

The Declaration of Arbroath: Georgian editions, libraries and readers, and Scotland's 'Radical War' of 1820

Michael Penman

(University of Stirling)

The starting point for this paper is, in part, earlier work exploring contested association with Scotland's medieval Wars of Independence and their key figures, battle anniversaries, heritage sites and primary sources.¹ However, it seeks in the main to nuance recent work by modern political and cultural historians which has highlighted how seemingly 'intermittently influential' (to use Murray Pittock's phrase) was politicisation of the 6 April 1320 Declaration in later eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Scotland. Such scholars have understandably focussed on a search for links between the Declaration and emergent nationalist politics: but what of the politics of class and socio-economic reform, those allied strands of 'freedom'? It may indeed be difficult to evidence a direct connection between the Declaration and the ideas and actions of radical working-class agitation in Scotland through and after the period of the Napoleonic Wars, culminating in the abortive 'Radical War' of April 1820. Yet might it nonetheless be possible to show that the Arbroath letter was better-known than hitherto acknowledged amongst such sections of society and thus by their leaders and polemicists?

¹ G. Morton, *Unionist Nationalism: Governing Urban Scotland, 1830-1860* (East Linton, 1999), ch 7; J.J. Coleman, *Remembering the Past in Nineteenth-Century Scotland: Commemoration, Nationality and Memory* (Edinburgh, 2014), ch. 3; M. Penman, 'Robert Bruce's Bones: reputations, politics and identities in nineteenth-century Scotland', *International Review of Scottish Studies*, 34 (2009), pp. 7-74; idem, 'Bannockburn and Popular Politics: Commemorating the Battle c.1814-c.1914' in Penman ed., *Bannockburn 1314-2014: Battle and Legacy* (Donington, 2016), 164-86.

After the letter's publication in English by Sir George Mackenzie of Rosehaugh in the 1680s, and then its reprinting throughout the Union of Parliaments debate, the Declaration has been said to have been 'sliding in and out of history' and public consciousness.² Before the Scottish Home Rule movement emerged across classes in the later Victorian era, the Declaration of Arbroath's profile seemed to have dwindled, indeed, from its Restoration/Union high to such a point by c.1820 that Chris Whatley has suggested that the barons' letter was known, really, to 'only a few hundred' readers, mostly in nascent upper-/middle-class historical clubs publishing Scottish documentary sources in handsome (and expensive) volumes.³ This can be related to what Colin Kidd identified as a 'crisis of confidence' in the development of a Scottish Whig ideology and community identity, both nationalist and reformist. This was a phenomenon caused in large part by the challenge of Scottish enlightenment scholars and theologians (both Jacobite and Hanoverian/Unionist) to the origins and historiographical icons of a potent 'ancient Scottish constitution', one roused to define and defend Scottish liberty and rights to strong effect (and supported by a powerful martial tradition) through the Middle Ages, the Reformation and up to the 1640s. This scholarly questioning had included debunking the punchy shorthand Scottish origin myth (from Greater Scythia to '...113 kings of their own royal stock...') expressed in the Declaration of Arbroath's preamble: this lay within a pedigree

² M. Pittock, 'The Declaration of Arbroath in Scottish Political Thought, 1689-1789', in K.P. Muller ed., *Scotland and Arbroath 1320-2020: 700 Years of Fighting for Freedom, Sovereignty and Independence* (Berlin, 2020), 165-80, at 168.

³ C. Whatley, 'Industrialising Scotland and the Nation: Nationalism, Liberty and Independence', in Muller ed., *op. cit.*, 267-88, at 276-7, 283.

of interlinked Scottish medieval chronicle and diplomatic statements crafted by crown and estates to answer external aggressors.⁴

Similarly, with the goal of pan-British political and social reform rather than national self-determination, the Chartist generation of the 1830s and '40s also seems to have largely bypassed Scottish medieval icons and principles. Chartist organisers and pamphleteers continued to draw instead on more recent political declarations (1689, 1776) and to commemorate the reform movement's martyrs and key events from the 1790s onward (such as the anniversary of the Peterloo Massacre of 16 August 1819).⁵ It seems natural, then, that only with the advent of a growing Home Rule movement in the 1860s (the decade which also saw the National Wallace monument at Stirling erected by public subscription), would the Declaration come into its own as an inspiring text of obvious appeal to key sections of

⁴ C. Kidd, *Subverting Scotland's past: Scottish Whig historians and the creation of an Anglo-Scottish Identity, 1689-c.1830* (Cambridge, 1993), passim, 104-5 for the Declaration; idem, 'The Strange Death of Scottish History' Revisited: Constructions of the Past in Scotland, c.1790-1914', *Scottish Historical Review*, 76 (1997), 86-102; E.J. Cowan, 'Identity, Freedom and the Declaration of Arbroath', in D. Broun, R.J. Finlay and M. Lynch eds., *Image and Identity: the Making and Re-making of Scotland Through the Ages* (Edinburgh, 1998), 38-68; K.J. Williams, *The First Scottish Enlightenment: Rebels, Priests and History* (Oxford, 2020), esp. chs 3-5.

⁵ J. Epstein, 'Radical Dining, Toasting and Symbolic Expression in Early Nineteenth-Century Lancashire: Rituals of Solidarity', *Albion*, 20, 2 (1988), 271-91; G. Pentland, 'Betrayed by Infamous Spies?' The Commemoration of Scotland's 'Radical War' of 1820', *Past and Present*, 201 (2008), 141-73; A. Tyrell and M.T. Davis, 'Bearding the Tories: the Commemoration of the Scottish Political Martyrs of 1793-94', in P.A. Pickering and A. Tyrell eds., *Contested Sites: Commemoration, Memorial and Popular Politics in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Farnham, 2004), 25-56; M. Nixon and G. Pentland, 'The Material Culture of Scottish Reform Politics, c.1820-c.1884', *Journal of Scottish Historical Studies*, 32 (2012), 28-49, at 6-9.

politicised Scottish society in challenging the Unionist status quo. The latter view of the majority from all classes in Scotland, however, continued to contest and lay claim to invoke such medieval icons as Wallace, Bruce, Bannockburn and Arbroath as British talismans. This imagined community followed the lead of enlightenment historians and Walter Scott in deploying these historic figures, events and texts as being responsible for keeping England and sovereign Scotland and its institutions apart until they were ready for the fruits of union and Empire as equals.⁶

Nevertheless, despite this broadly accepted chronology, might closer exploration here of Scottish working-class libraries and readers of the period allow us to cautiously re-position the Declaration's profile and importance within the late Georgian period of swelling radical political agitation and revolutionary threat?⁷ Of course, commemoration of famous people,

⁶ Kidd, *Subverting Scotland's Past*, 268-80; Morton, *Unionist Nationalism*, ch. 1. Crucially, this fragmented Scottish chronology deviates from the broad patterns of development for cultural and political nationalism through the eighteenth, nineteenth and on into the twentieth centuries outlined for many other (European) nations by key scholars: e.g. from a vast literature, E. Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism: New Perspectives on the Past* (Bodmin, 1983), 44, 47; B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 1983), 19, 41, 89-90; A. Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism* (Cambridge, 1997), 26, 55, 61-5, 70-3; J. Breuilly ed., *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Nationalism* (Oxford, 2013), chs 2, 5, 8.

