The Politics of Reading at the Subscription Library in Britain in the Age of Reform, 1789-1832

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Abstract

This thesis integrates a study of the politics of reading and political reading into an analysis of the politics of Georgian Britain between the French Revolution in 1789 and the passage of the first Reform Act in 1832. It does so by examining a type of reading association that was widespread across the English-speaking Atlantic world, the subscription library. These libraries played a substantial role in the politics of Georgian Britain, and their political significance was multi-faceted. It was intellectual, by enabling the spread of printed material amongst a politically active membership; social, by providing a space within which members could connect with each other; and finally ideological, in the sense of the civic identity it imparted to a politically active middling class. Two libraries, the Bristol Library Society and the Leighton Library, Dunblane, are examined as case studies to demonstrate the political importance of the subscription library within different contexts. This thesis uses the books and manuscript records of both libraries, alongside a range of other sources, to examine the roles the subscription library and political reading played as instigators of political thought and action. It engages in a study of political reading and political readers through a series of different methodological approaches, examining the subscription library within the wider context of associational culture, as well as its use by the individual reader, a community of readers and reading during a time of crisis. Individuals turned to books throughout this period to make sense of the changes occurring around them, and their use of the subscription library partly constructed the intellectual and ideological context in which they read and participated in political events. These libraries were also venues of social politics themselves, their administration combining both democratic and constitutionalist features. Participation within the managed and ordered library space was socially prestigious and provided a sense of worthiness and respectability for a political class, as well as practical experience in the bureaucracy of committee governance and the art of politics.

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Abbreviations

BA	Bristol Archives.
BCL	Bristol Central Library.
ECPPEC	Eighteenth-Century Political Participation & Electoral Culture project.
ECLO	Eighteenth-Century Libraries Online.
Fasti	Hew Scott, ed., *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticanae: The Succession of Ministers in the Church of Scotland from the Reformation*., 7 vols. (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1915-28).
HoP	*History of Parliament Online*.
LRO	Liverpool Record Office.
ODNB	*Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.
USA	University of Stirling Archives.

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Introduction

> *Mr Adams's friendship & mine began at an earlier date… The different conclusions we had drawn from our political reading & reflections were not permitted to lessen mutual esteem… Like differences of opinion existing among our fellow citizens attached them to the one or the other of us, and produced a rivalship in their minds which did not exist in ours.*[1]
>
> Thomas Jefferson to Abigail Adams, 13 June 1804.

This thesis argues that the subscription library played a substantial role in the politics of Georgian Britain. Its significance was multifaceted: intellectual, by enabling the spread of printed material amongst a politically active membership; social, in the networks one was able to forge by being a library member and in the political experience one could accrue from participation in its administration; and finally ideological, in the sense of the civic identity it imparted to a politically active middling class. This is also a study of the wider significance of reading, and particularly political reading, upon electoral and social politics in the period between the French Revolution in 1789 and the passage of the first Reform Act in 1832. Reading and subscription library participation shaped personal and political identities, motivating people to think and act politically, and influencing the methods they chose to do so. Both the art of politics and the act of reading are defined in their broadest senses to explain the significance of reading within the social and political world of eighteenth-century Britain. These concepts are examined through an analysis of the records of two subscription libraries with a broad array of surviving source material. Although located in different contexts, these

[1] Thomas Jefferson to Abigail Adams, 13 June 1804, Founders Online, National Archives, US, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/04-15-02-0219>, [accessed 16/04/2024].

libraries were important elements within the political networks of their communities. Together these libraries are symptomatic of the political significance of this form of library association.

Although used here as a category of analysis, political reading is not an anachronistic term. Contemporaries recognised that they were living within a context of rapidly proliferating printed material, with more publications and more material to read than ever before.[2] Within this environment, political reading constituted a specific and focused type of reading that was also a recent phenomenon. Thomas Erskine (1750-1823), the Whig lawyer and politician, referred in 1796 to the 'great increase of literary knowledge in this Country, and the general inclination that prevailed for what was called political reading'.[3] Erskine associated this type of reading with newspapers, whose readership had also undergone a dramatic increase: 'where one person read a Newspaper forty years ago, there were fifty who read them now'.[4] Nor was Erskine alone in this opinion. In 1819, Edward Law, 1st Earl of Ellenborough (1790-1871), speaking in the House of Lords debate on the Newspaper and Stamp Duties Act, the final of the Six Acts implemented by Lord Liverpool's administration following the Peterloo Massacre, also associated political reading with newspaper reading. Into this debate, Ellenborough inserted a specific class element, referring particularly to the 'lowest classes of society', whom he regarded as having no need to read politically; 'He saw no possible good to be derived to

[2] Simon Eliot, *Some Patterns and Trends in British Publishing, 1800-1919* (London: Bibliographical Society, 1994), pp.20-24; David D. Hall, 'The Atlantic Economy in the Eighteenth Century', in *A History of the Book in America, Vol. 1: The Colonial Book in the Atlantic World*, eds. Hugh Amory and David D. Hall (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp.153-57; Bob Harris, 'Print Culture', in *A Companion to Eighteenth-Century Britain*, ed. H.T. Dickinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), pp.283-93; William St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp.10-13, 103-21; John Feather, *A History of British Publishing*, 2nd ed. (1988; London: Routledge, 2006), pp.73-84; Bill Bell, 'The Scottish Book Trade 1707–1918', in *The Edinburgh History of Scottish Literature*, eds. S. Manning, I. Brown, T. Clancy and M. Pittock (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), pp.223-27; James Raven, *The Business of Books: Booksellers and the English Book Trade, 1450-1850* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), pp.223-24, 242-50, 320-22, 325-42; Michael F. Suarez, 'Towards a Bibliometric Analysis of the Surviving Record, 1701-1800', in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain. Volume 5: 1695-1830*, eds. Michael F. Suarez and Michael L. Turner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp.42-65.

[3] 'Law Report', *Sun* (London), 4 July 1796.

[4] 'Law Report', *Sun* (London), 4 July 1796.

the country from having statesmen at the loom and politicians at the spinning jenny.'[5] Yet political reading was not wholly associated with the newspaper press. In 1798, William Windham (1750-1810), speaking in the House of Commons, regarded the spread of political reading as the reason behind the popularity of Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man* (1791): 'the practice for the last fifteen years of giving debates, by preparing the People by political reading, has been a pre-disposing cause why that work found such circulation.'[6] Other kinds of print, beyond the obviously political, could also prove significant. Novels, for example, could be both damned and praised for their impact upon public morals and for their capacity to convey political ideas.[7]

As well as these literal definitions, contemporaries recognised that political reading could also refer to the 'reading' of one's own political situation, position, and views, as well as that of others. It is in this respect that Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826), third president of the United States, used the term in the letter to Abigail Adams (1744-1818) in 1804 that stands as the

[5] 41 *Parliamentary Debates* (1st ser.) (1819) cols. 1590-91. Erskine, then 1st Baron Erskine, spoke opposite Ellenborough in the debate. *The Times* reported Ellenborough's words as 'philosophers of the loom, or statesmen from spinning-jennies', rather than 'statesmen' and 'politicians' *at* the loom and spinning jenny. 'Parliamentary Intelligence', *The Times*, 30 December 1819. It also specifically used the term 'political reading', absent from Hansard's record. On the reading practices of weavers, see Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes*, 2nd ed., (2001; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), p.117.

[6] 'House of Commons', *St. James's Chronicle: Or, the British Evening Post*, 1 January 1799.

[7] Novels of the 1790s, both 'Jacobin' and anti-Jacobin, were particularly marked in this respect. See variously, Gary Kelly, *The English Jacobin Novel, 1780-1805* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976); Marilyn Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*, rev. ed. (1975; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), pp.29-123; M.O. Grenby, *The Anti-Jacobin Novel: British Conservatism and the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Kevin Gilmartin, *Writing Against Revolution: Literary Conservatism in Britain 1790-1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Morgan Rooney, *The French Revolution Debate and the British Novel, 1790-1814: The Struggle for History's Authority* (Lanham, MD: Bucknell University Press, 2013). A correspondent to the *Monthly Magazine* in 1797, in a discussion about John Moore's *Zeluco* (1789), praised the aptitude of the novel as a literary form to convey political ideas: 'The dialogues in *Zeluco*, passages in the philosophical romances of Bage, Holcroft, and some others, have probably diffused more liberal, and more just moral ideas, than could, in the same space of time, have been inculcated upon the public by a thousand sermons, or by as many dry political disquisitions.' 'To the Editor of the Monthly Magazine', *Monthly Magazine*, 4.24 (November 1797), p.348. Writing in 1815, Anne Grant (1755-1838) concurred with these sentiments 'that the general though gradual amendment of taste and morals is reflected in our novels', describing a 'good' novel as one that 'confers a material benefit on society'. Anne Grant to Mrs D.H. Rucker, 1 May 1815, *Memoir and Correspondence of Mrs. Grant of Laggan.*, ed. J.P. Grant, 3 vols. (London, 1844), II, p.84. See also Jacqueline Pearson, *Women's Reading in Britain, 1750-1835: A Dangerous Recreation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp.197-98.

epigraph to this chapter. Here Jefferson's reference to 'political reading' refers to the political principles held by himself and John Adams (1735-1826), his long-term correspondent and political rival, principles which shaped their identities, and which buffeted, but did not define, their friendship.[8] Jefferson's use of the term political reading, as well as a further reminder of the diversity of its meanings, is also a reminder of the potential for misreading, the heterogeneous possibilities in reading even a single text, action, or idea.[9] It had been Abigail Adams who had first initiated this exchange of correspondence with Jefferson, writing to him on 20 May 1804, to express her sympathy at the death of Jefferson's younger daughter, Maria Jefferson Eppes (1778-1804).[10] Abigail Adams' letter was the first substantial communication between the two families since Jefferson had defeated her husband at the presidential election of 1800.[11] Although she expressed great sorrow for the loss of Jefferson's daughter, whom she had cared for during her residence in London in 1785, Adams acknowledged that the bond of trust between Jefferson and her husband had been shattered by his electoral subterfuge and intrigue. Jefferson, however, read too much into her letter, believing it to be an overture to resume their families' friendship, a miscalculation which Adams swiftly set right.[12]

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[8] Jefferson to Adams, 13 June 1804. On this friendship, see variously, Joseph J. Ellis, *Passionate Sage: The Character and Legacy of John Adams* (New York: Norton, 1993), pp.119-42; Joseph J. Ellis, *American Sphinx: The Character of Thomas Jefferson* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), pp.235-37, 239-52; David McCullough, *John Adams.* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001), pp.603-08; Joseph J. Ellis, *Founding Brothers: The Revolutionary Generation* (New York: Vintage Books, 2002), pp.206-48; Darren Staloff, *Hamilton, Adams, Jefferson: The Politics of Enlightenment and the American Founding* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2005), pp.230-32; Richard Samuelson, 'Thomas Jefferson and John Adams', in *A Companion to Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Francis D. Cogliano (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), pp.318-32; Gordon S. Wood, *Friends Divided: John Adams and Thomas Jefferson* (New York: Penguin Press, 2017); Jamie Macpherson, *The Friendships of John Adams, 1774-1801* (Hoboken, NJ: Taylor and Francis, forthcoming).

[9] On this potential for misreading, see David Allan, *Making British Culture: English Readers and the Scottish Enlightenment, 1740-1830* (New York: Routledge, 2008), pp.16-17.

[10] Abigail Adams to Thomas Jefferson, 20 May 1804, Founders Online, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/04-15-02-0208>, [accessed 18/04/24].

[11] On the election of 1800, see variously, McCullough, *John Adams*, pp.535-36, 543-50, 554-58; Ellis, *Founding Brothers*, pp.201-05, 210-11; James Horn, Jan Ellen Lewis and Peter S. Onuf, eds., *The Revolution of 1800: Democracy, Race, & the New Republic* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002); John Ferling, *Adams Vs. Jefferson: The Tumultuous Election of 1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Staloff, *Hamilton, Adams, Jefferson*, pp.225-28; Joanne B. Freeman, 'A Qualified Revolution: The Presidential Election of 1800', in *Companion to Thomas Jefferson*, pp.145-63.

[12] Ellis, *American Sphinx*, pp.236-37; McCullough, *John Adams*, pp.581-85; Ellis, *Founding Brothers*, pp.207-11.

Political reading could encompass a myriad of possibilities. This thesis examines the significance of the different elements of reading (literal, social, individual and collective), but with the greatest regard for its core definition, to 'consider, interpret, discern.'[13] The term political reading is used to refer to the literal reading of texts, people, and events in a political manner, but also the wider politics of reading which encompassed membership and participation within the subscription library. Library membership provided more than simply access to the newest publications. Participation in the administration of the subscription library, to whatever degree, provided practical experience in the bureaucracy of committee governance and bookkeeping, as well as in the art of politics: speech giving, canvassing, and voting. Subscription library membership was also a key driver in imparting a collective civic identity to those who made up the urban and rural elites of Georgian Britain.

This study of political reading is necessarily an analysis of the political significance of readers and of individual reading habits in both an individual and a collective sense. Readers read for pleasure, knowledge and for practical purposes. Reading enabled an individual to learn more about the world they inhabited, how it was formed and how it was governed. People read to inform themselves about the core political debates of the eighteenth century, the questions of constitutional, ecclesiastical, economic, moral, and social reform, as well as about political theory and modes of thought. This reading aided their participation in the debates held in salons, reading rooms, and across dining tables in Georgian society, the venues in which social politics occurred. Indeed, in an age of smaller electorates, these were spaces of political dialogue, where party ties were forged and sustained.[14] Reading was an essential tool in this

[13] s.v. 'read (*v.*)', *Oxford English Dictionary*, March 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/7142905628>, [accessed 18/04/24].

[14] Kathryn Gleadle and Sarah Richardson, eds., *Women in British Politics, 1760-1860: The Power of the Petticoat* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000); Judith Schneid Lewis, *Sacred to Female Patriotism: Gender, Class, and Politics in Late Georgian Britain* (New York: Routledge, 2003), pp.95-126; Elaine Chalus, *Elite Women in English Political Life, c.1754-1790* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2005), pp.75-105; Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes:*

participation, informing an individual's personal and political identity. Reading influenced political culture in a number of ways: the 'reading' of one's own politics and that of one's network, one's understanding and reaction to events, including influencing one's involvement in electoral politics and the act of voting itself.

Scholars have struggled to grasp the multifarious and regularly idiosyncratic elements of the reading process, which are elusively distant from the written record. Reader reception theorists such as Stanley Fish, Wolfgang Iser and Hans Robert Jauss, rather than analysing the instances in which records of reading have survived, have utilised theoretical frameworks, such as the 'horizons of expectation' or 'interpretive communities', in an attempt to decipher the literary reception of texts.[15] Other literary and post-structuralist theorists, such as Jacques Derrida and Roland Barthes, have gone even further in their scepticism of the recoverability of the historical past or the reading process.[16] Even while reading historians have pushed back against some of these more rigid deconstructionist approaches, they have retained elements of these methods, for example in the awareness of the range of possible readings of any one text.[17]

Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850, 2nd ed. (1987; Hoboken, NJ: Taylor and Francis, 2013), pp.357-96, 416-49; Hillary Burlock, 'Party Politics: Dancing in London's West End, 1780-9', *The London Journal*, 47.2 (July 2022), pp.181-97.

[15] On Jauss and the 'horizons of expectation', see Hans Robert Jauss, *Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics*, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1982); Hans Robert Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. Timothy Bahti (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1982). On Fish and 'interpretive communities', see Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?: The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980). See also Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (London: John Hopkins University Press, 1980); Rosalind Crone, Katie Halsey and Shafquat Towheed, eds., *The History of Reading*: *A Reader* (London: Routledge, 2010), pp.67-92.

[16] Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. G. Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1976); Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of Text*, trans. R. Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975).

[17] The most famous of these types of studies remain those by Carlo Ginzburg and Robert Darnton. Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*, rev. ed. (1976; London: Penguin, 1992); Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History*, rev. ed. (1984; New York: Basic Books, 2009). For critiques of a post-structural approach, see St Clair, *Reading Nation*, pp.5-8; Allan, *Making British Culture*, pp.14-16; Rose, *Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes*, pp.3-4; Mark Towsey, *Reading History in Britain and America, c.1750-c.1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp.20-23.

