

Sidney Webb the bibliographer

*LSE's **Library**, the British Library of Political and Economic Science, opened in November 1896. In the second of a series of posts celebrating LSE Library's 120th anniversary in 2016, Graham Camfield shares the little-known story of Sidney Webb the bibliographer.*

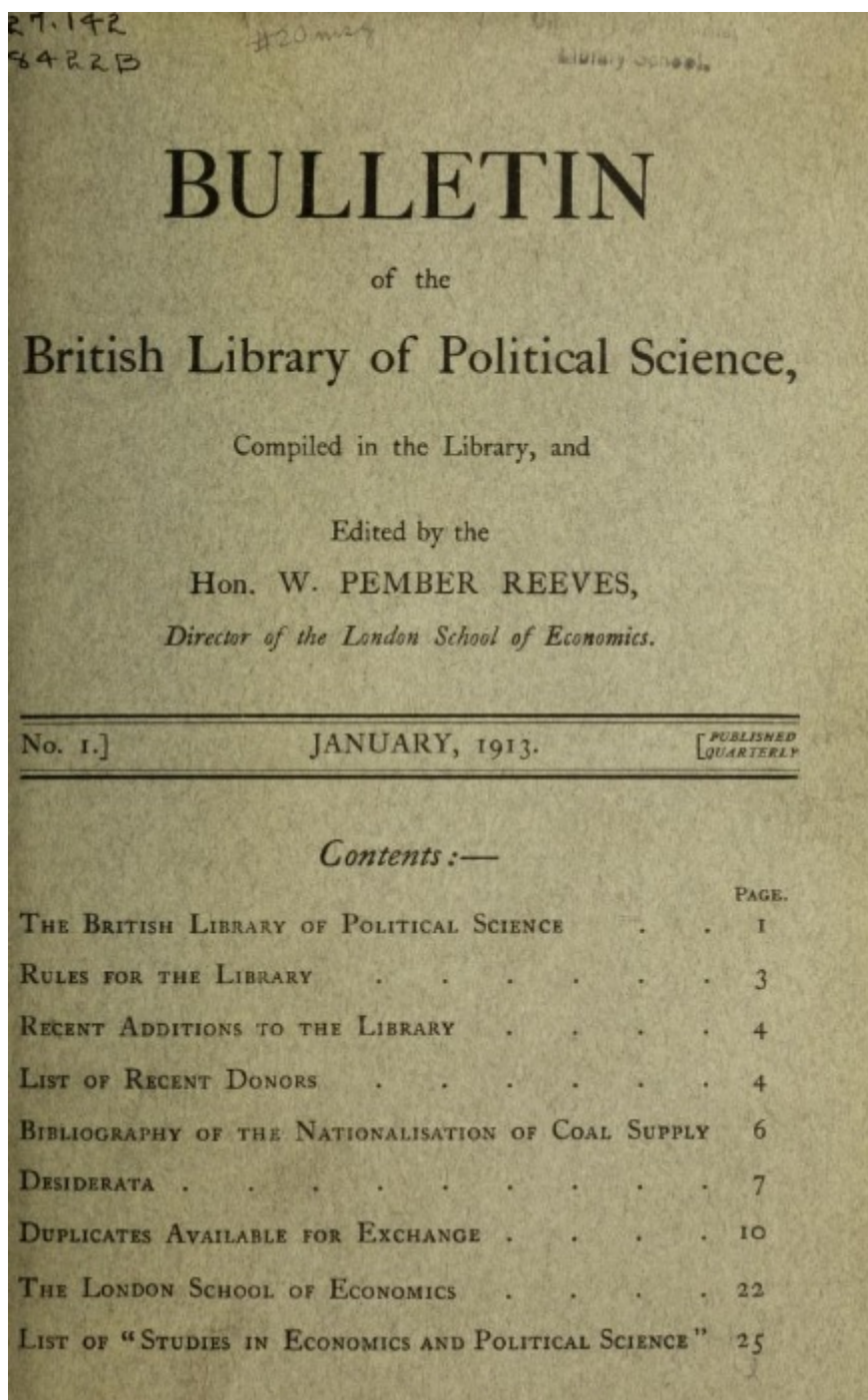
As a seasoned researcher Sidney Webb highly valued the work of librarians in compiling indexes and bibliographies. From early in the LSE Library's history all monographs with bibliographies were noted as such in the catalogue. Such was the high regard for bibliographic work that in 1910 a supplementary class on advanced bibliography was organised for librarianship students at LSE under the direction of Sidney Webb and others. Students were tasked with investigating the sources of information available in special subjects or special areas of economics and political science, with prizes for the best bibliography.



