boy's Progress* in 1838.<sup>78</sup> Hans Anderson was first translated in 1846 but his first publicly available work in Braille was the *Wild Swans*, listed in the BFBA's list in its 1990 Annual Report. That report includes *Pickwick Papers*, but not as a children's book. Among Hunt's other selections, the blind child had to wait for the new century to read *Alice in Wonderland* (1865), or *Through the Looking Glass* (1871). The BFBA was unable or reluctant to offer too wide a range of original works for children, perhaps preferring the more controlled option of the didactic periodical, and with no other centralized body guaranteeing any degree of equality of access to literature, institutional libraries depended on the whims of donors. Thus, the young Braille reader at Liverpool's new Wavertree School after 1900 could find in its library *Treasure Island* in three volumes, *Don Quixote* in two, Kipling's *Rikki Tikki Tarvey* and Anderson's

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 287.

<sup>76</sup> Hunt, *Children's Literature: the development of criticism*, 37.

<sup>77</sup> Julia Briggs and Dennis Butts, 'The Emergence of Form' in Hunt P., ed., *Children's Literature: an illustrated history* (Oxford, New York: OUP 1995).

<sup>78</sup> Hunt, Ibid., 354-356.

*Little Mermaid*, thanks to the aforementioned donation from a certain Miss Hornby.<sup>79</sup> *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (1857), as said earlier, was made available at the express wish of the author to Worcester College for transcription in its early years, but not sold in Braille until the following century. The reading of *Boys' Own* (1879-1965) and *Girls' Own* (1880-1965) was, similarly, a long delayed pleasure for the blind child.

As early as 1885, *Progress* announced the publication of *The Children's Hour*, a magazine for blind children and it appears the association was henceforth more inclined to publish periodicals for children with wholesome messages. *Progress* observed of *The Children's Hour's* selected extracts 'These books are not only amusing for children but are of very great educational value. Blind children are just like the seeing in this respect. They will devour any books which interest them and in doing so will without any pressure become good readers'.<sup>80</sup>

Blind children were not counted among Amy Cruse's 'lucky young Victorians', but they were not alone in facing obstacles and often exclusion from the democratization of literature. In a long buried study, Farnsworth traces the history of the libraries of the short lived London School Board, a bold attempt to offer recreational literature to the children of the working classes. These libraries were first seen by some as 'a carrot' to attract attendance in the Board's early phase when the urban poor and working classes saw their schools as an imposition interfering in wage earning children's lives. In 1870, the average length of time spent at school was two and a half years and as late as 1899, over 1,000 children admitted to working 19 to 29 hours a week.<sup>81</sup> Libraries were funded only when head teachers applied to a board to create one, and by May 1877, only four existed.<sup>82</sup> In 1883, ten percent of London's board schools had started libraries, and denominational differences were notable, with 17 percent of Anglican schools and only eight percent of Wesleyan ones operating a library.<sup>83</sup> The number of volumes grew considerably and a circular sent out in 1889 showed 364 schools lending 35,089 books and holding another 6,077 in need of repair.<sup>84</sup> As regards their content, Farnsworth contends that from the 1870s, lighter reading in the form of fairy tales from the continent offered a recreational alternative to the grim Readers used to prepare

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<sup>79</sup> Liverpool School, *Annual Report*, 1900, 24-25.

<sup>80</sup> *Progress*, November-December 1887, 13.

<sup>81</sup> A. Farnsworth, 'A History of the School Libraries of the London School Board, 1870-1904' Unpublished MA thesis, Loughborough University, 1977, 17-18.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>84</sup> School Board of London, Libraries and Rewards Sub-Committee, *Minute Book 1889-1891*, 61. London Metropolitan Archives, SBL/ 750.

children to pass the Standards. When the Higher Standards demanded the study of recreational literature from the 1880s, Defoe, Scott, Carroll and Shakespeare were added, and by the end of the century, Farnsworth concludes that 'a rich choice of reading material was available to the London School Board pupil'.<sup>85</sup>

Gender differentiation did exist, however, and the London School Board, introduced separate libraries for boys and girls. From 1891, more domestic tales with an emphasis on home and family duties were offered to the latter.<sup>86</sup> Charlotte Yonge, first published in the 1850s reached the young female of the working classes some 40 years afterwards, an example of Jonathan Rose's time lag thesis. As with publications for the blind child, those responsible for choosing what was to be read by the poor wanted a moral ingredient, but with public libraries offering little else to sighted children, they, like their blind counterparts were probably appreciative of what there was.

#### 7.4 Libraries

The following section raises the question of whether the reader with visual impairment, who depended entirely on voluntary provision, by nature inconsistent and variable in quality, benefited from the nationwide effort to provide literature to the public at large.

The Public Libraries Act of 1851, which aimed to ensure local provision of lending libraries, is one further example of improving legislation conceived and executed with little or no consideration for disabled people. It was to lead eventually to a notable provision of government sponsored facilities for the sighted, which enabled 62.5 per cent of the population of England and Wales to have access by 1911.<sup>87</sup> This charitable nature of library provision for the blind person has in more recent times been identified as one significant factor in the blind person's continued 'exclusion from the usual avenues of information-gathering'.<sup>88</sup> Public libraries have been encouraged in recent years to play a proactive role in providing disabled people with information, under the obligations set out by the Disabled Persons Act.<sup>89</sup> There has been, however, a tendency to leave borrowing services in the hands of the RNIB, despite its limited range of available texts judged to have been biased towards non-fiction, and excessively focused on light, often romantic, fiction.<sup>90</sup> As evidence that the

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>87</sup> Rose, *The Intellectual History*, 115.

<sup>88</sup> Peter Craddock, *The Public Library and Blind People: British Library Library and Information Research Report 36* (London: The British Library Board, 1985), 17.

<sup>89</sup> Craddock, *Project Libra*, 10.

<sup>90</sup> Craddock, *The Public Library*, 7.

blind community has often been distanced from the RNIB's initiatives Craddock quotes a 1967 government enquiry into the mobility and reading habits of the blind and partially sighted which found that in the 16-64 age group 21 per cent had never heard of Talking Books, and the figure rose to 47 per cent among respondents over 65.<sup>91</sup> In his view, the libraries' role is that of gatekeeper, collator and disseminator, and greater state support is needed to enable this. To understand the enduring acceptance of the hegemony of one charity in this area of social provision, one must appreciate the power to convince of the narrative of progress offered by voluntarist organizations and their supporters.