Even when these scholars situate their studies within the archival record, there remains the question of agency. Returning to Jefferson, Joseph Ellis has noted that his close association with print has led too many scholars to make his thinking 'an exclusive function of books', assuming that his mind was solely the product of what he read.[18] Such a step removes the agency of Jefferson's mind in the process, the role his personality played in what and how he read, as well as the significance of this reading process. As Mark Towsey has observed, a wide range of scholars have now re-introduced this individual agency into studies of readers.[19] As well as these individual elements, the context within which readers accessed and read material had a significant impact upon the reading process. A key influence in this regard upon the history of reading has been the work of the Cambridge School of intellectual history, most famously Quentin Skinner and John Pocock, who stressed a need to understand the linguistic context in which historical texts were constructed.[20] Reading scholars have been increasingly aware of the role contextual factors played in the construction of a text's meaning, from the range of actors involved in the creation and dissemination of texts, most famously classified in Robert Darnton's 'communication circuit', to the internal dimensions of the physical library space or in understanding the associational and institutional context in which books were accessed.[21] Alive to this latter approach, which William St Clair termed the 'communities of

[18] Ellis, *American Sphinx*, p.58.
[19] Towsey, *Reading History*, pp.14-17. For examples, see Jonathan Rose, 'Rereading the English Common Reader: A Preface to a History of Audiences', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 53.1 (1992), pp.53-56; John Brewer, 'Reconstructing the Reader: Prescriptions, Texts and Strategies in Anna Larpent's Reading', in *The Practice and Representation of Reading in England*, eds. James Raven, Helen Small and Naomie Tadmor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp.226-45; Rose, *Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes*, pp.2-4.
[20] Quentin Skinner, 'Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas', *History and Theory*, 8.1 (1969), pp.3-53. See also, Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1978); J.G.A. Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce, and History: Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century*, rev. ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
[21] Robert Darnton, 'What is the History of Books?', *Daedalus*, 111.3 (1982), pp.65-83. A number of scholars, even Darnton himself, have critically engaged with his model, see Thomas R. Adams and Nicholas Barker, 'A New Model for the Study of the Book', in *A Potencie of Life: Books in Society: The Clark Lectures 1986-1987*, ed. Nicholas Barker (London: The British Library, 1993), p.14; Robert Darnton, '"What is the History of Books?" Revisited', *Modern Intellectual History*, 4.3 (2007), pp.495-508; David D. Hall, 'What was the History of the

interpretation', this thesis will analyse the context (whether local, social, political, or national) through and within which readers engaged with texts.[22]

I

This study situates its analysis of political reading in the records of the subscription library. Readers in the early nineteenth century used a variety of means to buy, borrow, and share printed material. For those in what is termed the 'middling sorts' of society, this regularly involved the use of the subscription library.[23] Contemporaries valued the subscription library not only for the opportunity to borrow books, but also for its social and political prestige.[24] Membership of the subscription library was a marker of a rational and enlightened citizen and offered a ticket to circulate amongst the networks of Britain's urban elite. Involvement in its administrative elements could provide essential political experience for those seeking a career in civic or parliamentary politics.[25] Indeed, any degree of involvement, even as an ordinary member, involved participation in a system which had both constitutionalist and democratic elements, the administration of which revolved around debate, vote, procedure, and precedent. Participation within this bibliographical world was a political act and was an aspect of identity construction for those in professional occupations.

Book? A Response', *Modern Intellectual History*, 4.3 (2007), pp.537-44; Padmini Ray Murray and Claire Squires, 'The Digital Publishing Communications Circuit', *Book 2.0*, 3.1 (2013), pp.3-24. Though principally examining the circulating library and the private library, James Raven argues that by 'recovering a sense of the internal arrangements of these libraries, we gain more clues about the cultural significance of reading'. James Raven, 'From Promotion to Proscription: Arrangements for Reading and Eighteenth-Century Libraries', in *Practice and Representation of Reading in England*, p.196. For a similar approach, see Christy Lindsay, 'Reading Associations in England and Scotland, c.1760-1830', unpublished PhD thesis (University of Oxford, 2016), pp.20-22.

[22] St Clair, *Reading Nation*, p.4. Similarly, Stephen Colclough stressed the need to examine the importance of reading as a social activity, rather than a solitary one. Stephen Colclough, *Consuming Texts: Readers and Reading Communities, 1695-1870* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p.89.

[23] For the subscription library movement, and the complexion of its membership, as well as the two libraries examined in this study, see below, Chapter One.

[24] Discussed, below, in Chapter Two.

[25] For example, see the case of Peter Baillie, discussed in Chapter Three.

It is these elements of the subscription library that make an analysis of their records so fruitful for a study of political reading. As well as using additional source material, including private manuscript records, newspapers and other printed documents, this thesis uses the institutional records of subscription libraries, particularly focusing upon two, the Bristol Library Society and the Leighton Library, Dunblane. The borrowing records of subscription libraries (the bound registers or sometimes scraps of paper which detail who borrowed a library's books and when) have long been the subject of scholarly analysis. Indeed, the records of the Bristol Library Society have been amongst the most regularly cited of these types of records, first by library historians and latterly by scholars of Georgian urban history. This is partly because of the extent and breadth of the library's surviving manuscript material, the scale of which is unique for a library of this kind in this period, including not only minute books for its general and committee meetings spanning nearly the entirety of the library's existence, but also a cash book, a subscription book, two proposal books, three reservation books, two books recording library donations and seven separate surviving catalogues, including one annotated by the Bristol librarian.[26] More valuable still is the library's surviving set of borrowings which run in seventy-

[26] The records of the Bristol Library Society are stored variously at Bristol Archives and Bristol Central Library. The material at the Bristol Archives consists of BA, 32079/LS/M/1, Bristol Library Society, Minute book of General meetings, 2 December 1772-28 March 1870 [hereafter BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book]; BA, 32079/LS/M/3, Bristol Library Society, Minute book of Committee, 31 March 1789–10 March 1807; BA, 32079/LS/M/4, Bristol Library Society, Minute book of Committee, 24 March 1807–22 March 1823 [hereafter BA, LS/M/4, Committee minute book, 1807-22]; BA, 32079/LS/M/5, Bristol Library Society, Minute book of Committee, 1 April 1823–20 December 1836; BA, 32079/LS/F/1, Bristol Library Society, Cash book, 2 December 1772–24 April 1871 [hereafter BA, LS/F/1, Cash book]. The library's eighteenth-century minutes have been transcribed by Max Skjönsberg and Mark Towsey and published by the Bristol Record Society. *The Minute Book of the Bristol Library Society, 1771-1801*, eds. Max Skjönsberg and Mark Towsey (Bristol: Bristol Record Society, 2022). The library records stored at the Bristol Central Library consist of BCL, B7530, Bristol Library Society, Subscription book, 1773-1872; BCL, B26780, Bristol Library Society, Proposal book, 2 January 1816-7 September 1830; BCL, B26781, Bristol Library Society, Proposal book, 5 October 1830-1 April 1845; BCL, B26782, Bristol Library Society, Books engaged, 8 January 1816-15 February 1827; BCL, B26783, Bristol Library Society, Books engaged, 1858; BCL, B26785, Bristol Library Society, Library MSS, maps, periodicals acquisitions and donations; BCL, B26790, Bristol Library Society, Books engaged, undated; BCL, B26792, Bristol Library Society, Donation book, 1 July 1773-2 June 1829. The library's surviving catalogues consist of *A Catalogue of the Books Belonging to the Bristol Library Society; To which are Prefixed the Rules of the Institution, and a List of the Subscribers, 1774.* (Bristol, 1774); *A Catalogue of the Books Belonging to the Bristol Library Society; To which are Prefixed the Rules of the Institution, and a List of the Subscribers* (Bristol, 1782); *A Catalogue of the*

seven folio volumes of unbroken records from 1773 to 1857, providing an unparalleled insight into the reading habits of the inhabitants of an English port city in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[27] Rediscovered by a Bristol librarian in 1889, the earliest interest in these records was because they included the borrowings of Robert Southey (1774-1843) and Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834), both of whom were library members during their periods of residence in Bristol.[28] The first substantial analysis of the borrowings as a whole came with Paul Kaufman's pioneering study in 1960, in which he analysed all borrowings made from the library between 1773 and 1784.[29] Kaufman's study of 'reading vogues' established a structure that reading and library historians have since followed.[30] Though originally envisaged to be

Books belonging to the Bristol Library Society; To which are Prefixed the Rules of the Institution, and a List of the Subscribers. (Bristol, 1790); *A Catalogue of the Books belonging to the Bristol Library Society; To which are Prefixed the Rules of the Institution, and a List of the Subscribers.* (Bristol, 1798); *A Catalogue of the Books belonging to the Bristol Library Society: To which are Prefixed an Account of the Institution of the Society, and its Rules & Regulations.* (Bristol, 1814); *A Catalogue of the Books belonging to the Bristol Library Society: To which are Prefixed, the Rules and Regulations.* (Bristol, 1834); *A Catalogue of the Books belonging to the Bristol Library Society.* (Bristol, 1856). A copy of the 1798 catalogue is held by Bristol Central Library and seems to have been the working copy used by the librarian John Peace (1785-1861). BCL, B8453, Bristol Library Society, John Peace's 1798 catalogue.

[27] BCL, B7453-529, Bristol Library Society, Borrowing registers, 1773-1857, 77 vols.

[28] Paul Kaufman, 'The Reading of Southey and Coleridge: The Record of their Borrowings from the Bristol Library, 1793-8', *Modern Philology*, 21.3 (1924), p.317. See also, George Whalley, 'The Bristol Library Borrowings of Southey and Coleridge, 1793-8', *The Library*, 4 (1949-50), pp.114-32; Duncan Wu, *Wordsworth's Reading, 1770-1799* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp.176-86.

[29] Paul Kaufman, *Borrowings from the Bristol Library, 1773-1784: A Unique Record of Reading Vogues* (Charlottesville, VA: Bibliographical Society of the University of Virginia, 1960).

[30] For example, see Mark Towsey, 'First Steps in Associational Reading: Book Use and Sociability at the Wigtown Subscription Library 1795–99', *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, 103.4 (2009), pp.455–95; Isabelle Lehuu, 'Reconstructing Reading Vogues in the Old South: Borrowings from the Charleston Library Society, 1811-1817', in *The History of Reading, Volume 1: International Perspectives, c.1500-1990*, eds. Shafquat Towheed and W.R. Owens (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp.64-83; Vivienne S. Dunstan, 'Glimpses into a Town's Reading Habits in Enlightenment Scotland: Analysing the Borrowings of Gray Library, Haddington, 1732–1816', *Journal of Scottish Historical Studies*, 26.1+2 (2006), pp.42–59; Frank Felsenstein and James J. Connolly, *What Middletown Read: Print Culture in an American Small City* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2015), pp.99-135; Mark Towsey, 'Imprisoned Reading: French Prisoners of War at the Selkirk Subscription Library, 1811-1814', in *Civilians and War in Europe, 1618-1815*, eds. E. Charters, E. Rosenhaft & H. Smith (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012), pp.241-61; Katie Halsey, 'A "Quaint Corner" of the Reading Nation: Romantic Readerships in Rural Perthshire, 1780–1830', in *Before the Public Library: Reading, Community, and Identity in the Atlantic World, 1650–1850*, eds. Mark Towsey & Kyle B. Roberts (Leiden: Brill, 2017), pp.218–35; Matthew Sangster, 'Copyright Literature and Reading Communities in Eighteenth-century St Andrews', *The Review of English Studies*, 68.287 (2017), pp.947-67; Jill Dye, 'Books and their Borrowers at the Library of Innerpeffray c. 1680-1855', unpublished PhD thesis (University of Stirling, 2018); Gerard Lee McKeever, 'Reading Walter Scott on the Solway Firth: Books and Borrowing at the Wigtown Subscription Library, 1828-36', *Studies in Romanticism*, 62.3 (2023), pp.357-80.

only a pilot study, Kaufman's work is still regularly cited as the pre-eminent survey of library borrowing records.[31] This is slowly changing. The entirety of the library's eighteenth-century borrowing records will be transcribed as part of the Eighteenth-Century Libraries Online project.[32] Other studies have examined specific aspects of the Bristol Library, for example, the motivations of its founders and its library practices.[33] Analysis of the library's nineteenth-century records, especially its borrowings, have, however, been absent from these studies. Even Kathleen Hapgood's institutional history of the library provided no analysis of reading habits at the library in this period.[34]

Library records have been utilised in studies of historical readers, often in the pursuit of 'who read what?'.[35] Jonathan Rose, within a study of working-class reading during the nineteenth century, uses the borrowing registers of miners' libraries in three Welsh towns to 'quantify reading habits' of working-class communities.[36] Jan Fergus, in a study of provincial readers, analysed the records of two circulating libraries in the Midlands to quantify patterns of borrowing and purchasing.[37] In both their studies, David Allan and Mark Towsey have inverted

[31] For examples, see Skjönsberg and Towsey, 'Introduction', in *Bristol Minute Book*, p.xii, n.14.
[32] Eighteenth Century Libraries Online [hereafter ECLO], <https://c18librariesonline.org/>, [accessed 03/08/24]. I am grateful to the project's principal investigator, Mark Towsey, for providing me with early access to the database.
[33] Max Skjönsberg, '"This Revolution in the Town": Richard Champion and the Early Years of the Bristol Library Society', *Library & Information History*, 37.2 (2021), pp.149-67; Max Skjönsberg, 'Richard Champion and the Rockingham Whigs: The Aristocratic Politics of a Bristolian Quaker Merchant in the Age of the American Revolution', *The English Historical Review*, 138.590-91 (July 2023), pp.157-84; Kathleen Hapgood, 'Library Practice in the Bristol Library Society, 1772-1830', *Library History*, 5.5 (1981), pp.145-53.
[34] Kathleen Hapgood, *The Friends to Literature: Bristol Library Society 1772-1894* (Bristol: Avon Local History & Archaeology, 2014). Hapgood did analyse two months of borrowing records from April and May 1856, comparing these with Kaufman's study of the 1770s and 1780s. By the 1850s, the circumstances of the library had dramatically changed, having recently merged with the Bristol Medical Library Society and been forced from the premises it had inhabited since its founding. Hapgood, *Friends to Literature*, pp.27-32.
[35] Rose, *Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes*, p.244.
[36] Rose, *Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes*, p.3.
[37] Jan Fergus, *Provincial Readers in Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

the traditional 'producer-orientated approach' to a study of the Scottish Enlightenment, to one which concerns the reception of such texts by both English and Scottish readers.[38]

It is often the volume of borrowing records which poses its own challenge for the historian. Analysing the data contained in them, a task which in Kaufman's time took months and years, can now be accomplished, by the virtue of digital technology, in minutes. Yet the task of transcribing and cleaning this data in order to conduct a detailed quantitative analysis can be immensely time consuming. Moreover, the extent of the borrowing record of the Bristol Library is vast, with even a single year running to over 3,000 records.[39] In total, the thirty-nine registers containing the library's borrowings between 1800 to 1832 encompass over 100,000 individual records.[40] It is little surprise that those at the forefront of a quantitative analysis of library borrowing records have been large digital humanities research projects.[41] Capable of comparing vast quantities of data across a host of libraries, these projects are best at revealing general borrowing trends over time and in different geographic areas, analyses that reliance upon a singular case study would be unable to reveal. This thesis has not completely eschewed this kind of quantitative analysis of borrowing data. The transcription of a year's borrowings

[38] Allan, *Making British Culture*; Mark Towsey, *Reading the Scottish Enlightenment: Books and Their Readers in Provincial Scotland, 1750-1820* (Leiden: Brill, 2010). For examples of a publisher-orientated approach to bibliographical history see Raven, *Business of Books*; Richard B. Sher, *The Enlightenment and the Book: Scottish Authors and their Publishers in Eighteenth-Century Britain, Ireland and America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

[39] This was for the year 1812, analysed, below, in Chapter Five.

[40] Each borrowing register contained between 188 to 191 pages, with fifteen borrowings recorded on each page.

