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“It is ridiculous that the Borough Librarian of Croydon should decide the policy of the Scottish Education Department”: the establishment of Scotland’s second library school.

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Abstract

In the middle of the 1960s, amid concerns about the direction of professional education in Scotland and problems with the number of places available for those wishing to study librarianship, there emerged a strongly nationalistic debate surrounding proposals to establish a second school of librarianship in Scotland. The process of establishing that second school at Robert Gordon’s Institute of Technology in Aberdeen became protracted and fraught with difficulties. It was characterized by disputes and misunderstandings between the Library Association and the Scottish Library Association. Many of these differences of opinion took on a distinctly nationalistic quality and the debate within the library community at the time can be said to offer wider, allegorical lessons for the changing political landscape between Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom. This article outlines this debate, principally from the perspective of the members of Scottish librarianship community. It draws extensively on a hitherto private archive of correspondence of those directly involved.

KEYWORDS: librarianship education, professional education, library schools, Scotland, Library Association, Scottish Library Association, nationalism

On 26 August 1965, Charles Black, City Librarian of Glasgow, wrote to Bernard Palmer, Education Officer and Secretary of the Education Committee of the Library Association, to draw his attention to an emerging problem with professional education in Scotland. At that point, there was only one library school, the Scottish School of Librarianship at the University of Strathclyde in Glasgow. In his letter, Black noted that there was a significant concern about the number of places available at the Scottish School and that, in March of 1965, some eighty-two members of his staff had applied for leave of absence in order to obtain their professional qualification. He noted that thirty-six met the entry criteria and the remainder hoped to obtain the pre-entry qualifications over the summer.

He had just been informed that only 28 out of 82 had been selected for places and that eight of his applicants, who met the entry requirements, had not been offered places. He had consulted with William Tyler, then head of the Scottish School, who had informed him that 150 qualified applicants had applied for 100 places. Black ended his letter by predicting that there would be a “snowball by the summer of 1966”.¹ Palmer took almost a month to reply and began his response by noting that the “*Scottish School of Librarianship has provided 29 per cent of its places for members of your staff.....and I would draw your attention to the fact there are still ten other schools of Librarianship in Britain to which they can apply*”.² Palmer was clearly right in both respects. It was completely unreasonable for one school to take disproportionately high levels from one library service. Additionally, there were a good number of other schools across the United Kingdom. However, this second point viewed the situation in a Britain-wide context and this issue was soon to be at the heart of the debate over the establishment of a second school in Scotland.

This was a time when the distinctions, even outright differences, between Scotland and England were becoming apparent in a range of different fields. Scottish nationalism (with both a big and small “n”) had gradually come to the fore in the years after the Second World War and the distinctive identity of Scottish institutions in the education, legal and public sectors were all being strongly reasserted. Nationalists had been elected to Westminster committed to ending the Union and the notion that ‘Scotland could run its own show’ was emerging strongly in every sector, including the library community. This article charts an uncomfortable period in the relationship between the Library Association and the Scottish

Library Association which is analogous with the broader political and social climate of the time.

On the face of it, there appeared to be little difference in the way that the Scottish library scene had developed from that south of the border in England and Wales. However, there were notable differences, not least in the legislative framework which governed the provision of public libraries with separate statutes covering Scotland. Equally significant was the disparity which often existed between the bigger urban authorities (particularly in Central Scotland) and those on the periphery in the north and south. As this article will later demonstrate, there was a perception that library services in the north of the country were lagging well behind those elsewhere. Another fact which was noticeably different in Scotland was the relatively small size of the professional community. This meant that 'everyone knew everyone else' in the library sector. As a result of this, the personalities of the major players in the library scene emerge very strongly.

In this article, those personalities and their reaction to events are examined. As will be demonstrated, the Scottish Library Association was driven by a number of larger than life characters with strongly held views and, increasingly, those views can be seen as nationalistic in tone and who were determined to assert Scotland's own unique identity and *modus operandi*. The article draws heavily on a previously unseen archive of correspondence relating to the establishment of School of Librarianship at Robert Gordon's Institute of Technology. The archive, which is uncatalogued, has been held privately in the custodianship of successive Heads of School or Department at Robert Gordon³ and has only been fully explored since 2008. It largely presents the events through the eyes of those involved with the bulk of the archive being made up of letters of an often very candid and sometimes indiscreet nature.