Prior to Project Libra, an unqualified optimism had characterized almost all twentieth century histories of library services for blind people in Britain. In 1982, The National Library for the Blind celebrated its centenary, and an admirer described its growth from a collection of books in assorted types kept in a spare room by Miss Martha Arnold to a thriving organization with a third of a million volumes in stock.<sup>92</sup> Some earlier observers, however, suggested that the extension of library services that were affordable for all blind people was not one smooth narrative of progress. In Henry Wilson's 1887 guide to facilities for the blind he pointed out that most institutions and societies had their own libraries, but those of the visiting societies were circulating ones. He lists the leading standing libraries then functional. The Home Teaching Society Library at New Bridge Street, London held a Moon collection, and was described as 'for those in superior circumstances' with membership at 10 shillings a year.<sup>93</sup> The Lending Library for the Blind (later the National Library) was in South Hampstead. Costing a penny weekly, books were available in Braille, Moon and Lucas, and could be sent out if carriage was paid both ways. There was also The Indigent Blind Visiting Society Library at Red Lion Square, which acquired Braille books exclusively from 1884.

Stock for these collections came from three main sources. The BFBA furnished works in Braille, Moon type publications came from the society's Brighton base, and books in Roman type were supplied either by the Society for Providing Cheap Literature for the Blind in Worcester or St. George's where B.G. Johns continued to oppose the spread of Braille.<sup>94</sup> In addition, there were the previously mentioned visiting societies' libraries. In William Moon's evidence to the Royal Commission, he claimed 80 existed at the time in Britain, and others

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<sup>91</sup> Craddock, *Project Libra*, 18.

<sup>92</sup> Allan Leach, 'The National Library for the Blind: beginning a second century', *British Journal of Visual Impairment* 3 (1) Spring 1985, 11.

<sup>93</sup> Wilson, *Information*, 28.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

were also being established in America, Australia and Sweden.<sup>95</sup> Wilson, however, lists only 43 societies at work in 1887, and gives their starting dates. Among these, Bristol, Carlisle and Cornwall began in the 1850s: Cardiff, Manchester and Doncaster in the 1860s: Accrington, Barnstaple, Oxford and Cambridge in the 1870s, and Ashton under Lyne and Wolverhampton in the 1880s.<sup>96</sup>

In the early 1890s, the BFBA's activities were gathering momentum, and the number of Braille transcribers has grown to the point where an Auxiliary Union of the BFBA was founded in 1892 with 333 members, 321 of whom were women. A Certificate of Braille Writing Proficiency was introduced in 1895.<sup>97</sup> A lending library scheme had been planned, but the Executive Council decided to abandon it so as not to compete with the nascent Hampstead library run by Miss Arnold and Miss Howden.<sup>98</sup> This was a rare showing of an intelligent spirit of collaboration to avoid duplication in the voluntarist record of provision for the blind reader. The Association entered an exclusive agreement to supply the Library, offering a thousand volumes at five shillings each. There was a stipulation that newer titles, less than seven years old, would not be lent out.<sup>99</sup> The Hampstead Library was 'allowed' to buy its Moon books elsewhere.<sup>100</sup> The small venture grew at an impressive rate and by 1914, as The National Library for the Blind, it was able to place an advertisement in the published proceedings of London's Fourth International Congress on the Blind offering potential subscribers 18,000 volumes in Braille and Moon, with 3,500 volumes of music.<sup>101</sup> In 1902, a subscription to borrow four titles at a time cost a guinea, and it was double that to borrow eight. This price was steep for many, especially when the price of postage was added, as R.W. Pine had predicted when he said that the benefits of this library would never reach all classes because of its relative expense.<sup>102</sup> Unfortunately, the subscription lists for later years that would have tested his assertion have been lost, but undoubtedly cost remained a deterrent for many potential borrowers prior to 1908, when the government legislated to reduce mailing costs for Braille material.<sup>103</sup>

London's example was soon followed. In 1884, the Belfast Blind Association began a lending library and in 1886. Nottingham Corporation was the first in the United Kingdom to

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<sup>95</sup> RCB, *Minutes of Evidence*, Q. 17504.

<sup>96</sup> Wilson, *Information*, 32.

<sup>97</sup> Thomas, *The RNIB*, 24-25.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 25-26.

<sup>99</sup> BFBA, *Minute Book 1902-1906*, 59.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>101</sup> Fourth London International Conference on the Blind, June 18-24. 1914, *Proceedings*, xviii.

<sup>102</sup> R.W. Pine, *Westminster Conference 1902*, 163.

<sup>103</sup> 'Post Office Act 1908' in *New Beacon*, 15 March 1935, 68-69.

add embossed books to its Free Public Library, and in 1898 the Gardner's Trust opened a Braille Lending Library for University Students.<sup>104</sup>

Across the Atlantic, the New York State Library for the Blind was founded in March 1896, the first of five state libraries which had departments for the blind by 1915. Detroit Public library placed 110 embossed volumes on its shelves in 1896, and the Library of Congress opened its reading room for the blind in 1897.<sup>105</sup> On a visit to Europe, British educators learned that Leipzig had founded a library in 1894. Hamburg's opened in 1905 and soon held 5,000 volumes, many produced by volunteer lady writers. Stockholm's library held 3,000 volumes while Vienna, where the Emperor bestowed his patronage and the fashionable nobility had taken up the writing of Braille, held 4,000 volumes.<sup>106</sup>

In London the struggle to bring the fruits of literacy to the urban poor, sighted and otherwise, continued. School board libraries offered the sighted child new opportunities to read for pleasure, as Farnsworth's study has pointed out. Obstacles abounded, and there are school board committee records of the struggles to recover unreturned books and collect fines from nomadic, impecunious London families. One head teacher reported 'Anderson's *Tales* was lent to a boy who has since left the district. A messenger was sent to Wandsworth after it, but failed to get an answer. The family is poor. The father is an engine driver and has a family of nine'.<sup>107</sup> Recovering fines for lost books was similarly difficult. Another school's head stated '*Willing Hearts and Ready Hands* was lent to a girl whose mother is a widow with a large family and is quite unable to pay'.<sup>108</sup>

In a venture that captured the imagination of the British press, Stepney Public Library established a sizeable stock of lending materials for the blind reader. George Roebuck, a Borough Librarian, in an interview with the *Sunday School Chronicle* made some penetrating observations on the prevailing state of affairs. His idea was that providing literature for blind people could 'restore their dignity and cultivate their intelligence'.<sup>109</sup> Previously, he explained, blind people paying by subscription could borrow only a local clergyman's selections in Moon Type. Roebuck's comment on these was 'Mr. Moon's books were all more or less of the theological, scientific order' and 'not of the most exhilarating order',

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<sup>104</sup> Wagg, *A Chronological Account*.

<sup>105</sup> Mary C. Chamberlain, *Library Work with the Blind* (Chicago: American Library Association Publishing Board, 1915), 3.

<sup>106</sup> A.B. Norwood and H.W. Pine, 'A Visit to some of the Principal Continental Institutions for the Blind' *Outlook for the Blind* September-October 1906, 25-26.