[41] ECLO; Books and Borrowing 1750-1830: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/>, [accessed 03/05/24]. This shift towards using digital humanities research methods in the analysis of library borrowing records is not a recent one. For examples, see the City Readers database from the collections of the New York Society Library, the What Middletown Read project, and the Dissenting Academies Project. City Readers: Digital Historic Collections at the New York Society Library, <https://cityreaders.nysoclib.org/>, [accessed 06/05/24]; What Middletown Read Project, <https://lib.bsu.edu/wmr/index.php>, [accessed 06/05/24]; The Dissenting Academies Project, Queen Mary University of London, <https://www.qmul.ac.uk/sed/religionandliterature/dissenting-academies/>, [accessed 06/05/24]. This is also part of a broader trend within humanities research towards 'big data' and digitisation projects. For further examples, see the Scottish Privy Council Project and the Eighteenth-Century Political Participation & Electoral Culture (ECPPEC) project. Scottish Privy Council Project, University of Stirling, <https://privycouncil.stir.ac.uk/>, [accessed 06/05/24]; Eighteenth-Century Political Participation & Electoral Culture, <https://ecppec.ncl.ac.uk/>, [accessed 06/05/24].

from the Bristol Library for 1812, analysed in Chapter Five, allowed for the correlation of this data with other biographical and electoral information in order to examine the reading habits and intellectual culture of an urban electorate in a year of political turmoil. In addition to this, I transcribed the Leighton Library's main borrowing register, some 6,424 records for the years 1780 to 1840.[42] A targeted analysis of these records has been undertaken for Chapter Four.[43] Despite a recent trend towards larger and more inclusive data-driven digital humanities projects, there is still value in the study of limited and smaller-scale quantitative data. This analysis can counteract what has been called a 'survivor bias' that comes from a focus on the largest and most prosperous libraries for which records are more likely to survive.[44] It can also be easier to spot patterns in borrowing trends within thousands of records, than in one of hundreds of thousands. Chapter Six analyses the borrowings of abolitionist texts from the Leighton Library, a small data set of two books borrowed on only ten instances between 1788 and 1831.[45] Yet each of these occasions coincided with the abolition of the slave trade or slavery featuring prominently in either local or national political debates.[46] Whilst Bristol's context as a port city heavily involved in the West Indian trade would make a similar analysis at the Bristol Library interesting, it is much more difficult to judge the motivations behind a borrowing when that book is repeatedly borrowed amongst 300 different individuals.

[42] The remainder of the Leighton's borrowing records, some 603 borrowings spanning the years 1815 to 1842, were transcribed by the Books and Borrowing project. Additionally, my thanks to Jill Dye, Jacqueline Kennard, and Lauren Moffat for their aid in this.
[43] An analysis of the overall borrowing records of both libraries is undertaken in Chapter One.
[44] David Allan '"The Advantages of Literature": The Subscription Library in Georgian Britain', in *The Meaning of the Library: A Cultural History*, ed. Alice Crawford (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), p.110.
[45] *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Advanced search for 'Book Holding: An essay on the treatment and conversion of African slaves in the British sugar colonies.',", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/search/p-1/0/0/advanced/bhids|11649>, [accessed 22/03/24]; *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Advanced search for 'Book Holding: Letters on Slavery.',", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/search/p-1/0/0/advanced/bhids|17312>, [accessed 22/03/24].
[46] See below, Chapter Six, pp.295-98.

An analysis of borrowing records on their own reveals little about the reading process. Indeed, they might also be problematic in terms of judging overall reading habits. David Allan, in a methodological survey of the sources available for a study of eighteenth-century readers, describes library records as of 'essentially ancillary support', useful for context, but of no help in recovering the private experiences of the historical reader.[47] A borrowed book may not necessarily have been read, and library members frequently used their membership to procure books for others.[48] A borrowing record is proof of engagement with a text, but the act and processes of reading thereafter can only be inferred. Additional primary evidence is therefore necessary to analyse the act of reading, personal records which detail or reference the reading method, a written piece of work whose creation was influenced by the act of reading, or additional biographical or contextual information in order to make sense of a borrowing record that can seem inconsistent or contradictory. As such, Chapter Three analyses the borrowing record of Peter Baillie (1771-1811) but does so alongside an analysis of his private correspondence and a private diary in which he recorded his reading. Chapter Four examines the intellectual culture of the Leighton Library's clerical members, analysing their borrowing habits and their publications, whilst Chapter Five engages in a quantitative analysis of a community of Bristol readers but does so alongside an analysis of their voting habits. Combining a study of both quantitative and qualitative records, with an appreciation of the

[47] David Allan, 'Some Methods and Problems in the History of Reading: Georgian England and the Scottish Enlightenment', *Journal of the Historical Society*, 3.1 (January 2003), p.118.

[48] It was particularly common for books to be borrowed on behalf of a female friend or family member. Abigail Adams used a friend to procure books from the Boston Library Society in 1798. My thanks to Christopher Minty for this reference. Abigail Adams to John Adams, 28 December 1798, Founders Online, National Archives, US, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/04-13-02-0159>, [accessed 03/05/24]. Maria Edgeworth (1768-1849) used the membership of her father to access the books of the Bristol Library Society, whilst Anne Grant used her son's occupation as an advocate to borrow books from the Signet Library in Edinburgh. Maria Edgeworth to John Ruxton, 29 December 1791, in *Maria Edgeworth: Chosen Letters*, ed. F.V. Barry (London: Jonathan Cape, 1931), p.47, quoted in Richard De Ritter, *Imagining Women Readers, 1789-1820: Well-Regulated Minds* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), p.130; Anne Grant to Mrs Hook, 20 February 1824, in *Memoir and Correspondence of Mrs. Grant of Laggan.*, III, p.46.

particular context and significance of the subscription library, offers one solution to William St Clair's oft-quoted critique of a reliance upon individual reading records.[49]

Moreover, an analysis of a library's borrowing record on its own tells us nothing about the institutional significance of the subscription library or its effect upon the reading process, or of its wider political significance within Georgian politics. This requires not just an analysis of a library's borrowing record, but of its entire institutional record. Library catalogues have long been a regular source of study for historians of the book, but they are better judged as published advertisements, reflective of how the library wanted to depict itself, rather than as true reflections of everyday life at the library.[50] The two subscription libraries surveyed for this study both have a wealth of surviving institutional records, including borrowing records, administrative records such as request books, financial accounts, matriculation and subscription records and other manuscript scraps that provide an insight into the often-

[49] St Clair described these as a 'tiny, randomly surviving… sample of the far larger total acts of reception which were never even turned into words in the mind of the reader let alone recorded in writing.' St Clair, *Reading Nation*, p.5.

[50] Catalogues offered libraries an opportunity to assert their cultural significance within the community. The catalogue of the Gentleman's Library at Wigton proudly proclaimed 'We are here humanized without Suffering' on its title page. *Catalogue of Books Belonging to the Gentlemen's Library…* (Wigton, 1806), quoted in Paul Kaufman, 'The Community Library: A Chapter in English Social History', *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, 57.7 (1967), p.37. Judging the administration of these libraries by their catalogues alone can risk the assumption that all the rules codified were universally implemented. In practice, this was a patchier affair. See, for example, the case of library fines for late returned books, discussed in Chapter Two. For the use of catalogues for bibliographic surveys, see Paul Kaufman, 'The Rise of Community Libraries in Scotland', P*roceedings of the Bibliographical Society of America*, 59 (1965), pp.235-43, 249-51; Kaufman, 'The Community Library', pp.1-67; John C. Crawford, 'The Bibliography of Printed Catalogues Issued by Publicly Available Libraries in Scotland 1765-1930: An Analysis of the Database', *Bibliotheck: A Scottish Journal of Bibliography and Allied Topics*, 23 (1998), pp.27-48; E. Jacobs, 'Eighteenth-Century British Circulating Libraries and Cultural Book History', *Book History*, 6 (2003), pp.1-22; Norbert Schürer, 'Four Catalogues of the Lowndes Circulating Library, 1755-66', *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, 101.3 (2007), pp.329-57; Mark Towsey, 'All Partners May Be Enlightened and Improved by Reading Them: The Distribution of Enlightenment Books in Scottish Subscription Library Catalogues, 1750-c.1820', *Journal of Scottish Historical Studies*, 28 (2007), pp.20-43; David Allan, *A Nation of Readers: The Lending Library in Georgian England* (London: The British Library, 2008), pp.128-34; Towsey, *Reading the Scottish Enlightenment*, pp.23-55; Robert Betteridge, '"To Diligence All things become Subservient": Thomas Ruddiman's 1703 Catalogue of the Library of the Faculty of Advocates', *Journal of the Edinburgh Bibliographical Society*, 8 (2013), pp.33-71; Cheryl Knott, 'Uncommon Knowledge: Late Eighteenth-Century American Subscription Library Collections', in *Before the Public Library*, pp.155-72.

unrecorded aspects of library use.[51] Both libraries have also had remarkably stable histories as institutions, with parts of their book collections surviving intact and together into the present day.[52] Although a study of the materiality of the subscription library remains to be written, for example, in the look, feel, and smell of the subscription library space, this thesis has examined the physical texts that were present in each library when possible.[53]

The most detailed sources available for analysing the administrative and internal politics of the subscription library are their minute books. These record the administrative proceedings of the library, the monthly committee and the annual general meetings. They detail who was involved in these decision-making processes, and the identities of those who occupied the social hierarchies within the library. Despite a higher survival rate compared to borrowing records, minute books remain relatively underutilised by reading historians.[54] In the absence of printed

[51] For an overview of these sources, see below p.16, n.26 and p.25, n.59. The survival of these records is particularly rare in the case of libraries located in locations with low populations, such as the Leighton. To take one sample, David Allan notes the existence of subscription libraries across small communities in the east Lowlands of Scotland, including Elie, Strathmiglo, Milnathort, Auchterarder, Dysart, Burntisland, Largo, and Inverkeithing. Allan 'Advantages of Literature', p.105. Yet apart from the Elie library, which has a minute book that dates from 1841, no other manuscript records for any of these libraries have survived. Keith A. Manley, *Books, Borrowers, and Shareholders. Scottish Circulating and Subscription Libraries before 1825: A Survey and Listing* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Bibliographical Society, 2012), p.181 and *passim*.

[52] The books of the Bristol Library Society were donated to the Bristol Corporation in 1893, when the successor to the Library Society, the Philosophical and Literary Institution, and its debts were bought out. Many of the Library Society's books are now stored at Bristol Central Library or held offsite. Hapgood, *Friends to Literature*, pp.37-38. The books of the Leighton Library remain within the specially constructed library building in Dunblane, as some of them have for the last three centuries. During this period, the books have only been removed on three occasions, most recently in 2022 to allow for a restoration of the library's exterior.

[53] Books donated to a library were typically signed and inscribed by the donor. This inscription can often reveal further details as to the motives and intentions that lay behind this donation, as well as a book's provenance and ownership. For example, the Leighton Library's copy of William Forbes's *A Treatise of Church-Lands & Tithes* (Edinburgh, 1705) was donated to it by Robert Stirling (1765-1817), minister of Dunblane 1795-1817, on 2 January 1812, as recorded in the library's minute book. USA, Leighton MS 16, Leighton Library, Minutes of the meetings of the trustees, 31 October 1734-March 1822 [hereafter Leighton MS 16, Minutes, 1734-1822], 2 January 1812. An inscription on the book's title page reveals that previous to Stirling, the book had been owned by John Robertson (d. 1795), Stirling's predecessor as the minister of Dunblane. Robertson signed and gave the book to Stirling on 30 November 1795. Another signature on the same page reveals that previous to Robertson, the book had been owned by a Joseph Banks. Leighton Library copy, William Forbes, *A Treatise of Church-Lands & Tithes* (Edinburgh, 1705), Leighton 11-F-4.

[54] David Allan makes no mention of library minute books in his survey of the records available for a study of historical readers. Allan, 'Some Methods', pp.91-124. For surveys of surviving library records for Scotland and Ireland, see Manley, *Books, Borrowers, and Shareholders*, pp.137-230; Keith A. Manley, *Irish Reading Societies and Circulating Libraries Founded Before 1825: Useful Knowledge and Agreeable Entertainment* (Dublin: Four Courts, 2018), pp.197-234.

membership lists, minute books document who used the subscription library, providing a record of when new members were admitted and, in the case of proprietary subscription libraries, when and to whom library shares were transferred.[55] Borrowing records can be used in a similar fashion, but not everyone who paid to become a library member actually borrowed books. As analysed in Chapter Five, only 78 percent of the Bristol Library's paying subscribers are recorded as having borrowed a book in 1812.[56] As this study will show, the social and political elements of library membership were as important as its bibliographical features, and it was not uncommon for an individual to subscribe to a library without having any inclination to use its books.[57] A number of the Leighton Library's subscribers, including Francis Stuart, 9th Earl of Moray (1737-1810) and Catherine Georgina Stirling (1791-1863), were wealthy enough to afford their own private libraries.[58] For these individuals, a library subscription was about the social elements of supporting, and being seen to support, a common cultural institution.

In the absence of comprehensive lists of members, this study has used the range of surviving source material to decipher whether an individual was a library member.[59] Record keeping

[55] Printed membership lists for the Bristol Library Society did prefix the 1774, 1782, 1790, and 1798 catalogues. These are transcribed in *Bristol Minute Book*, eds. Skjönsberg and Towsey, Appendix 2. From 1790 onwards, the library compiled lists of all its members, printing and circulating these in advance of its AGM minute book. *Bristol Minute Book*, eds. Skjönsberg and Towsey, p.162. This practice was reiterated in a motion passed at the library's general meeting in 1827. BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 19 March 1827. Very few of these lists seem to have survived, although one list, for 1832, is present in the Pinney family papers. University of Bristol Archives, DM58, Pinney Family Papers, Domestic boxes A-T 1692-1902, Box S/22, 1 Papers of the Bristol Riots, *A List of the Members of the Bristol Library Society. March 9th, 1832.* (Bristol, 1832). Similar membership lists do not seem to have been compiled at the Leighton Library.

[56] There were 292 paying subscribers to the Bristol Library in 1812. Only 229 individuals are recorded as making a borrowing between January and December that year. BCL, B7483-84, Bristol Library Society, Borrowing registers, fol. 31-32, October 1811-July 1813; BA, LS/F/1, Cash book, March 1812 to March 1813.

[57] James Raven, *London Booksellers and American Customers: Transatlantic Literary Community and the Charleston Library Society, 1748-1811* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 2002), pp.74-80; Towsey, 'First Steps in Associational Reading', pp.479-81.

[58] On Stuart, see James Balfour Paul, ed., *The Scots Peerage*, 9 vols. (Edinburgh: David Douglas, 1909), VI, p.326; Bernard Burke, *Burke's Genealogical and Heraldic History of the Peerage, Baronetage and Knightage with War Gazette and Corrigenda*, 98th ed. (London: Burke's Peerage Limited, 1940), p.1781. On Stirling, see William Fraser, ed., *The Stirlings of Keir, and their Family Papers* (Edinburgh, 1858), p.113; Tara Leishman, 'Legacies of Transatlantic Slavery in Stirlingshire and Perthshire', *History Scotland*, 22.2 (March/April 2022), p.32.

[59] For the Bristol Library Society's records, see above p.16, n.26. The Leighton Library's manuscripts are held at the University of Stirling Archives and were catalogued by Gordon Willis in 1981, see Gordon Willis, *The*

practices at both libraries were flexible, with some members leaving a larger impression on the institutional record. Some, especially those involved in the administration of the subscription library, were social leaders within their communities and easy to identify.[60] To take one example, James Smith of Deanston (1789-1850) was a textile industrialist, agricultural engineer and a subscriber at the Leighton Library.[61] Smith's borrowings, made between April 1810 and December 1813, are recorded on one page of the library's register.[62] He is first mentioned in the library's accounts on 4 December 1810, and paid the customary subscription of ten shillings and sixpence.[63] As recorded, Smith continued to pay his subscription into

Leighton Library Dunblane: Catalogue of Manuscripts (Stirling: University of Stirling Bibliographical Society, 1981). The records used to prove library membership for this study include Leighton MS 16, Minutes, 1734-1822; USA, Leighton MS 17, Leighton Library, Minutes, 11 December 1840 onwards; USA, Leighton MS 25, Leighton Library, Leighton Library matriculation book, 31 October 1734-1814; USA, Leighton MS 27, Leighton Library, Register of borrowings from the Leighton Library, May 1780-1833 and 1840; USA, Leighton MS 28, Leighton Library, Book requests, letters and scraps taken from Leighton MS 27; USA, Leighton MS 30, Leighton Library, Register of borrowings from the library by short-term visitors, August 1815-July 1833. The Leighton's borrowing records have been transcribed and are available to view via the Books and Borrowing project website. *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Leighton Library: Introduction", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/library/leighton>, [accessed 08/05/24]. Subsequent references will be to the project database, rather than the physical registers. In addition to these records, the Leighton Library published two catalogues during its period as a lending library, copies of both of which survive in numerous repositories. *A Catalogue of the Leightonian Library, Dunblane* (Edinburgh, 1793); *Catalogue of the Leightonian Library, Dunblane* (Edinburgh, 1843). The National Library of Scotland holds a heavily annotated copy of the 1793 Leighton catalogue with numerous corrections made to the listed books, some book entries crossed through, and the names of books acquired later added in. There is no clue as to who its owner was, but it was clearly an individual with a great familiarity with the library. *A Catalogue of the Leightonian Library, Dunblane* (Edinburgh, 1793), RB.s.2548, National Library of Scotland.

