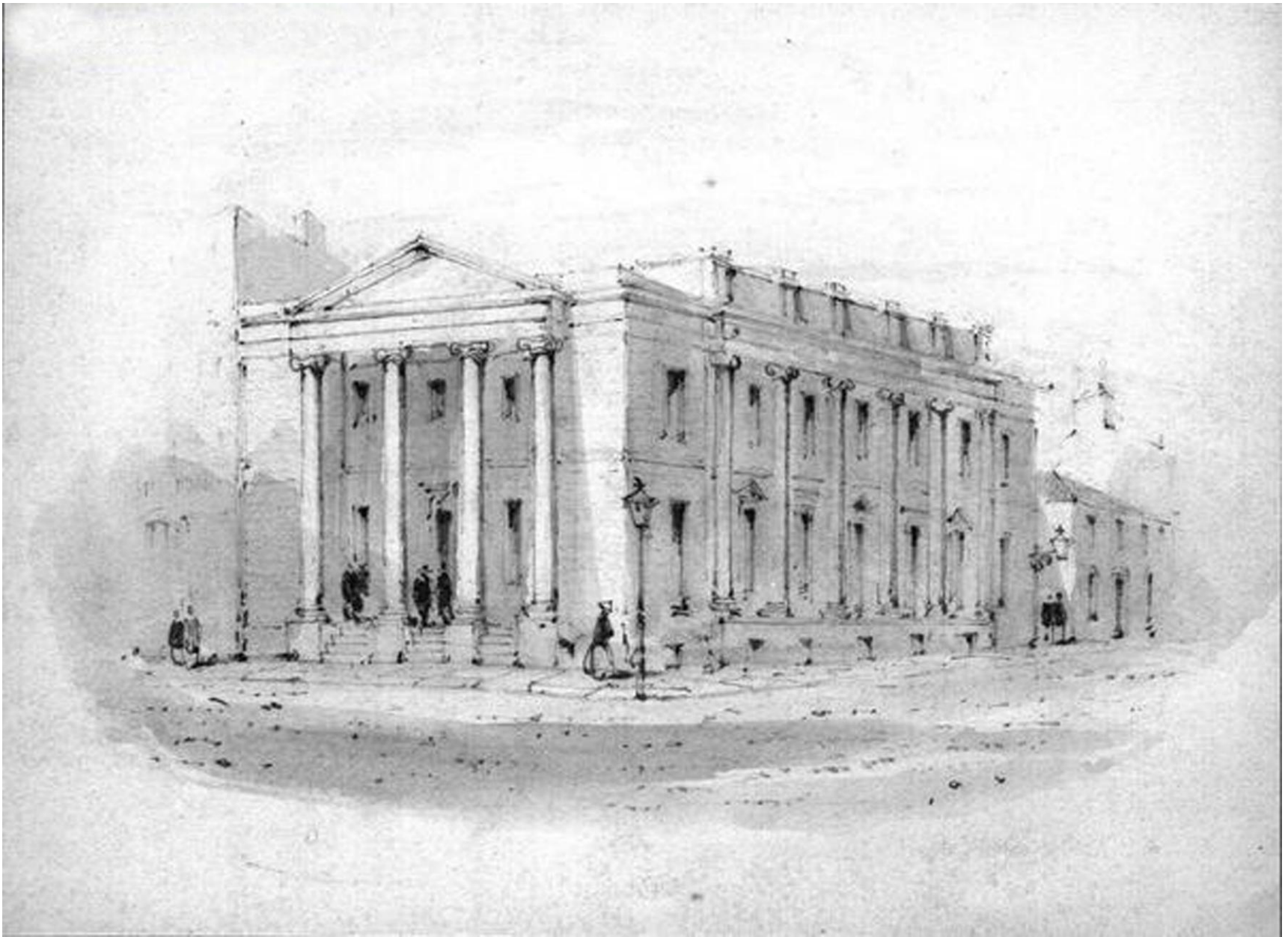




The Portico Library: from the Industrial Revolution to the Renaissance

Emma Marigliano

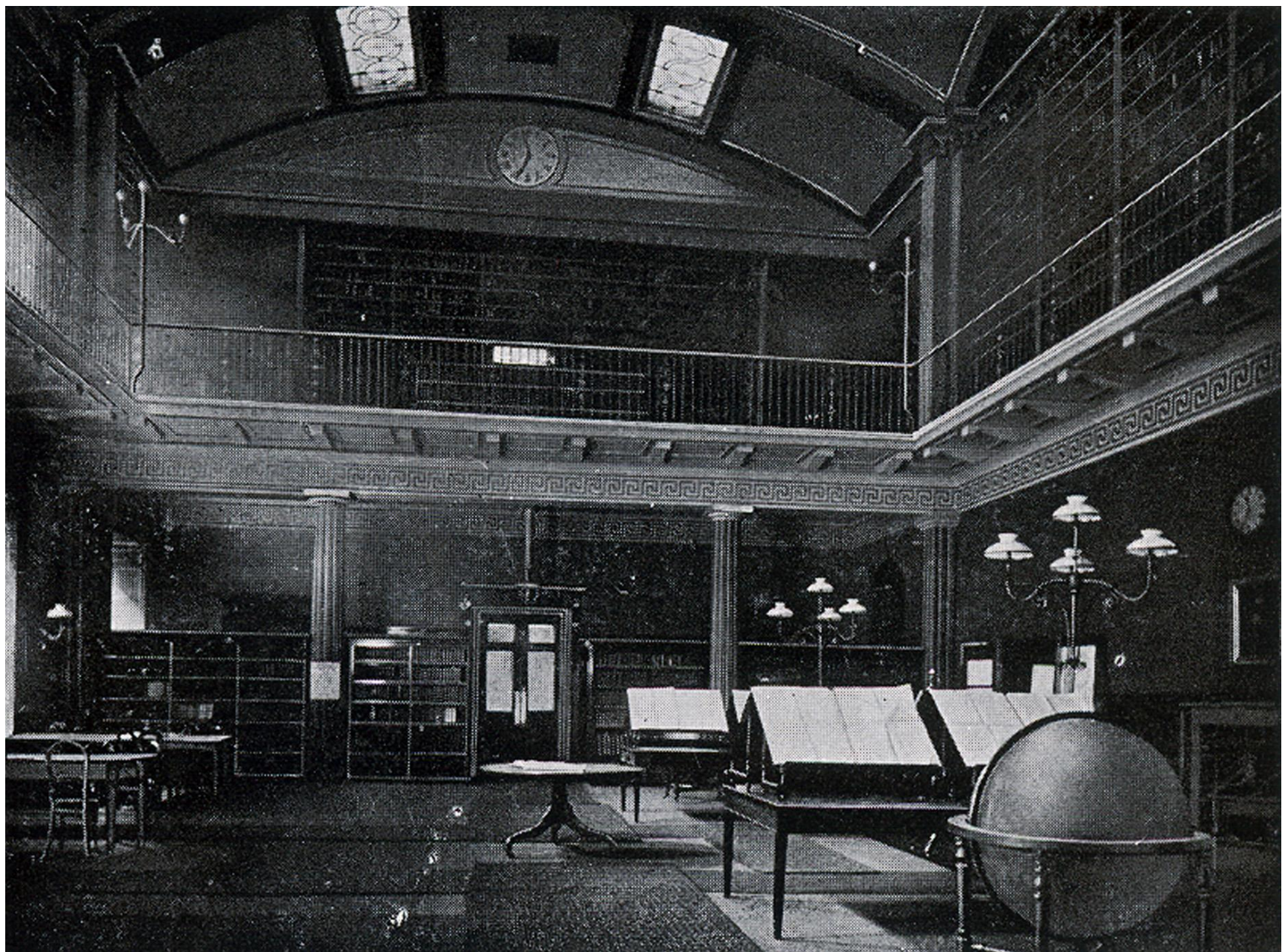
November 2016



