1888, BOSTON ATHENAEUM AND LIVERPOOL ATHENAEUM: THE HISTORIC SOCIETY AND OVERSEAS MEMBERS

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1988 sees the centenary of the first overseas member of the Historic Society – the Athenaeum of Boston, Massachusetts, U.S.A. In October 1888 the Boston Athenaeum was elected to Society membership, yet intriguingly just seven months before the Athenaeum of Liverpool also had been elected to the Society – forty years after the Society's foundation and ninety-one years after the Athenaeum's inception. Could there be any particular connection that linked the two institutions and the Historic Society in 1888?

The Athenaeum in Liverpool had been founded in 1797, the first such institution in Britain.[1] Presumably this arose out of the developing urban culture in the city during the second half of the eighteenth century. Aristocratic patronage of the arts and of learned societies was replaced by 'new men' of mercantile and manufacturing wealth.[2] The Liverpool Library had appeared during the 1750s with a membership of just more than one hundred, but by the 1790s this membership had reached nearly one thousand. From 1779–1783 there was a Philosophical and Literary Society which, in part, was replaced by the Athenaeum.[3] This new literary and scientific venture was supported by five hundred proprietors whose founder-members included some of the more radical Liverpool figures – William Roscoe, the first Vice-President, and James Currie, the infirmary surgeon.[4] The original Athenaeum was housed in a new building designed by John Foster in Church Street. This was used from 1800 until the present site in Church Alley was obtained in 1928, although some furniture and fittings were retained. Throughout the Athenaeum had

housed a substantial library which grew steadily during the nineteenth century through gifts and purchases. Eventually, more than seventy thousand manuscripts and books comprise the collection.[5]

From its foundation in 1630 Boston, Massachusetts, had grown by the end of the seventeenth century into a town with a fleet of ships ranking third in the English-speaking world. Not until the late eighteenth century did Philadelphia and New York overtake Boston in size, yet even so Boston's growth was sustained throughout the nineteenth century by diverse European immigration.[6] As a colonial city Boston had developed strong academic and literary interests with Harvard University on its doorstep at Cambridge (founded 1636). By the time of independence Boston was, and remained through the nineteenth century, the cultural centre of the United States. In 1780 the American Academy of Arts and Sciences had been founded there by John Adams, and other learned and philanthropic societies soon followed. The Massachusetts Historical Society of 1791 has the longest continuous operation of any American historical society.[7]

In this atmosphere, not surprisingly, an Athenaeum was incorporated in 1807 by members of the Boston Anthology Society. In an eight page circular dated 1st January, 1807, it was stated specifically that the proposed institution was to be 'similar to the Athenaeum and Lyceum of Liverpool in Great Britain'.[8] It was a proprietary institution of mainly professional men and merchants, which from the beginning laid great store on its library provision. By 1850 it exceeded fifty thousand volumes, one of the five largest libraries in America housing the William and Mary Library given to King's Chapel in 1698 by William III, Benjamin Franklin's encyclopedias and George Washington's books from Mount Vernon.[9] Indeed by the 1860s the Athenaeum building was seriously overcrowded and so, together with Harvard College and Massachusetts Institute of Technology, founded the Museum of Fine Arts on a new site in Copley Square to house many of its artistic works. The Athenaeum had operated on several sites including Tremont Street and Pearl Street before purchasing a site for a new building in Beacon Street – designed by Edward Clark Cabot and opened in 1849.[10] During the mid-nineteenth century this building was much frequented by many Bostonian writers and scholars – Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, William Hickling Prescott and Nathanial

Hawthorne.[11] Gifts and generous book funds ensured the continuing growth of the library.[12]

By the nineteenth century Boston and Liverpool were in regular contact with each other such as through Enoch Train's line of packet ships – the White Diamond Line, the Black Ball Line, and the British and North American Royal Mail Steam Packet Company – the Cunard Company.[13] During the mid century sailing packets and sailing clippers dominated passenger traffic with the *Danial Webster* taking thirteen days and ten hours to cross from Boston to Liverpool on her maiden voyage in 1850. Steamers, such as those of the Dominion Line, improved on these times later in the century.[14] After the end of the War of Independence commercial links across the Atlantic had resumed and the American government established its first English consulate in Liverpool. James Maury, a Virginian, was appointed consul by President Washington in 1790 and served until 1830.[15]

Maury became a proprietor of the Athenaeum in Liverpool and was prominent from 1801 in developing the American Chamber of Commerce in the city. He presided over a meeting of fourteen Liverpool merchants already involved in American trade and they established a voluntary association designed to promote and facilitate their activities.[16] By the 1850s and 1860s membership was about fifty with quite active participation and strong financial backing continuing into the 1880s; the Stolterfoht family providing much leadership and support.[17] Such was the significance of this American Chamber of Commerce that it provided the welcome for each United States ambassador on his arrival in Britain, such as Charles Francis Adams from Boston in 1861 or J.L. Motley (the historian) who stayed at the Adelphi Hotel on his arrival in Liverpool in 1869.[18]