[60] Many of the library members surveyed as a part of this thesis have entries in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, as cited below. Other sources used for biographical and genealogical purposes in the study of library members include Alfred Beaven, *Bristol Lists. Municipal and Miscellaneous* (Bristol, 1899); the British Book Trade Index, <http://bbti.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/>, [accessed 07/05/24]; Burke, *Burke's Genealogical and Heraldic History of the Peerage*; the Clergy of the Church of England Database (CCEd), <https://theclergydatabase.org.uk/>, [accessed 07/05/24]; the ECPPEC project, <https://ecppec.ncl.ac.uk/>, [accessed 07/05/24]; Hew Scott, ed., *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticanae: The Succession of Ministers in the Church of Scotland from the Reformation*, 7 vols. (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1915-28); *Index to the Bristol Burgess Books: Volumes 1 To 21, 1557-1995*. (Bristol: Bristol & Avon Family History Society, 2005); Legacies of British Slavery database, <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/>, [accessed 07/05/24]; the Scottish Book Trade Index, <https://data.cerl.org/sbti/_search>, [accessed 07/05/24]; the SlaveVoyages database, <https://www.slavevoyages.org/>, [accessed 07/05/24].

[61] Hugh Cheape, 'Smith, James, of Deanston (1789-1850)', *ODNB* (September 2004); Towsey, *Reading the Scottish Enlightenment*, p.151.

[62] *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Leighton Library: Register Ledger 1, page 227 (image and text view),", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/library/leighton/registers/15/103079/image-and-text>, [accessed 08/05/24].

[63] Leighton MS 16, Minutes, 1734-1822, 4 December 1810. Citations for all library minutes will give the date of the meeting listed, rather than the manuscript page number.

1815.[64] For others, especially women borrowers, the record of their name in the borrowing register, plus a singular mention of them in a minute book, may be their only surviving reference in the historical record.[65] This study has used the wide array of surviving source materials for both libraries as part of an identification process for each library member mentioned, to ascertain the details of their membership and engagement with the subscription library.[66]

Library minute books are also a valuable resource in that they record who lay behind the administrative workings of the subscription library. These individuals, the committee members and trustees, were the social and political leaders of their communities. Understanding the politics in which these members made decisions and managed their library societies reveals the political and ideological culture of those participants in the intimate social politics of Georgian Britain. At subscription libraries with an elective form of governance, such as the Bristol Library Society, committee members were chosen at the annual general meeting, to which all members were invited, and were elected to serve for a year. Members regularly served for consecutive years, as, for example, the surgeon John Bishop Estlin (1785-1855) did between 1824 and 1829.[67]

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[64] Leighton MS 16, Minutes, 1734-1822, 2 May 1815.

[65] See, for example, the case of Mrs Dalzell at the Leighton Library, who visited in July and August 1815, leaving a record of her title, name, the subscription she paid, and the books borrowed, but no indication of a home address. Dye, 'Books and their Borrowers at the Library of Innerpeffray', p.192. For Dalzell's borrowing record, see *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Advanced search for 'Borrower: Mrs Dalzell ',", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/search/p-1/0/sortDate/advanced/brids|5975>, [accessed 03/08/24].

[66] Subsequent references to library members will not list every instance in which a member is referenced in the records.

[67] BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 22 March 1824, 23 March 1829. Estlin was a surgeon and the son of the Rev. John Prior Estlin (1747-1817), the Unitarian minister of Lewin's Mead Chapel. R.K. Webb, 'Estlin, John Prior (1747-1817)', *ODNB* (January 2008); Norman Moore, revised by Anita McConnell, 'Estlin, John Bishop (1785-1855)', *ODNB* (September 2004). On the elder Estlin, see also Kenneth Morgan, 'Introduction', in *The Bright-Meyler Papers: A Bristol-West India Connection, 1732-1837* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp.122-23; Hapgood, *Friends to Literature*, p.8; *Bristol Minute Book*, eds. Skjönsberg and Towsey, p.258. John Prior Estlin had been one of the founding members of the Bristol Library and had served on its committee between 1772 until his death in 1817. BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 15 December 1772, 24 March 1817. Subsequent

Minute books allow for an analysis of the decision-making process in the library, the hierarchies that underpinned these and the local politics at play. Nevertheless, like a published library catalogue, they provide a partly idealised depiction of the administration of the subscription library in their representation of library meetings as occasions free from debate and contest. Written at a meeting's conclusion, these minutes provide no account of the course of discussions or dissenting opinions. They also leave no record of motions which were debated but ultimately voted down. To this end, additional source material, such as newspaper articles or private records, are essential to uncover these aspects of the library.[68] As discussed in Chapter Six, library meetings were political events in and of themselves, as spaces in which library members collectively shaped the management of their shared society. They had the potential to be raucous and rancorous affairs and were an opportunity for members to demonstrate their political and oratorical skills. These meetings, and the wider hierarchies in the library, were representative of the local political context in which such libraries were situated.

This study has focused upon two specific subscription libraries, the Bristol Library Society and the Leighton Library, Dunblane, because of the range and comparability of their surviving records. As Chapter One discusses, both libraries were similarly structured, although they differed in their size and the contexts in which they were located. Nevertheless, they are representative of the different types of subscription libraries that existed in Georgian Britain; the larger, wealthier institutions located in bustling urban centres, and the smaller libraries in rural communities with more limited financial clout but which were equally capable of imparting a civic sense of identity in their members. Together, both libraries provide useful

citations for committee members will be referenced in this manner, the first meeting in which they were elected and then the meeting in which they were replaced on the committee.

[68] In a similar method, and in the absence of an analysis of institutional records, Keith Manley uses reports in both Irish and London newspapers to reconstruct the internal debates which occurred at the Dublin Library Society in the 1810s. Manley, *Irish Reading Societies*, pp.101-02.

templates for examining the significance of the subscription library upon the political identity and political culture of Georgian Britain.

II

This thesis integrates the study of the politics of reading into an analysis of the politics of Georgian Britain. This method builds upon developments in political history which themselves have a long history. The impact of these newer approaches is clear across later editions of the *History of Parliament*, the brainchild of Lewis Namier, which used a prosopographical method for parliamentary history.[69] These elements remain in the biographical entries of parliamentarians, though the influence of new trends in political history can be seen in other aspects of the project, particularly the constituency surveys. Surveys produced in the mid-twentieth century (1754 to 1790 published in 1964, and 1790 to 1820 published in 1986) were overwhelmingly focused upon individuals, and 'elite' actors - voters, MPs and peers - at the expense of popular politics, politics of the 'public sphere', and the political culture of a constituency.[70] Newer surveys, such as those produced for the 1820 to 1832 period, published in 2009, discuss these elements of Georgian politics but combine them with an awareness of the politics that occurred between electoral cycles, extra-parliamentary activities, public meetings and petitions to parliament. These new approaches are the combined legacy of a post-

[69] For a defence of this approach in the study of parliament as an institution, see Paul Seaward, 'Why the History of Parliament Has Not Been Written', *Parliamentary History*, 40.1 (February 2021), p.13. See also, D.W. Hayton, 'Sir Lewis Namier, Sir John Neale and the Shaping of the *History of Parliament*', *Parliamentary History*, 32.1 (February 2013), pp.187-211.

[70] Judged by a comparison of the constituency surveys for Bristol, Perthshire and Stirlingshire. For the 1986 edition, see David R. Fisher, 'Bristol, 1790-1820', *HoP*, <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1790-1820/constituencies/bristol>, [accessed 25/07/23]; David R. Fisher, 'Perthshire: 1790-1820', *HoP*, <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1790-1820/constituencies/perthshire>, [accessed 14/11/22]; R.G. Thorne, 'Stirlingshire, 1790-1820', <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1790-1820/constituencies/stirlingshire>, [accessed 09/05/24]. For the 2009 surveys, see Terry Jenkins, 'Bristol, 1820-1832', *HoP*, <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1820-1832/constituencies/bristol>, [accessed 25/07/23]; David R. Fisher, 'Perthshire, 1820-32', *HoP*, <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1820-1832/constituencies/perthshire>, [accessed 09/05/24]; Terry Jenkins, 'Stirlingshire: 1820-32', *HoP*, <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1820-1832/constituencies/stirlingshire>, [accessed 14/11/22].

Namierite revisionism, which sought to integrate the concepts of party and ideology into the study of Hanoverian politics, and the post-structuralist linguistic and cultural 'turns' by various scholars of the 1980s and 1990s, which shifted focus onto language and ideas.[71] The material effects of these new approaches can be seen in the questioning of distinctions between a 'high' and 'low' politics, as well as the expansion of political history into an analysis of cultural politics and the politics of space.[72] These historians have looked beyond a conceptualisation of the political world in purely electoral terms, thereby broadening the definition of who and what constituted the political nation. This thesis builds upon this broadening of political culture beyond a traditional focus on parties, politicians and activists, by viewing participation in the subscription library as a form of 'subscriptional culture'.[73] In this regard, I expand a narrower

[71] The post-Namierite scholarship is vast. For specific examples, see Austin Mitchell, *The Whigs in Opposition, 1815-1830* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), pp.1-24; John Cannon, *Parliamentary Reform, 1640-1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973); H.T. Dickinson, *Liberty and Property: Political Ideology in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1977), pp.2-10; Albert Goodwin, *The Friends of Liberty: The English Democratic Movement in the Age of the French Revolution* (London: Hutchinson, 1979); B.W. Hill, *British Parliamentary Parties, 1742-1832: From the Fall of Walpole to the First Reform Act* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1985), pp.3-6; James E. Bradley, *Religion, Revolution, and English Radicalism: Nonconformity in Eighteenth-Century Politics and Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); H.T. Dickinson, *The Politics of the People in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995), pp.1-8; Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People: England, 1727-1783*, rev. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); J.C.D. Clark, *English Society, 1660-1832: Religion, Ideology, and Politics During the Ancien Regime*, rev. ed. (1985; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Stephen M. Lee, *George Canning and Liberal Toryism, 1801-1827* (London: Royal Historical Society, 2008), pp.12-13; Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce, and History*. For overviews of the historiographical field, see James Vernon, 'Who's Afraid of the "Linguistic Turn"? The Politics of Social History and its Discontents', *Social History*, 19 (1994), pp.85-88; Boyd Hilton, *A Mad, Bad, and Dangerous People?: England, 1783-1846* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp.703-04; Max Skjönsberg, 'The History of Political Thought and Parliamentary History in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries', *Historical Journal*, 64 (2021), pp.502-04.

[72] For some examples, see Mark Philp, ed., *The French Revolution and British Popular Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); James Vernon, *Politics and the People: A Study in English Political Culture, c.1815-1867* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); James Epstein, *Radical Expression: Political Language, Ritual and Symbol in England, 1790-1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); Ian Haywood, *The Revolution in Popular Literature: Print, Politics and the People, 1790–186*0 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); David Craig, '"High Politics" and the "New Political History"', *The Historical Journal*, 53.2 (June 2010), pp.453-75; E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, rev. ed. (1963; London: Penguin, 2013); Jon Mee, *Print, Publicity and Popular Radicalism in the 1790s: The Laurel of Liberty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Katrina Navickas, *Protest and the Politics of Space and Place, 1789-1848* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017); James Epstein and David Karr, *British Jacobin Politics, Desires, and Aftermaths: Seditious Hearts* (London: Routledge, 2021).

[73] Henry J. Miller, *A Nation of Petitioners: Petitions and Petitioning in the United Kingdom, 1780-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), p.72. See also Richard Huzzey and Henry J. Miller, 'The Politics of Petitioning: Parliament, Government, and Subscriptional Cultures in the United Kingdom, 1780-1918', *History*, 106.370 (April 2021), pp.221-43.

conception of the term, utilised by historians of petitioning culture, in order to examine associational culture and the subscription library.[74] As Henry Miller has observed, this method connects formal electoral politics to the actions and experiences of everyday life, thereby challenging accounts which focus upon the electoral and exclusive aspects of politics in the period.[75] Of course, part of the attraction of the subscription library was in its construction of an exclusive clubbable space, and the membership of some libraries was kept purposely small. Nevertheless, this could include peers, parliamentarians, activists, and voters, as well as those without the vote and women, and could therefore be wider than the boundaries of the electoral system.

A further consequence of the post-Namierite revisionism has been a re-evaluation of the political vitality of the unreformed electoral system, which has been thoroughly rescued from the misinterpretations of Whiggish history and the so-called 'reform perspective': the denigration of eighteenth-century society as 'unreformed' by nineteenth century reformers.[76] The electoral system pre-1832 was not overwhelmingly venal, corrupt or stagnant; its electors were not the mindless pawns of regional magnates; and the system as a whole was not immune to change or limited reform.[77] In the words of Frank O'Gorman, this version of the past 'owes

[74] Whilst historians of petitioning, such as Henry Miller, have made reference to associational culture, they have been more likely to judge associations as one of the drivers of petitioning culture, rather than an aspect of subscriptional culture in its own right. Miller makes no reference to the subscription library, but it, like other clubs and societies, could be a petitioner itself. In 1822, the Leighton Library produced what was described as a 'Statement' to be delivered to the 'Member for the County' requesting that he use his influence to procure financial support from the Treasury on account of the recent expense of repairing the library building. Leighton MS 16, Minutes, 1734-1822, 25 March 1822. The Bristol Library Society produced multiple memorials over the course of its history, mostly to the Corporation. For examples, see BA, LS/M/4, Committee minute book, 1807-22, 4 April 1809, 20 December 1814, 28 March 1815. On memorials as an aspect of petitioning culture, see Miller, *Nation of Petitioners*, pp.98-100. Yet subscription libraries, like associational culture, was politically significant in a number of ways and deserve to be judged as an equal aspect of this 'name signing culture'.

[75] Miller, *Nation of Petitioners*, pp.7-8.

[76] For the use of this phrase, see Joanna Innes and Arthur Burns, 'Introduction', in *Rethinking the Age of Reform: Britain 1780-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp.4-7. For a defence of this 'whig interpretation of history', see Annabel Patterson, *Nobody's Perfect: A New Whig Interpretation of History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), pp.1-35.

[77] Frank O'Gorman, *Voters, Patrons, and Parties: The Unreformed Electoral System of Hanoverian England, 1743–1832* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp.2-4; Burns and Innes, *Rethinking the Age of Reform*; Ian

more to the radical writers of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century and to the Whigs of the reign of Victoria than it does to modern scholarship'.[78] Whilst the role played by parties and ideas within this politics has been considered, the significance played by reading and the politics of reading has not. Alongside an increased focus upon the linguistics of political culture, political and cultural scholars have considered the significance played by print in Georgian politics.[79] Yet such studies have either been focused on popular politics or on the producers of such print, the authors and printers, rather than readers. Readers, and the significance of reading, are even absent from conceptualisations of 'political awareness'. Frank O'Gorman defined the 'political awareness' of the voter as emerging from his social and political environments and relationships, his image of himself and others, his ideals, expectations and objective realities.[80] In turn electoral behaviour 'arises out of such powerfully held social, political, and even moral, standards and beliefs'.[81] Setting aside the fact that 'political awareness' is defined only in respect to voters, and not those who did not have the

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Cawood and Tom Crook, eds., *The Many Lives of Corruption: The Reform of Public Life in Modern Britain c.1750-1950* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2022). For studies which have stressed the vibrancy of Georgian politics at a local level, see John A. Phillips, *The Great Reform Bill in the Boroughs: English Electoral Behaviour, 1818-41* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992); Valerie Honeyman, 'Burgh Politics in Perth: 1780-1840', unpublished MRes diss., (University of Stirling, 2004); Gordon Pentland, *Radicalism, Reform and National Identity in Scotland, 1820-1833* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2008); Katrina Navickas, *Loyalism and Radicalism in Lancashire, 1798-1815* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[78] O'Gorman, *Voters, Patrons, and Parties*, p.4.

