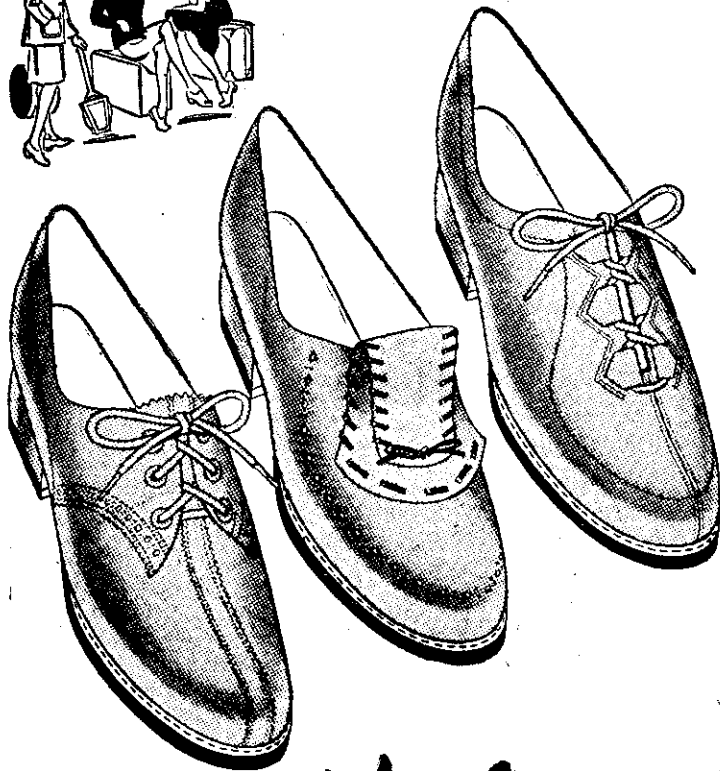


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# WHAT THE PUBLIC READS

## Some Revealing Figures From a Big Library

THE week before last we published an article in connection with Children's Book Week, showing how children's tastes have changed during the last two or three generations. This week we went to the Wellington Central Library for a survey of the reading taste of the general public. We asked them whether people are reading more than they did a few years ago, what kind of books they borrow from the Library, and whether they still read Charles Dickens and William Thackeray.

The survey showed that during the year ended March, 1944, there was an increase of 14,545 adult issues in the central and seven branch libraries, as compared with the previous year, and 253,321 as compared with 1940. There has been a notable increase in non-fiction and a slight decrease in fiction, due partly at least to the shortage of works of fiction.

The following analysis of one year's issues taken at the Central Library gives a more definite idea of the division of reading:

General Works	..	27,778
Philosophy, Religion	..	5,779
Sociology	..	6,992
Language, Literature	..	8,851
Science	..	4,347
Useful Arts	..	16,444
Fine Arts	..	17,589
History, Biography, Travel	..	64,557
Fiction	..	258,031
<b>Total</b>	<b>..</b>	<b>410,368</b>

A survey taken in the Lending Department on one day showed the approximate proportion of men and women borrowers in the various classes of reading. In Philosophy, Religion, Natural Science, Fine Arts (which includes gardening and hobbies as well as music, etc.), History and Travel, the numbers were equal. In Sociology the proportion was 3:1 (men mentioned first); in Useful Arts (anything from medicine to aeroplanes) 5:3; in Biography 13:20, and in Fiction 37:63. Over the whole number of borrowers there is one and a-half times as much fiction as non-fiction borrowed, although it must be remembered that non-fiction books are usually borrowed for longer periods.

### Most Popular Authors

The popularity of different fiction writers is indicated by the following figures which give the number of copies of a selection of authors in the library stock and the number on the shelves on one day (not including copies kept in the stockroom):

	Copies in Stock	Copies on Shelves
Austen, J.	15	0
Baum, V.	59	0
Bell, N.	34	8
Bennett, A.	21	1



Bentley, P.	..	23	8
Birmingham, G. A.	..	33	8
Bottoms, P.	..	28	0
Bridge, A.	..	29	9
Bromfield, L.	..	61	2
Broster, D. K.	..	19	1
Buck, P.	..	41	5
Carman, J.	..	15	8
Cheyney, P.	..	53	0
Cronin, A. J.	..	31	0
Deeping, W.	..	83	1
Dickens, C.	..	33	2
Du Maurier, D.	..	47	0
Erts, S.	..	23	0
Frankau, G.	..	45	5
Galsworthy, J.	..	75	6
Gibbons, S.	..	27	0
Gibbs, Sir P. H.	..	117	3
Heyer, G.	..	137	1
Huxley, A.	..	23	2
Mackenzie, Compton	..	48	8
Masefield, J.	..	35	9
Maugham, W. S.	..	46	1
Orczy, Baroness	..	46	4
Priestley, J. B.	..	46	4
Sayers, D. L.	..	75	1
Sinclair, U.	..	56	2
Steinbeck, J.	..	33	1
Thackeray, Wm.	..	42	28
Walpole, H.	..	111	9
Wodehouse, P. G.	..	106	8
Young, F. B.	..	71	0

In the more specialised Reference Department there is also definite selection, but this time according to subject and not to author. The biggest daily issue is always of art books, of which the largest proportion are music. Next comes the literature class, of which both American and English plays are specially popular, although many of these are taken out by amateur dramatic societies.

The next largest group are the technical books, borrowed chiefly of course by men, dealing in particular with subjects such as amateur mechanics, engineering, and business procedure. Many inquiries have dealt with technical processes not previously carried out in New

(continued on next page)