⁷ For the broad working-class political and socio-economic background of the period see: W.H. Fraser, *Conflict and Class: Scottish Workers, 1700-1838* (Edinburgh, 1988), ch. 6; T. Clarke and T. Dickson, 'The Birth of Class?', in T.M. Devine & R. Mitchison eds. *People and Society in Scotland: Volume I, 1760-1830* (Edinburgh, 1988), 292-309, at 297-304; C. A. Whatley, *Scottish Society, 1707-1830* (Edinburgh, Manchester, 2000), chs 6-8; I.G.C. Hutchison, *Industry, Reform and Empire: Scotland, 1790-1880* (Edinburgh, 2020), chs 7-8.

places and dated events is far easier to initiate and sustain, even in a post-Reformation Protestant polity and society, than it is for a medieval Latin document, not least one addressed to the Pope in the name of an exclusive assembly of aristocrats in support of the crown. This surely remains the case no matter how inspiringly (or ambivalently) that source might translate. In the early nineteenth century, the post-Waterloo fears of national and local authorities that Robert the Bruce and his battle victory at Bannockburn of 23-24 June 1314 might become embroiled with working-class agitation in distressed weaving and mining communities like Bannockburn parish, Stirlingshire, are to an extent predictable, if often hard to evidence from contemporary correspondence. Throughout 1819-20, the papers of Sir William Murray of Polmaise and Touchadam (1773-1847), Deputy Lord Lieutenant for Stirlingshire, recorded reports of weavers in Bannockburn and adjacent parishes making arms and carrying copies of Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man*, William Cobbett's tuppenny *Political Register*, Thomas Wooler's radical London title *The Black Dwarf*, and short-lived Scottish reformist titles like *The Spirit of Union*. There was thus real fear of sedition being fermented in the shadow of Stirling's castle-garrison. Crucially, Murray was also the landowner of the Borestone site, the traditional field marker for the first day of the battle of Bannockburn. He tried, unsuccessfully, to prevent political rallies of up to 1,500 local weavers and miners assembling on that field, particularly around the anniversary of the battle with frequent speech invocations of the inspiring struggles of medieval Scots against tyranny (more so by the seeming-everyman Wallace than the noble/royal Bruce).⁸ Stirling diarist, Dr John Lucas, noted that tensions had

⁸ Stirling Council Archives [SCA], GD 189 Murray of Polmaise MS 1/51 (4 April 1820), MS 1/87 and SC8/2/2 Minute Book of the AGM of the Depute Lieutenants, Stirlingshire, 1816-31, entry for 19 May 1820.

begun as early as 24 June 1814, the 500th anniversary of Bannockburn, when a crowd of 500 local weavers opposed to the Corn Laws had occupied the Borestone.⁹

The early nineteenth century perhaps saw only the tentative, contested beginnings of such historic (as opposed to contemporary) anniversary commemoration and its conscious politicisation.¹⁰ At a time of war, the calendar year from 25 October 1809 had seen George III's 50-year jubilee marked through public ceremonies, part of a trend which increasingly appropriated to the establishment control of what might otherwise be expected, according to Scripture, to be an anniversary or 'Jubilee' heralding widespread political, social and economic redress.¹¹ From 1815, Stirling burgh council and the castle garrison otherwise made sure to mirror these British civic ranks by marking with their own annual parades, dinners, toasts and artillery salutes such important state events as Wellington's victory (18 June) or Napoleon's abdication (22 June), both just after the king's birthday (4 June). The latter was however a civic affair often also marked by localised protest and drunkenness.¹² In truth, establishment figures in Stirlingshire post-1815 were just as nervous as elsewhere that public spaces and gatherings might be hijacked for rival political purposes, and references to Scotland's medieval wars did

⁹ SCA, PD16/4/2 Diary of Dr James Lucas pp. 9, 166-168; *Scots Magazine*, 1 August 1814.

¹⁰ R. Finlay, 'Heroes, Myths and Anniversaries in Modern Scotland,' *Scottish Affairs*, 18 (1997), 108-25; R. Quinault, 'The Cult of the Centenary, c.1784-1914,' *Historical Research*, 71 (1998), 303-23; T.G. Otte, 'Centenaries, self-historization and the mobilization of the masses', in idem ed., *The Age of Anniversaries: The Cult of Commemoration, 1895-1925* (London, 2017), 1-35, at 1-3.

¹¹ M. Chase, 'From Millennium to Anniversary: the concept of Jubilee in Late Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century England', *Past & Present*, 129 (1990), 132-47, at 141-3.

¹² *Caledonian Mercury*, 18 June, 20 June, 23 June, 25 June, 27 June 1815; C.A. Whatley, 'Royal Day, People's Day: The Monarch's Birthday in Scotland, c.1660-1860' in R. Mason and N. Macdougall eds., *People and Power in Scotland: Essays in Honour of T.C. Smout* (Edinburgh, 1992), 170-88.

feature. For example, in industrial Kilmarnock, Ayrshire, in December 1816 when a petitioning meeting cited Bruce's 1314 victory as a model against tyranny which should be emulated against the present Liverpool government. These were speeches quickly published as a pamphlet which in turn led to the March 1817 trial and conviction for sedition of a weaver, Alexander McLaren, and a merchant, Thomas Baird.¹³ Then, perhaps most infamously, in 1819 there was a further trial in Airdrie, North Lanarkshire, where a sheriff gaoled the entire burgh band for playing Robert Burns' *Scots Wha Hae wi Wallace Bled (Bruce's Address to his troops before Bannockburn)* at a political rally.¹⁴ Similar historical allusions arose, on the very eve of what later became known as Scotland's 'Radical War', in a severely economically distressed and disturbed Paisley, Renfrewshire, after a public meeting on 25 January 1820, emboldened by strikes and rallies by up to 30,000 workers through mid-1819. The later assembly led to the local publication of a *Process of the Poor Operatives of [Paisley] Abbey parish against the heritors and kirk session* for their failings in poor relief. This memorial, originally signed by over 600 workers, decried the loss of the Scottish characteristics of 'dauntless and heroic valour, inflexible fidelity, and an ardent love of independence' displayed by Wallace and Bruce and their compatriots at a time when 'LIBERTY or DEATH, was written on every heart.'¹⁵

The Stirling-based trials of those insurrectionist workers captured at the skirmish which ended the 'Radical War', the battle of Bonnymuir, Stirlingshire, on 5 April 1820, began with

¹³ J. Dow ed., *The Trial of Alexander M'Laren, and Thomas Baird, before the High Court of Justiciary, at Edinburgh, on the 5th and 7th March 1817, for Sedition* (Edinburgh, 1817), 2, 16-17, 61-2, 84; J. Smith ed., *Recollections of James Turner, Esq. of Thrushgrove* (Glasgow, 1854), 20-37.

¹⁴ P.B. Ellis and S. Mac a'Ghobhainn, *The Scottish Insurrection of 1820* (London, 1970), 123.

¹⁵ Renfrewshire Local Studies Centre [RLSC] (Paisley): *Process of the Poor Operatives of the Abbey Parish against the Heritors and Kirk Session* (Paisley, 1820), 4-5, 23, 49. Robert Bruce's daughter, Marjorie (d.1316), was buried in Paisley Abbey (the parish church after 1560).

arraignments before a Sheriff Ranald MacDonald on 23 June, Bannockburn's anniversary.¹⁶ That may have been coincidence. But there was deliberate and sustained application by these authorities over the next few years to counter any further radical association with Bruce and the Borestone site. By 1823, probably years earlier, a *Stirling and Bannockburn Caledonian Society* had been established. Its chief, Sheriff MacDonald himself (with Walter Scott named as a deputy without being asked), was joined each year on 24 June by local councillors, MPs, military officers, landowners and industrial employers. This body, surely further inspired by Scott's carefully choreographed ceremonial for George IV's visit to Edinburgh in 1822, made an annual parade in Highland dress from Stirling castle to the Borestone and there laid a wreath, but made no speeches, before returning to the middle-class suburb of the King's Park in Stirling for Highland games, dancing, music and school prizes. Their recorded toasts were suitably Unionist-Nationalist: George IV, the army and navy, Wallace, Nelson, Trafalgar, Ossian, Burns, Scott and Waterloo (which was compared directly but safely to 1314). The participation, too, of local self-help societies and educational bodies made this an effective paternalist method of defusing popular invocation of Bannockburn and Bruce in support of calls for reform or strikes: it was arguably only with the burgeoning Home Rule movement post-1850 that the Borestone site was reclaimed for such popular political assembly.¹⁷

However, we can also connect these early nineteenth-century tensions to Dunfermline, West Fife, another depressed weaving, mining and historic royal burgh oft-suspected as a

¹⁶ SCA, GD 189 Murray of Polmaise MS 1/85 (a calendar of prisoners).

