

# Civic Universities and Community Engagement in Inter-war England

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## Abstract

The new universities chartered at the beginning of the twentieth century have been designated the civic universities in recognition of the support they received from, and the services they rendered to, their local communities. Some historians have argued, however, that through the first half of the century, they drifted away from local concerns to become more occupied with pure research and national and international academic priorities. This article considers the question of the civic universities' disengagement from the community through an analysis of the activities of Liverpool University between the wars. There is abundant evidence of sustained and systematic attempts to engage with the community with no indication of any diminution during the period. One can, however, identify trends which tended to divorce the university from the community, primarily through the efforts to establish a discrete student experience.

The common designation of the new universities of the turn of the twentieth century as the civic universities captures an important sense of their distinctive origins and purpose. Founded in the great industrial and commercial cities of Victorian England, they derived considerable sustenance from their localities. Industrial, commercial, professional and other civic bodies offered moral and material support, sometimes drawing rate-payers into the orbit. In return, the universities offered technical and vocational training for the professional classes, plus liberal education for the cultured and leisured. They developed specialisms relevant to their urban economic base, offering advice, consultancy or original research to neighbouring firms, and expert services to local authorities. In the first decade of the century, the principal institutions were recognised as fully autonomous universities with an innovative role and mission.

Reviewing their progress through the first half of the twentieth century, however, the distinctive role of the civic universities has been called into question. There is a strong view that, whatever the initial differences, British universities tended towards a relatively uniform pattern, dictated by the dominant Oxbridge model.<sup>1</sup> The ways in which the newer universities are held to have copied the ancient ones is often depicted in somewhat narrow terms, primarily as the move away from an emphasis on technical and vocational activity towards a greater concentration on a more liberal curriculum and fundamental research. This overstates the vocational character of the new universities, which always had a significant tradition of liberal education.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, the argument remains that the new universities tended to neglect their distinctively civic mission in steadily copying Oxbridge norms. The creeping effects of this transformation are captured in the notion of academic drift, implying a greater emphasis on disinterested scholarship, liberal education and the aspiration to national standards of academia rather than service to a locality. There are different views as to its timing; whether it was already underway in the late nineteenth century, that it was mainly taking place in the Edwardian period, the 1930s, or that it only really took hold during the 1960s. Against that, historians whose focus is specifically on the civic

universities have been more sympathetic. Armytage referred to them as ‘community service stations.’<sup>3</sup> Sanderson is one of the staunchest defenders of the civic tradition, although he too notes a shift away from technical studies by the 1930s.<sup>4</sup> Barnes and Morse identify a continuing civic tradition during the interwar period, although they too suggest that distinctiveness was lost as the civics came to copy the dominant Oxbridge ideal.<sup>5</sup> One of the key factors cited as a cause of this drift is the increasing preoccupation with liberal academic research. The uncertainty about the role and nature of the provincial universities was recognised at the time, with mounting criticisms from the 1930s, culminating in the fulminations against ‘Redbrick’, and a sense of a crisis in the university.<sup>6</sup>

Summarising, there is a prevailing view that the new universities lost much of their traditional civic ethos during the first half of the twentieth century, a transition at least underway by the 1930s. Although seldom couched explicitly in terms of community engagement, the argument that there was a move away from local concerns towards national, academic priorities suggests a growing disengagement from the community. The purpose of this study, then, is to examine the nature and extent of the new universities’ engagement with their local communities during the interwar period. What forms did engagement take? Can we assess how extensive it was, and is there any evidence of a slackening during the 1920s and ‘30s? Can we evaluate whether the universities remained committed to a civic mission? To address these issues specifically, the focus will be on Liverpool University, arguably the most civic of the new institutions, but not out of character with the rest.<sup>7</sup> We also need a way of identifying community engagement and distinguishing it from merely serving the locality. It is clear that, until after the Second World War, all of the provincial universities were predominantly local institutions, in that the vast majority of their students were drawn from about a thirty mile radius.<sup>8</sup> Offering courses to local students, however, is not the same as engaging with the community. Nor is it necessarily sufficient that university departments offer training or research that could benefit local interests. A more stringent interpretation is required, one that goes well beyond the lecture hall to seek for evidence of a sustained and systematic attempt by the university to engage with the local community.

The principal source used to look for this evidence is the annual reports of the university, taken at intervals from the first post-war academic year 1919 / 20, to the year 1935 / 36.<sup>9</sup> Each annual report comprises summaries of reports from the Council of the University, the Vice-chancellor, and from the various Faculties and Departments. They constitute a public statement of the work of the university, which offers a convenient summary of what was done each year, plus an indication of underlying principles and priorities. This evidence is supplemented by a systematic survey of press cuttings for one academic year in the middle of the period.<sup>10</sup> We shall begin with a survey of official views as stated by the Vice-chancellors, followed by a review of the range of expert services and cultural offerings made by university staff. Before assessing what this amounts to, we must consider evidence for a move away from civic engagement. Overall, it is maintained that there was a systematic and sustained attempt by the university to engage with the city and community of Liverpool, but there were clear movements emerging during the period that tended to undermine this involvement.

## Official Engagement

This section considers some of the ways in which the university as an institution positioned itself with respect to the community. An important element of this is the rhetoric used by the Vice-chancellors. Through the inter-war period there were two main occupants of the role. Alfred Dale, the long-standing incumbent who had overseen the foundation of the university, stood down at the end of the war and was replaced by George Adami. When he retired through ill health, his place was taken by Hector Hetherington who served until 1936. He was succeeded by two short-term replacements, so effectively it was Adami and Hetherington who set the tone. Both used the annual reports to make programmatic statements about the nature, direction and orientation of the university. Under this heading, we can consider some of the more formally established channels of contact between the university and the wider population, through extension work and WEA tutorials. There was also an important settlement movement in Liverpool connected with the university. Although often decidedly informal, it is worth looking here at the work of high-ranking university officials, especially the Vice-chancellor, in meeting with local and community organisations, most notably schools.

