MAKING FULLER USE OF B.M. READING ROOM

Old methods in modern times

By our London Staff

Sir Lewis Namier has recorded that he could not have written his masterpiece, "The Structure of Politics at the Accession of George III," when he did if American public libraries had not stayed open in the evening.

He was then in business in the United States and could work on his book only after hours. Any potential Namiers there may now be in London offices and classrooms are no more able than was Sir Lewis 30 years ago to use the British Museum Reading Room. It still closes at 5 p.m.

Adherence to Victorian opening hours is one matter for complaint among those who use or wish to use the huge, august, and well-beloved library at the heart of the B.M. Another is that those who get there still face irritating delays before they can have the books they apply for. Some question whether the library is fully discharging what should be its task in modern conditions.

Though the Government has at length decided to give museums and galleries more money (increasing, among other things, the British Museum's purchasing grant to £100,000, which of course is not the same thing as spending more on its plant and running expenses), there is little sign that the Reading Room and its ancillary libraries will be able to solve most of their present problems for some years to come.

"Bursting at seams"

The main physical fact about the library is that the circular Reading Room set within a rectangle of iron stacks, though extremely advanced and practical when it was built just over a century ago to house a million volumes, is now ill-suited to cope with six times as many. It is authoritatively described as "bursting at the seams." War damage to the stacks has now been made good, but books still have to be kept in all sorts of nooks and crannies, some of them a long way from the Reading Room. The layout of the room also helps to baffle attempts at automatic handling.

All this explains the continuing delay in getting books to readers, which runs in general to between half an hour and an hour from the time a request slip is handed in. If a section of books is a long way from the central desk the attendant may need to wait until he has several request slips for books in that section before he sets off; and staff holidays, illness, or meal-times may further prolong the delay.

Though there are spiral chutes down which some books can be sent careering to a spot just outside the Reading Room, the books still have to be manhandled on to a trolley, wheeled to the central desk—a mere ten or fifteen yards away,—and manhandled off again. This operation, wasteful of both time and manpower, is unavoidable simply because the museum heating plant is under the floor of the Reading Room. It is therefore impossible to rearrange the layout so as to lift books straight up to the central desk from below, as is done at the Central Reference Library in Manchester.

Long-term project

Rearrangement or expansion might, of course, be possible if the library was to stay on its present site for many years to come. It is, in fact, expected to move across Great Russell Street when the new national library is built. How soon is this likely to happen? The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Works told the Commons in 1956 that redevelopment of a small part of the site—the area west of Coptic Street—"will not take place before about ten years from now," that is, before 1966. The second stage was not expected to be reached "before 1975, and it is likely to be later than that." These are still the only dates available. Meanwhile it is clear that no Government will invest heavily in the plant of the existing library. The museum will have to make do with what it has, and so will the readers.

Longer opening hours in the present building would not call for investment but they would, according to the latest information given to Parliament, add 69 people to the staff and about £50,000 to the annual running costs. This is on the assumption that the Reading Room would stay open until 10 p.m. on week-days and would provide a full service—as it would need to if it was to be of use to potential Namiers who could come only at 5 p.m. or 6 p.m.

The trustees and officials of the museum are willing in principle to keep the room open in the evening—they do not wish it to be regarded as the preserve of "gentlemen of leisure"—but inclined to tread cautiously in assessing the demand. One notion now being canvassed is that the Reading Room might (like the National Library of Scotland) stay open on one evening a week as an experiment. There is some doubt whether this would be a wholly fair test. But if it is tried, and the room is regularly full on the late opening night, the case to be put to the Treasury will obviously be strengthened.

Museum officials in general, though anxious that there should be no feeling of a barrier between the institution and the public, are yet more strongly aware that their first duty is to conserve the material in their care. They are thus chary of depending on microfilm as a substitute for newspaper files in the newspaper library at Colindale, which at the present rate will be full within the next decade (though microfilm is so used for some of the bulky foreign, especially American, newspapers).