¹⁷ SCA, PD1/96 *Meeting of the Stirling and Bannockburn Caledonian Society*, 24 June 1824, and PD1/95, *Regulations of the Bruce and Thistle Friendly Society of Bannockburn* (1815); *Caledonian Mercury*, 7 July 1825; National Library of Scotland [NLS] (Edinburgh), APS.1.80.72 - *Rules and Regulations of the Stirling and Bannockburn Caledonian Society*. For more details about events in Stirling see Penman, 'Bannockburn and Popular Politics', 167-77.

potential flashpoint of revolt amidst economic decline. Burgh and County Council authorities there had similarly shared reports of worker rallies and radical literature post-Waterloo.¹⁸ Such tensions were clearly heightened by the unearthing and wide reporting in February 1818 of Robert Bruce's grave and bones in Dunfermline's ruined medieval Abbey (where he lay alongside at least six other medieval Scottish kings and a royal saint, Queen Margaret). *The Black Dwarf* responded to the discovery: it joked that Fife radicals now carried both Bruce's bones and Paine's *Rights of Man* in their pockets and then parodied Burns's 'Scots Wha Hae' and his pro-republican poems of 1793 which lamented the 'Ghost of Bruce' walking Bannockburn field with a tilt at Westminster's 'Sidmouth, Chains and Slavery!'¹⁹ In response, that middle-class oracle of moderation, *Blackwood's Magazine*, ran a poetry competition for the best-imagined exchange between Wallace and Bruce at Carron Shore after the battle of Falkirk. This was a vignette made famous by Blind Hary's *The Wallace* of the 1470s, a hugely popular poetic work published in multiple editions c.1560-c.1900. *Blackwood's* rewarded a suitably romantic, apolitical entry by an Englishwoman.²⁰ This was followed by reporting of the official reburial of Bruce's bones in Dunfermline Abbey Church as a private, Protestant triumph of Union. This ceremony had been safe-guarded by Edinburgh officials led by the Deputy Royal Remembrancer and a Royal Physician on 5 November 1819: this was Guy

¹⁸ National Register of Archives of Scotland [NRAS] (Edinburgh), 1454, Blair Adam Archive (Fife), Series 2/225 Provost Wilson of Dunfermline to Sir William Adam, 20 Nov.1819; *Scots Magazine*, iv, 274-6 (Sept. 1819).

¹⁹ *Black Dwarf*, 11, ii, 18 March 1818, p. 176; Penman, 'Robert Bruce's Bones', 26-7.

²⁰ *Blackwood's Magazine*, xii (March 1818), p. 691 and xxxiii (December 1819), pp. 297-305; C. Kidd, 'The English Cult of Wallace and the Blending of Nineteenth-Century Britain', in E.J., Cowan ed., *The Wallace Book* (Edinburgh, 2007), 136-50, at 144-5.

Fawkes' Day but also the double holiday of the Hanoverian Landings of 1688.²¹ The authorities' fears, at a time of widespread chatter about potential working-class revolt and the need for civil militia preparedness, were also surely heightened in Dunfermline by the coincidence and widespread reporting of radical William Cobbett's exhumation in America (c.29 September 1819) of the bones of Thomas Paine and his declared intention in the wake of Peterloo to return them to Britain via Liverpool to rally the radical cause (which he did by 3 December if to no real effect).²² Dunfermline's titled heritors, including Sir William Adam of Blair Adam as Lord Chief Commissioner of the Jury Court, sought to exclude public attendance at the reinterment of Bruce's bones but were forced to admit a large if peaceable crowd of locals for a time.²³ Adam himself and his friend Walter Scott boycotted the ceremony itself, the Waverley author fearing embroilment with local 'tomfoolery'.²⁴ The same heritors evaded their promises to

²¹ National Records of Scotland [NRS] (Edinburgh), GB234/HR159/3, Dunfermline Parish Heritors' Records, Minute Book 1815-37, 28 Nov. 1818 to 7 Jan. 1819; J. Sharpe, *Remember, Remember: A Cultural History of Guy Fawke's Night* (Cambridge, Mass., 2008), chs 3-4.

²² P.A. Pickering, 'A 'Grand Ossification': William Cobbett and the Commemoration of Thomas Paine', in Pickering & Tyrell eds., *Contested Sites*, 57-80; K. Castellano, 'William Cobbett, 'Resurrection Man': the Peterloo Massacre and the Bones of Thomas Paine', in M. Demson and R. Hewitt eds., *Commemorating Peterloo: Violence, Resilience and Claim-making during the Romantic Era* (Cambridge, 2020), 183-204.

²³ *Caledonian Mercury*, 11 Nov. 1819; Penman, 'Robert Bruce's Bones', 34-5

²⁴ NRAS, 1454, Blair Adam Archive, Series 2/B.199 and /231, i-iii, 8 Oct., 27 Oct. and 30 Oct. 1819; *ibid*, Walter Scott Box, B.6/24, Scott to Adam 23 Aug. 1818. Adam, Scott and other Edinburgh legal and cultural figures gathered regularly at Adam's Blair Adam House, just north of Dunfermline, from where they made pilgrimages to sites of historical importance (including Dunfermline Abbey): this group often included Thomas Thompson (1768-1852), Deputy Clerk Register, who edited from 1814 the *Acts of the Parliaments of Scotland*, although volume I containing a

mark Bruce's grave then and for the next 60 years.²⁵ Yet, as around Stirling, the Edinburgh-Fife authorities, struggling in an unprecedented context of historical association and popular unrest, had arguably done well to contain matters.

Alongside these developments, there are several points that might initially suggest that association with the Declaration of Arbroath could also have been a factor in political tensions up to and including the failed workers' insurrection of 1820. That week of disturbances in early April, culminating in violence at Bonnymuir, eight miles south of Bannockburn, with additional skirmishes in Glasgow, Paisley, Greenock and Ayr, had begun with a central 'Committee of Organisation' of workers' union societies based in the western and central industrial heartlands which issued an *Address to the Inhabitants of Great Britain and Ireland*. This was a call to arms fly-posted across all central-urban Scotland.²⁶ In its pithy length [see Table 1], tone and language it drew on other (crucially) Anglo-British declarations of political

transcription of the Declaration of Arbroath would only be published in 1844 [Penman, 'Robert Bruce's Bones', 15-24].

²⁵ NRS, E.310/23, King's Remembrancer's Letter Book 2 Jan. 1818-30 June 1818, pp.115-17; GB234/HR159/4, Dunfermline Parish Heritors' Records, Minute Book 1838-82, 20 Nov. 1849, 7 May 1857; Penman, 'Robert Bruce's Bones', 8, 38.

²⁶ The *Address* is reproduced in C.J. Green ed., *Trials for High Treason in Scotland under a special commission at Stirling, Glasgow, Paisley, Dumbarton and Ayr in the year 1820* (3 vols., Edinburgh, 1825), i, 46-8, and online at <https://books.openedition.org/pus/9977?lang=en>, from C. Auer ed., *Scotland and the Scots, 1707-2007: A Reader* (Strasbourg, 2013), 128-30. For the wider context and events of 1820 in Scotland see the excellent G. Pentland, *The Spirit of the Union: Popular Politics in Scotland, 1815-1820* (London, 2011), esp. ch. 4, and 97-8 for the *Address*; for the British context see M. Chase, *1820: Disorder and Stability in the United Kingdom* (Manchester, 2013), chs 1-3.

principal, not least the historic statements of rights which it does *explicitly* reference, Magna Carta (1215) and the Bill of Rights (1689):

Table 1: Comparison of historic ‘declarations’/petitions

Address to the Inhabitants of Great Britain and Ireland (1820) – c.1,070 words

US Declaration of Independence (1776) – c.1,370 words

Claim of Right (1689) – c. 2,140 words

National Covenant, 1638 – c.4,160 words

Declaration of Arbroath (1320) – c.1,170 words

Magna Carta (1215) – c.4,400 words

However, in also calling for a general strike (which some c.60,000 workers would heed) and armed revolution across Britain leading to ‘free parliaments’, the address might be felt at first hearing to channel the outright defiance at all costs of the Declaration of Arbroath more directly. For just as the Scottish nobles in 1320 had pledged to drive out and replace even King Robert if he subverted their rights as a community and gave up the fight for sovereignty - the preamble lines to the most oft-quoted, rousing sections of the Declaration - so the 1820 placard vowed that:

those who shall be found carrying arms against those who intend to regenerate their country and restore its INHABITANTS to their NATIVE DIGNITY. We shall consider them as TRAITORS to their Country, and ENEMIES to their King, and treat them as such.