The larger than life personalities were not, however, confined to the Scottish side. Bernard Palmer had, during almost twenty years as Education Officer of the Library Association, fostered the development of many of those "ten other schools of librarianship". It was his own personal struggle to obtain a professional librarianship qualification by correspondence in the 1930s which had convinced him of the need for a more sophisticated approach to librarianship education in the United Kingdom. From this time, he believed there was a clear need for more full-time educational provision and, certainly, he saw the demand as being greater than scope offered by the nation's only Library School at the University of London.⁴ After leaving the Royal Air Force at the end of the Second World War, he was appointed as the Education Officer of the Library Association. His appointment coincided with the expansion of librarianship education through the establishment of new schools, including in 1946, the Scottish School of Librarianship in Glasgow, which extended the coverage of professional education to Scotland.

Palmer worked tirelessly for librarianship education in the United Kingdom and overseas and ultimately encouraged the transfer of many of the Library Association's responsibilities for education to the schools. His philosophy was one of where the LA would adopt a watching brief to ensure the maintenance of high standards but where the teaching and examining was left to the schools. This philosophy also extended to the policies the schools had for selecting their own students. To this end, in 1964, the Education Committee withdrew the Entrance Examination in favour of recognising school-leaving qualifications. During his time as Education Officer the number of library schools had increased to ten and professional education in librarianship had, for the first time, become available across the United Kingdom. Schools were established in Glasgow, Newcastle, Leeds, Manchester, Liverpool, Sheffield, and most recently Aberystwyth⁵ providing what seemed like enviable geographical spread across the United Kingdom.

Insert figure 1 here



Figure 1: Bernard Palmer, Education Officer of the Library Association. Image courtesy of the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals.

However, it was precisely the difficulties with this geographical spread that led to a further exchange of letters that took place in the early autumn of 1965 between Black and Palmer. Writing after the Education Committee had met, Palmer noted that the “committee were firmly of the opinion that it is not reasonable to expect any school of Librarianship to take the total output of students from one particularly library to the extent of excluding all other students”⁶ He was clearly correct and many other library services in Scotland would have agreed as smaller authorities, whilst sharing Black’s concern about the pressure of places, were always slightly reserved in their attitudes to the dominance of the large urban local authorities, particularly those in Central Scotland. However, Palmer’s response clearly antagonised Black:

I have never at any time said or even suggested that any school of librarianship should take the total output of students from one particular library to the exclusion of all other students, and this expressed opinion of the Education Committee is irrelevant to the main issue, which was to notify you, in accordance with your request, of the situation that has developed here in Scotland.⁷

Black pressed his case by outlining that more than one hundred and fifty applicants had applied for the one hundred places at the Scottish School, “with obvious results”.⁸ He dismissed Palmer’s comment about the other schools stating that they were all over one hundred and fifty miles away at least and ended by saying:

What chances have these trainees of carrying out their studies within their own country? There are many who are not in a position to come down to England and yet there is at present only one library school in Scotland and it is obviously inadequate in its present form to cater for demand. Surely it is not too much to ask that the Council...will keep the matter under review.⁹

This skirmish was to prove to be the beginning of a protracted and, at times, acrimonious debate over the establishment of a second library school in Scotland. Throughout 1966 and the first half of 1967, the need for a second Scottish school became the main preoccupation for many librarians across Scotland. What started as a series of letters about the paucity of places in Glasgow became, at times, an allegory for the ever-increasing political tensions between Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom. Unwittingly, Black set the tone which characterized much of the subsequent debate when he wrote about the possibility of education within “their own country” and the faint aroma of nationalism was never far away during the following eighteenth months.

On 16 November 1965, Black wrote to Neil McCorkindale, the Burgh Librarian in Galashiels in the Scottish Borders and, at that time, Secretary of the Scottish Library Association. In his letter, he reiterated the issue of places at the Scottish School and ended by saying that “accordingly, I have written to Mr Palmer asking what steps the Library Association propose to take to ensure that trainee librarians do have an opportunity to pursue the

requisite course of study leading to registration at a school within Scotland".¹⁰ This letter was the first inclination in writing that senior librarians in Scotland were now seriously considering the possibility of the establishment of second school in the country. Black certainly sincerely believed in the notion of Scots being able to train in Scotland rather than have to decamp two hundred miles or more south to English schools. Black's comments were doubtless influenced by the news that librarians in the north of Scotland had been in talks with Dr Gerald Bulmer, Director of Robert Gordon's Institute of Technology (RGIT) in Aberdeen about the possibility of establishing a full-time librarianship course within his institution. Dr Bulmer had been very encouraging of the idea and had informal discussions on the subject with the Scottish Education Department (SED) in the autumn of 1965.¹¹