Mosley Street in the 19th century – most elegant in Manchester



The Liverpool Lyceum – Bold Street, Liverpool



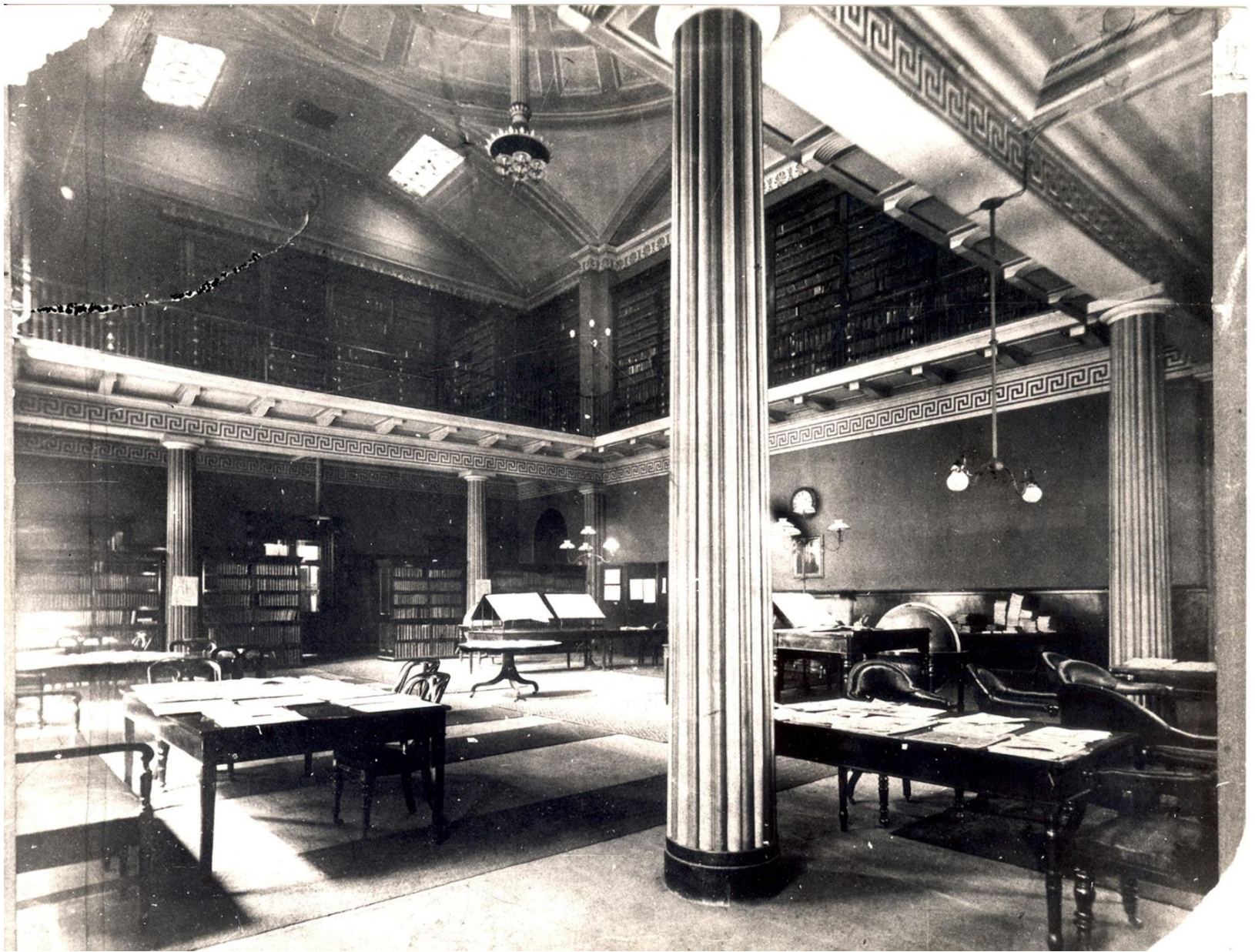
The interior of the Portico when it occupied the whole building