As for the main library, it is not difficult to get a reader's ticket, but the Reading Room is still much more a universal research library than a reference library readily available to the hurried inquirer.

Decentralisation

There is in London nothing strictly comparable to the New York public library, the Library of Congress, or—a more modest but still well-stocked example—the Manchester Central Reference Library. The British Museum Reading Room is slower and it is closed to the casual inquirer. The borough reference libraries are quick and open but not so well stocked.

Will there be a demand when the national library is built for readier access to its unrivalled facilities? A special problem facing a library attached to a great museum is that visitors to, say, the Assyrian galleries or the Sutton Hoo treasure may, if they are given the chance, drift in with inquiries—perfectly proper inquiries, but not really the business of a research library or even of a universal reference library.

No decisions appear to have been reached on the precise functions of the national library whenever it comes to be built. But the museum would like in principle to see a more decentralised system of libraries, reading rooms, and catalogues—with, say, a science library, an archaeological library, a reading room for the latest periodicals all in the same building or group of buildings. So there may possibly be an opening for combining the library's traditional help to scholars with easier access for the general public.

Merseyside looks back to Victorian days

The Liverpool Blue Coat Society of Arts announced yesterday that, for the second successive year, it was receiving a grant of £2,000 from the Gulbenkian Foundation, and would spend £1,500 of it on a "celebration"—exhibitions, concerts, and lectures—dealing with the second half of the nineteenth century, to be held during the middle fortnight of October.

The other £500 will be spent on grants to four young Merseyside "artists." Mr Noel Rawsthorne, organist of Liverpool Cathedral, will get a small award, supplementing the one made to him last year to enable him to study under Marcel Dupré in Paris. The other three grants go to Mr R. A. Bairstow, a typographer, who will visit the more important centres of printing in Europe; to Mr Roger Dean, a sculptor, for study at the Brera Academy in Milan; and to Mr Edwin Roxburgh, an oboe player, for a course at the Paris Conservatoire.

A Berkshire ceremony dating back to John of Gaunt: the Hungerford Hocktide Festival yesterday. The owners of buildings on sites which existed at the time of John of Gaunt's bequest of common rights meet annually to elect their Court Leet and two "tutty-men"—seen above wearing morning dress and carrying posies. The "tutty-men" and their "Orange man" visit the 90 commoners' houses for refreshment, collect kisses from the ladies, collect pence from the householders, which they distribute to the children, and provide oranges which the "Orange man" flings to the crowd

Bridge

INTELLIGENT LEADS

By Rixi Markus

Lee Hazen, a prominent New York lawyer and a member of the National American team, found a brilliant lead against a slam on the following hand:

♠—J, 5, 4, 3
♥—Q, J, 10, 9, 8
♦—10, 7
♣—K, 6

The bidding had gone:

South	West	North	East
1S	NB	2C	NB
3S	NB	4S	NB
4NT	NB	5D	NB
5NT	NB	6D	NB
6S	NB	NB	NB

Hazen, sitting West, expected to make a trump trick; he also knew that opponents were likely to hold all the top controls in the other suits. His best hope, therefore, was to force declarer into an early tactical decision before he had learned the bad news about the trumps. He led the six of clubs and the result was a great triumph.

This was the full hand:

NORTH
♠—10, 9, 2
♥—K, 6
♦—J, 6
♣—A, Q, J, 9, 8, 7

WEST
♠—J, 5, 4, 3
♥—Q, J, 10, 9, 8
♦—10, 7
♣—K, 6

EAST
♠—None
♥—7, 4, 3, 2
♦—Q, 9, 8, 5, 4, 3
♣—10, 5, 4

SOUTH
♠—A, K, Q, 8, 7, 6
♥—A, 5
♦—A, K, 2
♣—3, 2

Declarer, who was a fine player, could hardly risk a club finesse and a possible ruff when twelve tricks were certain unless, most improbably, West held all the missing trumps. If Hazen had not forced the decision about the club finesse at trick one, the contract would have been made without fail.