Sidney Webb, c1930s

From 1913 to 1933 each issue of the Bulletin of the British Library of Political and Economic Science carried a bibliography on some specialised subject compiled by library staff and students. Sidney Webb himself contributed to this series in 1921 with a bibliography on Travellers' Descriptions of Great Britain from 1300 to 1841. These accounts were among sources he and Beatrice had used to gain first-hand information for research on "workmen's combinations" and English local government. It is no surprise therefore to note Sidney's enthusiastic support for the realisation of long term project to create a printed subject bibliography of BLPES collections. He wrote in the introduction to the first volume,

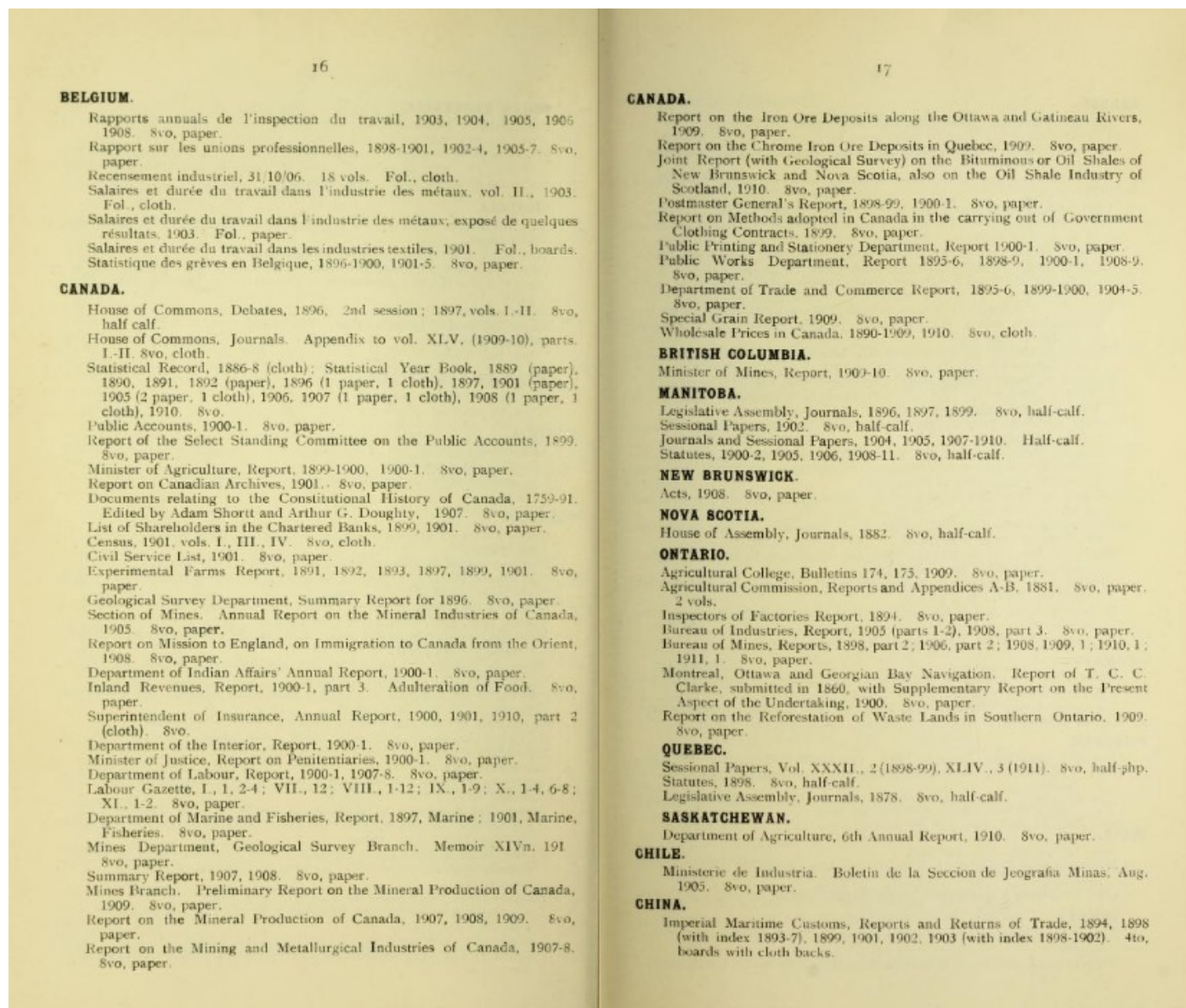
"It is probably because I am commonly reputed to have an infatuation for bibliographies that I am asked to contribute a preface to the London Bibliography of the Social Sciences – in sheer bulk the greatest work with which I have ever been associated."



Bulletin of the British Library of Political Science 1913, contents page

Work had started on the Bibliography in 1925 helped by a grant from the Laura Perlman Rockefeller Foundation. From the start it would be more than a subject catalogue of BLPES collections, covering material in other important libraries in London:

- The Goldsmiths' Library of Economic Literature at the University of London
- The Royal Statistical Society
- The Royal Anthropological Institute
- The Royal Institute of International Affairs
- The National Institute of Industrial Psychology
- Plus: parts of the economic section of the General Library of the University of London; the Hume Ricardo and other political collections at University College; and the collection of political and historical pamphlets in the Library of the Reform Club.



Bulletin of the British Library of Political Science 1913, government reports

The publication of the first four volumes in 1931 could be regarded as a defining moment in the history of social science information, certainly in the United Kingdom. Consistent with Sidney Webb's attention to primary sources, a notable feature of these early volumes is the separate recording of every item in the official publications of the central governments of the United Kingdom (including Parliamentary Papers), United States, Canada, and Australia, together with those of the Central and Provincial governments of India. The London Bibliography continued publication in print up to 1989 when the Library took over compilation and editing of UNESCO's International Bibliography of the Social Sciences.

Contributed by Graham Camfield (Collection Development Manager, LSE Library)

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