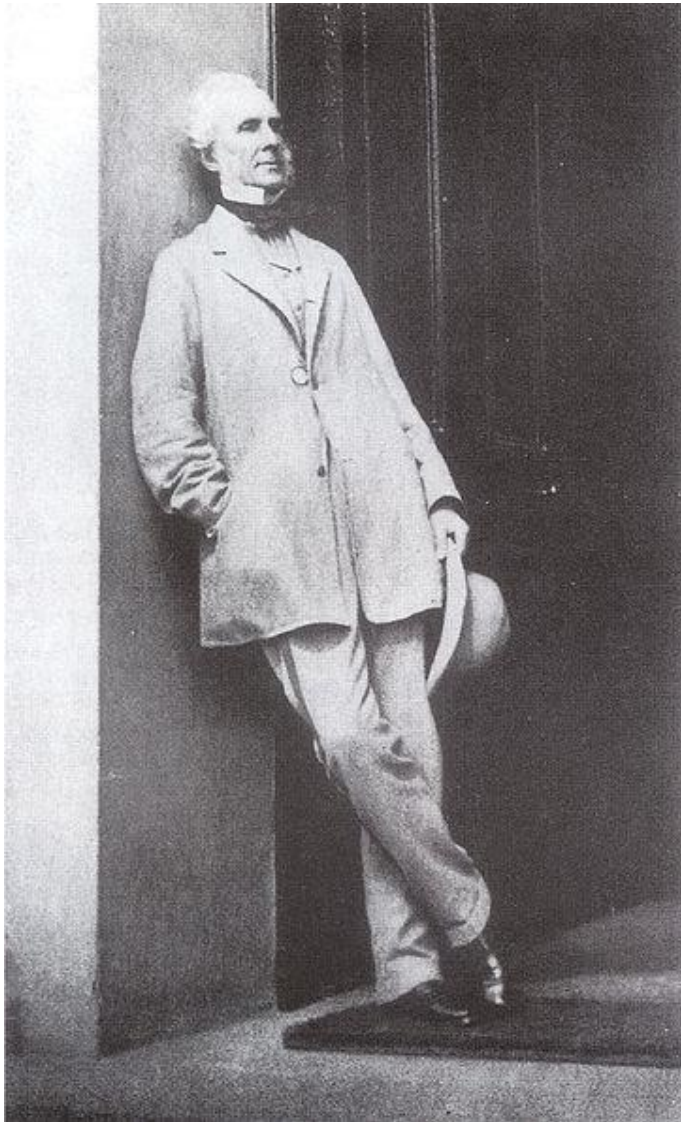
James Watson
taken at the age of Thirty.



Printed from Stone, at Oxford St.
August 1820.



The newsroom



William and Elizabeth Gaskell



Robert Peel Jnr (Prime Minister)