[79] Epstein, *Radical Expression*; Mark Philp, *Reforming Ideas in Britain: Politics and Language in the Shadow of the French Revolution, 1789-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Epstein and Karr, *British Jacobin Politics*. For examples of political studies examining the role of printed material, see Stuart Andrews, *The British Periodical Press and the French Revolution, 1789-99* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000); J.E. Cookson, *The Friends of Peace: Anti-War Liberalism in England, 1793–1815* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp.84–114; J.J. Sack, *From Jacobite to Conservative: Reaction and Orthodoxy in Britain c.1760–1832* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp.8–29; Kevin Gilmartin, *Print Politics: The Press and Radical Opposition in Early Nineteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Grenby, *Anti-Jacobin Novel*; Gilmartin, *Writing against Revolution*; Haywood, *Revolution in Popular Literature*; Mee, *Print, Publicity and Popular Radicalism in the 1790s*.

[80] The concept of 'political awareness' is rarely explicitly defined but often discussed as a necessary requirement for 'public opinion' in this period. For example, see J.A.W. Gunn, *Beyond Liberty and Property: The Process of Self-Recognition in Eighteenth-Century Political Thought* (Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1983), pp.263-315; Dickinson, *Politics of the People*, pp.221-54; James E. Bradley, 'The British Public and the American Revolution: Ideology, Interest and Opinion', in *Britain and the American Revolution* ed. H.T. Dickinson (Hoboken, NJ: Taylor and Francis, 2014), pp.153–54.

[81] O'Gorman, *Voters, Patrons, and Parties*, p.225.

vote but who exercised political influence through other means, this definition underplays the importance of ideas in motivating and shaping political engagement.[82] Likewise, it leaves no capacity for the reader, or the reading process, to play a role in either political awareness, action or identity. A study of the subscription library allows for a consideration of these elements, including how a politically engaged community consumed not just political works, but all manners of reading material, as well as how membership of the subscription library could be a driver for political awareness.

Various scholars have tacitly made reference to either political reading, the politics of reading or the politics of library associations, although frequently within the context of broader studies. Biographical studies of political figures, especially those well known for their large libraries, regularly make note of their subject's reading and responses to books.[83] Likewise, historians of both politics and intellectual thought sometimes reference reading in order to assess the reception or circulation of a particular text, or when examining the intellectual influences upon a specific author.[84] A number of reading historians have examined political reading, both implicitly, in regard to those considered subversive readers, and explicitly, with the case studies

[82] Dickinson, *Liberty and Property*, pp.1-10.
[83] Kevin J. Hayes, *The Road to Monticello: The Life and Mind of Thomas Jefferson* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Ruth Clayton Windscheffel, *Reading Gladstone* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); John Bew, *Castlereagh: Enlightenment, War and Tyranny* (London: Quercus, 2011), pp.42-55, 176-77, 534-36; Kevin J. Hayes, *George Washington: A Life in Books* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).
[84] Caroline Robbins, 'The Lifelong Education of Thomas Paine (1737-1809): Some Reflections upon His Acquaintance among Books', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical* Society, 127.3 (June 1983), pp.135-42; Douglas L. Wilson, 'Jefferson vs. Hume', *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 46 (1989), pp.49-70; Douglas L. Wilson, 'Thomas Jefferson's Library and the French Connection', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 26.4 (1993), pp.669-85; Douglas L. Wilson, 'Jefferson and Bolingbroke: Some Notes on the Question of Influence', in *Religion and Political Culture in Jefferson's Virginia*, eds. Garrett Ward Sheldon and Daniel L. Dreisbach (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), pp.107-18; David Bebbington, *The Mind of Gladstone: Religion, Homer, and Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp.14-42; Mark Philp, 'Godwin, Thelwall and the Means of Progress', in *Reforming Ideas*, p.216; Alastair Paynter, 'William Gladstone and the Homeric Constitution', *History*, 106.373 (December 2021), pp.751-74; Michael Penman, 'The Declaration of Arbroath: Georgian Editions, Libraries and Readers, and Scotland's "Radical War" of 1820', *The Scottish Historical Review*, 101.3 (2022), pp.491-511.

of the reading of politicians or those who read in a specifically political manner.[85] Of these, Mark Towsey has gone the furthest in examining the role political culture and political communities played in framing the reading of history.[86] Furthermore, library historians have always been interested in the disagreements and disunity that sometimes arose amongst library members of different religious or political persuasions, as well as the implicit politics of the library space acknowledged in its cultural, institutional, or imperial capital.[87] Except on rare occasions, the politics of reading, and its myriad elements, has not been the primary focus in any of these studies.[88]

Analysing the Suffolk Public Library, a subscription library in Bury St Edmunds, Christopher Reid has provided one of the few instances in which the politics of the subscription library is the explicit focus of study.[89] In the absence of the library's institutional records, Reid is reliant upon private correspondence and newspaper reports to attempt to reconstruct the internal

[85] Pearson, *Women's Reading in Britain*, pp.176-95; Colclough, *Consuming Texts*, pp.96-101; Julieanne Lamond, 'Representative Readers: Political Agency, Reading History, and the Case of Matthew Charlton', *Library & Information History*, 37.3 (December 2021), pp.219-33.
[86] Towsey, *Reading History*, pp.103-79.
[87] Charles Parish, *History of the Birmingham Library* (London: Library Association, 1966), pp.16-31; Peter Hoare, 'The Operatives' Libraries of Nottingham: A Radical Community's Own Initiative', *Library History*, 19 (2003), pp.173-84; Allan, *Nation of Readers*, pp.73-74; Sharon Murphy, 'Imperial Reading? The East India Company's Lending Libraries for Soldiers, c.1819-1834', *Book History*, 12 (2009), pp.74-99; Rebecca Bowd, 'Useful Knowledge or Polite Learning? A Reappraisal of Approaches to Subscription Library History', *Library & Information History*, 29.3 (September 2013), pp.182-95; Keith A. Manley, 'Jeremy Bentham has been Banned: Contention and Censorship in Private Subscription Libraries before 1825', *Library & Information History*, 29.3 (2013), pp.170-81; Keith A. Manley, 'Infidel Books and "Factories of the Enlightenment": Censorship and Surveillance in Subscription and Circulating Libraries in an Age of Revolutions, 1790-1850', *Book History*, 19.1 (2017), pp.169-96; Sean D. Moore, *Slavery and the Making of Early American Libraries: British Literature, Political Thought, and the Transatlantic Book Trade, 1731-1814* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019); Maggie Patton, 'An Early Colonial Thirst for Knowledge: Australia's First Subscription Library', *Library & Information History*, 37.3 (December 2021), pp.195-206.
[88] An exception to this, although a study of a different period, is Geoff Baker, *Reading and Politics in Early Modern England: The Mental World of a Seventeenth-Century Catholic Gentleman* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010). See also Joshua J. Smith, 'Reading against Reform: The Bristol Library Society and the Intellectual Culture of Bristol's Elections in 1812', *Parliamentary History*, 43.1 (February 2024), pp.112-28.
[89] Christopher Reid, 'Unitarian Activism and the Politics of the Subscription Library: Bury St Edmunds in the 1790s', in *Textual Transformations: Purposing and Repurposing Books from Richard Baxter to Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, eds. Tessa Whitehouse and N.H. Keeble (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), pp.76-94.

debates of a single library.[90] He concludes that in Bury, Dissenters were successful in shaping and controlling the town's principal subscription library, and did not seek to create an apolitical reading space, but a library specifically crafted to spread the key texts of rational dissent.[91] As Reid acknowledges, this makes the Suffolk Public Library somewhat of an outlier for libraries in this period, in that Dissenters remained the dominant group within the library's administrative apparatus.[92] By contrast, as we shall see at Bristol, but also at Birmingham, Leeds, and Sheffield, it was Anglicans who gradually came to dominate the elected positions of the library's administration.[93] Reid interprets the Suffolk Public Library's founding as a continuation of the political controversies which were then occupying national and local politics, specifically the campaign to repeal the legal restrictions upon Dissenters, the Test and Corporation Acts.[94] Yet as this thesis will demonstrate, the politics of the subscription library were not restricted to responding to the specific political experiences of the 1790s. Libraries retained a political significance, and responsiveness, beyond this single decade.

Historians of libraries, politics and associational culture have also underestimated the significance of the subscription library as a distinct form of voluntary association. For Jürgen Habermas and other theorists, libraries, book clubs, and coffee houses played pivotal roles in the establishment of the public sphere and the creation of a civic identity.[95] This theory of the

[90] Indeed, some of the library's catalogues, which were analysed during the twentieth century, have since been lost. Reid, 'Unitarian Activism', p.79, n.14.
[91] Reid, 'Unitarian Activism', p.80.
[92] Reid, 'Unitarian Activism', p.89.
[93] At the Bristol Library Society, changes in the committee's personnel mirrored similar changes in the complexion of the membership of the city's Corporation. Mark Harrison, *Crowds and History: Mass Phenomena in English Towns, 1790-1835* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p.64; Skjönsberg and Towsey, 'Introduction', in *Bristol Minute Book*, pp.xix-xx. For Birmingham, Leeds, and Sheffield, see respectively Parish, *Birmingham Library*, pp.16-31; Bowd, 'Useful Knowledge or Polite Learning?', pp.190-92; Manley, 'Jeremy Bentham has been Banned', p.176; Loveday Herridge and Sue Roe, 'Reading Sheffield: Sheffield Libraries and Book Clubs, 1771–1850', in *Before the Public Library*, pp.178-80.
[94] Reid, 'Unitarian Activism', pp.80-82.
[95] Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, MA: Polity Press, 1989); Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London: Verso, 2006), pp.33-46.

public sphere, sometimes 'spheres', has received substantial commentary and debate.[96] Arguing that the term has now been stretched beyond its meaning so far as to render it methodologically useless, Katrina Navickas has preferred to refer to a 'body politic'.[97] This conception, which Mark Harrison and Steve Poole in examining Bristol have termed 'citizenship', refers to the 'participatory political culture' that was conducted locally, the struggle for inclusion in the 'body politic' by both a working and a middling class.[98] Like the term 'subscriptional culture', this is an analysis of the political nation that is not defined by the boundaries of the electoral franchise. Subscription libraries formed an element of this culture, a 'participatory' reading association that was administered, collectively, according to the general will of the community. The format of the subscription library was therefore inherently political, regardless of what community it was located within. The types of subscription libraries examined in this thesis, and its two case studies, were not popular or working-class associations, although, as libraries, these too were political associations.[99] At Bristol and Leighton, the high financial and social cost of admission ensured these venues remained the purview of a landed, propertied, and professional class. Yet this was also a group that sought cultural assertion and political respectability, formed both of those who had the vote and those

[96] Craig J. Calhoun, ed., *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (London: MIT Press, 1992); Nancy Fraser, 'Politics, Culture, and the Public Sphere: Toward a Postmodern Conception', in *Social Postmodernism: Beyond Identity Politics*, eds. Linda Nicholson and Steven Seidman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp.287-312; John L. Brooke, 'Reason and Passion in the Public Sphere: Habermas and the Cultural Historians', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 29 (1998), pp.43-67; Jon Mee, *Conversable Worlds: Literature, Contention and Community 1762 to 1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp.13-17.

[97] Navickas, *Protest and the Politics of Space and Place*, pp.8-9.

[98] Navickas, *Politics of Space and Place*, p.9; Harrison, *Crowds and History*; Steve Poole, '"Till our liberties be secure": Popular Sovereignty and Public Space in Bristol, 1750-1850', *Urban History*, 26 (1999), pp.40-54.

[99] For studies of working-class subscription libraries, see John C. Crawford, 'The Ideology of Mutual Improvement in Scottish Working Class Libraries', *Library History*, 12 (1996), pp.49-61; Manley, *Books, Borrowers, and Shareholders*, pp.69-84; Manley, *Irish Reading Societies*, pp.25-44, 124-41. The libraries of mechanics' institutes were aimed at a working-class audience, but these institutions were nearly always managed, in a paternalistic manner, by a professional class, rather than the working-class subscribers. Steven Shapin and Barry Barnes, 'Science, Nature and Control: Interpreting Mechanics' Institutes', *Social Studies of Science*, 7.1 (1977), pp.31-74; Martyn Walker, *The Development of the Mechanics' Institute Movement in Britain and Beyond: Supporting Further Education for the Adult Working Classes* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017); Manley, *Irish Reading Societies*, pp.180-81. For an overview of the membership of the Bristol and Leighton libraries, see below, Chapter One, pp.83-86.

who did not. It was a semi-public space in which different partisan groupings could safely coalesce together. This was as true for the large and raucous electoral politics of Bristol as it was for the far more restrictive electoral franchise of Perthshire. In Dunblane, a landed and political elite shared the library space with those who could not vote but wished for the extension of the franchise.[100] Participation in the subscription library and the politics of reading should be understood within this context and as an attempt to attain political respectability and build a civic identity, amid a struggle to be included and accepted within the 'body politic'. Like Georgian politics more generally, it could often be concerned with national political issues but was fundamentally based in a local context.

III

This thesis is structured into six thematic chapters, which are also broadly chronological in sequence. Chapter One introduces the two contexts and the period under study, readers in Bristol and Dunblane across the period 1789 to 1832 and the political climate in which they lived. It introduces the two subscription libraries which were central to the urban culture of both communities, the Bristol Library Society and the Leighton Library, and situates both within the wider context of the subscription library movement. By 1800, both the Bristol and Leighton libraries had been in existence for decades, their management inherited by a later generation of administrators who faced different problems than those in recently founded libraries. Both libraries also had close associations with political and electoral networks inside the communities in which they were situated.

Chapter Two continues this analysis by situating the subscription library more generally within associational culture, the clubs and societies which inhabited the world of Georgian Britain. Neither library nor associational historians in either British or American scholarship have been

[100] See below, Chapter One, p.97.

particularly alive to the significance of the subscription library as a distinct form of associational culture, nor of its similarities and differences to other clubs and societies. The subscription library was neither as gendered nor as socially exclusive as it has often been depicted. The principal barrier to entry was financial rather than social, and women could, and did, become active subscription library members. The administrative elements of the subscription library also played a significant role in fashioning a civic identity and providing practical experience for those who held prominent and public positions in civil society. It is important to understand these more general elements of the subscription library before the second half of this thesis proceeds through an analysis of the politics of reading in a series of different methodological studies: the individual reader, the community of readers, and reading at the subscription library in a period of crisis.

Chapter Three undertakes a case study analysis of the reading and social life of Peter Baillie, a second-generation Scottish merchant and library member in Bristol, in the 1790s and 1800s. Baillie's family wealth and social position enabled him to interact and circulate amongst the associational networks of Bristol's mercantile elite, actions which he recorded in his own notebook. Baillie's membership in the subscription library was an essential crutch to this involvement, allowing him to connect with influential and politically significant figures in Bristol's society. Baillie's reading from the Bristol Library helped him in this endeavour, enabling him to forge the connections upon which political success in Georgian politics was built. This political reading, combined with the experience and civic education accrued from his involvement in the library's administration, aided Baillie in his pursuit of a parliamentary career.

The following two chapters then analyse the political significance of the subscription library upon communities of readers. Chapter Four focuses its attention on the Leighton Library in order to examine the aspects of political reading upon a community of religious readers. Church

ministers were consistent and recurring users of the subscription library, but they played a particularly prominent role in the administration and use of the Leighton Library. This chapter analyses the reading habits of ministers and preachers at the Leighton Library to assess the intellectual culture of a rural presbytery of the Church of Scotland. Leighton library members conscientiously cultivated a culture of learning and letters which mirrored the actions of Moderate ministers in Edinburgh, managing the Leighton Library as a subscription library and community resource. Their use of its collection and the networks forged within influenced their response, individually and collectively, to the political flashpoints of the 1790s, as well as their practice and identity as leaders of the local community.