<sup>107</sup> School Board of London, Libraries and Rewards Sub-Committee *Minute Book 1889-1891*, 25.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 149

<sup>109</sup> Interview: George Roebuck, *Sunday School Chronicle*, 3 July 1902.



which prompted him to conclude that ‘a man or a woman whose only recreation is continual thinking would obviously feel more exhilarated by an occasional volume of healthy fiction’. Since every book in Braille purchased might cost 12s. 6d. the library depended on ladies writing in Braille, including ‘a prominent West End Society Lady’ who produced a neatly typed *Alice in Wonderland*, and declared that writing Braille could be learned in three quarters of an hour’.<sup>110</sup> The following year, the *Daily Mail* wrote of the library’s 750 volumes of different types available for borrowing, mentioning *Paradise Lost*, *Pilgrim’s Progress*, *Three Men in a Boat* and *A Tale of Two Cities*.<sup>111</sup> Dickens was the most popular author among blind borrowers, according to George Cawthorne, the Chief Librarian of Stepney, ‘His books are so real and vivid to them, his pathos and humour appeal to them with such force’.<sup>112</sup> Other popular authors mentioned were Charles Kingsley and Walter Besant, and the more modern choices of Conan Doyle, Jerome, Anthony Hope, and Stanley Weyman. Poetry, on which the BFBA focused so heavily, had little appeal in a working class district, and Cawthorne observed ‘there is not the demand you might expect for Wordsworth, Browning, Tennyson or Ruskin’.<sup>113</sup>

Like many an honestly intended philanthropic venture, the Stepney project soon inspired florid praise in the press. The *Westminster Gazette* in September 1905 described Cable Street as ‘one of London’s many mean streets, ill paved, badly lighted, and congested’ and ‘at once notorious as it is undesirable’. There, in the journalist’s account, stood ‘an institution for bringing light into the lives of the blind – not the light of day, but the light of literature – a library for the blind’.<sup>114</sup> The responsible classes were exhorted to participate in a noble and ennobling action, ‘For ladies of leisure or blind people in good circumstances, it would be difficult to imagine any philanthropic work more beneficent and delightful than bringing some sunshine into the black, monotonous lives of those who “walk in darkness”’.<sup>115</sup> The rhetoric of rescue and consolation still echoed that used by the founders of the Liverpool School in setting out their aims over a century earlier.

Stepney’s Chief Librarian boasted that, by 1905, 267 Braille volumes had been borrowed in one month, 7,800 loans had been made after two and a half years, and stocks now stood at a remarkable 9,000 volumes.<sup>116</sup> But the comparison in the *Daily Mail* of the

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> ‘Stepney Library’ in *Daily Mail*, 10 September 1903.

<sup>112</sup> *Morning Leader*, 30 August 1905.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> ‘Stepney Borough Library’ in *Westminster Gazette*, 16 September 1905.

<sup>115</sup> *Sunday School Chronicle*, 3 July 1902.

<sup>116</sup> *Morning Leader*, 30 August 1905.

wealth of the Stepney collection with that of nearby Poplar, where 20 volumes of *The Pickwick Papers* were ‘about all’ that was available, offers an example of the intransient and unguaranteed nature of philanthropy, which will always deny regional uniformity of access to rights and benefits.<sup>117</sup>

The Victorian voluntarist approach to provision of book-lending to the blind through private associations and public libraries using charitable labour, has had an unfortunate legacy. In their international comparison of libraries for the blind, Schauder and Cram found that in Britain ‘Most libraries for the blind started as charities. Often the encouragement of charitable support is so deeply rooted in their origins and so much a part of their life that this factor more than any other moulds the library’s conception of itself, hindering it from reconsidering its aims and its relationship to sister services’.<sup>118</sup>

The following chapter considers a moment when one element of the blind community identified charity as the cause of many of its problems and how the very word inspired a rejection of all that British philanthropy stood for.

## 7.5 Literacy and the birth of protest

This section focuses on blind peoples’ protest literature and political action in Britain at the end of the nineteenth century, which has received no mention as yet in mainstream works of labour history, and raises an intriguing question. Since it is highly improbable that their institutional education familiarized them with the rhetoric of class struggle we can as yet only speculate on where the seeds of radicalism were sown in blind workers. Future research might unearth some documentation, but it seems most likely that workshop culture brought blind adults into contact with publications expressing radical ideas. Our appreciation of the strong vein of discontent that ran through Britain’s blind community at this time would be greatly diminished if we did not have the evidence of the early issues of the *Blind Advocate* to refer to. Its appearance and its influence are discussed below.

In a work of critical disability history that broke new ground in examining the political forces at work in periodical publishing for the blind, Catherine Kudlick examined two early advocacy journals in America. The American Blind Peoples’ Higher Education and General Improvement Association, a movement dominated by blind American intellectuals which had no British counterpart, founded *The Problem* in January 1900 to play a part in ‘all

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<sup>117</sup> *Daily Mail*, 10 September 1903.

<sup>118</sup> Schauder and Cram, *Libraries for the Blind*, 10.

pervading intellectual and spiritual revolution'.<sup>119</sup> *The Problem* lasted only until 1903, but in 1907, a journal with similar intentions was begun by the American Association of Workers for the Blind. Kudlick traces the gradual changes in the content and perspective of the latter journal as it came increasingly under the control of sighted professionals and lost much of its radical impulse and points out how the differences between the two journals reflected a struggle over how to define an identity for blind people.

There is no reason to believe there was any trans-Atlantic contact between the two disaffected groups, the international conference circuit being dominated by the hierarchy of administrators and educators, but their discovery of the journal as a medium of empowerment was almost simultaneous.

The *Blind Advocate* first appeared on 1 September 1898, describing itself as the journal of the National League for the Blind of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, although a later publication of the League dates its own beginning as 12 June 1899, and records its registration under the Trade Unions Act on 12 December 1899.<sup>120</sup> The journal sold for a penny, but by 1901, the price was dropped to a halfpenny and the format enlarged. Ben Purse (1874-1950) was its first Editor. A labourer's son from Salford, Purse was sent at 14 years old to Henshaw's Asylum in Manchester when his sight deteriorated. There, he apparently devoured every book he could lay his hands on', and aware of the transformative power of words, he founded the *Blind Advocate* on receiving a legacy of £60.<sup>121</sup>

From the beginning, 'voluntaryism' was attacked, and blind readers warned of 'the pernicious influence of this intolerable system'.<sup>122</sup> The Royal Commissioners had noted in their Report that many blind people said they saw the institutions as existing 'more for the pecuniary benefit of the institutions than for themselves'.<sup>123</sup> The *Advocate* offered a forum to express such views. One of its first targets was the institutions' widespread collusion with willow dealers supplying the nation's workshops.<sup>124</sup> The fact that the final recommendation of the Commission was that institutions should remain in private hands was attributed to the 'bonds of class' between its members and the institutions' management and patrons. In Ben Purse's stirring article, 'The Bitter Cry of Britain's Blind' he recalled Mazzini's telling

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<sup>119</sup> Catherine Kudlick, 'The Outlook of the Problem and the Problem of the Outlook' in Lennard Davis, ed. (2006). *The Disability Studies Reader*. New York, London: Routledge.