Soon afterwards Hazen was faced with another difficult defence problem. This time he had the slight advantage that he could see dummy after his partner had led to another 6S contract. The bidding helped him to find a correct solution:

South	West	North	East
1S	NB	3C	NB
3S	NB	4C	NB
4H	NB	4NT	NB
5D	NB	6D	NB
6S	NB	NB	NB

This was the full hand:

NORTH
♠—A
♥—Q, 5
♦—A, K, 6
♣—A, Q, J, 10, 9, 5, 3

WEST
♠—7, 6, 2
♥—K, 6, 3
♦—Q, 10, 7, 4, 3, 2
♣—7

EAST
♠—5, 3
♥—J, 10, 7, 2
♦—J, 8, 5
♣—K, 8, 4, 2

SOUTH
♠—K, Q, J, 10, 9, 8, 4
♥—A, 9, 8, 4
♦—9
♣—6

West led the 7 of clubs and declarer finessed dummy's queen. Hazen, sitting East this time, won with the king and came to the following conclusions. South certainly had a strong trump suit plus the ace of hearts. The fact that he finessed the club, holding a singleton himself, clearly meant that he was not worried about being over-ruffed at the second trick. On the other hand he had to get into dummy to discard his losers. His main entry cards were ace, king of diamonds. Hazen decided that unless declarer held a singleton diamond the contract could not be broken. He therefore returned a diamond and the contract went down.

It is true that the contract can be made if declarer plays the ace of clubs and relies on the heart position to be in his favour. On balance, however, it was right to finesse the club. But Hazen, knowing that no good player would make an unnecessary or dangerous finesse, drew the correct conclusion, which enabled him to break the contract.

QUEEN MOTHER'S VISIT TO PARIS

To see two exhibitions

Details of the private visit of Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother and Princess Margaret to Paris later this month were released yesterday.

The Queen Mother and the Princess will arrive at Orly airport, from Rome, at 5 p.m. on Saturday, April 25. They will dine informally at the British Embassy, where they will be staying during the week-end. Next day they will attend morning church service and in the evening will dine privately at the Embassy.

On the Monday morning Princess Margaret will leave for London by air. The Queen Mother will visit "Floralies," the international flower exhibition. Among the exhibits will be some sent by the Queen from the Windsor estates. In the afternoon the Queen Mother will visit the exhibition of eighteenth-century furniture at the Louvre, after which she will leave Paris by air for London.

MISCELLANY

The Elephant and Castle

The Elephant went out like a lamb, the Castle has fallen. There were no obsequies for this famous old pub. It fell victim to its own advantageous position—on the junction of six main roads spilling into the Thames from the South. It stood in the way of improvements and had to go—unsung and unlamented. There were, curiously, no petitions to save the Elephant. Most Londoners knew it only as a name, a place you bought a ticket to, like the Bank, the Monument, or Harrods. It had no august history, as its neighbour, the George Inn, at Southwark. Yet the Elephant was not without connections. The fabric that the demolition men will—reluctantly, one feels—soon plunge their picks into is Victorian; but a tavern stood on its site for centuries. They say the original was a true inn, licensed to lodge guests, and it could have been in Shakespeare's mind when he suggested, in "Twelfth Night," that "In the south suburbs, at the Elephant, is best to lodge." Before the scholars jump on us, we hasten to add that there were other "Oliphaunts" in the district where Antonio might have put up. Nor was the inn singular in its name; how it got it is conjectural. It may have been a straight lift of the heraldic emblem of Rome, and there is an ungallant tradition that ascribes it to a corruption of the Infanta of Castile, whom good King James fondly hoped might marry his son.