Peter Mark Roget



John Dalton



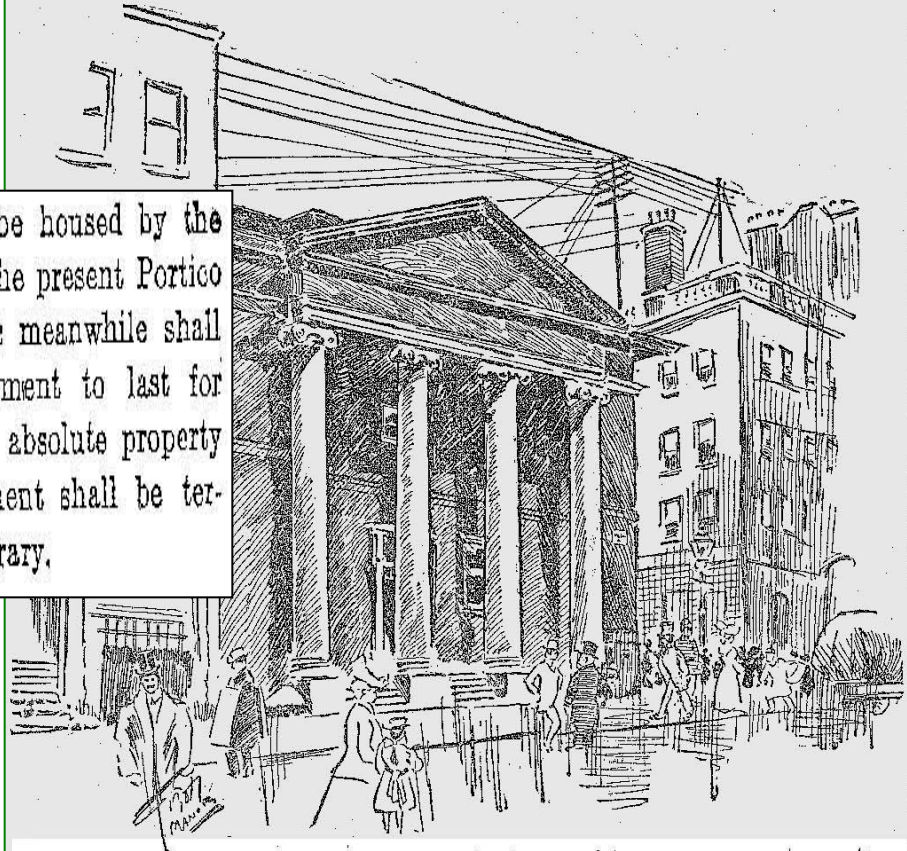
Elizabeth Gaskell

Charlotte Bronte



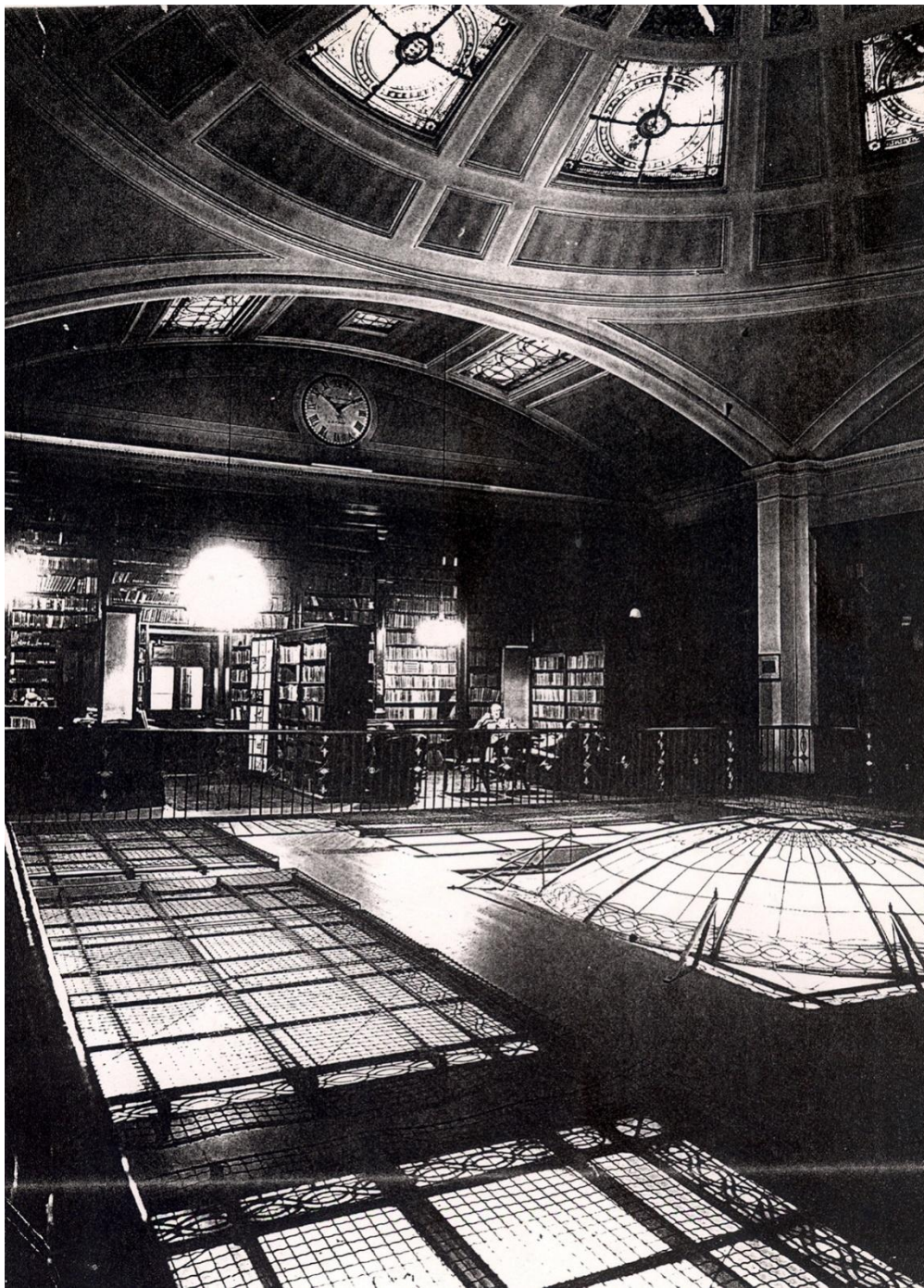
THE PORTICO LIBRARY.

The terms are that the library—it contains 60,000 volumes—shall be housed by the Corporation, who shall provide accommodation equal to that in the present Portico for the exclusive use of the members of that society. The public meanwhile shall have access to the books for reference purposes. This arrangement to last for 20 years, at the end of which time the library shall become the absolute property of the Corporation. During the 20 years the suggested arrangement shall be terminable on six months' notice by the members of the Portico Library.