Bulmer had, to a certain extent, got ahead of himself and it was only in December 1965 that he informed the Library Association in London of what was being proposed. His letter received a lukewarm response from H.D. Barry, Secretary of the LA. He noted that the LA Council's preference was to extend provision within existing schools and that it had very real concerns about *"small schools which are unable to employ lecturers to offer a reasonable amount of specialist tuition over the range of the Association's examination syllabus"*.¹² He went on to observe that the LA had, in fact, withheld support for two recent proposals for new schools. He did concede, however, that there was a particular issue in Scotland but urged him to come to speak to Palmer (who was out of the country at that point) before reaching a decision. It is interesting to note that Barry was candid about the LA having refused consent for two schools. He did not, however, mention that the recently-established school in Aberystwyth had also been much debated on the grounds of sustainability and, more particularly, its location. Both were factors which would re-emerge in the discussions of the proposed school in Aberdeen.

Some behind the scenes manoeuvring now took place, directed in a subtle way from the Library Association's headquarters in Ridgmount Street, London. Barry immediately contacted his Scottish counterpart, Neil McCorkindale, enclosing the entire correspondence with Dr Bulmer and asked him to solicit the opinions of the Council of the Scottish Library Association on the proposed school in Aberdeen. McCorkindale placed the whole matter before the Council's Sub-Committee on Staffing and Educational Matters which met in Glasgow on 29 December 1965. The minutes of the meeting noted that there were *"at present 173 established posts for qualified librarians in Scottish Public Libraries. To meet an annual turn-over of 20% would require on 35 qualified librarians each year and the estimated output of the Scottish School (from 80 to 100 a year) would seem to be sufficient"*.¹³ The minute concluded by stating:

Despite the pressure for places at all library schools, including the Scottish School.....it was felt that in all circumstances the establishment of a school in Aberdeen could not be justified at this stage. Further, if a second school of librarianship was to be established in Scotland, the Sub-Committee was doubtful if Aberdeen was the most suitable location.¹⁴

There were now two clear issues emerging. Firstly, there was the question of the supply of qualified librarians exceeding demand. There was real concern in Scotland that there simply were not enough professional posts in Scotland to justify a second school, in spite of the pressure on places which had become such an issue earlier in the year. The second question related to the suitability of Aberdeen. Although the SLA Sub-Committee (and indeed the LA generally) fully supported the idea of library schools being within Universities or central institutions such as Robert Gordon's Institute of Technology, there was a real anxiety about establishing a school in the north-east of Scotland, geographically removed as it was from the Central Belt of Scotland where more than two thirds of the Scottish population lived. Subsequently, Barry's concern about the size of staff and the breadth of curriculum would be added to these two anxieties.

On 12 January 1967, Palmer wrote to thank McCorkindale for an outline of the meeting and noted that the sub-committee's conclusions entirely coincided with his own Council.¹⁵ He was even more pleased when he received the actual minute of the meeting *"it ties up so completely with the views of that I expressed to Dr Bulmer when he called in to see me on Thursday, 20 January"*.¹⁶ From this, it can be inferred that Dr Bulmer, during his visit to Ridgmount Street, had been told of a lack of support for the notion of second school and about the

perceived unsuitability of Aberdeen as a location should a second school ever be established. It is clear that, in the early part of 1966, members of the Scottish Library Association Council were sympathetic to the concerns of the Library Association in London about the establishment of second school in Scotland. The *Annual Report of the Council* noted that “*despite the pressure for places all library schools, the establishment of a second school in Scotland could not be justified*”.¹⁷ The same report went on to express doubts that Aberdeen was the right location for the school. Interestingly, however, neither here nor in the existing archive of materials is any explicit reference made to the reason for Aberdeen being considered the wrong location. Perhaps no one wanted to say publicly that they considered it ‘too remote’ and ‘too far north’.