Name without a place

The choice probably lies between the Elephant and Castle crest of the Cutlers' Company, who owned land in Bankside, and the badge sported by an old Indian Army regiment. But it does not matter now. The Elephant survived the blitz when all round it was flattened. Mass destruction left Londoners indifferent to mass redevelopment. Old landmarks disappear overnight, and few will bother to tell their grandchildren how the skyline looked when they were young. The Elephant and Castle might survive as a name like Shepherd's Bush, whose grey streets have since lost the shepherd and most of the bushes.

Greetings

Forty years earlier Grimshaw and Jenkins had been classmates in the same village school, and then later on they had started together at the foot of the ladder in the same big business corporation. But whereas Grimshaw had climbed purposefully upwards until finally he had become general manager of the firm, Jenkins had worked his way steadily sideways and had remained an undistinguished clerk. One other marked difference between the two men was that while Grimshaw had grown noticeably surlier with the passing of the years Jenkins had retained his happy and agreeable disposition in full measure. The paths of the two men seldom crossed, but on the rare occasions when they did Grimshaw contrived not to see Jenkins. So it was that for many years no word had passed between them.

Then one day they found themselves the sole occupants of the office lift, and Mr Grimshaw, the general manager, could not pretend to be unaware of the proximity of Jenkins, his humble subordinate. Mr Grimshaw looked at Jenkins with a cold, unsmiling eye and then, with visible reluctance, he greeted him.

"Gr-r-mph," grunted Mr Grimshaw sourly.

Jenkins bowed politely and smiled.

"Gr-r-mph, sir," he replied, in tones of the deepest respect.

Temporary diversion?

The suspension in the publication of "Highway," the magazine of the Workers' Educational Association, is a sad reflection of the increasingly difficult financial situation of the W.E.A. centrally. For suspension rather than cessation is the way its friends regard the position announced at the end of the 1958-9 session of winter courses. Always a seasonal publication, appearing during the winter session of courses, "Highway" had reached its fiftieth volume as a journal of democratic discussion. It began in 1908, and its last issue still cost only 4d. (Thirty years ago it cost 2d.)

A SURFEIT OF MELANCHOLY

Butterworth's Housman

The whole of Schubert's "Winterreise" hardly contains more melancholy than George Butterworth concentrated into his setting of six poems from Housman's "A Shropshire Lad." For this reason they make a less than ideal song-cycle for performance complete, as William Coombes's singing of them at the Midday Concert yesterday, in the Lesser Free Trade Hall, Manchester, did not conceal. Mr Coombes's last programme at these concerts suffered from a similar monotony of tone and expression, and although no doubt he knows best the kind of music that suits his voice and temperament, and perhaps does not care much for, or does not feel that he is at his most effective in, more lively or dramatically powerful music, the lack of emotional variety and vigour in his singing is a serious shortcoming. He made a good try at gaiety, with rather poor material, in a Negro spiritual and an old French tune arranged by Thomas Pitfield and would do well to cultivate this strain in songs of better quality. Within its limited tonal and emotional range his singing was polished and musically sensitive.

He shared the recital with Delia Woolford, who sang a group of German and English songs in a contralto voice of pleasant quality, with considerable vocal poise and flawless enunciation, but with very little musical or verbal expression. Both singers were accompanied by Una Bradbury, who played with variable sympathy and effectiveness on an unresponsive and inadequate piano, on which she did well to give them as much support as she did. C. M.

Don't like snipers

By Herbert Chappell

"Hear that?" he said. "It's 'John' to-day. When it's a mucky job it's always 'John.' 'John, would you mind,' or 'John, when you've got a minute.' Any other time and it's 'Taff catch a hold of this,' 'Taff, give that end a thump'; 'Taff, do this,' 'Taff, do that'; 'Taff, do every —— thing around here.' But when it's a mucky job—when he says 'John'—then you can bet your wage-packet it really is mucky."