That the 1820 committee *Address* reflected political aims and language currently circulating in Scottish and British agitative circles, sentiment which itself drew on recent political events and slogans and which would presage others, is hinted at by its inclusion of the phrase ‘LIBERTY

or DEATH.’ Significantly this was rendered in print capitols in the same emphatic way as in the Paisley workers’ process of parish complaint of 1819-20, echoing its common usage in the American Wars of Independence c.1775-6 and anticipating its resonance in Greece’s fight for independence from 1821.²⁷

Such a general connection of language, principle and resolve, at least, has been used to assert a possible (but subsequently disputed) link to the Declaration of Arbroath for modern Revolutionary movements and their written statements.²⁸ Further suggestive coincidence might be used to take this further. After all, 5 April 1820 found the remaining contingents of armed workers from Glasgow and Condorrat (Cumbernauld, North Lanarkshire), led in platoons by two ex-servicemen, the weavers John Baird and Andrew Hardie, marching to Carron Ironworks outside Falkirk. This armaments manufactory stood on the very site of what had become Hary’s much-celebrated literary location for William Wallace’s reported exchange with Robert Bruce after the battle of Falkirk (1298), where the lesser subject openly criticised the behaviour of the-man-who-would-be-king. If more local armed support had been forthcoming for Baird and Hardie’s group then the Ironworks could have been occupied on the 500th anniversary of the Declaration, 6 April 1820. Instead, that dwindling force of c.30 armed men was routed by Kilsyth militia at Bonnymuir, just as three days later Port Glasgow Volunteer troops opened

²⁷ R. Raphael, *Founding Myths: stories that hide our patriotic past* (New York, 2004), ch. 6.

²⁸ L.S. Harrison, ‘That Famous Manifesto’: The Declaration of Arbroath, the Declaration of Independence, and the Power of Language’, *Scottish Affairs*, 26.4 (2017), 435-59. See Cynthia Neville’s review in *Scottish Historical Review*, 84, 1 (2005), 104-5, of Ted Cowan’s *‘For Freedom Alone’: The Declaration of Arbroath, 1320* (East Linton, 2003), especially his chs 5-6.

fire in Greenock, Renfrewshire, on an angry crowd protesting the removal of five radical prisoners from Paisley, killing six and wounding 12.²⁹

Of course, here, in the absence (thus far) of explicit comment in correspondence, trial-proceedings or speeches on either side in 1820, there is the danger of misinterpreting a close coincidence of date as solid link, distorted by our own modern perception of historic anniversaries. It is certainly fair to say that c.1820 radical association with historic figures, sites, anniversaries and texts remained more of a perceived establishment concern (and even that on the fringes of official reaction) than a consistent or hard-pressed strategy of organisation by radical pamphleteers or emerging working-class leaders. We thus return to the caution of several scholars that the Declaration, although published and commented upon in works throughout the eighteenth century, was not so widely known as to have such a direct motivational effect amongst a literate and politicised (skilled) working-class rising post-1815.

After all, Ted Cowan produced a listing of the Declaration's appearances in print in full, pre- and post-1776, for G.W.S. Barrow's Declaration of Arbroath conference collection for the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland. This identified only 17 published versions up to and including 1820, predominantly the expensive editions of Mackenzie (often without English translation) and James Anderson with subsequent cheaper if limited reprinting.³⁰ Such publications and knowledge thus do indeed seem almost exclusive to literate middle-class circles, predominantly clerical, legal and scholarly. This is thus seemingly some way from the Declaration growing in fame by c.1820 to constitute a true 'cultural artefact', a touch-stone of collective memory drawn from Scotland's medieval past and helping to construct its emerging

²⁹ Ellis and Mac a'Ghobhainn, *Scottish Insurrection of 1820*, 22-3 (*Address*) and chs 7-12; Pentland, *Spirit of the Union*, 97-101.

³⁰ E.J. Cowan, 'Declaring Arbroath', in G. Barrow ed., *The Declaration of Arbroath: History, Significance, Setting* (Edinburgh, 2003), 13-31, Appendix at 26-8.

national identity, one so well-known as to be easily and consensually referenced by a broad spectrum of Scottish society, then distilled to an essence and crucially, recast or reimagined to suit present political and cultural purposes (as it could be said historic events like the battles of Stirling Bridge and Bannockburn, or the Reformation of 1560 and National Covenant of 1637 had already become to a certain extent): in sum, Arbroath was not yet part of Scotland's vernacular 'usable past'.³¹ The gulf between such medieval propaganda and its motives and then nineteenth-century workers, no matter how literate, seeking better pay, conditions, poor relief and a vote, would thus seem obvious.

Nevertheless, can the evidence for the Declaration's apparently insubstantial level of circulation and fame by c.1820 be challenged to suggest that the 1320 letter, and its *date* and *place* of issue as well as its language and meaning, *were* more popularly if unevenly known? At the very least, through successive generations c.1775-c.1840 when working-class literacy and thus politicisation and trade-union organisation undoubtedly did grow, might this explain short-hand references by Walter Scott and other writers (whose views were not purely Tory and elite but could also be reformist and nationalist) to the 'famous' or 'celebrated letter' or even 'manifesto'? These had been phrases first applied to the 1320 letter by Aberdeenshire Catholic scholar, Thomas Innes, in his *Critical Essay on the Ancient Inhabitants of the Northern Parts of Britain* (1729), then repeated in *Scots Magazine* reviews of the 1740s). This is language which arguably does speak to a widening knowledge of the Declaration and its (political) contents.³²

³¹ For discussions of this concept throughout Scotland's history see the several valuable essays in E.J. Cowan and R.J. Finlay eds., *Scottish History: The Power of the Past* (Edinburgh, 2002), esp. chs 1-8.

³² G. Stuart, *Observations on the Public Law and Constitutional History of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1779), 339 ('celebrated'); *Scots Magazine*, 7 August 1747 p. 20, 5 August 1748 p. 21, 5 February 1765, pp. 22-6; J. Jamieson ed., *The Bruce, or the Metrical History of Robert I, King of Scots* (Edinburgh, 1820),

It is after all possible, at the risk of ‘Declaration spotting’, to add to Cowan’s list of Arbroath’s appearances in print up to April 1820. An initial cast in the National Library of Scotland (and several growing digital libraries online) allows us to add several works which either reproduce the barons’ letter of 1320 to the Pope in full and in translation, often with commentary; or at least do quote its most significant passages. For example, take popular if at times controversial political journalist, William Guthrie, whose 10-volume *General History of Scotland* was oft-reissued after its first appearance in 1767. This history, published by subscription funds, reproduced Mackenzie’s 1689 translation of Arbroath and asserted that:

for the freedom of its sentiments, [it] is not perhaps to be equalled in the chronicles of any nation in those days...their laws were superior to their king, [and] he was no more than the guardian of his people’s freedom, and dismissible from his charge and sovereignty the moment he attempted to subvert it.³³

Or try Robert Heron, son of a Kircudbright weaver, whose general *History of Scotland*, started in a debtor’s prison and published in six affordable volumes in Edinburgh in 1794-9, elaborated on the benchmark of Lord Hailes’ coverage of and summary quotations from the Declaration (where that authority had dismissed its ‘prurient’ take on Scotland’s ancient origin history but

286 (‘celebrated’); P.F. Tytler, *A History of Scotland* (8 vols, Edinburgh 1828-43), i, 318-21 (‘memorable’); W. Scott, *A History of Scotland* (3 vol., Edinburgh, 1841), i, 139-40 (‘celebrated’). For Innes see: T. Innes, *Critical Essay on the Ancient Inhabitants of the Northern Parts of Britain* (2 vols., London, 1729), ii, 554, 616-21 (‘famous letter...often published’); and Williams, *First Scottish Enlightenment*, 104.