<sup>120</sup> T.H. Smith, ed., National League for the Blind, *Golden Jubilee Souvenir Brochure 1899-1949*.

<sup>121</sup> J. de la Mare Rowley, 'Purse, Benjamin Ormond (1874-1950)', rev. Patrick Wallis, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/35633>, accessed 2 Dec 2010]. Benjamin Ormond Purse (1874-1850): doi:10. 1093/ref:odnb/35633

<sup>122</sup> *Blind Advocate*, 1 October 1898.

<sup>123</sup> RCB, *Report*, Para.204.

<sup>124</sup> *Blind Advocate*, 1 October 1898.

remark 'Charity is the crust thrown to you by the man who has stolen your loaf', and declaimed 'It is from pauperism, from the gutters and from the workshops that the blind cry out for STATE AID DIRECT'.<sup>125</sup>

The *Advocate* claimed that, well before Elizabeth Gilbert embraced the idea, a Hull Radical, Peter Miller, had first called for a state enquiry in the form of a royal commission. In the wake of its disappointing results, the *Advocate* placed as the second of its six objectives 'To secure State Aid as against the present inadequate voluntary system', the first being 'To promote brotherly love and unity among the blind in the United Kingdom'.<sup>126</sup> By 1904, the objectives had become more specific; a state department with a Cabinet minister to be responsible for the needs of the blind, and control over workshops, 'Technical schools' and pensions. A minimum wage was also to be established.<sup>127</sup> The journal's early years were marked by the radical fire born of auto-didacticism:

It is through the resources of education that we have been brought face to face with the social position in which we find ourselves. Our mission is to preach the gospel of discontent amongst the blind, to lead them to the conception of a higher social status than that they occupy today, to teach them, if we may presume so much, that their freedom must be won and not bought.<sup>128</sup>

The hostility encountered in British society at the turn of the century must be taken into account when reading these early issues and the *Advocate*, by spreading awareness of the iniquities suffered by the blind community undoubtedly promoted solidarity and increased the League's membership. By 1904, the National League for the Blind was affiliated to the Trades Union Congress, and had 27 branches including ones in Belfast and Dublin. A survey conducted by the *Advocate* in 1906 found that of approximately 33,000 blind adults in Britain, 5000 were on outdoor relief and 3,300 were still in workhouses while over 300 had no assistance whatever. Two out of seven of the known blind population were paupers and only 42 per cent of those trained by institutions found work.<sup>129</sup>

The *Advocate* was swift to publicize acts of hostility towards the blind community. In 1902, the Bradford Watch's sub-committee recommended that all blind people of working age be cleared from the city's streets to learn trades in institutions.

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<sup>125</sup> Ben Purse, 'The Bitter Cry of Britain's Blind', *Blind Advocate*, Vol.2. No. 13, 1902.

<sup>126</sup> *Blind Advocate* Vol.1, No.1.

<sup>127</sup> *Blind Advocate*, Vol.5, No.49, April 1904, 15.

<sup>128</sup> *Blind Advocate*, Vol.1, No.5, 1 January 1899, 34.

<sup>129</sup> National League for the Blind, *Golden Jubilee Souvenir Brochure 1899-1949*, 10-11.

Many had already been ‘trained’ and would have therefore been consigned to the workhouse, and there were insufficient workshop places for all.<sup>130</sup> The fifth stated original objective published by the National League suggests that there were ‘hindrances’ to the employment of the blind in Trade Union or other workshops, which suggests that blind workers were not always welcomed into the working class fraternity.<sup>131</sup>

Any hint of collaborative protest, however gentle its purpose, was discouraged by voluntary agencies providing for the blind. In 1898, a deputation from the Hull branch of the League called on the National Library to ask it to help provide a library supported by the rates, a request which implies that the working classes were indeed finding library facilities too expensive. The following morning at the workshop, Mr. Marks, who had led the delegation, was not allowed to enter his institutional workplace. Sixteen fellow workers left their benches in sympathy and were subsequently locked out, prompting *The Advocate* to ask that collections be made for ‘the distressed workers of Hull’.<sup>132</sup>

The journal considered it its responsibility to speak out against all forms of abuse and lent its voice to the protests in Edinburgh over a scandal at the Asylum where five young organists had apparently been forced to confess that they were responsible for illegitimate children born to female pupils of the asylum.<sup>133</sup> Eventually, an internal committee was appointed to carry out an enquiry. It presented its report at a special board meeting on Wednesday 9 November 1898. This blamed the workers for ‘numerous instances of looseness and misconduct, drinking, absence without leave, scamping of work and other misbehaviour’. The report concluded that ‘nothing has been brought to their notice which reflects on the moral character of the Head Master, the Lady Superintendent or any of the other officials’.<sup>134</sup> At the time, eugenicist ideas were being applied to the intermarriage of blind people of the lower classes. In a paper given to the Westminster Conference of 1902, W.C. Rockcliffe showed statistics on the repeated patterns of hereditary blindness among the ‘humble and dependent’ class of the blind and urged the strong discouragement of such marriages. Where ‘the blind of means’ were concerned, however, Rockcliffe stated that intermarriage was a practical

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<sup>130</sup> *Blind Advocate*, March 1902, 2

<sup>131</sup> *Blind Advocate* Vol.1, No.1.

<sup>132</sup> *Blind Advocate*, Vol.1, No.2, 1 October 1898.

<sup>133</sup> *Blind Advocate*, Vol.1, No.4, 1 December 1898.

<sup>134</sup> Report of the Special Committee appointed 20 October 1898. This was delivered 9 November 1898. Royal Blind Asylum and School, Edinburgh. Directors. Minute Book, entry 1298.

and humanitarian solution, 'for who is more likely to enter into the feelings and inclinations of the Blind more than they themselves'.<sup>135</sup> The *Advocate* showed its opposition by declaring it was contemplating carrying marriage advertisements for blind people, and when it found that Rockcliffe's alarm had not gone unheeded, it spoke out against Henshaw's victimization of Mr. George Edge, a blind Manchester working man, for allegedly marrying a blind woman. It was revealed that the asylum had sent detectives to question the man's neighbours and relatives.<sup>136</sup>

The journal's pages were not filled entirely with denunciations of oppression. Serialized light fiction appeared in several early issues, and poetry was given front page space throughout 1904. Jonathan Rose's contention that British working class radicals were inspired by the conservative canon is supported by the presence of leading articles on Homer and Milton in very early issues, alongside articles predicting class warfare in the strongest terms.<sup>137</sup> International events were commented on, sometimes with humor. The Empress of China's decree against foot binding found mention as did the Japanese troops' superior performance in the March to Peking to liberate the legations in the Boxer Rising, which was attributed to their diet of whole grain rice.<sup>138</sup>