Nathaniel Hawthorne served four years, 1853–7, as American consul at Liverpool and his *English Notebooks* record something of his activities and his impressions of the city. He plainly disliked the climate, 'the abominable Mersey', and many aspects of Liverpool. Hawthorne was only too well aware of the regular contacts with Boston – the weekly red-funnelled Cunard steamer and the fortnightly Collins Line steamer, and two American ambassadors travelled through the city – James Buchanan in 1855 and George Dallas in 1856 in his period of office. In November 1856 Herman Melville stayed with the consul's family.[19] In view of his position and literary interests it is not surprising that

Hawthorne had been introduced to the Athenaeum only a few days after taking up his duties, and by January 1854 he had had brought to his attention the current session of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire and to the publication of the papers from the first session (1848). Hawthorne was evidently familiar with Joseph Mayer and his Egyptian collections.[20]

By the 1870s some of the founder members were still active in the Historic Society, for instance Joseph Mayer and Canon Hume, the then President, who had never been out of office (as President, Vice President or Honorary Secretary).[21] There must have always been personal links between the Society and Liverpool Athenaeum; Canon Hume was certainly an Athenaeum proprietor and at the Society's annual general meeting of 1877 the position of assistant secretary was filled by Mr. E. Londini 'well known in connection with the Athenaeum library'.[22] He was to be responsible for printing a new catalogue of the Society's library and must have worked with alacrity and competence because by the annual general meeting of 1878 it was reported that 'on no previous occasion for at least ten years has the property of the Society been in such satisfactory condition. The library is now a large and valuable one, though little used, and has been put in perfect order'.[23] Publication continued and on the appearance of Volume XXX of *Transactions* the *Daily Post* reported 'no comparison could be feared with any other provincial society in the United Kingdom'. Society membership was also healthy with twenty-one members elected during 1880 and 'from the addresses of these gentlemen it is evident that the Society is making its way into various parts of the counties'. Many members, however, were in arrears with their subscriptions![24]

This relatively rosy picture of the Society thirty years after its foundation may well be deceptive. Only a few years later in 1883 Council was being asked to consider 'what steps should be taken to place the finances of the Society on a better footing' and during 1884 a special general meeting had to be convened because of problems associated with the holding of meetings. Papers from previous years had to be used to compile *Transactions*.[25] This unsatisfactory situation continued into 1885 with the very late appearance of *Transactions*, despite the agreement of the Prime Minister, W.E. Gladstone, to nomination as Vice President.[26]

During 1887–8 Society affairs revived somewhat with improved attendances at meetings, more satisfactory

finances and a policy of recruiting institutional members. Previously there had been only a handful of this type of member – Blackburn Library had joined in 1870, Chetham's Library in Manchester in 1879 and Burnley Literary and Scientific Club in 1881.[27] However, in 1888 a most successful campaign resulted in the Bodleian Library Oxford, the Lyceum Library Liverpool, the Free Library Darwen, Manchester Reference Library, Manchester University, St. Helens Public Library, and the Free Reference Library Lancaster all joining the Society – in addition to the Athenaeum Liverpool and the Athenaeum Boston, U.S.A.[28]

Perhaps George T. Shaw is the connection who provided this first overseas member. He had become sub-Librarian at the Liverpool Athenaeum in 1882 and then succeeded as Master and Librarian in 1888. In the same year Thompson Wadkin, the Historic Society's Honorary Librarian, died and was succeeded by George T. Shaw.[29] As librarian to both institutions perhaps understandably he promoted the Athenaeum's application for membership. Whether Mr. Shaw had further direct contact with Boston is not known, but he must have supposed the Athenaeum there a membership possibility. During the 1880s the Boston Athenaeum's librarian was C.A. Cutter. A Library Committee of nine shareholders remained mostly constant during this period and they and the librarian made significant efforts to introduce new rules for the administration of the library, for the management of the library and reading rooms, and to cope with outstanding library loans.[30] By 1888 this Library Committee consisting of Messrs. Cabot, Parkman, Lothrop, Stockton, Hill, Gray, Lowell, Shattock and Winthrop had certainly demonstrated an active interest in their library but whether any of them or their librarian had direct contact with the Liverpool Athenaeum, the Historic Society or George T. Shaw remains unrecorded. The Boston Athenaeum's letter file contains nothing of relevance; for the present the direct link remains elusive.[31]