³³ W. Guthrie, *A General History of Scotland from the Earliest Accounts to the Present Time* (10 vols., London, 1767), ii, 263-7; D. Allan, ‘Guthrie, William (1708?-1770)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* [ODNB] (Oxford, 2004) - <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/11792>, accessed 15/3/21.

lauded the nobles' patriotic principles, in a volume first published in 1779 and repeatedly reprinted, including in 1819).³⁴ Heron, after his own detailed summary of the 'apology and remonstrance' from 'Aberbrothick', asserted that 'injustice and oppression had so probed their feelings to the quick that [the Scots nobles] were awakened to reason.'³⁵ As Ted Cowan argued passionately to this conference in seeking to reclaim Heron's importance for Georgian liberal and radical circles, this was a gloss which sought clearly to make a reformists' connection between the language and aims of the 1320 letter and the state and fate of an enlightened Scotland as 1800 approached.

Even such cheaper published volumes, of course, remained beyond the individual purchasing power of Scotland's working classes. Yet as recent research by Vivienne Dunstan, Mark Towsey, Keith Manley, John Crawford and Lauren Weiss has shown (thus all work by historians of reading and readers), the works of Heron, Guthrie and many others were regular catalogue purchases and items borrowed through circulating or subscription libraries with working-class membership.³⁶ These libraries had emerged on an impressive scale throughout

³⁴ Sir D. Dalrymple, Lord Hailes, *Annals of Scotland: from the accession of Malcolm III in the year MLVII to the accession of the House of Stewart in the year MCCCLXXI, to which are added, tracts relative to the history and antiquities of Scotland* (3 vols, 3rd edition, Edinburgh, 1819), ii, 115-19.

³⁵ R. Heron, *A History of Scotland from the Earliest Times to the Era of the Abolition of Hereditary Jurisdictions of Subjects in the year 1748* (6 vols., Edinburgh, 1794-9), ii, 229-34; T.F. Henderson, revised by H.G.C. Matthew, 'Heron, Robert (174-1807)', *ODNB* - <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/13090>, accessed 15.3.21.

³⁶ V. Dunstan, 'Glimpses into a Town's Habits in Enlightenment Scotland: analysing the Borrowings of Gray Library, Haddington, 1732-1816', *Journal of Scottish Historical Studies*, 26 (2006), 42-59, and 'Reading habits in Scotland, c.1750-c.1820', unpublished PhD, University of Dundee (2010); M. Towsey, *Reading the Scottish Enlightenment: Books and their Readers in Provincial Scotland, 1750-*

central Scotland by 1820. As well as many middle-class foundations, there were over 50 small workers' libraries and several literary societies in Glasgow alone by the 1790s. Similar beginnings were identifiable in Paisley, Kilsyth (Stirlingshire), Stirling, Ayr, Falkirk, Dunfermline and even Arbroath (Angus) itself by 1810.³⁷ Heron's *History of Scotland*, for example, can be found in the surviving catalogues and associated pamphlet collections accessed by working-class patrons in Paisley (f. 1769/1802/1806), Kirkcaldy's Subscription Library (by 1800), the Glasgow Mechanics Institution Library (by 1825), and the Kilsyth Reading Society (by 1818, eight miles west of Bonnymuir).³⁸ This previously underestimated growth in working-class reading down to c.1800 and beyond might be linked back further in time through the late seventeenth- and eighteenth-centuries to the higher levels of Lowland literacy (once post-1560 myths of state Scottish education and learning are set aside) and popular affordable print-in-circulation via chapbooks, pamphlets, almanacs, handbills and early newspapers, identified by Rab Houston, Cowan, Michael Paterson, and Adam Fox,

1820 (Leiden, 2010), chs 2-3; K.A. Manley, *Books, Borrowers and Shareholders: Scottish Circulating and Subscription Libraries before 1825: a Survey and Listing* (Edinburgh, 2012), passim; J.C. Crawford, 'The high state of affairs to which this part of the country has attained': Libraries, Reading and Society in Paisley, 1760-1830', *Library & Information History*, 30, 3 (2014), 172-94; L.J. Weiss, 'The Literary Clubs and Societies of Glasgow during the Long Nineteenth Century: a City's History of Reading through its Communal Practices and Productions', unpublished PhD, University of Stirling (2017).

³⁷ Manley, *Books, Borrowers and Shareholders*, 137-230 passim ('Listing' by county).

³⁸ *Ibid*, 182, 200, 216-18, 226; RLSA, Paisley Pamphlets no 20; *Catalogue of the Glasgow Mechanics Institution Library* (1823), 10; Dunfermline Carnegie Library and Gallery [DCLG] Archives, R027.3 *Catalogue of the Kirkcaldy Subscription Library* (1888), 100; NLS, Pamphlets 3/2771 *Laws and Catalogue of the Books belonging to the Kilsyth Reading Society* (Glasgow, 1818), 3.

amongst others.³⁹ These are trends of literacy confirmed by the emerging research of the University of Stirling's project on *Books and Borrowing, 1750-1830* currently investigating Scottish borrowers' registers, including early case study analysis of the working men's collection held at Innerpefferay, Perthshire.⁴⁰

Alongside a core of Presbyterian religious works, these co-operative libraries typically favoured purchasing biography, history and travel literature.⁴¹ Here further works may have increased the 1320 Declaration's readership. For example, Thomas Pennant's best-selling Scottish journeys, reprinted in full over twenty times by 1820 as well as, crucially, included as an abridged entry in popular and affordable travel compendiums, quoted the letter at length in his passage of 1772 through the burgh of Arbroath (with its 3,500 weavers). By contrast, the

³⁹ R.A. Houston, *Scottish Literacy and the Scottish Identity: Illiteracy and Society in Scotland and Northern England, 1600-1800* (1985), 172-8 (libraries), chs 2, 10; E.J. Cowan and M. Paterson eds., *Folk in Print: Scotland's Chapbook Heritage* (2006), 11-40; A. Fox, *The Press and the People: Cheap Print and Society in Scotland, 1500-1785* (Oxford, 2020), 9-10, 14, chs 6, 9.

⁴⁰ E.g. J. Kennard, 'Labouring-Class Borrowing at Innerpefferay Library, 1815-33' (2 Aug. 2021) and eadem, 'A Comparison of the Borrowings of Different Classes at the Library of Innerpefferay, John Gray Library, Haddington, and Selkirk Subscription Library' (6 Sept. 2021), available at <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/> [News pages 3 and 4], accessed 1.12.21. See also the Open University's *Reading Experience Database, 1450-1945* at <https://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/reading/UK/>.

⁴¹ Manley, *Books, Borrowers and Shareholders*, 23-5.

first (*Old Statistical Account* (1793) for the parish ignores the famous 1320 missive.⁴² Yet such a popular and widely known source as Pennant for Arbroath underlines the obvious point that the letter need not have appeared in an explicitly academic, historical or political text, or in full, nor be the subject of politicised gloss, to reach an audience which might adapt it for contemporary purposes. In fact, for early libraries which often prohibited purchases of obviously political texts (as well as fiction), such travel or antiquarian works were their only chance to encounter the Declaration.⁴³

A wider search can be undertaken through extant subscription and public library catalogues published c.1775-c.1840 in those lowland industrial centres involved in the events of 1819-20: many of these are now held by local authority collections or the National Library of Scotland. These listings reveal, as for Heron's *History*, copies of Pennant in the early

⁴² T. Pennant, *A Tour in Scotland and Voyage to the Hebrides, 1772* (2nd ed., London, 1776), 131-7; J. Sinclair ed., *Old Statistical Account: Vol. VII - County of Forfar* (Edinburgh, 1793): Parish of Arbroath, 340-52, at 347-8, [https://stataccscot.edina.ac.uk/static/statacc/dist/viewer/osa-vol7-Parish record for Arbroath in the county of Forfar in volume 7 of account 1/osa-vol7-p340-parish-forfar-arbroath?search=arbroath](https://stataccscot.edina.ac.uk/static/statacc/dist/viewer/osa-vol7-Parish%20record%20for%20Arbroath%20in%20the%20county%20of%20Forfar%20in%20volume%207%20of%20account%201/osa-vol7-p340-parish-forfar-arbroath?search=arbroath), accessed 1.12.21; John Morrison, 'The declaration of Arbroath and the Absence of Imagery', in Muller ed., *Scotland and Arbroath*, 245-65. Pennant's journeys were abridged in an 1808 compendium edited by John Pinkerton, editor of Barbour's *The Bruce* in 1819, which also noted the 'celebrated' Declaration. See also M.A. Constantine, *Enlightenment Travel and British Identities: Thomas Pennant's Tours of Scotland and Wales* (London, 2017), chs 2, 6.