This is the building in Mosley-street which the proprietors propose, on terms, to present to Manchester.

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**The new dome
designed by Joseph
Sunlight, separating
the ground floor
from the mezzanine**

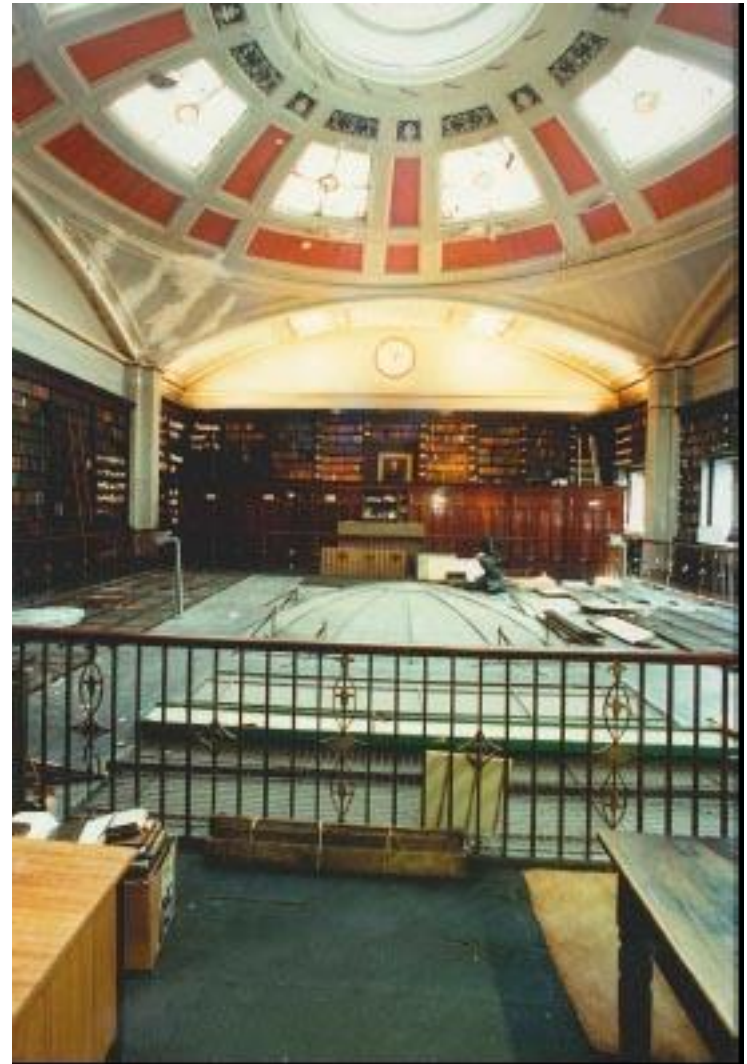


Early gallery set-up





The domed divider used as storage and hidden behind the gallery screens





Possibly the first Soiree held in the Portico with mulled wine, making the evening more convivial and, probably, getting everyone drunk into the bargain

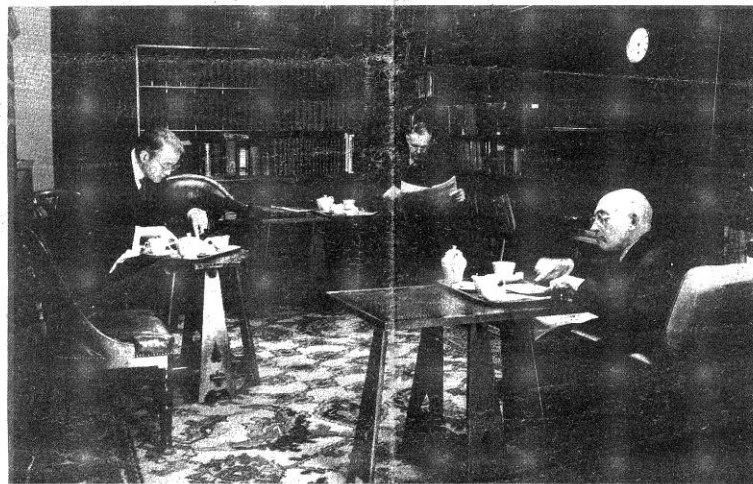




Perfectly sober performers under the dome and on top of a bookcase – nothing to do with mulled wine!

Martin Parr and Rob Powell continue their in-depth series with a look at one of Manchester's longest-surviving private clubs...

The Portico Library



If we had turned up at the Portico Library in 1906, the year of its founding, we probably wouldn't have been allowed in.

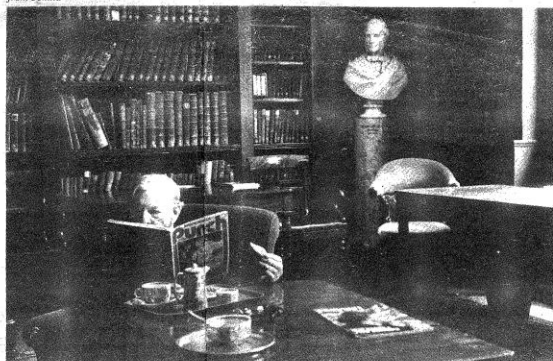
Although the Library's declared purpose was "to gratify the thirst for knowledge and promote a greater degree of intercourse among the town's inhabitants," its 400 original members—a prosperous elite that included Peter Mark Roget, author of the *Thesaurus*, and Sir Robert Peel, eventual Prime Minister—doubtless had very clear ideas as to which thirsting inhabitants they meant. In the world's first industrial city there were all sorts of unpleasant types, and the first librarian was under strict instructions "to prevent the intrusion of dogs and improper persons." On the other hand, tolerance had clearly expanded by the middle of the century, since Thomas de Quincey gained entrance—and he, as everyone knew, had some bad habits. So perhaps it's not too surprising that on a wet morning in 1980 Martin Parr and myself were made welcome by the present librarian, Linda Currin.