Chapter Five assesses political reading at the subscription library during periods of crisis. The subscription library, and its reading material, could play a key role in shaping the local intellectual and ideological context in which individuals read political events and participated in elections. The chapter examines the collective reading habits of an urban electorate by comparing library borrowing records with the voting records of Bristolians in 1812, revealing the important role the subscription library played in the creation and maintenance of the social networks which underpinned Georgian politics. The reading habits of electors in Bristol in 1812 were thoroughly international, and the threat of France loomed large in the books borrowed by library members. This pattern of reading, along with the specific circumstances of the electoral contest fought in the city in October 1812 contributed to the defeat of reformist and radical candidates at the general election. The chapter concludes by examining other anxieties faced by readers in this period. Anxious reading, for example about the strength and solidity of the British state, affected the habits and reading styles of both English and Scottish readers, and readers took meanings from a number of texts, even those from the previous century, to better understand their life and times.

Chapter Six concludes by drawing together all the elements of political reading hitherto discussed, the individual and literal reading of political texts, the 'reading' of broader social and intellectual changes, and of electoral politics whether local or national in the period leading up to the first Reform Act in 1832. It examines how all these types of political reading combined to influence the manner in which library users understood political change and reform in this period. During politically febrile periods, readers turned to the subscription library for guidance and education. At the Leighton Library, readers borrowed abolitionist and anti-slavery material as the issue returned to national prominence. Subscription library membership combined with an individual's political affiliation to influence their 'reading' of specific political events, such as the Bristol Riots of 1831, as well as of wider societal changes, the so-called 'March of Intellect' or the increasing prominence of reform as a political issue. In a similar respect, national politics reflected onto the local politics at play in the library. In the late 1820s, members of the Bristol Library Society wrestled with the best means by which to reform aspects of its administration. Those most active in these debates were seasoned political actors themselves, with experience of having spoken at large public meetings, and were aware of this wider context of change, explicitly modelling their tactics and language upon national political discourses.

The subscription library provided access to reading, but also to the intimate political and social networks within Georgian Britain. In this respect, the act of subscription library reading was a means to another end. It allowed a person to associate themselves amongst the elite of a local community, forging connections and acquiring civic experience in bookkeeping and committee work. Reading brought access to knowledge and pleasure, essential for the personal development of the mind and soul, judged to be vital by the social norms of eighteenth-century society. The books and space of the subscription library offered this opportunity and were a source of political agency. Yet the politics of an established subscription library, as both

Leighton and Bristol were, were materially different from those of a newly founded library. The nineteenth-century subscription library inherited its core features from the preceding century, but it also faced new challenges to the community cohesiveness of the library space. Understanding the historical context of such libraries is therefore necessary to understand the political experience of being a library member. As the next chapter discusses, the dawn of the nineteenth century saw the subscription library reach its height as a library movement, with the form successfully spreading across the British Isles and North America. Although ostensibly aloof from partisan politics, both the Leighton and Bristol libraries found themselves buffeted by the divisions and politics of the period. Both libraries had deep associations with the political networks of their local communities and the individuals who acted as the local political and civic leadership. Both institutions, and subscription libraries more widely, were generally successful in managing these challenges. This thesis is concerned with how they did so, and the material impact upon the political lives of library members and upon Georgian politics and society.

Chapter One: The Subscription Library in the Community at Bristol and Dunblane

> *Who are they… who are to select the works? Or, if every donation be to be accepted, what a pretty library would be put before the public, of sedition, immorality, and irreligion.*[1]
>
> John Eagles, *Blackwood's Magazine* (1855).

By the early nineteenth century, the subscription library was one of the most ubiquitous forms of library association to be found across rural and urban locales in the Atlantic world. Its origins, however, lay in the eighteenth century, and were both practical and ideological. Defined at its simplest, a subscription library was a permanent collection of books which were collected and administered for the good of their communities. Typically, access to such libraries required the payment of a one-off or annual fee. It was an inherently adaptive form of association, responsive to the requirements and preferences of a local community. The subscription format could be used to administer access to existing collections of books, as occurred at the Leighton Library, as well as newly founded libraries.[2] Some were proprietorial, i.e. collectively owned by their own members who were also shareholders, whilst the ownership of others was vested in a local civic or ecclesiastical body.[3] Many of these libraries allowed their members to play a direct role in its administration through elements of 'subscriber democracy': the annual general meeting amongst the entire membership, or the elected

[1] [John Eagles], 'Civilisation. – The Census.', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 77 (March 1855), p.313.
[2] For a discussion of the cost of subscription at the Leighton, see below, p.51.
[3] At proprietorial subscription libraries, members would pay an entrance fee upon first joining the library which would provide them with a share in the institution. This was an additional expense to the annual subscription. For the cost of the entrance fee at the Bristol Library Society, see below pp.59-60.

committee that oversaw the library's day-to-day management.[4] Even without these electoral features, subscription libraries were managed as a resource for the benefit of the community, rather than for a narrowly commercial, sectarian or partisan benefit. Of course, this community extended only as far as the paying subscribers. Although subscription libraries regularly pronounced their public purpose and virtues, they were not 'public' in the modern sense, although anyone could typically join one, provided they had the resources to meet the social and financial barriers to entry. This exclusivity was also a major element of their attraction to those who circulated amongst elite social and political networks. The chief significance of the subscription library, and a major marker of difference between it and other institutional, educational, or religious libraries, was its freedom; the freedom of members to choose how they associated together and to decide for themselves which books they wished to read. The object of the Liverpool Library, declared its 1814 catalogue, was 'the providing a fund of literary instruction and entertainment, adapted to the various tastes of the subscribers.'[5] These decisions were themselves inherently political, as was the manner in which library members conducted library business and managed their societies.

For those who could afford to be subscription library members, the benefits were manifold. Joining a subscription library brought members access to books ordinarily unaffordable to the independent buyer.[6] Moreover, the collective purchasing power of the community enabled the continued purchase of the newest publications. In this respect, many subscription library members were probably the first generation of their families to be able to regularly and more

[4] For the use of this term 'subscriber democracy', see Robert J. Morris, 'Clubs, Societies and Associations', in *The Cambridge Social History of Britain 1750-1950: Volume 3, Social Agencies and Institutions.*, ed. F.M.L. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp.412-13.

[5] *Catalogue of the Liverpool Library, at the Lyceum, Bold-Street*. (Liverpool, 1814), p.5.

[6] Books, especially those newly printed, remained expensive commodities throughout this period. Simon Eliot, *Some Patterns and Trends in British Publishing, 1800-1919* (London: Bibliographical Society, 1994), p.24; Richard D. Altick, *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public, 1800-1900*, 2nd ed. (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1998), pp.260-67; William St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp.196-205; Matthew Sangster, *Living as an Author in the Romantic Period* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), pp.51-56.

easily read the newest works.[7] This access to print brought important ideological benefits in that it provided ambitious members of an emergent middling class with the necessary tools for self-improvement. Indeed, the subscription library was nationally renowned for this purpose. As the *Monthly Review* noted in 1804:

> We need not descant on Library-Societies as being the most cheap, useful, and amusing institutions which can be established in country towns. They afford not only a permanent but a growing fund of instruction, and must obtain the good wishes, if not the actual patronage, of all those who are friends to the diffusion of knowledge.[8]

Access to the socially exclusive library space also brought opportunities for library members to network amongst and across social and political boundaries, connecting with the urban elite of Georgian Britain who monopolised the reins of civic and political control.

Although active as a form of library association from the early eighteenth century, the numbers of subscription libraries saw their fastest expansion across the four decades between 1780 and 1820.[9] Max Skjönsberg and Mark Towsey estimate that there were over 350 active subscription libraries across North America and the British Isles by 1800.[10] Contemporaries recognised that this was a transatlantic trend. In 1801, a London newspaper, the *Oracle and the Daily Advertiser*, reported the successful spread of libraries across New Hampshire in the United

[7] Mark Towsey, *Reading the Scottish Enlightenment: Books and Their Readers in Provincial Scotland, 1750-1820* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), p.63.
[8] *Monthly Review*, 45 (1804), pp.97-98.
[9] For an overview of the growth of the subscription library movement in the British Isles, see variously St Clair, *Reading Nation*, pp.246-54; David Allan, *A Nation of Readers: The Lending Library in Georgian England* (London: The British Library, 2008), pp.63-77; Keith A. Manley, *Books, Borrowers, and Shareholders. Scottish Circulating and Subscription Libraries before 1825: A Survey and Listing* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Bibliographical Society, 2012), pp.17-45, 123-25; Keith A. Manley, *Irish Reading Societies and Circulating Libraries Founded Before 1825: Useful Knowledge and Agreeable Entertainment* (Dublin: Four Courts, 2018), pp.45-56.
[10] Max Skjönsberg and Mark Towsey, 'Introduction', in *The Minute Book of the Bristol Library Society, 1771-1801* (Bristol: Bristol Record Society, 2022), p.xii.

States, noting that its state legislature had recently 'passed thirty acts, of which fifteen were acts for incorporating Library Societies in different towns.' It went on:

> Such, throughout *America*, is the general passion for Literature and study. We know, from experience in *Britain*, that nothing can contribute more effectually than those institutions to the general diffusion of knowledge and civility…[11]

Precise statistics are sometimes difficult to establish. Within the British Isles, Scotland is estimated to have had between fifty-two or a hundred subscription libraries active by 1800, with all scholars agreeing that this rate of expansion continued to increase into the nineteenth century.[12] Ireland also saw an increase in its number of subscription libraries after 1800, albeit from a very low base.[13]

Nevertheless, subscription libraries had a much older history, having been active in Britain since the middle of the eighteenth century and in North America a couple of decades earlier than this. The first subscription library of any kind is widely considered to have been the Library Company of Philadelphia, founded in 1731 by a group of fifty shareholders, including Benjamin Franklin (1706-90).[14] As such, the proprietorial subscription library inverted the

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[11] *Oracle and the Daily Advertiser*, 1 September 1801. Emphasis in original. On the spread of subscription libraries in North America, see Jesse H. Shera, *Foundations of the Public Library: The Origins of the Public Library Movement in New England 1629-1855* (1949; repr. Hamden, CT: Shoe String Press, 1974), pp.59-75; Ross W. Beales and James N. Green, 'Libraries and Their Users', in *A History of the Book in America, Vol. 1: The Colonial Book in the Atlantic World*, eds. Hugh Amory and David D. Hall (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp.400-02; Manley, *Books, Borrowers, and Shareholders*, pp.28-29.

[12] Towsey, *Reading the Scottish Enlightenment*, p.58; Manley, *Books, Borrowers, and Shareholders*, p.73. Bob Harris and Charles McKean noted the existence of at least 190 subscription libraries in Scotland between the 1780s and 1820. Bob Harris and Charles McKean, *The Scottish Town in the Age of Enlightenment 1740-1820* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), pp.386-88. Mark Towsey believes that 203 libraries were founded between 1800 and 1830. Towsey, *Reading the Scottish Enlightenment*, p.58.

[13] There were only three subscription libraries in Ireland before 1800. In the nineteenth century, subscription library growth was most pronounced in the north and principally Ulster. Manley, *Irish Reading Societies*, pp.56, 98-123. See also Johanna Archbold, 'Book Clubs and Reading Societies in the Late Eighteenth Century', in *Clubs and Societies in Eighteenth-Century Ireland*, eds. James Kelly and Martyn J. Powell (Dublin: Four Courts, 2010), pp.139-42, 152-60.

[14] J.A. Leo Lemay, *The Life of Benjamin Franklin, Volume 2: Printer and Publisher, 1730-1747* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), pp.93-123; *"At the Instance of Benjamin Franklin": A Brief History of the Library Company of Philadelphia*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: The Library Company of Philadelphia, 2015), pp.5-11.

typical movement of associational clubs and societies in that it began first in the imperial periphery before making its way back to the metropolitan centre.[15] In 1949, the library historian Jesse Shera questioned the status of the Library Company as the forerunner of the 'social library':

> Unfortunately, no record has survived to tell of the first social library or even of the earliest examples. But it was not the invention of Benjamin Franklin, nor was it even an American innovation. Probably the idea of a social library came from a number of different sources, and among these the influence of England was undoubtedly strong.[16]

Shera, however, was not considering the subscription library on its own, and included the book club within his analysis of a 'social library'.[17] He is far from alone in having done this. William St Clair, writing for a British context, referred to both subscription libraries and book clubs as 'reading societies'.[18] There is also a similarity here with Paul Kaufman's use of the term 'community libraries' in the 1960s to refer to all kinds of secular-library institutions, including the subscription library and the commercial circulating library.[19] Yet whilst this might be a useful term to refer to the spread of different libraries as a cultural movement, it ignores the differences between the different library associations, most notably the manner in which they were administered.[20] Moreover, as others have noted, the term 'community libraries' was not,

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[15] Peter Clark, *British Clubs and Societies, 1580-1800: The Origins of an Associational World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp.131-37.
[16] Shera, *Foundations of the Public Library*, p.54.
[17] For Shera's definition, see Shera, *Foundations of the Public Library*, pp.57-64. The term 'social libraries' is often used within American scholarship today to refer to subscription libraries. Shera, *Foundations of the Public Library*, pp.54-126; Sophie H. Jones, '"Very useful as well as ornamental": Social Libraries in Early American Communities', *Library & Information History*, 37.2 (2021), pp.109-30.
[18] St Clair, *Reading Nation*, pp.246-54.
[19] Paul Kaufman, 'Community Lending Libraries in Eighteenth-Century Ireland and Wales', *Library Quarterly*, 33 (1963), p.299, n.1. In a similarly confusing manner, in the opening to his study on working-class libraries in Scotland, John Crawford used the term 'subscription libraries' to refer to a whole range of libraries, including 'commercial circulating libraries; proprietary libraries… and mechanics' institutes'. John C. Crawford, 'The Ideology of Mutual Improvement in Scottish Working Class Libraries', *Library History*, 12 (1996), p.49.
[20] In contrast to the subscription library, the circulating library was typically managed by a bookseller or printer who maintained a permanent stock of books to lend out. These libraries were run purely for commercial profit

historically speaking, in contemporary use, nor were some library associations, such as the circulating library, especially communitarian in their outlook.[21]

The book club and subscription library did operate on the same associational principles and offered similar experiences to their members; both were collections of books bought to facilitate reading for a community of subscribers. Indeed, many book clubs acted as precursors to subscription libraries.[22] Similarly, the book club, as an associational form, preceded that of the subscription library. St Clair, likely following Thomas Kelly, believed that England's first book club was founded in 'about' 1740 by the 'Dissenters of Leicester'.[23] In fact, other clubs preceded this, and the book club as a whole was probably a seventeenth century invention, even if this cannot be wholly proved from the surviving evidence.[24] Philip Doddridge (1702-51) recorded that he was a member of a book club in 1725, thought to have been the Kibworth Book Society (established by 1724), whilst Paul Kaufman, in his 'census' of English book clubs and reading societies compiled in 1964, listed two other book clubs founded in the early

with all decisions regarding stock, borrowing length and rates solely determined by the proprietor. On the circulating library, see Devendra P. Varma, *The Evergreen Tree of Diabolical Knowledge* (Washington, DC: Consortium Press, 1972); Allan, *Nation of Readers*, pp.119-62; E. Jacobs, 'Eighteenth-Century British Circulating Libraries and Cultural Book History', *Book History*, 6 (2003), pp.1-22; St Clair, *Reading Nation*, pp.237-46. On the circulating library in North America, see David Kaser, *A Book for a Sixpence: The Circulating Library in America* (Pittsburgh: Beta Phi Mu, 1980).

[21] Thomas Kelly, *Early Public Libraries: A History of Public Libraries in Great Britain Before 1850* (London: Library Association, 1966), p.242, n.1; Allan, *Nation of Readers*, p.22, n.74.