It was, however, the role of the *Advocate* as a forum for discussion and a disseminating vehicle for the National League in years of protest that mark its memory most clearly. One of the earliest issues reports a meeting in Limehouse Town Hall attended by the Labour M.P., W.C. Steadman, which was told by Ben Purse that over £1.5 million had been given to causes for the blind, but only a small portion had been used to their direct advantage. With workshop wages at a minimum of 8 shillings a week for men and 6 shillings for women, it was impossible for blind people to subsist and only State intervention could bring reform.<sup>139</sup> In 1899, Mr. John Kerr, a blind trade unionist had his motion calling for State aid for the blind adopted by the Scottish Trades Union Congress, and in 1902 the British Congress carried a similar motion.<sup>140</sup> Considerable goodwill seems to have been shown to the National League within the organized labour movement. The TUC offered free use of Leeds Town Hall for a meeting in 1904, to which the League responded with a donation of £25 to the Leeds

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<sup>135</sup> W.C. Rockcliffe, 'The Inter-Marriage of Blind Persons' in Westminster Conference 1902, *Report*, 97.

<sup>136</sup> *Blind Advocate*, Vol.1, No.2, February 1901, 2.

<sup>137</sup> See the 1898 issues, Vol. 1, no.3 for Homer: Vol.1 No.4 for Milton.

<sup>138</sup> *Blind Advocate*, Vol.5, No.56, December 1904.

<sup>139</sup> *Blind Advocate*, Vol.1, No.4, 1 December 1898.

<sup>140</sup> National League for the Blind, *Golden Jubilee*, 12.

School for the Blind and Deaf and Dumb.<sup>141</sup> The National League's Jubilee publication on its history fails, however, to capture the anger that blind people now yearned to express. A crowd of brush makers 'locked out' of their workshop by The Association for the Welfare of the Blind gathered in Trafalgar Square on the afternoon of 17 September 1900, with William Banham, the recently appointed Secretary of the National League presiding. Speakers described the condition of the blind as 'abject misery', with many working until night, sometimes for as little as two shillings a week. One declared that the dogs of the aristocracy were better off than the blind man and 'The Archbishop of Canterbury and the likes of him and Queen Victoria and the Prince of Wales are a damned set of scoundrels that the country could well do without'. Another declared 'Objects sold as 'Made by the Blind' are bought in Germany or East End Sweatshops. This is Christianity in England'.<sup>142</sup> Reference was made to the million and a half pounds sterling 'laying there for the charitable institutions' while blind men paid to learn a trade. A resolution was moved to urge Government to manage workshops directly and a collection was taken for the locked out workers. G.T. Cox, Secretary of the Lambeth Trades and Labour Council attended and told the *Star Chronicle* he was 'surprised at the extent of their intelligence and enthusiasm and the way in which they hated the word "charity"'.<sup>143</sup>

W.H. Steadman was a key figure in obtaining the full support of the Labour party in introducing, albeit unsuccessfully, a 1907 Bill for 'Technical Education, Employment and Maintenance of the Blind'. Official reports did follow, nonetheless, and these gave impetus to the movement and the League's demands for an Act of Parliament increased from 1917 to 1919. On one occasion, blind protesters, members of the League, were dispersed by police in Trafalgar Square. When blind marchers left assembly points at Newport in Monmouthshire, Manchester and Leeds on Easter Monday 1920 to converge on Trafalgar Square, it was a protest that had novelty value and attracted immense goodwill. In April 1920, Lloyd George received a deputation and by August 16 The Blind Persons Act had been passed. In the eyes of the nation, blind people had represented themselves successfully as something more than the passive objects of sentimental charity.

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<sup>141</sup> *Blind Advocate*, Vol.5, No. 54 October 1904, 9.

<sup>142</sup> 'Blind Workers' Grievances' a file containing manuscript accounts of the gathering and assorted undated newspaper clippings. Metropolitan Archives: LMA. Acc/ 3006/ y/7.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*

The enduring hostility of some blind institutions to any form of state intervention has also to be remembered when the *Advocate*'s messages are read today. As late as 1922, Henshaw's was attempting to make illegal wage cuts and even refused state aid offered to improve technical education, as it would bring 'municipal interference'. Swansea in 1921 and Newcastle in 1923 had made similar attempts at wage reduction.<sup>144</sup> The *Advocate* kept blind people in touch with the spirit of protest at a time of social strife and fostered a sense of solidarity with other embattled working class groups.

The transformative power of literacy may be under question today, but the experience of Britain's blind community in finding a critical voice, a more active identity and the linguistic means to engage in cultural politics seems to suggest that power was at work. The *Advocate*, in offering a public sphere in which information and experiences of disability could be shared, helped dispel many of the unspoken fears of the blind person and helped prompted a transformation in identity, from the cringing 'unfortunate being' to the proud protest marcher. It offered a space for dialogue, and as Paolo Freire once wrote, 'Dialogue is the loving encounter of people who, mediated by the world, "proclaim" that world. They transform that world and in transforming it, humanize it for all people'.<sup>145</sup>

In the battles fought by the National League, the *Blind Advocate* was the vehicle through which the language of protest was acquired and disseminated, and a critical element in spreading what the League called 'the gospel of comradeship', enabling at least some blind people to become 'conscious members of the working class'.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> National League for the Blind, *Golden Jubilee*, 21.

<sup>145</sup> Paolo Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness* (London, New York: Continuum, 2005.), 104.

<sup>146</sup> National League for the Blind, *Golden Jubilee*, 12.



## Chapter 8 Conclusions

This study set out to explore the historical background to the current issue of inadequate provision of reading material, both educational and recreational, to Britain's blind community. In the early chapters setting the narrative in the context of recent research in disability history, history of education and the history of the book, new perspectives are suggested that can help identify the factors from the past that have influenced the patterns of the present. Turning points are identified in ways of perceiving blindness that have influenced the evaluation of literacy, both on the part of the sighted providers of literature and by blind people themselves in their identity construction. A shift in the perception of the blind person's educability, probably inspired by Diderot's discourse on the nature of blindness, was marked by Valentin Haüy's creation in 1784 of an institution to educate the blind. The latter used a book in raised type to gain royal support and the acquisition of literacy was the principal aim of his school, which offered a model for a culturally stimulating education.

Haüy planted the concept of an institutional model for blind education and the Frenchmen Louis Braille, improving Barbier's earlier *écriture nocturne*, created in the first half of the nineteenth century the tangible reading code that has played the most significant part in educating blind people since then. So well adapted has Braille's system been to their needs that recent attempts to discontinue teaching it, on grounds of its difficulty and a lack of demand, have prompted an international outcry, identifying a threat to the blind person's cultural autonomy. Sources of information such as television and audio books, as Richard Altick points out, are no substitute for the experience provided by the printed book.