For a few months the issue seemed largely closed. However, Gerald Bulmer, encouraged by Marcus Milne, City Librarian of Aberdeen and others, had resolved to plough on with the idea. However, the catalyst for moving forward came, ironically enough, from William (Bill) Tyler, Director of the Scottish School of Librarianship in Glasgow. Writing on 13 April 1966 to Neil McCorkindale, he outlined the position of applications for that academic year. There were 249 applications for the Degree and ALA courses but only 80 places and 319 applications for the postgraduate diploma and only 30 places. He ends his letter by saying “*in view of these figures the Council [of the SLA] may wish to reconsider the question of the proposed school in Aberdeen*”.¹⁸ The matter came up two days later at the SLA Council on Friday, 15 April and it is likely that members from Aberdeen (led by Marcus Milne) reported this back to Dr Bulmer at Robert Gordon’s Institute of Technology. Then, two weeks later, on 27 April 1966, a quite extraordinary thing happened which took many by surprise. Robert Gordon’s Institute of Technology advertised two posts in the *Glasgow Herald*: a lecturership and a senior lecturership in librarianship. The advertisement gave notice that the Institute intended to start a full-time course in Librarianship in September 1966.¹⁹ It is almost certain that Bulmer had intended to do this long before Bill Tyler’s letter but the timing ended up being remarkably pointed.

In London, the news was met with some dismay. H.D. Barry, Secretary of the LA, immediately wrote a lengthy letter to the Scottish Education Department in which he outlined that the existing schools were encouraged to grow rather than establishing new ones and that there was “*a careful balance over the Kingdom as whole*”.²⁰ He went on to reiterate the figures that had been previously quoted about the number of graduates produced and the number of posts available and concluded that the University of Strathclyde was more than adequately catering for the demand. The point which was missed was that a large number of applicants (who met the entry criteria) had been turned away because of the limited number of places. The Library Association’s focus was largely on the number of posts available and ensuring adequate turnover; it was less concerned with the career progression of those who aspired to obtain professional qualifications but who were being turned away. On the same day, Barry also wrote, in somewhat frustrated tones to McCorkindale:

I have just learned from Mr Palmer that the proposal to set up a course in Aberdeen is being pressed by Dr Bulmer. The attitude of the Library Association has been made quite clear to Dr Bulmer, but I do not think he has been moved from his purpose.²¹

However, on the 9 May, Dr Bulmer backed down, albeit temporarily. Dr Alexander Law, HM Inspector at The Scottish Education Department convened a meeting with representatives of the Library Association, the School of Librarianship at the University of Strathclyde and Glasgow Corporation where RGIT’s course was discussed. As a consequence of this meeting, Dr Bulmer, agreed that, pending further investigation in to the number of librarians in Scotland, the proposed course would be postponed.²² In the meantime, a well-orchestrated campaign in support of the Aberdeen School was being mounted in the north of Scotland. This came to a head later in May when the North of Scotland Branch of the Scottish Library Association passed a motion “*deprecating the action of the SLA Council in opposing the establishment of a Library School in Aberdeen*”²³ It went on to note, somewhat provocatively, that “*elected members of a Council designed to protect the interests of librarians should not place obstacles in their way of this Central Institution [Robert Gordon] which is prepared to offer a career opportunity.*”²⁴

The background to this motion is interesting and the reasons for it are instructive. It was proposed by William Critchley, the Deputy City Librarian of Aberdeen who like his boss, Marcus Milne, was firmly behind the school as were almost all of the senior professionals in the north of the country. Both Milne and Critchley were fearful of what they perceived as the traditional “Central Belt bias” which affects many aspects of Scottish public life and which assumes, rightly or wrongly, that Edinburgh and Glasgow always dominate at the expense of other areas. Their particular fear was that if a second school were to be agreed upon it, the reservations about Aberdeen as the location would be so great that result would be in the establishment of a school in Edinburgh instead (and indeed Edinburgh had been mooted as a possible location). To an extent these concerns, north versus Central Belt (which still prevail) can be said to replicate, in miniature, the tension which exist between Scotland and London. There had already been examples of that tension in this case and these were, at points, to become worse in the coming year.

The upshot of this activity was that the SLA Council appointed three representatives to go to Aberdeen and to meet with both librarians and with staff from Robert Gordon’s Institute of Technology. The delegation consisted of Ralph Beer, Information Manager at British Hydrocarbon Chemicals at Grangemouth, Dugald MacArthur, Librarian of the University of St Andrews and FJ Guthrie, Deputy County Librarian of Perth. The visit took place on 20th June. In the morning session, they met with Dr Bulmer and other senior staff at RGIT and during this meeting the administrative arrangements for a school were discussed. Interestingly it was suggested that the school be a branch of the pre-existing School of Management Studies (something which, in fact, did not happen).²⁵ In the afternoon, there was a meeting with a number of senior librarians from the north of Scotland including McCall (Marine Laboratory), Saxon (UK Atomic Energy Authority, Dounreay in Caithness) and Paton (Aberdeen County Library) all of whom were supportive. Interestingly, there was no representative of the University of Aberdeen which, after the city and shire councils, was the biggest employer of librarians. This was because most of the senior library staff at the University believed “*there was no demand for a second school*”.²⁶