⁴³ E.g. *Catalogue of the Glasgow Mechanics Institution Library* (Glasgow, 1823), 5 - 'Books on Science, History, Voyages and Travels, and general Literature; but no book of a political, deistical or atheistic nature, shall, upon any account whatsoever, be admitted.' Or *Laws and Catalogue of the Books belonging to the Kilsyth Reading Society* (1818), 3 - 'no book of an irreligious, immoral or seditious tendency.'

subscription, circulating or public libraries of Stirling (x 2), Paisley, Greenock, Cupar, Kirkcaldy and Dunfermline (where there was also a separate Tradesmen's and Mechanics library by 1808).⁴⁴ Similarly, the perennially popular *Border History of England and Scotland*, by Rev. George Ridpath of Stichill (Roxburghshire), published in 1776 and reissued in 1810 and 1816, contextualised and quoted Arbroath's key passages as breathing a 'spirit of independency and determined resolution' which might easily have appealed to the workers' cause: it was a frequent loan item in the libraries of Stirling and Paisley.⁴⁵ The chief Renfrewshire burgh had indeed several communal libraries by this date, totalling thousands of volumes, including Patrick Abercromby's popular *Martial Achievements of the Scots Nation*, of 1711-15, an initially de-luxe two-volume folio edition, but which was reprinted in four affordable volumes in 1762. Abercromby, too, cited and glossed that 'bold, loyal, judicious and pious letter of 6 April 1320' in detail. Editions of his work also feature in the catalogues of Dunfermline Subscription Library (f.c.1789) and weaver George Caldwell's Paisley Circulating Library (f. 1769).

Although an older text, the enduring popularity of Abercromby reminds us that earlier publications which touched on the Declaration, and full editions of the 1320 letter published in

⁴⁴ J.C. Crawford, 'The bibliography of printed catalogues issued by publicly available libraries in Scotland 1765-1930: an analysis of the database', *The Bibliothek*, 23 (1998), 27-48; *Catalogue of Books in Stirling's Public Library* (1805), 34; G. Caldwell, *A Catalogue of the Paisley Circulating Library consisting of above 1,000 volumes* (1789), 10; *Catalogue of Paisley Library Society* (1858), 23; *Catalogue of Books in the Greenock Library* (1808), 32; *Catalogue of Books in the Dunfermline Library* (1825), 119; *Catalogue of Books in the Dunfermline Tradesmen's Library* (1823); *Laws and Catalogue of the Cupar Library* (1813), 64; *Catalogue of the Kirkcaldy Subscription Library* (1888), 164.

⁴⁵ *Catalogue of Books in Stirling's Public Library* (1805), 35; *Catalogue of Paisley Library Society* (1858), 28.

the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, including those of Mackenzie and James Anderson (1739), all remained obtainable by libraries established after c.1775.⁴⁶ These books could often be purchased for a modest second-hand fee, moreover, and their dissemination of knowledge of the Declaration and its text was thus sustained.⁴⁷ It follows that we should acknowledge the potential influence of older texts like Thomas Ruddiman's *Views on the Constitution of Scotland* or his *Dissertation concerning the competition for the crown of Scotland betwixt Lord Robert Bruce and Lord John Balliol* (1748), the latter of which can be found in Cupar's Library Catalogue of 1813.⁴⁸ A farmer's son and former schoolmaster of Laurencekirk (Perthshire), Ruddiman rose to be publisher for the University of Edinburgh and Keeper of the Advocates' Library in Edinburgh, editing and prefacing Anderson's Latin edition of Arbroath, *Selectus Diplomatum et Numismatum Scotiae* (with copies recorded in Stirling Public Library's catalogue of 1805 and by Paisley's Library Society). Anderson was thus a source Ruddiman drew on throughout his political works and pamphlets in disputes with

⁴⁶ P. Abercromby, *Martial Achievements of the Scottish Nation* (2 vols., Edinburgh, 1711-15), i, 610 and (2nd ed., 4 vols., Edinburgh, 1762); *Catalogue of Books in Stirling's Public Library* (1805), 1 (1st ed.); *Catalogue of Books in the Dunfermline Library* (1789), 299 (1st ed.) and (1825), 5 (1st ed.); Caldwell, *A Catalogue of the Paisley Circulating Library consisting of above 1,000 volumes* (1789), 16 (2nd ed.); Williams, *First Scottish Enlightenment*, 95-7, 172-8.

⁴⁷ See the second-hand purchases recorded in the Dunfermline Subscription Library Minutes, DCLG D/LIB/OS for 1806-21, including editions of Froissart, Chalmers' *Caledonia*, Nimmo's *History of Stirlingshire*, McRie's Knox biography, Hailes' *Antiquities* and Robert Kerr's 1811 2-volume biography of Robert Bruce.

⁴⁸ T. Ruddiman, *Dissertation concerning the competition for the crown of Scotland betwixt Lord Robert Bruce and Lord John Balliol* (Edinburgh, 1748), 85, 88; *Laws and Catalogue of the Cupar Library: Supplement of 1818* (Cupar, 1819), 10.

several other scholars.⁴⁹ Another George Mackenzie, a Ross-shire soldier's son, a physician and antiquary (friend to Ruddiman), also included both the transcribed 1689 Latin text and a full translation in his three-volume *Lives and Characters of the most Eminent Writers of the Scots Nation* (1708, repr. 1711, 1722): this was an older encyclopaedic title surely attractive to many discerning early libraries seeking volumes of broad appeal and which we can also add to Cowan's tally.⁵⁰

Moreover, as well as collectively purchasing, borrowing and reading works that reproduced and/or discussed the Declaration, working-class subscribers to these libraries can also be found contributing, if in smaller numbers, to the subscription *publication* of relevant titles. For example, publisher John Finlay of Arbroath secured public subscription for an 1805 edition of Ralph Holinshed's collected *Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland* which also included brief mention of the Scots' bold 'answer' to the Pope's summons after a detailed account of the 1320 Soules plot against King Robert (which according to some later-medieval chronicles had been provoked by the forceful gathering of noble seals to append to the

⁴⁹ A.P. Woolrich, 'Ruddiman, Thomas (1674-1757)', *ODNB* - <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/24249>, accessed 15.3.21; Pittock, 'The Declaration of Arbroath in Scottish Political Thought', 168-74; R. Mason, 'The Declaration of Arbroath in Print, 1680-1705', *Innes Review*, 72, 2 (2021), 158-76; *Catalogue of Books in Stirling's Public Library* (1805), 35; *Catalogue of Paisley Library Society* (1858), 24. Ruddiman disputed with a George Logan who also cited the Anderson edition of Arbroath in *A Treatise on Government; Shewing that the Right of the Kings of Scotland to the Crown was not Strictly and Absolutely Hereditary* (Edinburgh, 1746), 46.

⁵⁰ G. Mackenzie, *Lives and Characters of the most Eminent Writers of the Scots Nation* (3 vols., Edinburgh, 1708-22), i, 279-83; C. Jackson, 'Mackenzie, George (1669-1725)', *ODNB* - <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/17581>, accessed 15.3.21; Williams, *First Scottish Enlightenment*, 167-73.

Declaration). This volume's listed subscribers through an Arbroath Reading Society included 15 local weavers as well as working men from Dunfermline (two), Stirling (three) and, tantalisingly, even Carron Ironworks (two).⁵¹ Arguably, this represents further traces of a marked shift towards a more socio-economically diverse base of literate subscribers and readers, away from the landowning, professional or mercantile dominance of such literary patronage surveyed recently by Kelsey Jackson Williams for some 17 Scottish (mostly north-eastern) subscription publications c.1708-44.⁵²

Crucially, circulation or subscription libraries, and allied publishers, were often attached to mutual improvement, benevolence or literary and debating societies. Thus the printed word fed a vibrant oral culture and networks of learning and, for many, activism.⁵³ Here we might bring in evidence for the reform-minded Robert Burns as librarian for the Monkland's Friendly Society and other book clubs, ordering works by John Knox, Lord Hailes, William Robertson, Gilbert Stuart, Ridpath, Guthrie (who also wrote a hugely popular *Geographical World Grammar*), and even John Pinkerton's popular 1790 edition of Barbour's *The Bruce*, most of which dwell on or reference the 'celebrated' Declaration. Yet Burns also took part in debates, essay-readings and lectures with neighbouring weavers, farmhands, shop boys and

⁵¹ R. Hollinshead ed., *The Scottish Chronicle, or a Complete History and Description of Scotland* (2 vols., Arbroath, 1805), i, 449-51 and ii, 486-8. For the Arbroath Subscription Library Minutes and catalogues 1797-1872, see Angus Archives (Forfar), GB618/MS 451.

