

# The Strange Case of Samuelson's Archive

This is not a detective story, but concerns the chance discovery of an archive collection which – having miraculously survived the vicissitudes of time – has apparently become forgotten and, effectively, lost to scholarship.

Between 1882 and 1884, the Report of the Royal Commission on Technical Instruction (the Samuelson Report) was published.<sup>1</sup> Its terms of reference were:

'To inquire into the instruction of the industrial classes of certain foreign countries in technical and other subjects for the purpose of comparison with that of the corresponding classes in this country; and into the influence of such instruction on manufacturing and other industries at home and abroad'.

After examining a large body of written evidence, and after several visits abroad, the Commission identified some major deficiencies in the provision of technical education in this country, and it made several specific recommendations; for example:

'... it is essential that instruction in the rudiments of science bearing upon industry should form a part

of the curriculum of elementary schools, and that instruction in drawing, and more especially in drawing with rule and compass . . . should receive far greater attention than it does at present . . .'

The Samuelson Report was widely circulated and had a significant influence at the time, and is a document of seminal importance in charting the history and development of technical education in this country. It was therefore something of a surprise to literally stumble over the collection of evidence collected by the Commission in order to do its work and prepare the report.

The Samuelson archive is contained in 44 large boxes (disguised as books) and resides in the basement of the Science Museum Library in South Kensington. Precisely how it came to be there remains something of a mystery, but a neat piece of detective work by Mr. Ian Carter and Mrs Janet Cole of the library staff has established that it was presented by the Royal Commission to the South Kensington Museum (Education Division) on March 23rd 1887. The register entry reads:

'Reports and Programmes of Technical Schools & Institutions etc., at home and abroad, collected by the Commission, in 44 boxes'.<sup>2</sup>

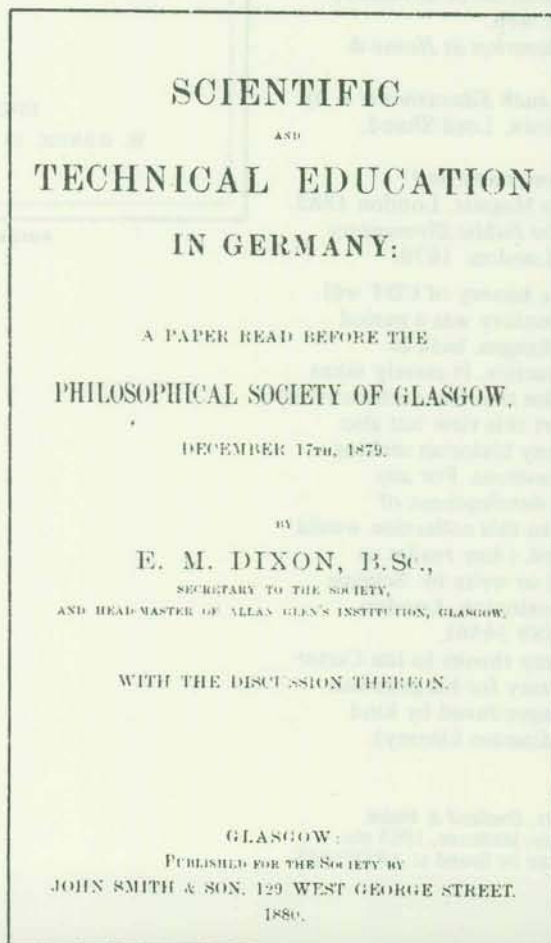
The register also records that some material has been diverted from the main collection (to Department of Education in October 1896).

The bulk of the material is exactly as the commission left it and is divided by country of origin as follows:

AUSTRIA	7 boxes
LOWER AUSTRIA	1 box
BELGIUM	2 boxes
FRANCE	5 boxes
GERMANY	13 boxes
ITALY	4 boxes
GREAT BRITAIN	5 boxes
AMERICA	2 boxes

The contents of these boxes is remarkable indeed – containing all manner of pamphlets, posters, ephemeral printed documents and archival material relating to a narrow period around 1878 to 1881. And as such, it is nothing less than a time-capsule offering a unique perspective on technical education in Europe. Doubtless, copies of *some* of the printed material survive elsewhere, but the uniqueness of this collection is the fact that it survives – albeit in a dusty and fragile state – as a *collection*.

Although the main organising principle of the archive is by origin of country, it is very difficult to make sense of the contents of each box. Allowing for the possibility of random shuffling over the years, it seems that the peculiar mixture in each stems from the way in which the material was solicited – which left it up to those giving evidence to submit whatever documentation they thought



relevant to the commission's needs. Hence, we immediately discover such exotic items as the 'Flint Glass Makers Magazine', 1882, or the Spring Programme of the Wigan Mining and Mechanical School (1876/77).

The proliferation of such material is both a blessing and a menace: a blessing because some of this material is both relevant and perhaps unique, and a menace because the volume of the archive is staggering. There are well in excess of 2000 unsorted items including: posters (e.g., to announce opening of schools), prospectuses, pamphlets, journal and newspaper offprints, syllabuses, plans of buildings, bundles of letters, tabulated lists of students etc.

Leaving aside some of the more esoteric material, a listing of some pamphlets randomly taken from a 'Great Britain' box might suffice to give both a flavour of the archive, and an indication of its importance. (The list is presented below with short titles only).

*The Relation of the School to the Workshop*, D. Sandeman, Glasgow: 1882. 22p.

*Papers on Technical Education*, W. Montgomerie Neilson, Glasgow: 1880. 31+8+8pp.

*Scientific and Technical Education in Germany*, E.M. Dixon, Glasgow: 1880. 44p.

*Unofficial Comments of Education at Home & Abroad*, Leeds: 1872. 30p.

*Technical Education: What such Education is & by what means it can best be given*, Lord Shand, Edinburgh: 1882. 37p.

*Technical Instruction in Elementary and Intermediate Schools*, Philip Magnus, London 1883.

*On Technical Teaching in the Public Elementary Schools of Rural Districts*, London: 1878.

As those interested in the history of CDT will know, the late nineteenth century was a period of rapid and fundamental changes, both in educational thinking and practice. It merely takes a cursory inspection to realise that the documents in this archive not only support this view but also constitute a gold mine for any historian seeking answers to more specific questions. For any colleagues interested in the development of technical education, a visit to this collection would seem very worthwhile indeed. (Any reader so interested should telephone or write to: Science Museum Library, South Kensington, London SW7 5NK. Telephone: 01 589 3456).

I should like to express my thanks to Ian Carter of the Science Museum Library for his generous help. Pamphlet covers are reproduced by kind permission of the Science Museum Library).

#### References

1. See: *Educational Documents, England & Wales, 1816-1968*, J. Stuart Maclure, Methuen, 1965 etc.
2. The original register entry can be found at ARCHIVES: Z64/9.

## TECHNICAL EDUCATION

WHAT SUCH EDUCATION IS,  
AND BY  
WHAT MEANS IT CAN BEST BE GIVEN.

ADDRESS ON THE OPENING OF THE  
WINTER SESSION OF THE WATT INSTITUTION  
AND SCHOOL OF ARTS, 1882.

BY  
LORD SHAND.

*Published at the Request of the Directors of the Institution.*

EDINBURGH:  
W. GREEN, 18 ST. GILES STREET.  
1882.

PRICE SIXPENCE