To enter the Portico from busy Mosley Street is to step into another world. If time hasn't exactly been stopped, its progress has certainly been severely stunted. High overhead a great stained-glass dome gazes upwards like the eye of a cyclops (the Library was designed in the Greek style), and under it hovers a dusky gloom that is never quite dispersed either by daylight or the electric lamps that hang on long cords from above.

On all sides, shelves of antiquarian books stretch 20 feet from floor to ceiling, and over them the faces of Shakespeare and Milton stare dimly down, while at the same height, from opposite ends of the building, a large clock and a wind-dial confront each other. Once John Dalrymple—the father of Atomic Theory—was made a member of the Library on condition that he keep these mechanisms in working order, but clearly his ghost hasn't seen fit to continue the arrangement. The clock's hands are frozen

Portico Library members sitting in the foreground.

Former chairman of the Library, H.W. Eggers reads 'Punch' while a deceased chairman, the Reverend Gaskell peers down from behind.



at 12:45, while the wind-dial remains obsessed with a South-South-Westerly that no doubt changed direction long ago.

Down at floor-level the fittings and furnishings are of polished wood and brass, and at the far end is a large and elegant room where the past is so palpable that you half-expect to find some well-preserved Victorian businessman ensconced at a table reading the latest news from the Crimea. The only Victorian in sight, however, is a marble version of the Reverend William Gaskell, husband to a famous wife and chairman of the Library long ago—and he isn't reading anything.

Slowly, however, the present begins to assert itself. Here and there are hints of the twentieth century... a Tom Wolfe novel, a fire extinguisher, a pile of *Artful Reporter*... and towards noon the living begin to occupy the building in larger numbers—chiefly well-

dressed middle-aged gentlemen who drift in from the rain and seat themselves by the electric fires that glow invitingly from the hearths. These are the present members and their guests. Clearly at their ease in this haven from the outside world, they sit quietly chatting or reading 'Punch' or 'The New Statesman', while two bustling ladies serve them with lunch.

The two bustling ladies are May Edgerson and Emily Wright, who long with Linda Currin form the permanent staff of the Library. They know most of the members by name and their soup is widely reputed to be the best in Manchester. Back in their little kitchen by the stairs, however, they will confess that the soup in fact comes from a packet. But the service, they say, makes up for it. "Oh yes, yes," says Emily, "some of them are better looked after here than what they are at home. That's why they come!"

Emily and May also clean the Library—no mean feat, to say the least. They sweep the floors, polish the wood and brass, wipe down the Reverend Gaskell, and dust the spines of the books—at least the ones they can reach. "But you've got to be careful cleaning here," says May, "the floors are very old, and some of the books fall apart if you touch them!"

So it appears that the Portico doesn't have immunity from the ravages of time after all. On closer inspection you notice that the ceiling paint is cracked and peeling, and apparently the roof occasionally leaks as well. One of the members blames this on the bomb the German Luftwaffe donated to the Library in the Blitz, but the credit could just as easily go to 174 years of infamous Manchester rain.

In fact, despite the brave efforts of the conservative wind-dial, the Portico has bowed many times to the winds of change. For a start, it

is literally only half of its former self. In 1920 its interior was cut in two when the lower floor—once a spacious newsroom that stretched all the way to the dome—was leased to a bank to help keep the wolf from the door. The members were reduced to using the side entrance—once reserved for servants and footmen—and at the same time many of the Library's most valuable books were auctioned. Hard times indeed.

H.W. Eggers, the Portico's oldest member and himself a former chairman, explains: "I think the decline dates from around the Great War, you know. At that time the Library ceased to be an evening club, because no one lived in the town centre any more. And society was changing too—that War changed everything—and membership started to fall off. Since then it's been one crisis after another. The site is tremendously valuable, of course. Good Lord, yes! We're sitting on a goldmine, but we're broke! Still," he adds, pouring himself another cup of tea, "we've survived, haven't we?"

These days the Library is run on a more open basis than ever before, and for several years now space has been made available for public exhibitions of work by local and Northern artists. The balancing act between adapting to the modern world and retaining the Portico's special atmosphere is a difficult one, but Linda Currin believes the worst is now over. "Our membership is slowly going up again after reaching a low of 130 in 1975. Although most of our members are middle-aged, we do have younger ones now—the youngest is 17—and there are 41 women members too."

The members tend to be more interested in the new books which Linda orders on request and then re-sells when they've been read. The unique collection of older books has in the meantime gathered dust on the shelves, inaccessible to specialists and scholars because no one knew exactly what there was. Indeed, *Jukes' Manual of Geology*, the *Catalogue Scriptum Britanniae*, and the 40,000 other volumes, give the impression of not having been scanned by too many eyes during the past century or so.

