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Book Launch: The Development of the Mechanics' Institute in Britain and Beyond

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Book Launch

The Development of the Mechanics’ Institute Movement in Britain and Beyond
Supporting further education for the adult working classes

Martyn Walker

Inspiring tomorrow’s professionals
Book chapters

• Introduction
• Brief History of the Mechanics’ Institute Movement
• Scientific Education up to 1850
• Scientific and technical education up to 1900
• Social class membership
• Female membership
• From rented to civic pride
• MI libraries and Public Libraries
• Three clusters
• Overseas
• MI Legacy
Overseas

Canada
Australia
New Zealand
America

• Birkbeck was the central figure in the drama and Americans, who always felt comfortable in the assurances of old-world precedent, Glasgow, and London, were the proofs they urged in support of their own ambitions. They might just reasonably have looked for examples amongst themselves. The mechanics’ institute began simultaneously in Britain and the United States. The London Society and the Franklin Institute were established practically at the same time (Sinclair 1974, p.7)

• Josiah Holbrook was the Birkbeck of America (Bode 1958)
American MI and Lyceums

Franklin, Philadelphia, New York, Boston, New Harmony, Indiana
Chicago, Washington, Bigelow, Ohio,
Mercantile Library Associations
..... San Francisco Mechanics’ Institute (Goldsmith, 1955).
San Francisco Mechanics’ Institute

- Started in rented property 1855,
- 1857 Mechanics’ and Manufacturers Fair,
- End of the Civil War, technical subjects offered in support of industrial growth and the Gold Rush,
- Foundation of the University of California.
• At the time of the San Francisco earthquake the Institute had 200,000 books,
• The building was destroyed with all its books and archives, including British patent reports going back to James 1, as well as technical and scientific papers and works of art.
• At the time of the fire, the librarian was already contacting book dealers and libraries in the eastern states by telegram asking if it was possible to send books, especially on architecture and engineering, for re-stocking in what was a temporary building established some five months after the earthquake….the rest is history!
‘Reinvention – Thriving in the 21sr Century’

‘No more admirable building could be provided for such a purpose’:
A study of several mechanics’ institutes and how they have been adapted for twenty-first century Britain

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Overview

What happened to mechanics’ institutes in Britain following the introduction of state post-school education?

This paper is divided into three parts:

1. Mechanics institutes and education,
2. Mechanics’ institutes and the library movement,
3. Mechanics’ institutes and the community.
Distribution of MI in 1850
Mechanics institutes and education

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Yorkshire: Bradford MI
Bradford

Mechanics’ Institute and Technical School

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The buildings at Saltaire, including the Mechanics Institute (now the Victoria Hall) were built in a neo-classical style very typical of the period.
The School, which faces the Mechanics Institute is also neo-Classical in style with it’s Ionic columns.
Keighley, near Bradford: First owned MI
Keighley MI and Carnegie Library

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Keighley: MI fire
Keighley: Former FE College
North Wales: Llanrwst MI
Salford, Peel Building
Salford: Peel building, museum and art gallery & 1960s Salford University building
Newcastle North of England Institute of Mining and Mechanical Engineers
Main hall with stain-glass window
Entrance from the main hall
Main library and archives
Mechanics’ institutes and the library movement
Newcastle Literary & Philosophical Society

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Interior

Inspiring tomorrow’s professionals
Lancashire Accrington MI and Carnegie Library

Inspiring tomorrow’s professionals
Skipton MI and Carnegie Library

Inspiring tomorrow's professionals
Salford Working Class Movement Library

Inspiring tomorrow’s professionals

University of Huddersfield
Inspiring tomorrow’s professionals
Cardiff Technical Institute and Library

University of Huddersfield

Inspiring tomorrow’s professionals
The new Cardiff library
Coniston: Lake District
Mechanics’ institutes and the community

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Inspiring tomorrow’s professionals
Derbyshire: Whaley Bridge and Eyam
Kirkby Malzeard: Yorkshire

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Wark: Northumberland
Nottinghamshire: Eastwood
However.......
Heptonstall MI, Lancashire

- And finally.... Heptonstall MI Now semidetached house on the market in January 2016 for £340,000 ($413,474!)
Conclusions

• Mechanics’ institutes and education
• Mechanics’ institutes and libraries
• Mechanics’ institutes and the community
• The future…..conferences such as these, papers and publications to highlight the importance
• Realistically, however, at this point in time there is a high percentage that some will disappear from the British landscape……