

G.A. CARTER. *J.L. Hobbs's local history and the library*. Andre Deutsch: London, 1973. 344 pp. (No price available)
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For many years the study of local history has been the province of amateurs. Traditionally professional historians indulged in the study of national history, showing but scant regard for this cinderella of the discipline which is often erroneously classified as an antiquarian pastime. To a certain extent this attitude is still prevalent among many historical groups. But local history as a fully-fledged branch of learning is rapidly gaining a respectable status as more research results become available. For this reason it is gratifying to note that modern information scientists have shown a willingness to regard local history as an independent discipline, and have formulated comprehensive systems for developing libraries which suit the requirements of this specialised field of local historical research.

Two pioneers in local historical librarianship are G.A. Carter and the late J.L. Hobbs who have also incidentally made their mark as practising historians. *Local history and the library*, by Hobbs, first appeared in 1962 and has subsequently been revised by Carter owing to recent developments in the field. The authors concentrate extensively on three aspects in this comprehensive work: the philosophy and logic of local history and library science; the basic guidelines for planning and developing the local history library; and lastly — faithful to their breed — a history of this type of library in Britain.

As regards the first aspect, the work contains much information on the practice of local history, enabling the librarian to understand some of the unique problems that the modern researcher has to contend with. These are many, as the authors point out, because local history as a discipline is no longer practised in isolation from national history. Owing to the thorough study of local detail, certain myths and misinterpretations of the past are in the process of being debunked. The national historian can no longer make generalised statements without taking note of certain historical facts of a local nature which are at variance with dated concepts of past reality.

The planning and development of the local library is remarkably specialised. In contrast with a former generation the modern local history librarian needs to be a specialist in various aspects of history. Also from an occupational point of view the librarian must be capable of applying the basic principles of archival practice in storing documentation. Today the archivist is a specialist who has completed a graduate or diploma course in an extremely sophisticated field. Few courses in librarianship give sufficient attention to this department of information science. The authors, bearing this in mind, devote two chapters (four and six) to manuscript records and the care and treatment of archives. Owing to the complex nature of cataloguing and indexing primary and secondary material, several practical examples are considered and suggestions are made which could be of cardinal importance in the sensible planning of a functional local history library.

The history of the fully-fledged local collection in Britain goes back to 1824 when a start was made at the Guildhall library in London to preserve documents of local interest. Legislative measures were introduced in 1850 by the Public Libraries Bill to create the necessary facilities for information storage. The authors point out that for some 75 years it was the public library, and ironically enough not the historical fraternity, that "laboured almost alone in trying to bring together materials for the study of local history". (p.42) During the 1960's the development of local history collections at public libraries made great progress. In the space of one decade these libraries increased by 64 per cent in Britain. The South African historian can but stand in astonishment and take note of what has been accomplished so well in so short a time. It fills one with respect and at the same time envy, realising what can be accomplished in local history if only the necessary facilities are available. The inimitable Samuel Johnson once remarked "A man will turn over half a library to make one book". And after considering the importance of a good local history library one may add to that: had it not been for the librarian, far more than half a library would have had to be turned over.

Local history and the library is without doubt a work that can be of great value to the South African information scientist who wishes to take part in a noble and pioneering study which has made good progress in recent years. The book however has one shortcoming: the authors have not taken the facilities offered by computer technology into consideration. Modern information science becomes increasingly concerned with time-saving and efficient electronic data systems. It is to be hoped that should a new edition of the work appear in the near future Mr. Carter will take this matter up as well.

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