The final report of the delegation is a somewhat unsatisfactory document. The conclusions clearly state that there is a need for the school and that there were no administrative difficulties in it being part of Robert Gordon’s Institute of Technology and, ultimately, that “*the establishment of the school should no longer be delayed*”.²⁷ Yet, in places, the report strikes a discordant note; it states that “the North of Scotland knows it is even further behind than the Central Belt of Scotland in being able to provide the kind of library services to which the public.....is entitled”.²⁸ It also attempts in places to over-intellectualize the situation with lengthy quotes from the professional press and makes some comments about the number of women studying the subject, the marriage age and that as a consequence “*only a few years of service can be expected from many of the women*”.²⁹ A number of people saw this at the time. Robert Walker, who took over in 1968 as SLA Secretary noted:

I know they produced a report which accorded with our ideas, but frankly I have always thought it an illogical, undiplomatic document which apart from its conclusions has done more harm than good.³⁰

Interestingly, these comments appearing in a draft of a letter to Marcus Milne were edited out of the final version that was sent.

The report of the representatives was considered at the SLA Council Meeting on 4 October 1966. The main conclusion, that the establishment of the Aberdeen school should be no longer delayed, was endorsed by a vote with eighteen in favour and eight against. The same council meeting also reviewed the figures for admission to the Department of Librarianship at the University of Strathclyde; in 1966-67, 110 had been admitted from 319 applications. This applications to enrolments ratio indicated to council members that the establishment of the Aberdeen School was timely. However, the day before the SLA Council Meeting, Bernard Palmer wrote a pointed letter to it (although it is doubtful that this letter arrived in time for the debate at the Council). In it, he noted that if the SLA changed its opinion and supported the establishment of a second school then his own [Education] Committee would have to reconsider its position in due course. His own resistance to the idea is, however, clearly apparent in the final paragraph:

Can you really see any future alumni of this college rushing to take up jobs in the north of Scotland? Are they likely to find a job at Dounreay more attractive than Bill Tyler's successful students do? I fear that all the talk about providing a sufficiency of librarians in the north of Scotland is so much sentiment. ³¹

Then, in a somewhat irritated tone, Palmer added in pencil: *"there will have to be a considerable movement south if they are to find jobs"*. ³² Palmer's opinions accorded with the feelings of most members of the Education Committee. That committee resolved to express its disapproval of the Aberdeen School to the full LA Council (due of meet on 27 January 1967). Unfortunately, at this point, there was a breakdown in communications and this decision was not communicated back officially to Scotland until January 1967; a lapse of courtesy which enflamed the situation further. Marcus Milne, SLA President, encouraged Robert Walker, the Secretary, to *"make our protestations strong about the LA's failure to let us know officially about their Education Committee's decision and even stronger our protestations about that decision being made in spite of the SLA Council's recommendation"*. ³³

Insert figure 2 here



Figure 2: Marcus Milne, City Librarian of Aberdeen and one of the principal backers of the second school in Scotland. Image courtesy of Aberdeen City Libraries.

Marcus Milne (known as "Mr Aberdeen" because of his omnipresence in civic life) was a wily operator and he used one of his numerous contacts to establish exactly what had gone on in the Education Committee meeting. He had received a letter from W. Howard Phillips, Deputy City Librarian of Sheffield, and then spoke to him on the telephone. He discovered from this telephone conversation that this situation was not without precedent: *"He [Phillips] tells me that the LA opposed the Aberystwyth School but in spite of that the School was set up and the Education Committee are falling over themselves to praise it"*.³⁴ Milne also learned from Phillips that much of the opposition came from Lorna Paulin, the County Librarian of Hertfordshire and a former President of the Library Association: *"Miss Paulin was the chief opponent of the Welsh school, and she was the chief opponent of the Aberdeen one"*.³⁵ As a consequence of this, Milne tried to telephone Barry at the LA but was told that he was out; he left a strongly worded message with his secretary, telling her that the SLA was very angry about the whole thing and that Members of Parliament were being approached and that *"personally I would do everything possible to get the school started"*.³⁶ He also noted that the action of the Education Committee was contrary to the agreement between the SLA and the LA and that action would perhaps be taken on that as well. This meant opening the can of worms that was the articles of understanding between the two organisations and the relationship between the Scottish and British bodies. However, both Paulin and Palmer's reservations were actually about the standards of the proposed school and its potential dependency on too small a geographic catchment area.