The first annual report of the post-war period was written by Dale whose immediate concern was to re-launch the university after the difficult war-time years. Student numbers were rising, fuelled by ex-servicemen, but staffing, buildings and facilities needed to be made good after years of neglect and deterioration. Obviously more funds were required, so an appeal for £300,000 was launched and Dale looked to the people of Liverpool to 'once again come to the assistance of the University at a critical period.'<sup>11</sup> He made a point of making public some of the war work the university had conducted, which had hitherto been shrouded in secrecy, especially chemical research and the inspection of millions of tons of explosives. '[T]he time has come', he announced 'for the citizens of Liverpool to take a just and honest pride in the doings of their own University.'<sup>12</sup> The refrain was taken up the following year in the first report of the new Vice-chancellor Adami. Despite the increase in students, the university was in deficit and Adami pursued all avenues to raise funds; representations had been made to the government, the city had increased its contribution by 50%, and fees had risen by a third. The principal focus, however, was the public appeal, its target now raised to £1 million and a professional fund-raiser hired to drive it forward. Local businesses were called upon to support the university in the way that philanthropic merchants of previous ages had endowed the ancient universities. Ultimately, however, it was the people of Liverpool who had to be persuaded of the value of the university. 'If every man and woman in the district can realize that in the University lies, next to the Mersey which made the city, Liverpool's greatest asset, and greatest glory, then all will be accomplished.'<sup>13</sup> Reciprocally, the university could not worthily serve the community unless it had the funds.

Although clearly connected to the public appeal whereby eloquent rhetoric was designed to persuade people to part with their cash, Adami made the most fully articulated and far-reaching statement about the local relevance of the university and academic independence.<sup>14</sup> While acknowledging the importance of state grants, he was wary of too much dependence on government. He feared that teaching staff would become civil servants who would be more inclined to teach that which had official approval. There was a danger of Prussianization and a servile professoriate, which had so debased the German academic profession during the war. Adami gave a specific example of the proposal by the chief Medical Officer of Health for full-time professorships in medical subjects. Although still an experiment, the government had

offered funds to provide such posts, with the likely result that the experiment would become a *fait accompli* before being properly tested. Even in the midst of financial crisis, Adami preferred to look to the locality than rely too much on state funding.

The more we in Liverpool can help ourselves, the less we have to depend on national aid . . . the more sensitive and more responsive will we be to local needs, the greater will be the service we can render to Liverpool, to Lancashire and the surrounding district.<sup>15</sup>

No doubt Adami was couching his appeal to suit his audience, but there is a genuine sense of the necessity of close interaction between university and locality.

Local bodies were not insensible of the appeal, although a general application coming during the post-war depression was unpropitious timing and only about £300,000 of the £1 million hoped for was realised.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, Adami believed that a great deal of good had been achieved besides the material returns. In addition to the general appeal, individuals continued the tradition of great personal generosity towards the university. Each report catalogued the contributions, of money or kind, made during the previous year. By way of example, £20,000 came from the will of William Prescott for a Chair in Veterinary Medicine and in the same year there were several smaller donations which added to the endowments of the Chair of Organic Chemistry to help increase the income of the holder.<sup>17</sup> Later in the period, a very substantial donation of £100,000 from H. C. Cohen went towards a new library.<sup>18</sup> A special note was made of W. Harding, who had recently died. Late in life, he had discovered the university as an object of philanthropy and made a number of donations to help improve student facilities, including £5,000 for a new gymnasium. Corporate contributions remained important, with a project for a new chemistry building costing £50,000 promptly attracting £20,000 from local firms: £10,000 from ICI, £5,000 from Bibby's and £3,000 from Pilkington's.

Local authorities also featured more prominently in financial considerations. The City of Liverpool responded quickly to the post-war appeal, increasing its grant by half.<sup>19</sup> A series of receptions was planned for representatives from Liverpool and district to visit the university to gain a better insight into its work.<sup>20</sup> Greater effort was made to reach out to a wider range of local authorities who might regard Liverpool as their nearest university and grants were received from across Merseyside, south central Lancashire and from the Isle of Man.<sup>21</sup> In 1935/36 a co-ordinated appeal was made by the universities of Liverpool and Manchester to Lancashire and Cheshire County Councils, which resulted in both councils doubling their grants for university education. There was still cause for criticism, however. Despite the increases, there was little systematic rate aid. Only Bootle County Borough gave a fraction of a 1d rate and the university was disappointed that, in this respect, it enjoyed less local authority support than other universities.<sup>22</sup> Over the period, grants from local authorities grew from £19,655 in 1923/24 to £26,758 in 1934/35, representing a small increase in the proportion of the university's income from 10.1% to 10.8%.<sup>23</sup>

In common with other universities, Liverpool had more formal means of communication with the wider community through extension work. Although obviously an important aspect of engagement, less will be said about it here because it was an expected and organised activity. Arguably, extension schemes actually ghettoised such work, which is why this study focuses more attention on other aspects. Nevertheless, it is important to note what was achieved under this rubric. There were two main forms, university extension lectures of a more popular and *ad*

*hoc* nature, intended primarily for public interest and entertainment, whereas WEA tutorial classes were more systematic and demanding, in principle leading to access to the university. At Liverpool, the period started with separate organising boards for the two kinds of work operating under a joint committee. Extension lectures enjoyed a surge in the post-war years. In 1923/24, lecture courses were arranged at 27 centres in conjunction with local organisations.<sup>24</sup> The Extension Board also arranged lectures for Poor Law Board officials preparing for exams and in geography for secondary school teachers. In all some 267 lectures were given, plus Christmas holiday lectures for boys and girls. The number of tutorial classes, however, was reduced to 36 because of economic circumstances, but there were 997 on the rolls. Over the period, the extension lectures declined noticeably. By 1931/32, although held at more centres, only 144 lectures were given.<sup>25</sup> With economic difficulties reducing both individuals' surplus income and local authority grants, plus the expansion of alternative forms of leisure, there was less demand for traditional extension type lectures. Offsetting this, there was an increase of lectures to secondary schools and technical colleges. While *ad hoc* lectures declined, there was greater demand for more serious instruction and courses of lectures. Tutorial work now led the way supervising 63 classes from Barrow to Crewe, reaching 1,318 students.