The bright brown water sloshed over his rubber boots as he shifted his weight from one foot to the other, shook back his head, and looked at the grey sky above the trench we stood in. The end of his pneumatic drill stuck firmly in the shale and, in spite of a battered pump pulsating erratically above us, the muddy water continued to rise.

"Course you can't blame him," he said, glancing over his shoulder at the ganger. "It's not his fault. It's the job. A dirty job wouldn't be a dirty job if it wasn't dirty, would it?"

Taking out a battered tin that once held cough sweets he offered me a cigarette. "Ever known anything like it? Typical. England." His face brightened: "Typical of England," he said with deliberation. "That's what it is, typical of England."

He wiped some of the mud from the back of his hand, transferring the red sludge to his thick khaki trousers, tied around his waist with a piece of sisal. "Can you imagine—I mean, can you imagine any building site, in any other part of the world, without a decent pump?" He kicked the muddy shale to emphasise his argument. "Like giving a donkey strawberries."

He pulled a brass lighter, shaped like a bullet, from a trouser-pocket and lit the cigarettes with its enormous flame—fiercer than a blow-lamp though not quite up to that of a flame-thrower. "Nice, isn't it?" he said. "Got it off a wog in Korea—though you wouldn't think it to look at it. See that," he pointed with a muddy finger, "made in England on the back." Then adding as a further qualification: "Course he was dead by then. Got him through the neck." He patted his throat just above the collar bone. "A sniper. Don't like snipers."

We kept plugging away at the trench. Taff would drill out great lumps of shale then stand back for me to clear a few more inches with a pick. There was no feeling of hurry or urgency about the job—we were not on piece-work—it was a plain fact that on this building site, or any other, drains had to be dug. When you had dug one trench there was always another waiting to be done. Taff had outlined the philosophy: "You just keep at it. Don't flog yourself—you won't get a ruddy medal—and you might pull something. Just keep at it and they can't grumble."

A shrill whistle cut through the noise. The drills and cement-mixers cut out abruptly. From all parts of the site labourers hurried to form a sullen queue outside the corrugated tea-hut. The tea was hot and stewed but went down well and broke up the morning. A few yards away two young teds were larking about. One had a tattered paratroop-beret draped down the side of his greasy hair and was giving an account of his experiences on a park bench the previous night. Apparently he had had little success and no one, except his fellow apprentice-brickie, was paying much attention to his loud-voiced account. "But you wait till Saturday," he said. "I'm going out with her sister and. . . ." He growled in anticipation, flexing one arm and patting the biceps with the other hand. "Roll on Saturday." And he growled again.

The whistle shrieked again and we ambled back to our various jobs. Taff offered me another cigarette and lit it with the brass lighter. "Yes," he said. "I've had that ever since Korea. Funny, isn't it—go all the way out there, bump off a wog, and come home to Blighty with a cigarette lighter. But I've told you the story haven't I. He was dead all right."

He wrenched the point of the drill from the earth and set to work again. I watched his shoulders, bunched like an ox, vibrate tense with the stuttering of the drill. The veins stood out on the side of his neck and I thought of him shooting the sniper through the throat. It would have been a job—nothing more. No heroics or second thoughts; merely a job, like drilling out a trench or mixing concrete.

Suddenly the drill stammered back at him as the tip struck a patch of rock that was harder than the rest. He just bunched his shoulders a little more and pressed down with extra weight, easing the tip into the rock and levering it in two. And though his whole body shook with the rhythm of the compressor you knew that Taff was in control of the situation—as he had been when faced with the sniper. And you felt that, if ever the occasion arose, he could remove a thorn from a kitten's foot without bruising the skin.

ALAN KING

Comedian of the night club school

"Why does anyone want to go to the theatre at six o'clock in the evening?" Alan King, the American comedian, apparently genuinely puzzled, asked his audience at the Palace Theatre, London, last night. Before he came on the stage, the question would have been difficult to answer. Most of the latest "International Variety Show" in Shaftesbury Avenue is remarkably like all its recent predecessors. There are chorus girls whose dancing looks like drill. There are puppets and juke-box singers and uni-cyclists and electric organ music like molten marshmallow. But Alan King, comedian of the New York night club school, is a wonderfully funny man.