However, Milne's irritation was shared by many others in the Scottish library community and was indicative of the tensions which often came to ahead when there was difference of opinion between Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom. On 27 January 1967, immediately

prior to the start of the LA Council Meeting, Charles Minto, the City Librarian of Edinburgh, tackled Callander and other members of the Education Committee. He made clear that the disapproval of the SLA recommendation was beyond the powers of the LA (as the SLA was an autonomous body) and that the decision would almost certainly lead to more serious action (the idea of the SLA breaking away entirely was being mooted as it had before and would again). As a result of this, Callander withdrew that part of the committee's minute expressing disapproval of the SLA. He also agreed to meet with representatives of the SLA before reporting back to the Education Committee. Palmer, therefore, wrote to Walker on 31 January to request that the SLA appoint two members of Council for this purpose. At this point, Thomas Drummond, the secretary of the Scottish Education Department (SED), became involved and invited the representatives of LA and SLA to meet with his department in early March. Both sides accepted this invitation; Robert Walker busied himself preparing the SLA's submission for this meeting and representatives were chosen.

In the meantime, Milne had managed to discuss the proposed Aberdeen School with representatives of the Scottish Education Department. Up to this point he had assumed that the meeting of LA, SLA and SED was intended to persuade the representatives of the LA Education Committee to approve the Aberdeen School. However, in a conversation with an officer of SED, he was relieved to discover that the Education Department was entirely satisfied that Aberdeen had all the necessary facilities for the School and that there was clearly a need for it. The meeting was, therefore, more about the long term needs of librarianship education in Scotland. It is doubtful that this interpretation of the meeting's purpose was ever communicated to the LA in London, for on the 6 February, Bernard Palmer, the LA's Education Officer, telephoned Robert Walker to suggest that the representatives of LA and SLA meet in the morning prior to the meeting with SED in order to present a *"united front"*.³⁷ The irony of this cannot have been lost on Walker. Nor was it lost on Milne, *"I cannot think why they imagine we have to meet the SED with a united front unless it is a face-save. The SLA and SED are already"*.³⁸

In spite of this newly-found spirit of co-operation, Marcus Milne's exasperation with the Library Association was made plain in a confidential letter to Walker, Secretary of SLA, on 3 February 1967. Although he noted that it was likely that Callander would withdraw opposition if it could be proved that the Aberdeen school was viable and would not result in taking students from elsewhere, he remained frustrated with the behaviour of the Education Committee. The saga of the Aberdeen library school had highlighted division between the LA and the SLA and, for Milne, it was symptomatic of a wider malaise: *"whatever the outcome of the Aberdeen School, I still feel that the SLA should seriously consider a break with the LA."*³⁹ He was particularly vexed by the role of the LA Education Committee in the affair. Ten years before the 'West Lothian Question' emerged in Parliament, Milne was rehearsing it, but in reverse, when he noted *"...it is quite ridiculous that the Borough Librarian of Croydon (Callander) should be in a position to decide the policy of the Scottish Education Dept., and this in fact is what it amounts to."*⁴⁰

He even went so far as to draft a motion for the Annual General Meeting of the SLA:

"That this Conference having no longer confidence that the agreement made between the Library Association and the Scottish Library Association and which became effective on 1st January 1931 is in the best interests of Scottish Librarians and Scottish Librarianship resolves that the said agreement should be terminated as from 1st June 1968 (or 31st December) 1968".⁴¹

He concluded the letter noting that it was his belief that Scotland had 'everything to gain' by such a move. He noted that some of the 'diehards' might object but pointedly commented that even they would have great difficulty in proving that the Library Association had done anything to justify continuing with the agreement. Walker was more cautious in his reply suggesting that a closer examination of the terms of the 1930 agreement between LA and SLA was required before committing to a separation. In particular, Walker noted his annoyance that SLA was treated as (merely) a branch rather than an affiliated, but ultimately autonomous, association.