Another more organised point of contact was the Liverpool University Settlement, which became an important city institution between the wars.<sup>26</sup> Although the university did not own or run the settlement, it did have an important role in its supervision. Of 18 members of the settlement committee, the Vice-chancellor was chairman, the President of the University Council an ex-officio member, and Senate, Convocation, and the School of Social Science each had rights to nominate a member. The historian of the Liverpool Settlement suggests that connections with the undergraduate body were less developed than elsewhere although, up to 1938, 120 out of a total of 230 residents had degrees. The settlement found its main partner in the David Lewis Hotel and Club, a charity established by the founder of Lewis's department store and this perhaps helps to account for the limited engagement with the university. In our period, however, there were two important combined initiatives. During the slump of the early 1930s, an appeal was made from the settlement to university staff to offer lectures to unemployed men. A distinctive problem in the commercial economy of Liverpool was the number of black-coated workers, minor clerks, who were also victims of the depression. Hetherington personally supported the scheme and there was a generous response. As well as lectures of general cultural or current affairs interest, there were classes of direct commercial value, for example in languages, and attempts to place the unemployed in actual jobs. Another important relationship came through the industrial and social surveys of Liverpool conducted by Caradog Jones, in association with the settlement.<sup>27</sup>

On the general subject of social and charitable work, it is worth mentioning the student RAG events. Usually the occasion for high spirits, bordering on anarchic horseplay, the traditional parade and inventively threatening exhortations to give to charity were generously and indulgently reported in the press.<sup>28</sup> During her office as Lord Mayor, Miss Jessie Beavan hosted two receptions for students to help cement relationships between the university and the city. Her reward was being taken hostage on RAG Day and only released on payment of a ransom, which she accepted in good part. The money raised went towards an operating table for the open-air children's hospital, which was also reported. **Not surprisingly**, the university's collection of press-cuttings reveals little sense of friction between the undergraduate body and the city, although Hetherington more than once defended his students, perhaps indicating

residual tensions. In his valedictory report, he observed that they may be high-spirited, but they were also serious in purpose. Most were local and deserved, acknowledged and justified 'what the generosity of Liverpool citizens had provided for them.'<sup>29</sup>

Hetherington himself was indefatigable in his efforts to reach out to the wider community, notably in the large number of school prize-givings and speech days he spoke at.<sup>30</sup> In the midst of a particularly hectic period, the local paper commented on the fact that he had given four different speeches at four schools in eight days, plus addresses to the Boys' Association and the WEA.<sup>31</sup> This wasn't the full story; between 8<sup>th</sup> November and 14<sup>th</sup> December 1928, Hetherington spoke at 6 different schools, an indication of the importance he attached to this work. Obviously, it was important for the university to maintain good relationships with its hinterland, especially when income depended heavily on local sources, whether philanthropic or from the rates. It would be wrong, however, to see this as simply a pecuniary interest; the public pronouncements made great emphasis on the fundamental significance and value of connections with the community. At no stage did the university seek to devalue, or distance itself from, the locality.

### **Expert and Professional Engagement**

One of the main ways by which a university could engage with its community was through providing expertise, difficult or impossible to find elsewhere. This is probably the most common understanding of how the civic universities served the community and why they enjoyed the support of local industrial and commercial concerns.<sup>32</sup> We need to look for more than just a generalised connection, however. A philanthropic industrialist might find a convenient object for his generosity in making a donation to a department that had some relevance to his firm, but this does not necessarily denote regular and routine engagement. There is plenty of evidence, however, that most of the professional and vocational departments did have significant and well-established connections with neighbouring establishments. The Faculties of Medicine and Engineering especially required close co-operation with outside agencies to provide proper professional training and experience of real working situations. They also offered expert services to hospitals, firms and local authorities, commanding a virtual monopoly on some activities. It was not just a one-way relationship, however, and there were numerous occasions where outside bodies provided valuable services to the university. Liverpool also had a dynamic Department of Architecture, which operated in similar ways, but connections in the Faculty of Science were less pronounced.

An extremely important component of the work of the Departments of Pathology and Bacteriology was the huge volumes of diagnostic work they performed. Bacteriologists in university medical schools had quickly dominated this lucrative market as the techniques were established at the turn of the century.<sup>33</sup> The two departments looked in different directions, pathology catering primarily for local hospitals, and bacteriology working mainly with the city public health authorities. For example, in the post-war years, a major pre-occupation was with VD. In 1918/19, pathology issued 2,500 reports to several hospitals under the VD Acts.<sup>34</sup> By the following year, this had increased to 4,169 reports on VD for the Royal Infirmary, plus 3,722 Wasserman reports, and 787 others, together with 388 miscellaneous reports for the Children's Infirmary.<sup>35</sup> The department feared that it simply could not keep up with the amount of routine work, which put pressure on space as well as time. Several rooms in the laboratory were allotted to the Women's Hospital where most of the work was done. The Clinical Pathologist to the Royal Infirmary and his staff were

also accommodated in the department, but a re-organisation in 1932 seemed to help things to run more smoothly.<sup>36</sup> Other medical departments came to provide diagnostic services through the period. Biochemistry offered more chemical investigations, amounting to 1,020 for the Royal Infirmary in 1923/24.<sup>37</sup> The Department of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology conducted a large amount of work for the city's Criminal Investigation Department.<sup>38</sup>