When Britain's urban communities first embraced the challenge of instructing the blind, the institutional form was borrowed from Paris but the spirit that moved the founders and administrators was very different. This study, making unprecedented use of the primary sources in their records, illustrates the character of the instruction and training within, and provides a framework in which to assess the impact of the technological developments described in detail by Pamela Lorimer. Those institutionalized in Britain were first regarded as abject, unfortunate creatures who required the comfort and protection offered by aggregation in confinement and the consolation of hearing the Scriptures. Although the Royal Society of Arts in Scotland offered a gold medal as early as the 1832 for the most convincing raised type, British institutions, according to their records, were far less interested in the acquisition of literacy. Industrial training in the workshop and listening to the word of God was considered adequate provision for their pupil-inmates' needs until well into the second

half of the nineteenth century. James Gall's attempt to introduce his raised type books at Edinburgh in the 1830s was not well received by the pupils themselves. In a predominantly oral culture, the religious message was thought best conveyed through sermons and by the sighted reading to the blind pupil-inmates. Evidence of institutions actively teaching reading before the 1860s is sparse, except where an inventor of a type was permanently present, like John Alston at Glasgow. The chapel and the workshop were the centre of institutional life, and becoming literate was not seen by blind men and women as part of their identity formation. The demand for the few books published before the midpoint of the century was almost entirely for religious books and came from institutions and visiting societies for religious works. This sentimental notion of a debilitated blind person in need of the comforting rhetoric of Christian salvation remained a dominant feature in shaping publication policy well into the twentieth century, as the proportion of religious publications consistently showed.

In this situation, several British pioneers sought renown by inventing a universally accepted type. Contact with France being limited, Braille was not well known. Indeed, Thomas Armitage thought fewer than twenty people were competent in its use in Britain before 1870. The names of Britain's early inventors, Gall, Alston, Lucas, Frere and Moon have largely been forgotten. They perhaps deserve some credit for keeping the quest alive in Britain, but their partisan, parochial approach was already being criticized at the time of the Great Exhibition which pointed to greater progress elsewhere. According to sales records, William Moon's system probably brought most benefit to blind readers, particularly the older ones and those with hardened fingers learning later in life. His abrasive manner and aggressive competitiveness made him few friends but the numbers of volumes sold in his type, albeit mostly limited to religious matter, make his role significant.

The third research question posed regarded the effects of philanthropic control on institutional education, visiting societies and publishing in the nineteenth century. So vast was the extent of private involvement and so many diverse individuals and associations were involved that blanket judgements on this extensive sphere of philanthropy are untenable. There are certain criteria for evaluation, however, that can be applied. The key functions of philanthropy are said to be identifying a need in society, attracting attention to the newly perceived problem, and generating resources to remedy it. Britain's philanthropists felt compelled to do all three where the blind were concerned, and no desire was expressed for state involvement until the second half of the century. The enthusiasm for the cause, expressed in 'conspicuous contribution', swept Britain in the nineteenth century and enabled

the building of an institution in every major city and the founding of numerous visiting societies in every corner of the land, suggesting success on the first two points above. On the third point, where institutions were concerned, resources were generated in abundance, but critics from Mrs. Van Landeghem to the Blind Advocate argued forcefully that their allocation brought less benefit to blind people than to their custodians. Visiting societies undoubtedly multiplied, and their volume holdings swelled, but for most of the century offered little more than religious reading matter.

In the field of publishing, the 'Battle of the Types' offers an example of the excesses of individualism. The inefficiency of teaching different reading systems and the waste and duplication in printing in different types was deplored from the Jury Report to the Great Exhibition in 1851 through to *The Times's* derision of a 'Babel of Types' in 1870 and the critical observations of witnesses to the Royal Commission in the 1880s. Even after Braille gained acceptance as Britain's universal type, the bickering was to continue over contractions well into the following century. This study does show, however, that from 1870 to 1900 battle lines between supporters of Braille and Moon were not as sharply drawn as once thought. Other Roman types were seen as superfluous by Braille advocates who conceded Moon's value to the older reader.

The charitable nature of blind publishing left an imprint that remains to this day. The main features of this legacy are diffidence towards the State, attachment to and excessive respect for the hierarchical power accumulated by the central charity, in this case the RNIB, inconsistency and over-emphasis on the local. A lack of meritocracy in recruitment and a continuing tendency to regard women as foot soldiers in a 'civilizing' initiative also characterize charity effort for the blind. Such charity was as 'top down' as any other type of benevolence of the period, and, until late into the nineteenth century, women were only given a more responsible role where the State or local government was involved.

Apart from the quantitative deficiencies denounced by present day campaigners, recent studies on library provision note the 'charity atmosphere' of public libraries in providing for the blind reader. Victorian value judgements still cast their shadow in the continuing preference of the 'useful' and 'worthwhile' in selecting material for publication in alternative formats, and the culture of sentiment is still in evidence.

The Royal Commission report in 1889 demonstrated the charitable institutions' reluctance to cede control of either publishing or educational institutions, and the extent of the considerable financial investments at stake. On balance, the evidence of this study has suggested that a higher degree of central control might have brought benefits to the blind

community in expanding their access to literature as well as in their general education, training and aftercare.

The next question raised was whether it would be justified to speak of ‘a wave of improvement’ in education and publishing from the late 1860s. Four particular developments were discussed; Worcester College and its offer of a ‘higher’ education to blind scholars, the BFBA which revolutionized publishing, the Royal Normal College that offered music education and the work of the London School Board.

Worcester College may have benefited very few blind scholars, but it marked a turning point in perceptions of their educability. The evidence of the college’s curriculum, examination success and publications introduced in this work show that aspirations were raised, and respect for intellectual capacity beyond the college was enhanced. By using Braille, even if at first only for Mathematics, Music and Ancient Greek, it helped legitimate its value for education. Direct reference to blind men studying at university is made here for the first time.

This work also gives previously unavailable empirical support to the claims that the BFBA disseminated a far wider range of literature for the blind, through the evidence of publication lists of the association and its internal records from its foundation in 1868 to the start of the new century. The venture marked a step forward for its blind founders towards greater agency in determining their own cultural experience. The current claims of the ‘Right to Read’ campaign suggest that an even smaller proportion of published work is made available in raised type today than at the start of the twentieth century, a further tribute to the efforts of Thomas Armitage and his companions. If Braille has only benefited a nucleus of active blind readers thereafter this has been due to embedded differentiation in Britain’s educational culture.

The evidence gathered by the Royal Commission on the Royal Normal College, reproduced for the first time from the verbatim reports of interviews in its Minutes of Evidence, shows a truly effective example of innovation in music education that brought benefits to blind students of every social class. Francis Campbell’s contribution is notable for his insistence that children of every social class could become proficient in some branch of music and financially independent as performers, church organists, teachers or piano tuners if need be. The college’s training of teachers also was an important turning point in blind education as shown in the account, given fuller treatment here than previously, of the work of the teachers of blind children employed by the London School Board under the supervision of Mary Greene. When most school boards were unaware of or deliberately avoided their

responsibility to educate blind children, London's embraced its duty wholeheartedly and the testimony of inspectors praised its work.