The events of the first months of 1967 are interesting on two accounts. Firstly, it is noticeable that there is an absence of any significant involvement from Robert Gordon's Institute of Technology in most of these discussions. The fight was largely being fought by the grandees of the Scottish Library Association and the name of Dr Bulmer, Principal of RGIT, or James Orr, the recently-appointed principal lecturer, are virtually non-existent in the extensive archive of correspondence. Secondly, it is interesting because of these early manifestations of Scottish nationalism. Milne was certainly no nationalist – he remained very much the former Wing Commander that he had once been – but he was a strong advocate of the interests of Scottish libraries and he was convinced that they were not always the same as those elsewhere in the United Kingdom. It is enlightening to see his frustrations with London displayed with such candour in his often indiscreet correspondence with Robert Walker. It was perhaps an indication of things to come as devolution steadily climbed up the political agenda. Interestingly, many of the issues that Milne raised – albeit perhaps in a fit of pique – continue to rumble on today, nearly fifty years later.

There was much discussion at an emergency council meeting of the SLA as to who should be the representatives at the meeting. Ralph Beer, the librarian and information officer at British Hydrocarbon Chemicals Limited at Grangemouth was selected as it was felt he represented the younger breed of professionals and because of his expertise in the special library sector. This was an interesting interpretation as Beer was approaching sixty but it is true he represented what was perceived as being a “non-traditional” sector. The others in the troika were J.W. Cockburn, Depute City Librarian of Edinburgh and W.B. Paton, the County Librarian of Lanarkshire. Milne was pleased with Beer's inclusion – in spite of his role in the report of the previous summer – but, characteristically, he was indiscreet about the fact that he was less enamoured of the others: “*it was disappointing to land with W.B.P. [as] one of our deputation and I am none too sure of Jim Cockburn*”.⁴² Milne's concern about the latter must surely have been derived from there having been talk of a school in Edinburgh and a fear that Cockburn, as Depute Librarian of the capital, might prevaricate in the meeting with the LA.⁴³ Robert Walker, the SLA Secretary was more concerned with Beer's inclusion because of his concerns that the report he had produced was “illogical” and “undiplomatic”.⁴⁴ The representatives from the Education Committee of the Library Association were to be T.E. Callandar, chairman of the Committee, Eric Clough and Edward Dudley.

Eventually, the meeting was agreed for Thursday, 2 March 1967 and, at 11am that morning, the two sides came face-to-face in the office of Charles Minto, City Librarian of Edinburgh. Callandar made clear that his committee did not find the report of the Council representatives who visited Aberdeen in June 1966 particularly convincing. However, he made clear that this should not be taken as opposition to the establishment of a second Scottish school *per se* nor was it necessarily opposed to its location in Aberdeen. Indeed, he made clear that this was a matter entirely for the Scottish Library Association and Scottish Education Department.⁴⁵ This rather contradicted Milne's previous assertion about the Borough Librarian of Croydon deciding on Scottish education policy. Paton assured the LA representatives that Aberdeen had all the facilities to establish a school of high standard. This came as a surprise to Milne, albeit a welcome one because he was concerned that Paton did believe a second school would result in the over-production of librarians. He also suspected Paton of having a Central Belt bias.

Callandar did, however, raise two issues that remained of concern to the Education Committee. Firstly, he raised the forthcoming Department of Education and Science report on the future staffing needs of libraries throughout the United Kingdom; he indicated that it was likely to show the need for the expansion of librarianship education but was cautious about promoting the establishment of new schools until the report was published. The SLA representatives pointed out that Scotland could not merely be regarded as part of the United Kingdom in this respect and that there was a particular issue in terms of training and education north of the border. In addition, of course, the Department of Education and Science's *Report on the supply and training of librarians* which appeared the following year was specifically looking at England and Wales only.

The second point which Callandar raised was more problematic. He indicated that his committee did not believe that the school in Aberdeen would measure up to the standards expected; this principally related to the number of students that would be required to make

the course viable (forty was the bare minimum required) and the need for a staffing complement of four to six. This point was supported by Clough who said the “*successful schools could not be built of levels of local demand*”.⁴⁶ Edward Dudley also indicated that the status within the institution was very important and that the new school should rank as an independent department.⁴⁷ Both he and Clough also indicated that the smallest library school in England still managed to offer sixteen options as part of their curriculum.⁴⁸

These latter concerns were to form the crux of the day’s second meeting, at the Scottish Education Department. The meeting at St Andrew’s House was chaired by Dr J.G. Strachan who indicated approval for a course in Aberdeen with a minimum of ten student enrolments. Callander reiterated that his committee’s basic concerns were the nature of the school as proposed and the standards aimed at. The Education Committee were of the opinion that in order to ensure appropriate standards were met then a realistic intake number needed to be set. Milne voiced his confidence in Dr Bulmer, the Principal of Robert Gordon’s Institute of Technology, and indicated that, to-date, some fifty-nine enquiries had been received about the course and this was without any advertising and was sure that this would result in a viable enrolment. At the conclusion of the meeting, Clough indicated that the Library Association would “*willingly advise in any matters of administration or teaching*”⁴⁹ should the school be established in Aberdeen. Dr Strachan of the Scottish Education Department assured everyone present that if “*the Secretary of State [for Scotland] approved the introduction of a course, he would also ensure that all proper requirements for such a course would be met*”.⁵⁰ In his summing, up he undertook to examine fully the questions relating to the size of the student intake and the staffing requirements with the Principal of Robert Gordon’s Institute of Technology.