The Department of Bacteriology was more locked into the public health services, indeed the professor at times held the post of City Bacteriologist. It too was concerned with VD in the post-war years carrying out 3,242 examinations in an eight month period under the scheme of the Local Government Board.<sup>39</sup> In the same period, the department examined over 10,000 miscellaneous specimens for the city authorities. The following year, these figures had risen to 7,446 for the, now, Ministry of Health scheme plus over 24,000 specimens in total for the city.<sup>40</sup> In subsequent years, the gross numbers were not recorded, it merely being noted that '[t]he bacteriological work for the city has been heavy this year – many of the problems requiring prolonged investigation.'<sup>41</sup> In addition to the routine work, the bacteriologists were commonly asked to conduct special investigations. For example, the Professor of Bacteriology had found some plague-infected rats near the docks, which led to a systematic survey in conjunction with the Bacteriologist to the Ministry of Health.<sup>42</sup> A suspected anthrax infection of shaving brushes revealed 36% of brushes to be infected. The relationships were not all one way, and the city authorities frequently reciprocated in kind. In recognition of the work done by the Department of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology, the city coroner allowed students in the department opportunities for observation on cases.<sup>43</sup> Similarly, the Medical Officer of Health made facilities available at the abattoir for students on food hygiene courses in the Veterinary Department. At times, the assistant city bacteriologist and some of his staff actually helped out with the professor's practical classes.<sup>44</sup>

In rather different, although parallel, ways other departments of the medical school made concerted efforts to situate themselves at the centre of local practice and a source of expertise, while also making arrangements for improving facilities for students. The Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology consciously set out to make itself the fulcrum of all such work in the area.<sup>45</sup> Arrangements were made with the Maternity Hospitals and Royal Infirmary for notice of all operative work to be sent to the department, which would alert its students. In this way, more students were able to observe actual operations. A co-ordinated system was established with the City Council to ensure that the department provided for three municipal hospitals.<sup>46</sup> Catering for the public in a rather different way, the department re-established a public pregnancy diagnosis centre which proved 'of the greatest use to many.'<sup>47</sup> At the same time, the Veterinary Department was making similar initiatives. It was already a centre of agricultural advisory work, offering lectures and consultancy services.<sup>48</sup> An extra effort was made to connect with local veterinary practitioners, through the work of the advisory officers and through the establishment of a hospital, and a poor person's out-patient clinic. The Lecturer in Veterinary Hygiene was appointed official surgeon to the local greyhound track, which also enabled students to visit the racing kennels.<sup>49</sup>

Several of the medical departments made efforts to provide for the continuing training of qualified practitioners. The Board of Clinical Studies instituted a series of lecture-demonstrations aimed at local practitioners, which were well-attended to begin with, but then quite quickly trailed off.<sup>50</sup> An attempt was made to make the lectures more attractive and to publicise them more effectively, but little more is reported so it

does not seem to have continued. More successful was a similar scheme for dentists. A national initiative launched post-registration courses throughout the country, and Liverpool was invited to establish one. This was reported to have been thoroughly appreciated by those who attended and a second one was planned for the following year. The dental board also held an 'at home', which attracted about 150 former students.<sup>51</sup> On a less ambitious scale, the Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology allowed pupil and trained midwives into their museum where they offered informal demonstrations.<sup>52</sup>

In the other main vocational area, departments in the Faculty of Engineering were assiduous in cultivating relationships with local employers, to provide real practical experience, to place graduates in positions, and to provide a forum for discussion and sociability. Two schemes which continued throughout the period were to arrange visits to works, and work placements.<sup>53</sup> The former usually took place during the Easter vacation and involved visits to private engineering companies, shipbuilders and municipal installations. Placements were usually offered over the summer and could be routine positions, or more investigative projects. An 1851 Exhibition Scholar was supported by two local shipping lines to visit shipyards throughout the country and then to embark on a voyage to observe the behaviour of ships at sea.<sup>54</sup> The employment prospects of students was a regular feature of the faculty's reports, reassuring readers of the continuing demand for engineers in difficult times.<sup>55</sup> An advisory committee of electrical engineers met with representatives from firms, who commented on the high quality of graduates. Similarly, the mechanical engineers noted the number of applications they received from employers seeking students for research, administrative and commercial positions.<sup>56</sup> In recognition of his interest in the careers of graduates, P. J. Robinson, Electrical Engineer to the City Council was invited to become a member of the faculty.<sup>57</sup> At the other end of the process, members of the faculty were keen to offer advice to schools on opportunities in engineering. Prof. Bannister was appointed president of the North-Western Branch of the Science Masters Association, which gave him an opportunity to advise on appropriate preparation, the facilities offered by the faculty and the prospects for graduates. Lectures were given at the municipal technical school, and school parties also visited the laboratories.<sup>58</sup> Architecture was located in the Faculty of Arts, but operated in similar ways to other vocational areas. Staff did consultancy work in the area, designing stalls for the Mersey Docks and Harbour Board, or a new church for the Diocese.<sup>59</sup> In return, the city engineer gave lectures in civic design and the Town Hall exhibited student posters.<sup>60</sup> In the mid 1930s, there was an initiative to promote building education and the department established a materials gallery for the use of builders as well as architects, and hosted conferences for building organisations.<sup>61</sup>

There are much fewer references to external relationships from the Faculty of Science. One important initiative was the formation of a Tidal Institute in the Department of Mathematics in conjunction with the marine surveyor to the Mersey Docks and Harbour Board and the Bidston Observatory.<sup>62</sup> Records were examined to try to improve tidal prediction at Liverpool. Another nautical venture was the Department of Oceanography, which involved collaboration of interests between the Manx Government, the Western Sea Fisheries Committee and the Liverpool Biology Committee.<sup>63</sup> An advisory board was formed of representatives of these bodies with four professors from the university. Some terse comments a few years later suggested that the department was providing a service to the public although not in an entirely appropriate manner. Apparently, the marine station at Port Erin on the Isle of Man



derived a considerable portion of its income from tourists who paid to see the small aquarium they had established!<sup>64</sup> Other departments in the faculty carried out work of local relevance. Zoology did research on Irish Sea fisheries, Botany conducted surveys on the Wirral, and there were important interactions between the chemistry departments and local firms.<sup>65</sup> ICI supported research in the departments, and there was frequent exchange of staff between the university and chemical companies. Nevertheless, local interactions do not feature so highly and much of the work was not particularly local, but of general scientific value that happened to have local relevance. Perhaps by the nature of the subjects, it was difficult to make the connections in the ways that engineers or medics could.