"It's in quite a mess," Linda admits, "but at last we've begun the chore of making a proper catalogue. Once we've become a working collection, students will be able to make use of the books and we'll also be able to apply for charitable status, which will help us a good deal."

Does she envisage the Library ever going fully public? "Well, no. First, there's no room for expansion. Secondly, the books we have are highly specialised, and really only of interest to researchers in certain fields. Ideally we hope to make the collection more generally useful, but still retain our own identity."

Peter Mark Roget and Robert Peel paid 13 guineas plus two more per annum for the privilege of using the Portico Library. Now the fee is 33s a year—half price for the first year—and for people living more than 20 miles away.

As one might expect from an institution that has maintained its essential traditions from the age of Napoleon to the age of the Armada Centre, the search for new members continues—but not necessarily a sense of history and a love of books are good prerequisites and perhaps someone with a knowledge of clock-work mechanisms would be especially welcome.

Rob Powell

dressed middle-aged gentlemen who drift in from the rain and seat themselves by the electric fires that glow invitingly from the hearths. These are the present members and their guests. Clearly at their ease in this haven from the outside world, they sit quietly chatting or reading 'Punch' or 'The New Statesman', while two bustling ladies serve them with lunch.

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The removal of the dome



The new flooring for the Portico Gallery



The Gallery to 2015 – with café area



Portico Prize award evening in the Great Hall of Manchester's Gothic Town Hall



**Portico Prize 2012 – shortlisted
Fiction Authors at The Portico – with
Manchester Literature Festival and
Arts Council England**



Portico Prize 2012 – shortlisted authors



Young Writers' masterclass 2012

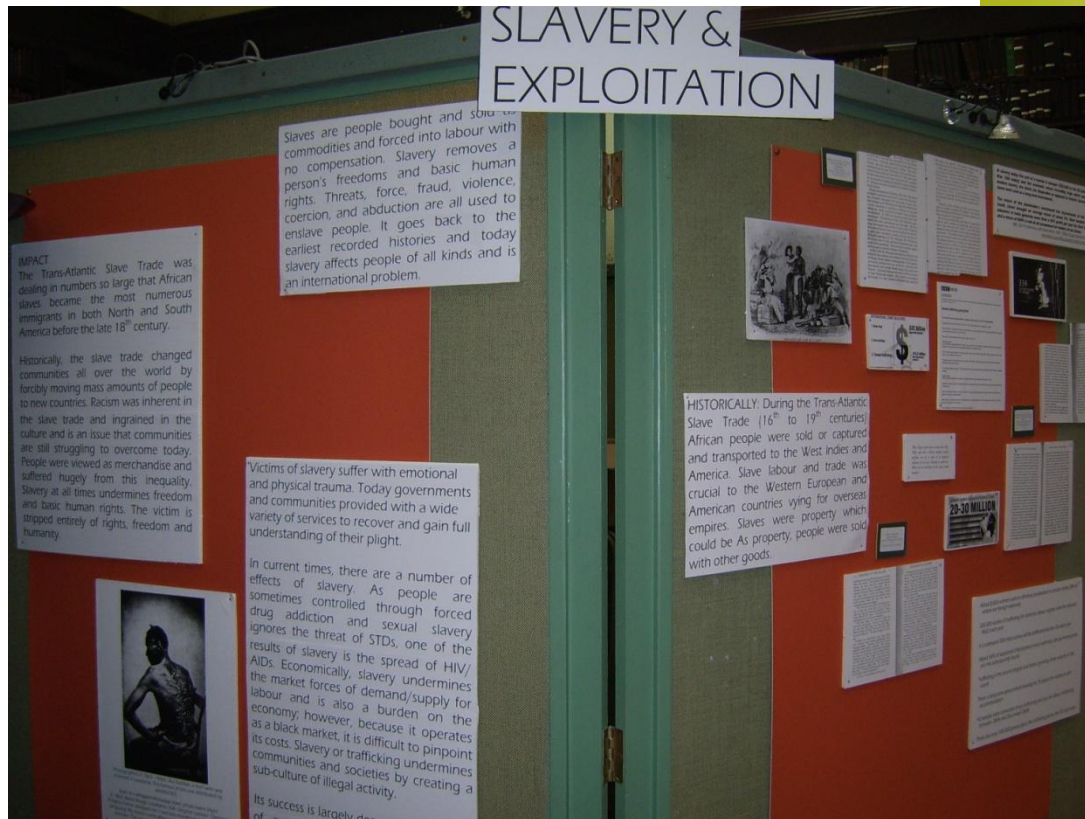


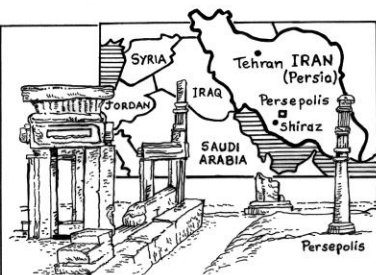
Winners of Portico Prize for Young Writers 2010, with Madeleine Bunting, (3rd from left) winner of The Portico Prize non-Fiction Category 2010 and (2nd from right) Sarah Hall, winner of The Portico Prize Fiction category 2010). In the background is one of the murals by Ford Madox Brown, depicting an episode in the history of Manchester, in the Great Hall of Manchester Town Hall.