The American connection, however, was reinforced in the next few months with the election to membership of Mr. John Calvin Crane of West Millberry, Massachusetts, Mr. William Bispham of 12 Eighteenth Street West, New York and in 1889 of Boston Public Library.[32] John Crane was involved in the tobacco and wool trade at Boston, but also had extensive historical and topographical interests including expeditions to determine the head of the Mississippi River.[33] The revival of the Historic Society during 1888 was

recognized locally and in April 1889 the *Courier* reported that 'the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire has given renewed evidence of vitality by the publication of a new volume of *Transactions* being the fourth added within the last two years'. The society had laboured 'for some time under a cloud' but had emerged successfully from its 'temporary state of seclusion' – with two venerable institutions as new and continuing members.[34]

NOTES

1 The Athenaeum in London did not appear until 1824. F.H. Taylor, *Liverpool and the Athenaeum* (Liverpool, 1965), pp. 12–19. H.R. Tedder, *The Athenaeum 1824–1924* (London, 1924), p. 6.
2 C.P. Darcy, *The Encouragement of the Fine Arts in Lancashire, 1760–1860*, Chetham Society, 3rd series, XXIV (1970), pp. 1–7.
3 *Ibid.*, pp. 21–23.
4 Taylor, *Liverpool and the Athenaeum*, pp. 12–19.
5 *Ibid.*
6 W.M. Whitehill and N. Kotker, *Massachusetts* (New York, 1976), pp. 3–9.
7 *Ibid.*, p. 12.
8 Quoted in Report of the Director and Librarian for 1984, Boston Athenaeum, 1985, p. 8. The Athenaeum in Boston is the oldest institution in the United States to carry this title consistently. The Athenaeum in New York was founded in 1824.
9 Whitehill and Kotker, *Massachusetts*, p. 12. M.C. Hansen, 'Brahmin Boston Preserved', *The New York Times*, 14 July, 1985.
10 Whitehill and Kotker, *Massachusetts*, p. 13. J.S. Knowles, *Change and Continuity, A Pictorial History of the Boston Athenaeum* (Boston, 1976), *passim*.
11 Hensen, 'Brahmin Boston Preserved'.
12 A. Wadsworth, *The Boston Athenaeum: A Reader's Guide* (2nd edition, Boston, 1981), *passim*. Report of the Director and Librarian 1984, pp. 11, 38, 40. Today Boston Athenaeum library contains over six hundred thousand titles and receives over five hundred periodicals. Women were admitted to membership in 1829 and there are now just over one thousand proprietors, with also life members and guest researchers.
13 Whitehill and Kotker, *Massachusetts*, p. 11. M. Maddocks, *The Atlantic Crossing* (Amsterdam, 1981), p. 81. G. Chandler, *Liverpool Shipping* (London, 1960), pp. 109–111.
14 F.E. Hyde, *Liverpool and the Mersey* (Newton Abbot, 1971), p. 97. Chandler, *Liverpool Shipping*, pp. 114, 121.
15 Bureau of Public Affairs, U.S. Department of State, Washington, D.C.
16 W.O. Henderson, 'The American Chamber of Commerce for the Port of Liverpool, 1801–1908', *THSLC*, 85 (1935), pp. 1–4. Chandler, *Liverpool Shipping*, pp. 108–109.
17 Henderson, 'The American Chamber of Commerce', pp. 4–9.
18 *Ibid.*, pp. 23–25.

19 N. Hawthorne, *The English Notebooks*, ed. R. Stewart (New York, 1962), pp. 4, 9, 21, 99, 265, 280, 384, 432–434.
20 *Ibid.*, pp. 6, 45, 59, 547.
21 Liverpool Record Office, Minutes of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, Vol. IV, 1869–1887, p. 260.
22 *Ibid.*, p. 233.
23 *Ibid.*, p. 260.
24 *Ibid.*, pp. 268, 339.
25 *Ibid.*, pp. 376, 378.
26 *Ibid.*, pp. 394–396.
27 *Ibid.*, p. 334.
28 Liverpool R.O., Minutes of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, Vol. V, 1887–1901, pp. 24–26.
29 Information kindly provided by Mr. A.L.M. Cook, Chairman of Library Sub-Committee, The Athenaeum, Liverpool.
30 The Athenaeum, Boston, Records of the Trustees, Vol. V, 1880–1903, pp. 23, 28, 38.
31 *Ibid.*, p. 152.
32 Liverpool, R.O., Minutes of the Historic Society, Vol. V, pp. 28, 34. From 1888–9 American membership strengthened with the Newberry Library Chicago joining in 1893, the New York Public Library in 1897, and the Library of Congress in 1905 until by the present there are 53 American members and 14 other overseas members of the Historic Society.
33 *Who's Who in New England*, ed. A.N. Marquis (2nd edition, Chicago; 1916), p. 285.
34 Liverpool R.O., Minutes of the Historic Society, Vol. V, p. 45.