Unexpectedly, one area which recorded almost no activity with local organisations was the Department of Law, yet it is difficult to imagine that there were no connections. Perhaps it was an issue of recording, but in the absence of evidence, one cannot comment further. This example, however, stands in marked contrast to the considerable evidence of engagement between all the other vocational departments of the university and outside agencies. Across a spectrum of professional training, practical experience, graduate employment, research, advice and consultancy, university staff were heavily involved in working with city organisations. Nor was it just one way; the city responded in many ways, providing facilities or expertise of its own.

### **Cultural Engagement**

It is probably to be expected that professional and vocational departments would seek external contacts. Real practical experience was a crucial part of training, which required connections with actual workplaces and employers. They might also be a useful source of income for a department; bacteriological examinations were not done for free, although payment might be in kind, such as making facilities available for students. Provincial universities, however, were also intended to act as beacons of culture and enlightenment in the industrial and commercial cities, so how far did Liverpool University offer cultural engagement? The principal medium was through a large range of free public lectures given by members of staff, usually at the university, although sometimes off-site. These did not lead to qualifications, they were not usually given as part of a systematic series, although some were, and seem to be delivered at the instigation of the lecturer, as a part of their acknowledged duties for the university and the community. University departments also hosted, sometimes taking a lead in, local scientific and cultural societies, which could be as much sociable as academic.

To appreciate the sheer diversity of topics, we could consider the lectures listed for one academic year, 1919 – 20.<sup>66</sup> Lascelles Abercrombie of the Department of Architecture gave a series of public lectures over two terms, which were well and steadily attended. Prof. Bosanquet and his colleagues Ormerod and Smiley delivered lectures on classical subjects to visiting school parties, which proved so popular they were repeated. A free course of lectures was offered by the Italian Department on ‘social and economic problems of modern Italy.’ The Professor of Philosophy, besides concluding a course of lectures for the WEA, felt it his duty to give lectures to surrounding communities in Waterloo, West Kirby and Wallasey. Nor were the scientists to be out done. Mr Rice gave a special course of nine lectures on Einstein’s principle of relativity, which were ‘highly appreciated.’ The Professor of Geology gave six public lectures on topical aspects, with an average attendance of about 200.

A course of lectures in oceanography was offered by the new professor, while the assistant lecturer held a series of classes for fishermen at Barrow. Four 'very successful' public lectures were given by members of the Faculty of Engineering. Although not listed for this year, later stalwarts of the public lecture programme were the Professors of Classical Archaeology and Egyptology, with topics such as 'the Hittite empire', 'Roman sculpture', 'Greek athletics', and the standby 'Egyptian history and archaeology', which 'proved more popular than ever'.<sup>67</sup> Members of the university were also popular as after-dinner speakers, with the Vice-chancellor a regular at meetings of the Rotary Club and the Liverpool Soroptimist Club.<sup>68</sup>

A quite distinctive offering at Liverpool was a number of special lectureships in areas not featured in the undergraduate curriculum. The two most regular ones were in music and the art of the theatre. In 1918, a group of well-wishers had attempted to establish a lectureship in music, but only realised enough funds for a temporary post.<sup>69</sup> The incumbent, A. W. Pollitt taught in the training college and gave a course of popular lectures for people from outside the university. At the end of the year, there was not enough to continue even this but a Mrs Alsop, who became the chief benefactor of the scheme, contributed £3,000 towards an endowment to promote the study and practice of music. With further contributions, a small committee was formed and a regular programme of occasional lectures was instituted.<sup>70</sup> The lectures were given in the Autumn term and were well reported in the press, with advance notice and a write-up of each one.<sup>71</sup> For example, the series for 1928 took as its theme 'the meaning of progress in music' and featured musical examples to support the lecture. The other most regular sequence was on 'the art of the theatre', which ran during the Winter term. This rather idiosyncratic subject reflected a keen interest by members of the university earlier in the century in promoting the Liverpool playhouse.<sup>72</sup> In return, the manager of the playhouse, Shute, supported the lectureship named after him. Several other special lectureships were begun at various times. One on poetry attracted Walter de la Mare, but only lasted a short time.<sup>73</sup> Later in the period, a special lectureship was begun on the Philosophy of Religion, perhaps an unusual departure for the university which comprehensively avoided theology as an undergraduate course. A series of six lectures on 'The historical background of the New Testament' suggests a suitably scholarly tone.<sup>74</sup> In keeping with the broad desire to expand cultural horizons, in 1936, the Pro-Chancellor C. Sydney Jones established an annual lectureship in Art to run for five years. There were to be public lectures on 'art and society' but also talks to students by the director of the city's Walker Art Gallery.