[22] See, for example, the case of the Pembroke Society, in Wales, which was first founded, in 1741, as a book club and later became a subscription library when it began to maintain a permanent stock of books. The date in which it did so is unclear. G. Walters, 'The Eighteenth-Century "Pembroke Society"', *Welsh History Review*, 3.3 (June 1967), pp.291-98. Another example of a book club eventually becoming a subscription library is the York Book Society, later the York Subscription Library. St Clair, *Reading Nation*, p.668. For the literature on book clubs, see variously Paul Kaufman, 'English Book Clubs and Their Role in Social History', *Libri*, 14 (1964), pp.1-31; Keith A. Manley, 'Rural Reading in Northwest England: The Sedbergh Book Club, 1728-1928', *Book History*, 2 (1999), pp.78-95; St Clair, *Reading Nation*, pp.250-52; Allan, *Nation of Readers*, pp.26-54; Archbold, 'Book Clubs and Reading Societies in the Late Eighteenth Century', pp.138-52; Ina Ferris, *Book-Men, Book Clubs, and the Romantic Literary Sphere* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp.3-5, 116-23.

[23] St Clair, *Reading Nation*, p.246; Kelly, *Early Public Libraries*, pp.137-38. St Clair provides no evidence to support his claim that 'the tradition was older in Scotland' with much of the impetus for the founding of new societies elsewhere coming from 'expatriate Scots.' In contrast, Keith Manley believes that book clubs made little inroads into Scotland, certainly prior to 1800. Manley, *Books, Borrowers, and Shareholders*, pp.119-23. Ireland was also a late adopter of the book club, the first founded in the village of Doagh, near Ballyclare in county Antrim in 1770. Archbold, 'Book Clubs and Reading Societies', p.143, see also pp.143-52.

[24] Keith A. Manley, 'The SPCK and English Book Clubs before 1720', *Bodleian Library Record*, 13 (1989), p.236.

eighteenth century: the Caxton Book Club (established 1712), and the Castle Society Book Club (1725) in Colchester.[25] Keith Manley believes that the earliest society for which more than a singular reference survives is for a book club in Meppershall, Bedfordshire, active in 1704.[26] Other clubs existed in Carmarthenshire, Huntingdonshire and Pembrokeshire at around the same time, many of which were mostly the preserve of the local clergy and had their origins in the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK).[27] Regardless, the chief difference between the book club and subscription library is the permanency of the latter, compared to the transitory nature of the former, as books from book clubs were sold off at periodic intervals to fund new purchases. While they both offered similar social experiences, the permanent presence of the subscription library brought a heightened degree of civic prestige and allowed for the reading association to establish its own semi-public space within the community. Permanency also allowed the collection of different types of reading material, the accumulation of a larger repository of printed knowledge which could include works of reference, or successive editions of periodicals or magazines.[28]

Out of the associational legacy of the book club, subscription libraries in Britain began to be founded from the 1740s onwards, emerging first in areas away from the centres of the publishing industry, London and, to a lesser extent, Edinburgh.[29] The Scottish Borders saw a

[25] Philip Doddridge, *Correspondence and Diary*, ed. John Doddridge Humphreys (London: Colburn & Bentley, 1829), II, p.57, cited in Shera, *Foundations of the Public Library*, p.55; Paul Kaufman, 'English Book Clubs and Their Social Import', in *Libraries and Their Users: Collected Papers in Library History* (London: Library Association, 1969), pp.39-43.
[26] Manley, 'SPCK and English Book Clubs', p.236.
[27] Kelly, *Early Public Libraries*, pp.136-37; Manley, 'SPCK and English Book Clubs', pp.234-36.
[28] As discussed below, pp.77-78.
[29] On the publishing industry in Edinburgh in the eighteenth century, see Alastair J. Mann, *The Scottish Book Trade 1500–1720: Print Commerce and Print Control in Early Modern Scotland* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press 2000), pp.7-33; Bill Bell, 'The Scottish Book Trade 1707–1918', in *The Edinburgh History of Scottish Literature: Volume 2, Enlightenment, Britain and Empire (1707-1918)*, eds. Susan Manning, Ian Brown, Thomas Owen Clancy and Murray Pittock (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), pp.223-25; Iain Beavan and Warren McDougall, 'The Scottish Book Trade', in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain. Volume 5: 1695-1830*, eds. Michael F. Suarez and Michael L. Turner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp.352-65; Warren McDougall, 'Edinburgh', and Richard Ovendon, 'Bookselling in Early Eighteenth-Century Edinburgh',

number of these earliest subscription libraries, including the first, founded at Leadhills in 1741 for a community of miners, which established a template for miners' libraries that was later replicated at Wanlockhead in 1756 and Westerkirk in 1793.[30] In England, Manley notes the existence of the Pocklington Public Library, near York, which closed in 1749, although its circumstances remain unclear.[31] A longer lasting subscription library, and the first to be proprietorial in the British Isles, was founded at Kelso in 1750.[32] Other libraries swiftly followed in the Scottish Borders and the north of England. England's first proprietorial subscription library was the Liverpool Library, founded in 1758, with later libraries founded in Warrington in 1760, Hawick and Ayr in 1762, Manchester in 1765, Duns, Leeds, and Halifax in 1768, Lancaster in 1769, Macclesfield in 1770, Stranraer in 1771 and Bristol in 1772.[33] Although it is unclear whether American subscription libraries served directly as models for similar institutions in Scotland and England, many of these libraries within the British Isles consciously modelled themselves off each other.[34] In its initial advertisement, the Bristol Library made reference to the subscription libraries in Manchester and Liverpool which it

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both in *The Edinburgh History of the Book in Scotland, Volume 2: Enlightenment and Expansion 1707-1800*, eds. Stephen Brown and Warren McDougall (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), pp.118-31, 132-42. On the London publishing industry, see St Clair, *Reading Nation*, pp.158-209; James Raven, *The Business of Books: Booksellers and the English Book Trade, 1450-1850* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), pp.134-41, 320-37; James Raven, 'London and the Central Sites of the English Book Trade' and Michael Turner, 'Personnel Within the London Book Trades: Evidence from the Stationers' Company', both in *Cambridge History of the Book in Britain. Volume 5*, pp.293-308, 309-34. For both, see Richard B. Sher, *The Enlightenment and the Book: Scottish Authors and their Publishers in Eighteenth-Century Britain, Ireland and America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), pp.265-326.

[30] Manley, *Books, Borrowers, and Shareholders*, pp.17-25. In addition, see Paul Kaufman, 'Leadhills: Library of Diggers', in *Libraries and Their Users*, pp.163-70; Crawford, 'Ideology of Mutual Improvement', pp.49-55. The borrowing records of the Westerkirk library between 1813 and 1822 have been digitised as part of the 'Books and Borrowing' project. *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Westerkirk: Introduction,", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/library/westerkirk>, [accessed 06/08/24].

[31] Manley believes the library was associated with a nearby public school. Manley, *Books, Borrowers, and Shareholders*, p.5.

[32] Manley, *Books, Borrowers, and Shareholders*, p.28. The ECLO lists the founding date of the Kelso Library as 1751.

[33] Foundation dates taken from ECLO and Manley, *Books, Borrowers, and Shareholders*, p.28. For the Bristol Library Society's founding, see *Bristol Minute Book*, eds. Skjönsberg and Towsey, p.1.

[34] Mark Towsey and Kyle B. Roberts, 'Introduction', in *Before the Public Library: Reading, Community, and Identity in the Atlantic World, 1650–1850* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), pp.2-3.

described as having been met with 'approbation and encouragement'.[35] Keith Manley posits that there was a 'chain' of libraries, imitating one another in style and structure, spreading from Kelso and Berwick-upon-Tweed, where a library was founded in 1753, down into the north-east of England.[36] A similar 'chain' likely existed in Lancashire and can be seen in the decision of a number of subscription libraries, such as those in Manchester and Leeds, to use the term 'Circulating' in their titles.[37]

I

The Leighton Library has its own claim to longevity but was far from a typical subscription library. The library was founded in the late seventeenth century following a bequest of books and money by Robert Leighton (1611-84), the former bishop of Dunblane.[38] Construction of a library building was completed in 1687 and the first formal meeting within the library took place on 9 August 1688.[39] This established the 'Rules and Orders to be observed by the Keeper', but said little about the library's condition of access.[40] The keeper was to attend the library each day and ensure that 'no books be lent out without the citie of Dunblane', and, in

[35] *Bristol Minute Book*, eds. Skjönsberg and Towsey, p.2.
[36] Manley, *Books, Borrowers, and Shareholders*, p.28.
[37] Allan, *Nation of Readers*, p.110, n.12.
[38] Gordon Willis, 'The Leighton Library, Dunblane: Its History and Contents', *The Bibliotheck*, 10.6 (1981), pp.140-42. An account of the library's founding was provided by Robert Douglas (c.1630-1716) in 1691, as well as a first catalogue of its books. USA, Leighton MS 1, Leighton Library, 'Register of the Bibliotheck', historical outline and catalogue, 1691. This register was transcribed by the Bannatyne Club. See 'An Account of the Foundation of the Leightonian Library. By Robert Douglas, Bishop of Dunblane', *The Bannatyne Miscellany; Containing Original Papers and Tracts, Chiefly Relating to the History and Literature of Scotland*. (Edinburgh: Bannatyne Club, 1855), III, pp.227-64. Any subsequent references will be to this transcription, cited as *Bannatyne Miscellany*, III. Gordon Willis transcribed this catalogue of books and compared it with an earlier catalogue compiled by Leighton between 1682 and 1684 and continued by his nephew Edward Lightmaker between 1686 and 1687. Gordon Willis, 'Leightonian Library Catalogue of Bishop Robert Douglas, 1691 (Leighton Library MS 1, ff 24-59) transcribed by Gordon Willis, 2020', <https://libguides.stir.ac.uk/ld.php?content_id=32977851>, [accessed 16/08/24].
[39] The Leighton is Scotland's oldest purpose-built library building. *Bannatyne Miscellany*, III, p.259; Willis, 'Leighton Library', pp.141-42. Attendant at this meeting were Robert Douglas, the bishop of Dunblane, Gaspar Kellie, the dean of Dunblane, James Fall (1647-1711), the principal of the University of Glasgow, John Graham, the commissary clerk of Dunblane, and George Robertson, a lawyer.
[40] Robert Douglas provided a description of these rules in his account, also transcribed in *The Bannatyne Miscellany*, III, pp.258-59.

rather more colourful language, they were also required to 'sufferr no persones to haunt the Library but such as come with a purpose to read'.[41] Clearly, much of the authority over the library's purpose remained with the bishop of Dunblane, and no doubt the abolition of the episcopal polity in the Church of Scotland in 1690 delayed further resolutions in the library's administration.[42] Despite Robert Leighton's last will and testament stating that he had left his books 'to the Cathedrall of Dunblane in Scotland, to remaine there for the use of the clergie of that Diocess', the library's earliest borrowings, covering the period 1699 to 1745, reveal that lay persons were just as active users.[43] Moreover, the library was quite possibly free to use at this time; there is no evidence that users paid anything before 1734, and, indeed, some to suggest that they did not.[44] Rules to formalise access to the library in 1734 were written in the new minute book, whilst a matriculation book was started to record the signatures and fees paid by those who became library members.[45] In 1734, anyone wishing to borrow from the library was required to matriculate and pay a one-off sum of 'at least half a crown [two shillings and sixpence]'.[46] Library trustees frequently paid more, with both Sir James Campbell of

[41] *Bannatyne Miscellany*, III, pp.258-59. Despite this geographical restriction, the library's earliest eighteenth-century borrowings record that books were lent out to those who lived beyond Dunblane. These were recorded in the back of the local kirk session minutes. Stirling Council Archives, CH2/101/9/2, Dunblane kirk session, Minutes (1700-66). See also Linda Chapman's chronological list of borrowers, Stirling Council Archives, CH2/101/9/1, Dunblane kirk session, Transcript of library catalogue and borrowers (1699-1745).

[42] This is discussed further in Chapter Four, p.203.

[43] A 'tennor' of Leighton's will is given by Douglas, and transcribed in *Bannatyne Miscellany*, III, pp.236-37, for quote see p.237. See also Graeme Young, 'Leighton Library Borrowers of the Early Eighteenth Century', *Journal for the Society of Friends of Dunblane Cathedral*, 20.4 (2009), pp.151–53; Andrew T.N. Muirhead, *Scottish Presbyterianism Re-established: The Case of Stirling and Dunblane, 1687-1710* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021), pp.154-55. Although Young assumes these borrowings were later bound together with the kirk session minutes, closer examination of the ledger by Gordon Willis reveals this to have been unlikely to be the case.

[44] I am grateful to Gordon Willis for sharing his notes and expertise on these earliest records. He suggests, firstly, that the preface to the 1734 matriculation book implies that this was the first time payment had been demanded, secondly, there is no evidence of any pre-existing matriculation money held by the library in either its 1734 or 1740 minutes, and, thirdly, the slight dip in the number of borrowings and borrowers after 1734 might suggest that some chose not to continue their use of the library after a fee was demanded.

[45] USA, Leighton MS 16, Leighton Library, Minutes of the meetings of the trustees, 31 October 1734-March 1822 [hereafter Leighton MS 16, Minutes, 1734-1822], 31 October 1734; USA, Leighton MS 25, Leighton Library matriculation book, 31 October 1734-1814 [hereafter Leighton MS 25, Matriculation book].

[46] Leighton MS 16, Minutes, 1734-1822, 31 October 1734. Manley incorrectly refers to this payment as a 'subscription'. Manley, *Books, Borrowers, and Shareholders*, p.209.

Aberuchill, 2nd Bt. (c.1672-1754) and Sir Hugh Paterson of Bannockburn (1685-1777) choosing to pay double the minimum matriculation fee.[47] Over time, the library's trustees were more likely to refer to this as an entrance fee, rather than a matriculation fee, reflecting the terminology more commonly used in other subscription libraries.[48] The cost of joining the library also steadily rose. In 1752, the sum required at matriculation was increased to 'a Crown [five shillings] as the minimum for that Priviledge', whilst in 1757 it was raised again to 'half a Guinea', with all those who had previously paid less required to make up the difference before they could continue to use the library.[49]

With this conscious widening of access, the Leighton's trustees may well have been influenced by the wider tradition in Scotland for community-oriented religious libraries. In the 1700s, the Rev. James Kirkwood (d. 1709), following the practice of Thomas Bray (d. 1730) and later the SPCK, supported the establishment of about eighty libraries, predominantly across the Scottish Highlands and Islands.[50] Critically, whilst Bray's and the SPCK's libraries, founded in England, Wales, and Maryland, were only for the use of local ministers, Kirkwood intended his libraries to be used by a wider community.[51] At around the same time the Leighton Library was admitting lay persons as 'cives', a former Kirkwood library, the Dumfries Presbytery Library

[47] Leighton MS 25, Matriculation book. Both Campbell's and Paterson's matriculation fees were recorded in the pound Scots, and, as such, its true value has been frequently confused. For example, see Towsey, *Reading the Scottish Enlightenment*, p.149, n.69. For Campbell, see Bernard Burke, *Burke's Genealogical and Heraldic History of the Peerage, Baronetage and Knightage with War Gazette and Corrigenda*, 98th ed. (London: Burke's Peerage Limited, 1940), p.482. On Paterson, see D.W. Hayton, 'Paterson, Sir Hugh, 3rd Bt. (c.1685-1777), of Bannockburn House, St. Ninians, Stirling', *HoP*, <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1690-1715/member/paterson-sir-hugh-1685-1777#footnote9_l5agkxi>, [accessed 16/08/24].

[48] For examples, see the terminology used at trustee meetings on 27 October 1757 and 27 October 1779. Leighton MS 16, Minutes, 1734-1822, 27 October 1757, 27 October 1779.

[49] Leighton MS 16, Minutes, 1734-1822, 22 May 1752, 27 October 1757. It was also noted in 1757, that trustees were entitled to the use of the library without the payment of this fee.

[50] Kelly, *Early Public Libraries*, pp.90, 104-15; W.R. Aitken, *A History of the Public Library Movement in Scotland to 1955* (Glasgow: Scottish Library Association, 1971), pp.6-13; Beales and Green, 'Libraries and Their Users', p.400; Mann, *Scottish Book Trade*, pp.64-65; Andrew Pettegree and Arthur Der Weduwen, *The Library: A Fragile History* (London: Profile Books, 2021), pp.192-98. Kelly provided a checklist of 'Bray Libraries' in Great Britain to 1850. Kelly, *Early Public Libraries*, pp.258-66.