⁵² Williams, *First Scottish Enlightenment*, ch. 10.

⁵³ J.C. Crawford, "A not unedifying field for some local antiquary of the future': new evidence on library activity and mutual improvement: the experience of north-east Scotland", *Library & Information History*, 36, 1 (2020), 18-31.

clerks.⁵⁴ Recollections of radical life c.1819-20 in and around Paisley (Langloan, written by Janet Hamilton), Strathaven (by James Stevenson), Kilmarnock (by James Paterson) and even Dunfermline (by Andrew Carnegie, recalling his radical grandfather, Thomas Morrison, and that burgh's links to the *Friends of the People* of the 1790s) all confirm the importance of such growing literate and articulate networks, and of libraries and personal reading, in shaping collective workers' early political language and aims.⁵⁵

Nevertheless, thus far there is no explicit link born of such a network to tie the 1320 Declaration to the Radical War. Nationalist historian, Peter Beresford Ellis, asserts that ex-soldier and radicalised weaver, John Baird, captured at Bonnymuir and executed at Stirling in 1820, had joined his local circulating library at Condorrat (Cumbernauld) after demobilisation; however, (so far) this cannot be traced.⁵⁶ A Cumbernauld Public library was established in August 1816, but its first recorded officers suggest a predominantly middle-class group with a carefully curated theological and moral mission inspired by its pioneering neighbour, the

⁵⁴ L. McIlvanney, *Burns the Radical: Poetry and Politics in Late Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (Edinburgh, 2003), 39-41; Manley, *Books, Borrowers and Shareholders*, 95.

⁵⁵ J. Hamilton, *Poems, Essays and Sketches* (Glasgow, 1870), ix, 245-6, 456-64; J. Stevenson, *A True Narrative of the Radical Rising in Strathaven, in Vindication of the Parties Concerned, as also of the Martyred James Wilson, in Answer to McKenzie's Exposure of the 'Spy System' and the Rev. Mr Proudfoot, in the 'Statistics of Scotland'* (Glasgow, 1835); J. Paterson, *Autobiographical References: Including Recollections of the Radical Years 1819-20 in Kilmarnock* (Glasgow, 1871), 63, 70-3; A. Carnegie, *Autobiography of Andrew Carnegie* (Boston & New York, 1920), 26-35.

⁵⁶ P.B. Ellis, 'Baird, John (1788-1820)', *ODNB* - <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/42328>, accessed 15.3.21.

Leadhills Library (f. 1741).⁵⁷ A ‘John Baird’ does appear in January 1820 amongst the list of office-bearers of a Paisley Sabbath and Week-Day Evening School Society (which had over 2,300 pupils at that time), as does a Robert Ritchie, perhaps the same Paisley man of that name reported for posting copies of the 1820 workers’ *Address* on house walls.⁵⁸ Several Bairds, including a ‘wright’, Alexander, also appear in 1819-20 and down to the 1880s as subscribers and donors to an Airdrie Subscription Library.⁵⁹ Yet despite a lack of direct record-linkage to a library with catalogued titles and recorded subscribers for any of the Bonnymuir radicals (many of whom had names as ubiquitous as the 50 or so other workers from across central Scotland charged with and tried for sedition in 1820), we should not be surprised to find such a connection elsewhere.

Undeniably, a reading, book-borrowing, debating and correspondence network can be evidenced through trial testimony for the oldest radical executed in Paisley in 1820, James Wilson of Strathaven. His house was reported as a beehive of periodical exchange (including Cobbett’s *Register* and *The Black Dwarf*), literary discussion and political activity, a ‘[Trade] Union Club’ attended by 20-30 men at a time.⁶⁰ On occasion, moreover, we might find a tentative match between the few extant lists of names of library subscribers or officers from this period and those known to have been charged, injured or killed in the wider agitation of

⁵⁷ North Lanarkshire Archives [NLA] (Motherwell), U/72/3/1 ‘An Old County library’ (13pp, nd); <https://www.leadhillslibrary.co.uk/>, accessed 15.3.21; Manley, *Books, Borrowers and Shareholders*, 17-24, 127, 205.

⁵⁸ *Report of Paisley Sabbath & Week-Day Evening Schools Society of 1819* (Paisley, 1820), 2-3; *Trials for High Treason in Scotland*, i, 301-421 [Baird trial transcript] and iii, 365.

⁵⁹ NLA, U27/1893 J. Gardner, ‘An Airdrie library in the 18th century’; and UA/1/10/1/01 Airdrie Library Committee Minutes (1869-1906), *passim*.

⁶⁰ *Trials for High Treason in Scotland*, iii, 192, 365.

1820. For example, a John Turner was recorded as a subscriber to Greenock's Library and as sitting on its allied Library of Arts and Sciences committee established in 1819, his name matching that of a man listed as wounded by Port Glasgow troops in April 1820.⁶¹

However, perhaps most suggestive of all in search of a 1320-1820 connection, if still circumstantial, is the evidence that one of the known and fully translated reproductions of the Arbroath letter was published in the first quarter of 1820 in Glasgow, on the very eve of that year's armed revolt. It appeared in just the kind of affordable compendium volume of historic tracts popular with circulating libraries: a copy may have reached Renfrewshire Local Studies Archive via the nineteenth-century Paisley Library Society.⁶² Indeed, volume III (of IV) of the *Miscellanea Scotica* reproduced Mackenzie's 1689 translation as an 'historical tract' of contemporary interest with a preface note to the effect 'that if the King should offer to subvert their Civil Liberties, they will disown him as an Enemy, and choose another to be King, for their own defense.'⁶³ This was a gloss just as relevant to George III and his ministers as to

⁶¹ *Supplement to the catalogue of books in the Greenock Library for 1819* (1820), item 8 of NLS bundle RB.s.2283(1-8) including the 1808 catalogue and list of 200 subscribers and annual holdings supplements down to 1819; *Battle of Bonnymuir and An Account of the Skirmish which took place at Greenock on Saturday last, betwixt the port Glasgow Volunteers (escorting five Radical prisoners from Paisley) and the inhabitants; when Nine of the latter were killed and 15 dangerously Wounded* (Glasgow, 1820) - <https://digital.nls.uk/scotlandspages/timeline/1820.html> , accessed 15.3.21.

⁶² RLSC, PA PC146 *Catalogue of Paisley Library Society* (1858), 27; Cowan, 'Declaring Arbroath', 27 [#B.3].

⁶³ *Miscellanea Scotica: A collection of tracts relating to the history, antiquities, topography, and literature of Scotland* (4 vols., Glasgow, 1818-20), iii, 123-8; available at <https://archive.org/details/miscellaneascot04unkngoog/page/n155/mode/2up>. Volume iii was

Robert Bruce or Edward I. This edition's retention of Mackenzie's capitols and the translation to 'Liberty' in the 1320 letter's most famous passage might also seem to link it closely as source material for the organising committee's *Address* to the workers on 1 April to demand 'Liberty or Death', as well as to the aforementioned Paisley parochial meeting whose petitions were also published in 1820:

For it is not Glory, it is not Riches, neither is it Honour, but it is Liberty
alone that we fight and contend for, which no Honest man lose, but with his
life.⁶⁴

The Glasgow print shop of Robert Chapman which produced the *Miscellanea* set, working for publisher John Wylie and co. (with branches in Aberdeen, Kilmarnock and Greenock), was based at 81 Hutcheson Street. This was just two blocks north of Duncan Mackenzie's printing house at 20 Saltmarket where the radical workers' *Address* was produced off-the-books in late March 1820, dated to 1 April.⁶⁵ The Saltmarket had long been a hub for cheap handbill, chapbook, tract and school reader publication, with increasingly reformist and radical associations.⁶⁶ One of the fugitive print-workers charged with running off the *Address* was a

noticed/reviewed in *The Edinburgh Review*, xxxiii (66) in May 1820, p. 515, as part of a 'Quarterly List of New Publications January-April 1820'.