Besides public lectures, the university departments also served as hosts and supporters of local industrial, scientific and cultural organisations. In engineering, a branch of the Institution of Electrical Engineers was established, which met monthly and thrived throughout the period with attendances up to 200.<sup>75</sup> Members of the faculty acted, at times, as chairman and secretary to the branch. The engineering society of the local firm Automatic Electrical Company also held its meetings in the faculty.<sup>76</sup> A Metallurgical Society was established, which held its meetings at the university and arranged visits to works. There was a very well-supported student engineering society, which organised a series of speakers and visits to firms. The topics were not solely technical; at the nadir of the slump, J. R. Hobhouse from Messrs. Alfred Holt and Co. gave a talk on 'Labour Problems'.<sup>77</sup> Geology seemed to take its public duties very seriously, regularly reporting on its activities and noting that while being too pressed to carry out research, 'a certain amount of what may be termed propaganda work has been attempted.'<sup>78</sup> The department had a good

relationship with the Liverpool Geological Society. Staff acted as directors of the society's field trips, led visits to the new Mersey Tunnel and occasionally served as president. In return, the society deposited its collection of foreign periodicals with the department library.

Perhaps the most ambitious cultural organisation was the Summer School in Spanish, established by the professor, E. Allison Peers, soon after his arrival.<sup>79</sup> It was aimed partly at prospective applicants to the department, to get them up to scratch in a subject that did not feature highly in the school curriculum, but it was also suitable for teachers and for the wider public. There were linguistic and literary courses for different levels and more popular lectures on Spanish and Spanish-American life and letters.<sup>80</sup> The school settled in Santander and quickly grew in popularity; in 1929 there were 62 in residence, by 1932 there were 117.<sup>81</sup> Initially for two weeks, by 1936 there were three separate courses in July, August and September.<sup>82</sup> A further intensive course was established at the university, known as Hispanic Week, which became the foundation of the Institute of Hispanic Studies and was soon attracting nearly 1,500 members and 15 incorporated societies. Of rather more modest ambition, but notable nonetheless, was a Russian circle of about 50 members formed just after the war, which held meetings, including a concert of Russian folk music and dances.<sup>83</sup> A good example of how such cultural organisations were engendered is provided by Prof. Roxby of the Department of Geography. In 1932, he was invited to become part of a delegation from the British Universities' China Committee to attend a conference there.<sup>84</sup> On his return he gave a course of public lectures, which resulted in the formation of a Liverpool China Society to foster closer cultural relations. Apart from the special lectureships, there seems to be no system or organisation to all this activity, it simply seems to have been accepted, perhaps especially by the professors, as a part of the job.

### **Countervailing Tendencies**

Before we attempt some kind of assessment of what all the undertakings discussed so far amounted to, we should consider the evidence for countervailing movements. Are there any indications that academic drift was taking place at Liverpool University, or that the university and its staff were actively or passively disengaging from the community? One of the main arguments put forward is that during the inter-war period, staff at provincial universities became more interested in doing research, and that of an increasingly abstract and academic kind. Another suggestion is that there was pressure from central government bodies, especially the University Grants Committee, for provincial institutions to divorce themselves from local commitments and become more like Oxbridge. In this respect, a particularly important issue is the growing emphasis on the student experience.

Research was certainly regarded as important. In the immediate post-war years, it was regretted that the great increase of student numbers meant that research had been virtually abandoned. '[T]he professors and lecturers must have time for research and original work in the interests not only of research but also of good teaching.'<sup>85</sup> By the mid 1920s, as student numbers and the university's finances stabilised, time was found for research, especially the production of larger studies and books which, it was noted, had a better chance of reaching the wider public and so offering 'an indication of the extent to which the University is influencing thought in very various directions.'<sup>86</sup> Research work is highlighted most prominently in reports from the Faculty of Science. The departments of Botany and Zoology noted various

research projects, Oceanography continued work on tidal records. The Chemistry departments were most active with regular support from ICI, and funding for research studentships coming from the central government Department of Scientific and Industrial Research. Medics participated in the investigations of the Liverpool Cancer Research Committee. In Engineering, projects on insulating material, the calibration and standardisation of flow meters and annealing were recorded.<sup>87</sup> There is less indication of research activity in the Faculty of Arts, a situation famously castigated by Peers under his pseudonym Bruce Truscot.<sup>88</sup> He was a little unfair as several of the arts professors produced substantial works, although his own output was prodigious by comparison.<sup>89</sup>

While we might discern increasing attention devoted to research, can we regard it as superseding other activities? One approach to this question is to consider the nature of many of the projects, which were predominantly carried out in conjunction with outside bodies. For example, much of the work in oceanography was in connection with Merseyside maritime organisations to produce better tidal predictions. The research on insulating materials in engineering was tested at a nearby works and that on annealing at the request of local firms. Much of the routine bacteriological testing came to involve considerable investigative work. It is important to recognise that there is a spectrum of activity spanning post-graduate studies, routine analysis, consultancy and advice, collaborative projects and original research, which intersects with and feeds back on itself. To carry out research work does not at all imply neglect of other kinds of work or retreat into cloistered seclusion. Another way of addressing the question is to analyse the way research is portrayed in the annual reports. The 1923/24 report gives much greater prominence to research, with the faculty and departmental summaries proudly detailing their work.<sup>90</sup> By 1927/28, there is much less attention to research in the body of the text, but a substantial list of publications given as an appendix.<sup>91</sup> A list of publications was subsequently issued separately but limited reference to research in the annual reports continues. We should not really see this as a decline in the importance of research to the university, more an indication that it was being recorded elsewhere. It does suggest, however, that research was not seen as something that deserved high prominence in the annual report.

There was increasing attention devoted to research, although much of it was in conjunction with local interests, which suggests that a growing emphasis on pure research was not really an issue. Indeed, there were mounting criticisms of provincial universities on just this point. Flexner's report for the Rockefeller Foundation on European universities criticised the English provincial institutions for their failure to promote proper research of a fundamental, abstract nature.<sup>92</sup> Partly on these grounds, vast sums were poured into Oxbridge and London, with very little finding its way elsewhere.<sup>93</sup> Truscot's castigation of arts professors' failure to engage in research portrayed provincial universities as research deserts. Much of the post-war debate on universities in Britain argued that they should focus much more on academic research than routine activity.<sup>94</sup> Again, this would suggest that the problem was a lack of such work, yet it seems to have been interpreted as a growing call through the 1930s for more fundamental research.