The results of blind teachers in accelerating learning in London's Board School classes, using Braille, offer an indication of what might have been achieved if that momentum had not been interrupted by the return to the residential, utilitarian approach that characterized blind education in the twentieth century.

The foresight, enthusiasm, integrity and sense of a higher social purpose that marked these separate ventures suggest that it would not be hyperbole to call this a wave of improvement. The visits of the Royal Commissioners to Worcester, the Royal Normal College and the classes for the blind children of the London School Board all were recorded in spirit of appreciation and optimism.

Yet, progress was far from uniform; where it was made it was not always sustained. Worcester students were but a handful; many school boards avoided or neglected their responsibilities towards children with disabilities, and the London Board eventually turned its back on integration. The Royal Normal College could not accommodate all those who merited an education there and as a result many children with musical talent were consigned to life in the workshop.

The proceedings of conferences held in the closing decades of the nineteenth century, which have been completely overlooked until now, show clearly that some educators of the blind in Britain, along with counterparts in Europe indicated a more fulfilling educational path for the blind child. The fact that institutions in the years to follow chose a more pragmatic utilitarian model, where 'other than elementary' education meant transfer to the mat making shop, should not detract from the positive value of what was proposed and accomplished in the last three decades of the nineteenth century.

It is for the reader to decide whether this account has lessons for Britain and other industrialized democracies currently experiencing uncertainty and anxiety over the question of responsibility for providing information and literature to blind people. Governments are stepping back from earlier levels of commitment to give more space to the private sphere to participate in social provision, and the record of the charitable past is a useful reference point if nothing more.

The constraints of time and resources have led to insufficiency of detail in some aspects of this account, a fault which I hope that other researchers will have occasion to rectify in the future, but if it indicates the complexity and reversibility of 'civilizing' initiatives and their effects on those whose lives they are intended to improve it will have met

one of its aims. The other wish, shared with every other researcher, is that it will open paths to further study in the future.

None of the pioneers discussed have found their way into the recently published *New Dictionary of National Biography*, an indication of the persisting neglect of disability studies in the academic world. No critical account of Worcester College in the twentieth century has yet appeared. Scottish historians have almost completely ignored James Gall and John Alston. A short hagiographic account of Thomas Armitage's life is all that has been published on this important figure in the history of Britain's blind community. Historians of the school boards will find many interesting points of reference in the evidence given to the Royal Commission by those who worked with disabled people, and the history of the treatment of deafness could also be greatly enriched by the testimonies to the Commission offered by luminaries in the field from both sides of the Atlantic. Francis Campbell's extensive discourse, found in the Minutes of Evidence, on his methods of teaching music is a similarly valuable source in itself, as is E.C. Johnson's earlier work on music education in Europe. Mary Greene is a woman who made a significant difference in London education and she and her team of female blind teachers deserve more attention than has been accorded to them here. Women may not have played as decisive a part in blind education and publishing as they did elsewhere in Victorian philanthropy, in that masculine dominance of these particular private institutions and associations was pronounced, but apart from Mary Greene's great contribution, women helped write into Braille many previously unavailable works before the arrival of more efficient machinery, and also served as equals on the Braille Committees formed at the turn of the century.

The current, long overdue reorganization of the RNIB archive under way in Stockport should soon make possible regional studies of library services in associations and institutions. Such studies will certainly refine or even contradict some of the conclusions expressed above, just as more localized research has done in studying the development of literacy has done for the sighted.

The work of disability historians has grown in range and depth in recent years, but a deep sense of academic isolation still affects those in the field. It is hoped that this study, for all its flaws, may help to connect their rich body of work to those exploring other fields.

## Appendices

### Appendix A

#### **Principal British institutions for the blind:**

##### Liverpool School for the Indigent Blind

A local poet and bookseller William Rushton and the Anglican churchman Reverend Dannett created a 'Plan' for the first British institution for the blind, which opened in 1791. It was at first a day training centre, but soon became residential, having 18 inmates by 1794. In 1806 the Prince of Wales became patron, a role he continued to fill after his accession. The chapel was the pride of the school, raising such considerable sums of money that it was dismantled and re-erected when the school changed location in 1848. School records suggest a utilitarian regime emphasizing workshop training, with dismissals recorded for idleness and frequent punishments. There is no evidence of the teaching of reading until the 1860s.

##### Edinburgh Royal Blind Asylum and School

In 1793, the world's third institution for the blind, after Paris and Liverpool, opened in Edinburgh. It was set up by the Reverend Dr David Johnston, Dr Thomas Blacklock, a blind poet and another blind man, David Miller. The Duke of Buccleuch was the first president, and his family's connection with the school survives to this day. It was at Edinburgh that the first attempt to teach the reading of raised type to reluctant inmates was made by James Gall. Prior to that, a knotted string alphabet had been introduced with little success, as the pupil-workers preferred to be read to by volunteer or paid readers. After his 1837 visit, the Abbé Carton reported that Edinburgh struck the best balance between education and industrial training. By the 1870s, the teaching of all the leading raised types took place.

##### School for the Indigent Blind, St. George's Fields, Southwark.

Begun as a small establishment in 1799 with 15 pupils, the school aimed to train its pupils and return them as self-sufficient to their families. The skills learned were typical of institutions at the time; basket making and mat weaving mainly for boys, spinning and knitting for girls. Donations made the school the richest of its type and it was criticized in the 1860s for exploiting its pupils, who numbered 220 in 1867. B.G.

Johns was chaplain of the school and while he fought for more literary provision for the blind, he remained an opponent of Braille. By the close of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as his influence waned, Braille was taught, the curriculum was greatly expanded.

#### Glasgow Asylum for the Blind

The foundation dated from 1828 and is best remembered for the work of its Treasurer, John Alston, inventor of a form of Roman type which enjoyed widespread support for much of the century, even finding users in the United States. Alston had an innovative approach to the curriculum, and taught astronomy by means of wooden balls representing the planets. The city's newspapers record his public demonstrations of reading at the Asylum in the 1830s.

#### Yorkshire School for the Blind

Dedicated to the memory of William Wilberforce, the school opened in 1833.

Thomas Anderson, its Master travelled to Europe to familiarize himself with developments there, but remained opposed to excessively intellectual activities for his charges. Readings from 'improving' literature, such as the tracts of Hannah More in Roman type, was the staple fare. Music was taught to pupils with recognised ability, but training for self sufficiency remained the priority. By 1900, inspectors reported great enthusiasm for the teaching of typewriting for clerical purposes, and the school possessed 9 machines by then.