The minutes of this meeting, produced by Robert Walker, were accepted by everyone, although Marcus Milne, in his own inimitable fashion, had the most suggested amendments. One of the drafts returned to Walker from an unknown (but presumably Scottish) participant, notes against the reference to waiting until the publication of the report from the Department of Education Science on the library workforce, “*I don’t recall we agreed to this proviso*”.⁵¹ However, the statement remained in the final version.

On the 10 April 1967, Thomas Drummond of the Scottish Education Department wrote to Robert Walker stating that “*after very careful consideration we have today approved the proposal to establish a two year course in librarianship at Robert Gordon’s Institute of Technology, Aberdeen. The intake of the course will, in the first instance, be restricted to a maximum of forty students*”.⁵² In the following September, sixty-one students became the first to study for Library Association Examinations at the new School of Librarianship which was located at Robert Gordon’s Schoolhill Campus.

It had been a lengthy and at times tortuous process but Scotland’s second library school had come to into being. It is interesting to reflect on the extent to which the debate surrounding the establishment of the school became mired in political and, indeed quasi-nationalist, controversy. In many respects, this debate was a metaphor for changing political landscape of the time in Scotland. The issues arose initially because there was a perceived problem with the levels of provision of professional education in Scotland and a desire, as Charles Black noted, to ensure that Scots could study for their chosen career in Scotland. In much of the surviving correspondence connected with this affair, there is a clearly apparent sub-text which displays frustration and irritation with people in London (no matter how honourable or legitimate their views might be) determining policy in Scotland. Marcus Milne’s comment about how ridiculous he considered it that the Borough Librarian of Croydon (T.E. Callander as Chairman of the LA Education Committee) should have the final say on Scottish education policy makes this point good and clear.

These views were very much in character with those of the time. The 1960s saw an increasing in Scottish nationalism (and indeed Nationalism). The decade saw Nationalists elected to the House of Commons and in the years to come the issues rehearsed by the Scottish Library Association and the UK Library Association would become an allegory for much of Scottish public life in the years to come. The sometimes intractable debate told in this story has been repeated in other spheres countless times since the 1960s and the tensions between Scotland and the United Kingdom continue to this day. The idea that one, British-wide, policy could fit

all was challenged in this case as it was to be in many others. Even moderate individuals, like Marcus Milne, could – as has been seen – adopt more nationalistic stances. His suggestion of the SLA severing ties with LA and that “*Scotland can run its own show*”⁵³ would be repeated within the library sector but would also be replicated in other parts of public life more generally

The second and equally significant issue was the enormous change in the nature of professional education that was going on during this period. Bernard Palmer had, during his tenure as secretary of the education committee, actively promoted the development of new schools, across the entire United Kingdom. He cannot, therefore, be held up as a villain trying to thwart the second school in Scotland. His reservations were entirely legitimate within the context of a British-wide policy. He was a keen promoter of the library school and, in particular, of giving them autonomy in respect of the curriculum and the examination with the Library Association maintaining a watching brief to ensure the maintenance of quality. However, as has been noted, the problem – as many of the Scots saw it – was with the very notion of this British-wide policy; in the estimations of people like Charles Black, Marcus Milne and Robert Walker that disadvantaged Scotland and failed to take into account any of its unique national characteristics: a debate which continues on many levels to this day.

Notes on contributor

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- ³ The School of Librarianship archive collection may be viewed by any other interested parties by contacting the author.
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- ²² E.S. Forrest, Scottish Education Department, letter to Neil McCorkindale, Secretary, Scottish Library Association, 2 June 1966.
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- ²⁵ Technically, in 2003, this did come about when the successor school, the School of Information and Media became the Department of Information Management, one of the constituent parts of Aberdeen Business School.
- ²⁶ Private Source.
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- ³¹ Bernard Palmer, Education Officer, Library Association, letter to Neil McCorkindale, Secretary, Scottish Library Association, 3 October 1966.
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