In a survey of pressures acting on the provincial universities, we must consider the increasing role of central government agencies, most importantly the University Grants Committee (UGC).<sup>95</sup> This was established in 1919 as a conduit of state funding to the universities, which increased through the period to approximately a third of their annual income. Although intended as a buffer between the universities

and the state, and protective of the autonomy of universities, it has been argued that the UGC came to exert considerable, albeit usually implicit, pressure on institutions. The ways in which the UGC influenced relationships between the new universities and their localities, however, were mixed. On the one hand, the UGC recognised the special role of universities in providing for their hinterlands. They were supposed to be centres of professional training, expertise and advice for industry, business and local authorities; they were also to act as beacons of culture and enlightenment to provincial communities. Equally, the UGC was keen to encourage local authorities to support their nearest university, especially through rate aid. Yet, there were also concerns lest universities get too close to local interests. In a showdown with Nottingham University College, the UGC forced it to limit the influence of the local council on its governing body. In Sheffield, the university was made to give up its work for the local authority in providing pre-degree level technical education. A specific example affecting Liverpool actually involved another government department, the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research (DSIR) established in 1917. This agency was created to channel state funding towards scientific and industrial research of national significance, and we have come across it providing grants to post-graduate students, one of the main ways in which it related to universities.<sup>96</sup> When Liverpool's Vice-chancellor, Dale, sought advice from the DSIR on doing research work for local firms, the DSIR was adamant that such ventures were fraught with danger and should be very carefully monitored.<sup>97</sup> In particular, research students had to be safeguarded against embroilment with private firms. As we have seen, the universities continued to keep close relationships with local concerns and it is strange that a government agency devoted to promoting industrial research should have become almost hysterical about work that the provincial universities had performed successfully for some time. It suggests some uncertainty among central government departments about the extent to which universities should be engaging with local interests.

During the inter-war period, the overriding aim of UGC policy with respect to provincial universities was to upgrade them to become institutions of the highest education. Staff, facilities, degree courses and research were to be of a standard befitting the term university and the model of what this constituted was provided, inevitably, by Oxbridge. One of the most important features of this model was the student experience, and the UGC gave considerable emphasis, and not inconsiderable funds, towards improving social, cultural and welfare facilities for students.<sup>98</sup> Ideally, student life was to be catered for in halls of residence but, given the expense of these, other means included sporting and cultural facilities, student unions and refectories. At Liverpool, successive Vice-chancellors saw the improvement of amenities for students as a priority and were happy to acquiesce in the UGC's exhortations. One of Dale's last initiatives was to purchase a 25 acre site for athletics, which he hoped someone would come forward to pay for.<sup>99</sup> Adami was a leading figure in arguing for improved health and welfare services for students and he pressed the case for more halls of residence.<sup>100</sup> Hetherington took up the refrain. It was not just the limitations of residence or the smallness of the Union building, even the main quadrangle was dilapidated, undermining the whole environment of university study. The 'unity of University life' was impaired and he cautioned that his priority was 'the strengthening of the agencies of our common life, rather than in further departmental expansion.'<sup>101</sup> With the financial constraints, it was difficult to achieve very much, especially in halls of residence, but there was a new Students' Union building, sporting and athletic facilities were expanded and there was the beginning of a student health service.

Liverpool, alongside most other universities between the wars, made great efforts to improve the quality of the student experience, and achieved significant results. There were limitations, but doubtless there was a positive impact on many students' lives. In trying to create a more self-conscious student and university community, however, something was perhaps lost in relationships with the wider community. Behind the initiatives was an urge to remove the student from undesirable connections, primarily to take them out of lodgings but also, to an extent, to take them out of their homes and off public transport.<sup>102</sup> Lodgings were potentially unhealthy, unsavoury and isolating; even parental homes might not furnish a suitable environment for study, particularly for women who might be pressured into domestic tasks. Travelling across the city might entail exposure to dangers and distractions. The tendency of the moves to establish an identifiable student community was to divorce students from the city community at large.

### **Conclusions**

We have seen evidence of a great deal of interaction between the university and its staff and the wider community. There were close relationships between professional and vocational areas and practitioners in their fields to provide suitable training and experience, and to help secure jobs. There were several initiatives to maintain contact with graduates to continue to develop their careers. Expertise and advice was offered to firms, hospitals and local authorities, which reciprocated in making practical services available, or even in helping out with teaching. A great variety of lectures and talks were given, whether through formal bodies such as the university's extension department, WEA courses, or in a huge number of occasional events. At the same time, local cultural and scientific organisations made use of university facilities. The question that obviously arises is what does all this activity amount to; was it a little or a lot? Equally obviously, it is impossible to arrive at a definitive answer. There is little evidence about the audiences for these events. Where information is given, the indications are that attendances were good, clearly sufficient for them to be continued in successive years. It would be difficult to argue, however, that more than a small fraction of Liverpool's population was reached by the university, and it is highly likely that the majority of that fraction were the educated and cultured classes. Similarly, we do not know what proportion of firms and businesses in the area had any kind of contact with the university. Our concern here, however, is not with impact, but with the attempts by the university to engage with the wider community and it would appear that there is considerable evidence of a systematic and sustained effort to reach out to the people, businesses and city of Liverpool. Nor is there any indication of a diminution of effort between the wars, or any indication that the university sought to disengage from its hinterland.