His act consists simply of a rambling monologue on the most familiar of subjects—family life in the contemporary rat-race. His wife, it seems, watches television at night "until the dot disappears," and to make sure he has enough domestic chores to do, she buys "instant garbage—add water, and you've got all the garbage you need." The lines themselves do not have the chrome-plated finish that often give an impression of a back-room committee of gag writers. This is personal stuff and it is the delivery that counts. He delivers it with a down-turned mouth and resigned shrugs of the shoulders and occasional, probably deliberate, lapses into syntactic confusion and silence; and there are outbursts of indignation, as though he has suddenly noticed what a ludicrous world he is inhabiting. Even when he served the occasional chestnut (he had been reading doctors' waiting-room magazines: "Isn't it tragic about the Titanic?"), the effect is always one of inspired spontaneity. The rest of the audience also apparently enjoyed him. P. S. C.

CHURCHILL COLLEGE GETS £70,000 GIFT

For assembly hall

The trustees of Churchill College, Cambridge, have accepted a gift of £70,000 from the Isaac Wolfson Foundation to build an assembly hall in the main college buildings. At the beginning of this year gifts received or promised for the building and endowment of the college already totalled £2,832,000 towards a target of £3,500,000.

Paul Robeson's Othello

By Philip Hope-Wallace

STRATFORD-UPON-AVON, TUESDAY.

In 80 years, the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre has chalked up 100 seasons, and they celebrated their centenary to-night by opening with an "Othello" of which much was expected. It is a remarkably handsome production by Tony Richardson, with Loudon Sainthill decorations. And it is neither confused nor freakish in its layout of the play. But in so far as a success in Shakespeare draws strength from the speaking of the text, and from finding some inner dramatic and poetic rhythm and balance, this is as yet a rather limp and curiously unmoving performance. It should not have been, if expectation is any guarantee. But Paul Robeson, returning after nearly a quarter of a century to the stage in England, slightly cheated our memories of that long-ago powerful Othello of his at the Savoy. True, he still has the volume, the imposing stature, the sonority, and the generosity. His rage looks dangerous, and at the end he excites the pity due to a noble animal at bay; but tonight he was also stiff and monotonous and, though there was richness of tone and feeling, there was no richness in the phrasing of his delivery. He is an instinctively noble Othello who, in spite of the magnificence of his voice, curiously fails to get the best out of the wonderful words in which Shakespeare portrayed the character.

Sam Wanamaker is too clever an actor to fail with Iago, whose malignant and saturnine emanations from under a roughly plausible exterior he was very well able to suggest. But the part, delivered in a curiously nasal sing-song voice, is here loaded down with a great deal of tiresome naturalistic detail and a positively flamboyant display of "relaxation." At times he seemed to be modelling himself on Sir Laurence Olivier's Richard III. It was an extremely restless performance, often absurdly so, as when at one point he took off a metal helmet and began to use it as a fan. And yet, in spite of what was very obvious trying, no particularly satisfactory solution was found for the problem which this rôle always presents. However, it is by no means an ineffective Iago. Mary Ure, on the other hand, a strikingly pretty girl, is as yet a wholly colourless Desdemona, lacking in pathos and given to mincing. Angela Baddeley as Emilia went to the other extreme. As well balanced a part as any was the Cassio of Albert Finney. There is plenty of pageantry and a great sense of place and period, but on the essential Shakespearean poetry we feel that we are being sold decidedly short.

MANCHESTER THEATRES, ETC.

MANCHESTER CINEMAS

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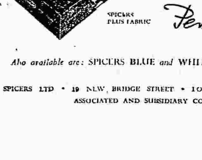

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