#### Worcester College for the Blind Sons of Gentlemen

The idea of creating a college for the higher education of blind pupils was first floated in 1858. In 1866, Worcester College opened, intended for the blind children of 'opulent' parents. Its model was the English public school, which emphasized the teaching of Latin and Greek as well a rich athletic tradition. Blindness was seen as no obstacle to participation in sport, and rowing, cricket and football were compulsory. By 1870 a gym was built and German instructors employed. R.H. Blair, the first Head supported the use of Roman type for general reading, but then introduced Braille for Mathematics, Music and ancient Greek. In 1872 S.S. Forster succeeded Blair and set the goal of university entrance for Worcester boys. By 1883, one fifth of the departing pupils entered university, a figure which may have included some of the sighted boys admitted. The rarified atmosphere of the school, compared to others for the blind, is



evident in the curriculum described in annual reports. The school published *The Venture*, a collection of poems, essays and articles and a surviving Speech Day programme records classical music concerts and performances of Molière and Aeschylus. Only when social class based entrance restrictions were lifted in 1918 did the school receive State subsidies.

#### Royal Normal College and Academy of Music for the Blind

Created 1871 by two blind men, Thomas Armitage and the American Francis Campbell, the school was seen as a two year experiment in music education and training. Its success enabled the founders to purchase a permanent home and the Duke of Westminster became President. There was to be no manual training whatsoever for industrial purposes. Campbell believed in physical exercise to increase vitality and cold baths began the day. Boys trained in rifle drill. The college was distinguished by Campbell's egalitarianism and many poor children attended, often sent by school boards using Gardner's Trust scholarships. The college trained Miss Greene and her fellow blind teachers who transformed education for the blind under the London School Board. These training activities were monitored by the Board of Education who recognized the training department as Smith College in 1897. Many of its teachers were active throughout the British Empire in the first half of the twentieth century. Records from the early 1930s show that 90 of 130 graduates in one year were employed as church musicians, piano tuners and music teachers with others working as shorthand typists.

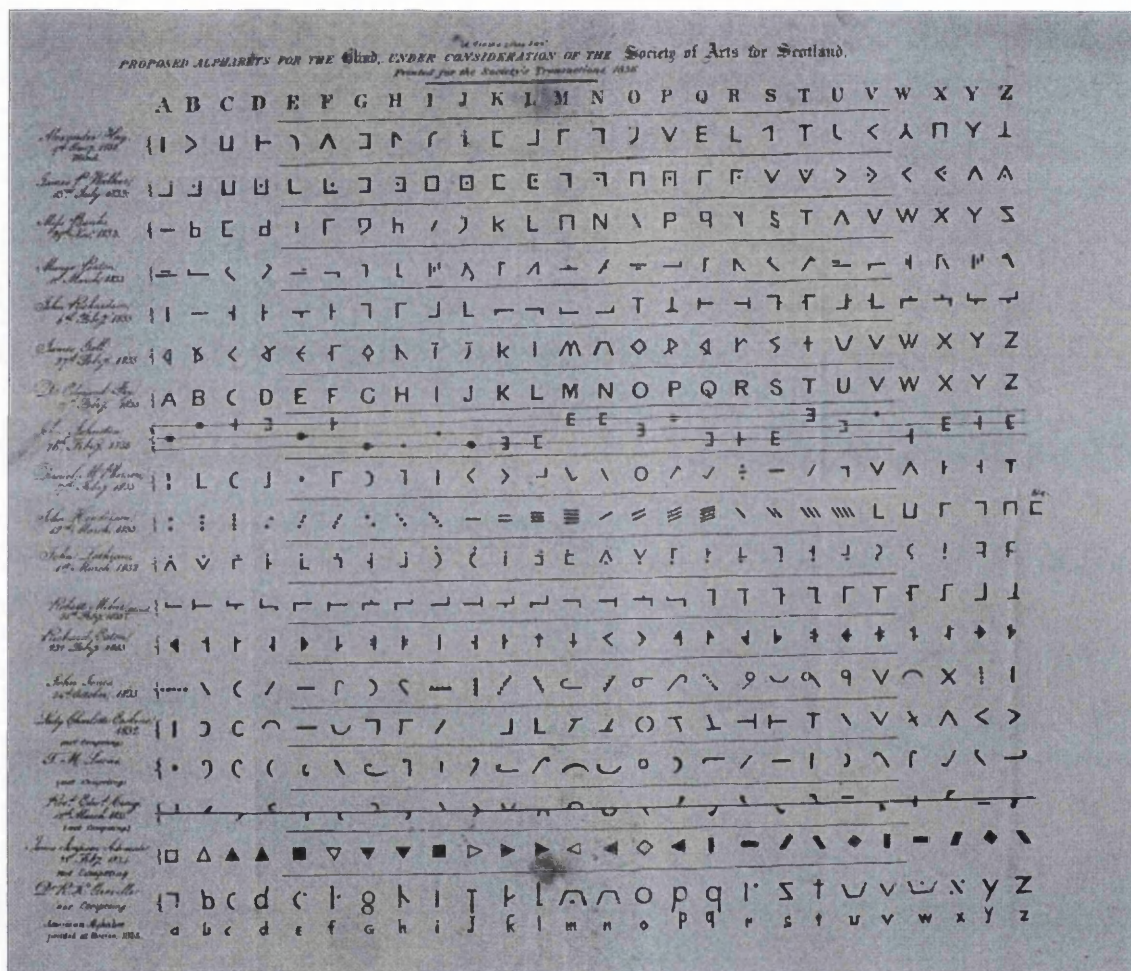


**Appendix B** From a privately printed edition of an anonymous translation of Sebastien de Guillié's *Essay on the Instruction and Amusement of the Blind* (1819). The young man and woman are welcomed into the world of 'higher learning', symbolized by Corinthian columns, a harp, globes, books and a bust of Saunderson, the blind Cambridge mathematician.





**Appendix C** In this image from a cutting from a late Victorian magazine the blind reader's passivity is emphasized, through feminine imagery. There was still a common belief that a sighted helper was needed to serve as a blind person's 'eyes'.



**Appendix D** Examples of types submitted in competition for the Gold Medal of the Scottish Society of the Arts, Edinburgh. Society of the Arts, *Annual Report for 1836* (Edinburgh, 1837). Shelfmark 3.998(5). Reproduced by kind permission of the Trustees of the National Library of Scotland.

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Annual reports, 1793-1900 (some missing), minute books 1802- 1890, legacy books 1800-1900, correspondence, cuttings and miscellanea.

##### Liverpool Record Office:

Thomas Bickerton Papers. Including the 'Plan' for the School. 820 Tom 148/ 21

Liverpool Royal School for the Blind. (The archive has been transferred to the Wavertree campus at Church Road North, Wavertree, Liverpool):

Correspondence, record books, visitors' books, annual reports, minute books, chapel accounts, miscellanea.

##### London Metropolitan Archives:

Records pertaining to Worcester College for the Blind Sons of Gentlemen;



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