However, we can identify several trends emerging during the period that had a tendency to divorce the university from the community. The view from the UGC and critical commentators that the provincial universities ought to become more like Oxbridge if they wanted to be counted as proper universities was powerful and implied engaging more with national and international academic priorities than responding to local concerns. These are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but one cannot give priority to both and they tend in opposite directions. In the moves to ape Oxbridge, however, it was not research that was the key factor. There is little evidence that, during this period, research replaced community activity; indeed, to a great extent, research work was integrated with local agencies. The more significant

element was the growing emphasis on the creation of a self-contained university community with a discrete and recognisably different student experience. Divorcing students from their home environments helped to establish a separate university enclave within the city.

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<sup>2</sup> D.Jones, *The Origins of Civic Universities. Manchester, Leeds and Liverpool* (London: Routledge, 1988). K.Vernon, *Universities and the State in England 1850 – 1939* (London: RoutledgeFalmer, 2004).

<sup>3</sup> W.H.G.Armytage, *Civic Universities. Aspects of a British Tradition* (London: Ernest Benn Ltd., 1955)

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<sup>5</sup> S.Barnes, 'England's Civic Universities and the Triumph of the Oxbridge Ideal' *History of Education Quarterly* 36 (1996): 271-305. E.J.Morse, 'English Civic Universities and the Myth of Decline' *History of Universities* 11 (1992): 177-204

<sup>6</sup> H. Silver, *Higher Education and Opinion Making in Twentieth-Century England* (London: Woburn, 2003)

<sup>7</sup> For background on the University of Liverpool see T.Kelly, *For the Advancement of Learning. The University of Liverpool, 1881 – 1981* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1981). S.Harrop, 'A New College for a New City: An Exploration of "A Genuinely Civic Enterprise" in Sectarian Liverpool in the Late Nineteenth Century.' Paper delivered at the ISCHE conference on 'Urbanisation and Education', Birmingham, 14th July 2001. I am grateful to the author for a copy of this paper.

<sup>8</sup> See comparative statistics tables in the annual reports of the University Grants Committee for the period.

<sup>9</sup> *Annual Reports of the Council, The University and the Vice-Chancellor* (University of Liverpool Press) [Hereafter *Annual report*]. Held in the archives of the University of Liverpool.

<sup>10</sup> 'University of Liverpool Newspaper Cuttings 1928 – 1932.' [Hereafter 'Newspaper Cuttings'] Held in the archives of the University of Liverpool. The year surveyed was October 1928 – October 1929. I should like to thank Adrian Allan and his colleagues at the University of Liverpool archives for their help and advice.

<sup>11</sup> *Annual Report* 1919, 6

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>13</sup> *Annual Report* 1920, 18

<sup>14</sup> *Annual Report* 1920

<sup>15</sup> *Annual Report* 1920, 24.

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- <sup>16</sup> *Annual Report 1920*
- <sup>17</sup> *Annual Report 1924*
- <sup>18</sup> *Annual Report 1936*
- <sup>19</sup> *Annual Report 1920*
- <sup>20</sup> *Annual Report 1928*
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- <sup>23</sup> *University Grants Committee Report 1923-24* (HMSO, 1925). *University Grants Committee Report for the Period 1929/30 to 1934/35* (HMSO, 1936).
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- <sup>28</sup> ‘Newspaper Cuttings’
- <sup>29</sup> *Annual Report 1936*, 18
- <sup>30</sup> These were routinely reported in the press, see ‘Newspaper Cuttings’.
- <sup>31</sup> *Liverpool Daily Post* 24<sup>th</sup> November 1928. ‘Newspaper Cuttings’
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- <sup>38</sup> *Annual Report 1928*
- <sup>39</sup> *Annual Report 1919*
- <sup>40</sup> *Annual Report 1920*
- <sup>41</sup> *Annual Report 1928*, 50
- <sup>42</sup> *Annual Report 1920*
- <sup>43</sup> *Annual Report 1928*
- <sup>44</sup> *Annual Report 1932*
- <sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>46</sup> *Annual Report 1936*
- <sup>47</sup> *Annual Report 1932*, 54
- <sup>48</sup> *Annual Report 1936*
- <sup>49</sup> *Annual Report 1928*
- <sup>50</sup> *Annual Report 1924*
- <sup>51</sup> *Annual Report 1936*
- <sup>52</sup> *Annual Report 1932*.
- <sup>53</sup> These were noted in each annual report.
- <sup>54</sup> *Annual Report 1932*.
- <sup>55</sup> *Annual Report 1928*.
- <sup>56</sup> *Annual Report 1924*.
- <sup>57</sup> *Annual Report 1932*.
- <sup>58</sup> *Annual Report 1936*.
- <sup>59</sup> *Annual Report 1924*. *Annual Report 1928*.
- <sup>60</sup> *Annual Report 1928*. *Annual Report 1932*.
- <sup>61</sup> *Annual Report 1936*.
- <sup>62</sup> *Annual Report 1919*.
- <sup>63</sup> *Annual Report 1920*.
- <sup>64</sup> *Annual Report 1928*.
- <sup>65</sup> For Botany see *Annual Report 1920*, *Zoology Annual Report 1924*, and *Chemistry Annual Report 1932*.
- <sup>66</sup> *Annual Report 1920*.
- <sup>67</sup> *Annual Report 1924*, 40.
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- <sup>69</sup> *Annual Report* 1924.
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- <sup>76</sup> *Annual Report* 1924.
- <sup>77</sup> *Annual Report* 1932.
- <sup>78</sup> *Annual Report* 1920, 56.
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- <sup>80</sup> *Annual Report* 1920.
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- <sup>83</sup> *Annual Report* 1920.
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- <sup>85</sup> *Annual Report* 1920, 4.
- <sup>86</sup> *Annual Report* 1924, 21.
- <sup>87</sup> *Annual Report* 1920. *Annual Report* 1936.
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- <sup>99</sup> *Annual Report* 1919.
- <sup>100</sup> Vernon, ‘Health and Welfare of Students.’
- <sup>101</sup> *Annual Report*, 1928, 17-18.
- <sup>102</sup> Vernon, ‘Health and Welfare of Students.’