Portico Sadie Massey Inspiration workshop – April 2016

Conflict Exhibition

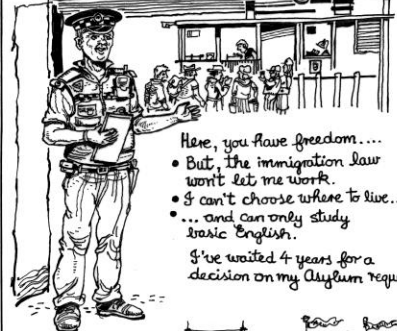




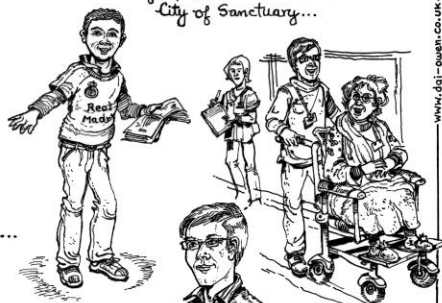
I lived with my wife and young son in Shiraz near Perspolis, in Iran.
But, because of political problems and dictatorship we were forced to leave ...



... we had to leave all behind ... job, life, home, possessions, and most importantly family, which we call 'the soul of my country'.
We reached Britain and asked for Asylum.



Here, you have freedom ...
• But, the immigration law won't let me work.
• I can't choose where to live ...
• ... and can only study basic English.
I've waited 4 years for a decision on my Asylum request...



... the skies are always grey - but I decide to act!
... I teach my son to read and write Persian and I volunteer for the Greater Manchester Values Group (NHS) and Manchester City of Sanctuary...



... with a friend I've set up a free project to help adults with maths ...



... I feel the government could use the skills that it now doesn't ...

Sanctuary Seekers

IMMANUEL: MY STORY

a PORTICO interview - 1



THE ZOCHONIS CHARITABLE TRUST



UNITED FOR CHANGE

In the country where I lived ...



... because one son was close friends with a gay person ...



... we were targeted by groups threatening our lives ...

The police were scared and couldn't protect us - ... the friend was murdered ... we were next



Nowhere was safe ...
I left with my family to the UK, and on advice asked for asylum



The first stage was a 'Screening Interview' ... I was told "Don't worry, you're safe." But my sons were in tears, because of the way they were treated ...

Next came a 'Substantive Interview' for 7 hours by our case workers. We were re-living the trouble and the fear ...



After a period of time came the decision ...

CASE REFUSED



We appealed and a 'Tribunal' followed but we had no one to defend us, and the judge was against us ...

The judgement came we were ...
... denied asylum ...
and became destitute ...

My hope is to live in peace and safety with my partner ...

Sanctuary Seekers

JANE DOE: MY STORY

a PORTICO interview - 2



THE ZOCHONIS CHARITABLE TRUST



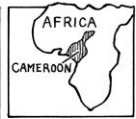
UNITED FOR CHANGE



... and children and grand-children - a normal life

* someone who at present has no name

For more copies of our 3 posters go to:
www.theportico.org.uk



I come from Cameroon. When my father died, the President's men tried to force me to sell the land... they beat me many times... and in the police station beat me again....



I went to my priest for help, and slept in the church... he sent me away to safety in the UK....

I didn't know where to go....



I slept rough and was in and out of hospital. I applied for asylum and first a social worker put me in a hostel...



Then the National Asylum Support Service put me in a house; I have my own bedroom, and share the bath-room, kitchen and living room with 3 other men... I feel safe here.



and now....

I've been in the UK for 12 years, and have been told to re-apply for asylum... and to prove who I am...

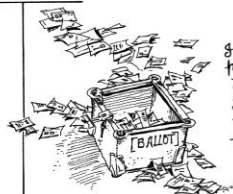


David

Rashid

PORTICO interview 3

For more copies of our 3 posters go to:
www.theportico.org.uk



I was active in a political party, the Pakistan Muslim League. I stopped 300 votes being rigged by the opposition party, the Pakistan People's Party - and when they were defeated they blamed me.

I received threatening phone calls and I and my wife and sons... were attacked.

The police said they couldn't help... and finally my house was stoned....



We were very scared and felt we had to leave...

So, we came on a visa to Heathrow Airport...

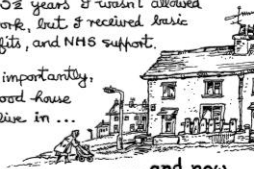


Arrivals

...and applied for asylum

For 3½ years I wasn't allowed to work, but I received basic benefits, and NHS support.

and importantly, a good house to live in...



....and now

I have Discretionary Leave to Remain for 3 years. ... I can work ... and we have a better house....

Sanctuary Seekers



THE ZOCHONIS CHARITABLE TRUST



UNITED FOR CHANGE





A Victorian Science Spectacular – Manchester Science Festival, 2014



Manchester Histories Festival 2014



Yours sincerely – Conference (June 2013)



The Gallery laid out today



Schools' Art Exhibition and Prize 2003



Gé Orthof – A Many Splendoured Thing June 2016 - in the run-up to 2016's Rio de Janeiro Olympic Games, Brazilian contemporary artist **Gê** was resident in the Portico Library gallery space, interacting with visitors and creating works responding to the collection



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Manchester
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librarian@theportico.org.uk

www.theportico.org.uk

Open Monday and Friday 09.30 - 16.30
Tuesday to Thursday 09.30 – 17.30
Saturday 11.00 – 15.00

November 2016