⁶⁴ *Miscellanea Scotica*, iii, 126. As opposed to the translation to 'freedom alone' favoured in modern scholarly editions by G.W.S. Barrow (1965), James Fergusson (1970), A.A.M. Duncan (1970 and editing Barbour 1997), Donald Watt et al editing Walter Bower's *Scotichronicon* [vol. vii, 5-9, 1996], and Barrow ed. (2003).

⁶⁵ *Glasgow Post Office Directory* (1819) and *Glasgow Directory* (1820), <http://digital.nls.uk/directories/browse/pageturner.cfm?id=83429752> and <http://digital.nls.uk/directories/browse/pageturner.cfm?id=83279214>, accessed 15/3/21.

⁶⁶ Fox, *Press and the People*, 9.

Robert Fulton, son of John, a man whom William Roach points out in his ground-breaking thesis on the (for him ‘failed’) radical movements of Scotland c.1815-c.1822 had delivered a series of reformist lectures in 1816-17 on Britain’s ‘constitution’ across Perthshire and Angus (including at Arbroath).⁶⁷ Moreover, it is easy to accept the notion that the workers who were likely authors of the 1820 *Address* - Parkhead weavers Robert Craig, James Armstrong and James Brash, reportedly aided by English radical, James Brayshaw - also had access to such books and materials and were themselves literate and articulate, steeped in political and historical reading. The transcribed cell-letters and scaffold speeches of Hardie and Baird attest to their relatively high-levels of literacy, piety and - although they had given their word to Sheriff Macdonald to avoid any such talk - their politicisation.⁶⁸

Therefore, the *opportunity* and *capacity* for working-class activists and their supporters to have read, interpreted and engaged with the 1320 Declaration and other historical sources certainly existed. Nevertheless, this remains a long way from proving that the Arbroath letter was a live element in the Radical War, as either a cultural touchstone in rallying support or as an associational inspiration to direct action, planned or improvised in the heat of the moment in the first week of April 1820. As is frequently noted by historians of literacy, possession of a volume does not prove it was read or understood. Allied to this, Gordon Pentland has cautioned against trusting self-published spy accounts of the events of 1820.⁶⁹ These are sources which Ellis and Mac a’Ghobhainn drew on to present a narrative for 1820 in which government *agent-*

⁶⁷ William M. Roach, ‘Radical Reform Movements in Scotland from 1815 to 1822’, unpublished PhD, University of Glasgow (1970), 23-5, 214, 220, 387-8.

⁶⁸ Pentland, *Spirit of the Union*, 90-2, 107; Ellis and Mac a’Ghobhainn, *Scottish Insurrection of 1820*, Appendix 1 (‘The letters of Baird and Hardie from the death cell’). See also J. Prebble, *The King’s Jaunt: George IV in Scotland, 1822* (London, 1988), 3-21.

⁶⁹ Pentland, *Spirit of the Union*, 102-4.

provocateurs not only penned the *Address* with its English historical references (thus for these scholars consciously neglecting the Arbroath letter of the *Scottish* barons) but also directed armed workers in Scotland into deliberate militia traps.⁷⁰ In the wake of the failed rising, even the *Black Dwarf* jibed unconvincingly on 12 April 1820, dismissing the call to strike and armed revolt, and the ensuing debacle at Bonnymuir, as the result of state schemes laid in association with the *Address*'s date of issue, 1 April.⁷¹

Was this in fact the ploy of a government agent or even Downing Street itself, to thus make 'Political April Fools' of the workers by baiting a trap – by issuing a false petition to principle and a call for armed help, a 'Huntigowk' for Scots of the day? It is tempting to suggest that if that were true then any use of the Declaration in 1820 lay, in fact, in the hands of state agents, drawn from the professional, literate and even antiquarian circles which had had earlier access to the text. We might leap from the named spy ring-leader, a 'John King' of Anderston (an assumed identity almost Sir David Lindsay of the Mount-like in its everyman yet royalist appeal), to Carron Ironworks, employing c.2,000 workers by 1814 and supplying the state with guns under royal charter.⁷² These are both thus symbols arguably kin to the anniversary of an *aristocratic, parliament-approved* Declaration of loyalty to a hero *king*, i.e. establishment icons, as problematic for Scottish radicals in 1820 as Arbroath's anti-English and Catholic context and heritage.

However, given that there was a general election held across the period 6 March-13 April 1820, with Scotland's royal burghs voting on 31 March, there might be just as much truth or error in the counter-notion that literate workers like the central organising committee

⁷⁰ Ellis and Mac a'Ghobhainn, *Scottish Insurrection of 1820*, 138-42.

⁷¹ *Black Dwarf*, 4 (14), 12 April 1820, p. 36.

⁷² *Ibid*, 28-9, 138-45, 165-71; B. Waters, *Where Iron Runs Like Water: a new history of Carron Iron Works, 1759-1982* (Edinburgh, 2001).

delegates - or even Hardie and Baird on the ground - adapted their plans *ad hoc* as their revolt unravelled and, crucially, a repeatedly promised simultaneous English rising failed to transpire.⁷³ Perhaps thinking on the hoof, they thus turned to Carron as a target and 6 April as a relevant anniversary through a loose association of the ‘celebrated’ 1320 letter with Blind Hary’s even more famous vignette of Wallace, the subject, criticising and thus reforming Scotland’s future king, Bruce, across the river at Carronshore after the battle of Falkirk. Perhaps most significantly, it is this exchange (often illustrated) that recurs regularly in the hugely popular chapbook literature of the day. Surviving examples of these penny works covering Bruce’s life and Bannockburn, by contrast, make little or no mention of the letter to the Pope, Arbroath or 1320.⁷⁴

In this context, we might indeed be wise not to simply expect the Declaration and similar direct textual inspirations from Scotland’s historic past as major drivers of popular protest in the early nineteenth century. This does indeed speak to a political context in which key emerging groups were not yet able to revive and deploy some of the nation’s iconic medieval totems and ideas to serve present-day purposes of identity and collective action. As Chris Whatley puts it, the ideas of liberty central to the Declaration may have had ‘wider purchase’ for transitional Scottish popular politics c.1800-20, a melting pot of Barbour, Hary, the Covenant, the Claim of Right, the American Declaration of Independence, Robert Burns and even Jane Porter’s popular novelisation of Wallace’s fight inspiring Bruce, *The Scottish*

⁷³ Pentland, *Spirit of the Union*, 93-4.

⁷⁴ NLS, ABS.1.203.018 (1-26), a collection of 26 chapbooks; Cowan and Paterson, *Folk in Print*, 343-4. Thus far the only mention found of the Arbroath letter in a chapbook is from a *Life of King Robert Bruce* (Glasgow, 1852), 19-20: ‘a manifesto to the Pope in justification of their cause, which was drawn up in a spirited manner’ (thus echoing Hailes?). The Universities of Stirling and Guelph (Canada) also hold special collections of Scottish chapbooks, some of them digitised.

Chiefs (1809).⁷⁵ But this was still a loose association of sources and broad ideas, usable but awkwardly nationalist, often ambivalent or even contradictory (and thus contested). Therefore, at best we can offer that the 1320 letter from Arbroath was surely much more widely available, known and read by Scottish late-Georgian workers (and other classes of Scot) than we have hitherto appreciated; but it remained limited in its utility at a time when Anglo-Scottish Whig and worker collaboration motivated class revolt and demands for reform. It may have been very much in the mix c.1815-20 but, if it did, it ‘intruded in ways that are hard to pin down’.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Is this, then, Porter meets Sallust via the 1320 letter (and 1776/89)? ‘...for while we have arms to wield a sword, he must be a fool that grounds them on any other terms than Freedom or Death’ [J. Porter, *The Scottish Chiefs* (2 vols., Philadelphia, 1819), i, 112].

⁷⁶ Whatley, ‘Industrialising Scotland and the Nation’, 276, 283.