[51] Towsey, *Reading the Scottish Enlightenment*, pp.122-23; Manley, *Books, Borrowers, and Shareholders*, p.7; Pettegree and Der Weduwen, *The Library*, p.192.

instituted similar terms of access.[52] As at the Leighton, although the majority of the library's users were local church ministers, lay persons could be granted access as 'cives' with the payment of a one-off fee and an annual subscription and did so from at least 1736.[53] In this regard, Keith Manley believes that the Dumfries Presbytery Library was following the example set by the Leighton, but it is important to note that the latter did not implement a system of annual subscription until 1789.[54] Another library that might have had a stronger claim to having been influenced by the Leighton was the Theological Library in nearby Alloa, established in 1777.[55] This was a non-proprietary library, the administration of which was vested in a committee of Presbyterians, and was open specifically for students in divinity and philosophy who were charged an entry fee of five shillings and a subscription of two shillings and sixpence.[56]

In the changes instituted at the Leighton in 1789, the influence of the practices of other subscription libraries is clear. Not only was the cost of joining the library changed again – any member, unless they were a minister within the Presbytery of Dunblane, was required to pay an annual payment of five shillings – but now any prospective members had to receive the consent of two trustees before they were allowed to join, a rule commonly found across a

[52] John V. Howard, 'John Hutton, M.D. and the Dumfries Presbytery Library, 1714–1826', *Scottish Church History*, 32.1 (2002), pp.41–69; Towsey, *Reading the Scottish Enlightenment*, p.123; Manley, *Books, Borrowers, and Shareholders*, pp.7-8.

[53] These regulations seem to have been first set out in 1731. According to John Howard, prospective borrowers had to pay a deposit of three pounds on admission as well as ten shillings annually, eventually reduced to four shillings and then raised to seven shillings. Although Howard is not clear, these figures are likely to be in pound Scots. Howard, 'Dumfries Presbytery Library', pp.54-57. Manley cites a different figure as the cost of subscription, five shillings. Manley, *Books, Borrowers, and Shareholders*, p.8. For an overview of the books and borrowers at the Dumfries Library, see Howard, 'Dumfries Presbytery Library', pp.44-64; Towsey, *Reading the Scottish Enlightenment*, pp.123-31; Manley, *Books, Borrowers, and Shareholders*, pp.7-8.

[54] Leighton MS 16, Minutes, 1734-1822, 1 December 1789.

[55] Manley, *Books, Borrowers, and Shareholders*, pp.111-12, 156.

[56] In 1787, the library's books were moved to Whitburn. In 1807, they were moved to Edinburgh where it became known as the Divinity Hall library. Manley, *Books, Borrowers, and Shareholders*, pp.156, 165.

number of subscription libraries.[57] The terms of borrowing a book were also formalised, and these rules would eventually be affixed to the library's first printed catalogue, produced in 1793.[58] It is difficult to say whether the Leighton was influenced by a specific subscription library to make these changes; certainly, they pre-empted the founding of most other subscription libraries nearby.[59] One potential inspiration may have been the Perth Public Library, established in 1784 but opened in 1785, the property of which was vested in the burgh council and a body of trustees that consisted of public officials and church ministers.[60] Manley describes it as having been a 'more general community library', of which, as at the Leighton, Episcopalians played a significant role in its promotion.[61] Regardless, the Leighton's changes were made at a significant point in time for the subscription library in Britain, just pre-empting its rapid proliferation as a form of library association.[62]

[57] Leighton MS 16, Minutes, 1734-1822, 1 December 1789. This latter rule was first formulated in 1789 and then included in the library's first printed catalogue in 1793 and its final catalogue in 1843. *A Catalogue of the Leightonian Library, Dunblane* (Edinburgh, 1793), p.iii; *Catalogue of the Leightonian Library, Dunblane* (Edinburgh, 1843), p.vii. For a discussion of similar restrictions at other libraries, see below, Chapter Two, pp.125-26.

[58] There were some minor differences between the rules drafted in 1789 and those that eventually appeared in the 1793 catalogue. In 1789, a member was allowed to borrow one folio, or two volumes of a quarto, or four volumes of an octavo at a time. In 1793, this was altered to two volumes of a folio, or three volumes of a quarto. Books were allowed to be borrowed for up to a period of two months, after which the member would be liable for the payment of a fine. Library fines were rarely implemented, either at the Leighton or elsewhere. See below, Chapter Two, pp.128-35. In the 1789 rules, it was stipulated that 'These minutes to be read over to every Civis at their admission by the Librarian.' This rule was replaced in 1793 with a resolution reminding members that they were liable 'for any damage done to the books, while in their hands, or in the carriage.' Leighton MS 16, Minutes, 1734-1822, 1 December 1789; *Catalogue of the Leightonian Library* (1793), pp.iii-iv.

[59] Nearby subscription libraries were founded in Tillicoultry in 1793, Falkirk in 1796, Alloa in 1797, Stirling in 1805, Denny in 1806, and Auchterarder in 1809. Manley, *Books, Borrowers, and Shareholders*, pp.156-57, 208, 225-26.

[60] Manley, *Books, Borrowers, and Shareholders*, pp.41, 211-12. See also David Allan, 'Provincial Readers and Book Culture in the Scottish Enlightenment: The Perth Library, 1784-c.1800', *Library*, 3.4 (2002), pp.367-89.

[61] Manley, *Books, Borrowers & Shareholders*, p.41; David Allan '"The Advantages of Literature": The Subscription Library in Georgian Britain', in *The Meaning of the Library: A Cultural History*, ed. Alice Crawford (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), pp.103-04.

[62] St Clair, *Reading Nation*, p.247; Manley, *Books, Borrowers, and Shareholders*, pp.123-25; Harris and McKean, *Scottish Town in the Age of Enlightenment*, pp.381-82.

Whether one dates its beginning as 1734 or 1789, a number of scholars have asserted the importance of the Leighton as a subscription library.[63] Yet it has also been successively dismissed or overlooked in this regard.[64] Paul Kaufman seems to have been wholly unaware of the Leighton's books or records, despite his study of its sister library at Innerpeffray.[65] Indeed, Kaufman's statement that the borrowing register of the Library of Innerpeffray 'is the only known record of the kind surviving in Scotland' and, apart from the Bristol Library, possibly the only record 'preserved in the whole of Britain if not in the whole of Europe' is all the more curious because he was aware that borrowing records survived for the libraries of Leadhills, Haddington, and Dumfries.[66] It is somewhat of a tragedy then that Kaufman was unaware of the existence of a library, contemporary with Innerpeffray, located less than twenty miles to its southwest which still survives with its building, books, and borrowing records.[67] Other scholars have not had Kaufman's excuse of residency in another continent. William Aitken dismissed the Leighton and another library within a single sentence as 'scarcely public libraries', despite quite probably being a resident of Dunblane himself.[68] Aitken's study was concerned with the

[63] Gordon Willis dates the formal founding of the Leighton as a subscription library from 1734, whilst Manley describes it as having 'clearly played a part in the rise of the private subscription library.' Willis, 'Leighton Library', p.142; Manley, *Books, Borrowers, and Shareholders*, p.8.

[64] Willis describes the books added to the library after Robert Leighton's death as having 'frequently been under-valued.' Willis, 'Leighton Library', p.152. Even Manley's otherwise extensive 'Listing' of libraries makes no mention of the Leighton's later eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century borrowing records. Manley, *Books, Borrowers, and Shareholders*, pp.209-10.

[65] Paul Kaufman, 'Innerpeffray: Reading for all the People', in *Libraries and Their Users*, pp.153-62. In contrast to the Leighton and other subscription libraries, Innerpeffray (established 1680) was a free library and thus had a more socially diverse group of borrowers. Robert Hay Drummond (1711-76) was a trustee to both libraries, and a number of readers made use of both collections. For modern studies of Innerpeffray, see Katie Halsey, 'A "Quaint Corner" of the Reading Nation: Romantic Readerships in Rural Perthshire, 1780–1830', in *Before the Public Library: Reading, Community, and Identity in the Atlantic World, 1650–1850*, eds. Mark Towsey & Kyle B. Roberts (Leiden: Brill, 2017), pp.218–35; Jill Dye, 'Books and their Borrowers at the Library of Innerpeffray c. 1680-1855', unpublished PhD thesis (University of Stirling, 2018).

[66] Kaufman, 'Innerpeffray', p.161, n.4. The Leighton's earliest borrowing records, which quite possibly record users using the library freely, are also far older than those that survive for Innerpeffray (1747 onwards). Dye, 'Books and their Borrowers', p.17.

[67] It is unclear whether Kaufman ever visited Innerpeffray in person. References in his essay make clear that he was indebted to its librarians for descriptions of the library's environs. Kaufman, 'Innerpeffray', p.159, n.9.

[68] Aitken, *Public Library Movement in Scotland*, p.2. Aitken was a life member of the Society of Friends of Dunblane Cathedral, and his address was listed as Dunblane when some of his private papers were deposited with the National Library of Scotland in 1986 and 1992. Jo Haythornthwaite, 'Obituary: W.R. Aitken',

history of the public library movement in Scotland, but he also assessed the other library associations that preceded it, including that of the subscription library which he referred to as having 'almost anticipated the public library idea.'[69] Clearly though he did not consider the Leighton to have been amongst them. Most scholars have categorised the Leighton as a religious library. Thomas Kelly listed it as a 'Diocesan library', whilst Mark Towsey classified it as one 'run to a large extent for the succour of its religious community', choosing to analyse it amongst other 'Religious and Endowed' libraries.[70] In truth, the Leighton was many and more of these things and here the looseness of library nomenclature may yet serve a purpose.[71] It was an endowed library, first formed from the bequest of one individual, as well as a parochial library, the administration of which remained centrally vested in the local church hierarchy, but it was never exclusively either of these things. The collection quickly grew from Leighton's initial bequest and the administration of the library was vested in a body of trustees, not all of whom were church ministers.[72] Critically, by the end of the eighteenth century, the library differed in few respects from other non-proprietary subscription libraries. Indeed, as Chapter Four discusses, this was a decision consciously taken by the Leighton's trustees over a number of decades to reform the library into an intellectual resource of use to its community.

II

The non-proprietorial nature of the Leighton ensured that decision-making at the library was far narrower than at a proprietorial library such as Bristol. The community ethos of the latter

Independent, 19 November 1998, <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/obituary-w-r-aitken-1185809.html>, [accessed 18/08/24]. See catalogue entries for NLS, Acc.9182, Correspondence of W.R. Aitken, 1950-77 and NLS, Acc.10488, 115 letters to W.R. Aitken and his family of Hugh MacDiarmid, and four from Valda Grieve, 1934-78.

[69] Aitken, *Public Library Movement in Scotland*, p.25.

[70] Kelly, *Early Public Libraries*, p.257; Towsey, *Reading the Scottish Enlightenment*, p.150.

[71] For discussions of this see Shera, *Foundations of the Public Library*, pp.57-64; Kaufman, 'Lending Libraries in Eighteenth-Century Ireland and Wales', p.299, n.1; Kelly, *Early Public Libraries*, pp.241-43; Allan, *Nation of Readers*, p.22, n.74; Katie Halsey, 'Types of Libraries', Books and Borrowing 1750–1830: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/types-of-libraries/> [accessed 26/03/23].

[72] Willis, 'Leighton Library', pp.152-54; Towsey, *Reading the Scottish Enlightenment*, pp.148-57.

stemmed from the library's inception when twenty-five Bristolians met together at the Bush Tavern on 15 December 1772 to formulate the rules and regulations of a library society.[73] The library's decision-making apparatus revolved around the concept of 'subscriber democracy', a common form of administration for voluntary associations in this period where decisions were taken collectively by the members or by elected committee members.[74] The highlight of the library's annual calendar was the general meeting to which all members were invited, originally held in the confines of a local tavern and after 1789 in the newly-constructed wing of the library.[75] General meetings were held each year in the week before Lady Day, typically during the third week in March, and had followed a consistent format since the library's earliest days.[76] These meetings were to be chaired by the bishop of Bristol, as the president and head of the Library Society, although his frequent absence ensured that this role was regularly undertaken by his deputy, the vice-president.[77] Meetings followed a consistent format that began with motions of thanks to those who served in the library's administrative positions (president, vice-president, treasurer, committee), as well as the library's principal financial supporters, the Corporation and the Society of Merchant Venturers.[78] Although the positions of president, vice-president, and treasurer were decided by 'open vote', these were never contested, with the

[73] Skjönsberg and Towsey, 'Introduction', in *Bristol Minute Book*, pp.x-xiii.
[74] Morris, 'Clubs, Societies and Associations', p.412.
[75] Before general meetings were nearly always held in the Bush Tavern, and, on one occasion, at the Nag's Head. Skjönsberg and Towsey, 'Introduction', in *Bristol Minute Book*, p.xxi.
[76] For an overview of the library's general meetings in the eighteenth century, see Skjönsberg and Towsey, 'Introduction', in *Bristol Minute Book*, pp.xx-xxvi.
[77] Skjönsberg and Towsey, 'Introduction', in *Bristol Minute Book*, p.xiii. As the 1814 catalogue made clear, 'The Bishop of Bristol has always been President of this Society'. This catalogue also included a list of all previous bishops who had held the post of president, as well as the dates on which they were translated elsewhere. *A Catalogue of the Books belonging to the Bristol Library Society: To which are Prefixed an Account of the Institution of the Society, and its Rules & Regulations.* (Bristol, 1814), p.xi. Over the course of three decades between 1802 and 1832, the library's general meeting was only chaired on one occasion by the bishop of Bristol, at a specially convened general meeting held on 21 January 1828. BA 32079/LS/M/1, Bristol Library Society, Minute book of General meetings, 2 December 1772–28 March 1870 [hereafter BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book], 21 January 1828. For more on the circumstances surrounding this meeting, see below, Chapter Six.
[78] BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 22 March 1802.

incumbents always retaining their positions unless retiring.[79] The librarian's wage was then settled for the ensuing year, as were the library's opening times.[80] Thereafter, the meeting dealt with any immediate administrative business before it, including any changes to rules proposed by members.[81] The meeting ended with the election of the library committee 'by ballot'.[82] What elements of electioneering were involved in this is unclear. The general meeting's minutes merely record the outcome of the contest, and not those who stood unsuccessfully for a position or the tally of cast votes. Despite Robert Morris's assertion that 'uncontested elections [were] the normal practice' for similar societies, a surviving letter detailing the 1774 general meeting reveals that on this occasion a contested ballot was held.[83] Nevertheless, open contests for

[79] *Catalogue of the… Bristol Library Society* (1814), p.xiii. Only three individuals held the position of vice-president between 1773 and 1840: John Casberd (1721-1803) between 1773 and 1801, Samuel Seyer (1757-1831) between 1801 and 1829, and John Eden (1766-1840) between 1829 and 1840. This longevity accorded each of these a great deal of collective respect and reverence. Between 1773 and 1843, the position of treasurer was held by seven individuals: William Buller between 1772 and 1776, John Deverell (d. 1798/99) between 1776 and 1791, Joseph Smith (d. 1815) between 1791 and 1815, Thomas Jarman between 1815 and 1821, William Brame Elwyn (1774-1841) between 1821 and 1824, George Fisher junior (d. 1821) between 1824 and 1828, and Joseph Reynolds (1768-1859) between 1828 and 1843. *Bristol Minute Book*, eds. Skjönsberg and Towsey; BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book.

[80] In 1800, the librarian was paid an annual salary of thirty guineas, as well as an additional allowance for 'Coals and Candles'. In 1808, this salary was increased to fifty-two pounds and ten shillings, plus an allowance of thirty-two pounds for 'Fuel & Candles'. In 1812, the salary was increased further to eighty-four pounds. Skjönsberg and Towsey, 'Introduction', in *Bristol Minute Book*, p.xxi; BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 31 October 1808, 23 March 1812. From 1790, the library hired an additional sub-librarian to enable it to open additional hours. The salary for this position stood at twenty-five guineas in 1800, raised to thirty-one pounds and ten shillings in 1808, and then to forty-two pounds in 1814. Skjönsberg and Towsey, 'Introduction', in *Bristol Minute Book*, p.xxiii; BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 31 October 1808. It was not uncommon for the same person to hold both the position of librarian and sub-librarian, and take both wages, as occurred in the cases of James Carter, between 1809 and 1812, and John Peace, after 1815. BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 20 March 1809, 23 March 1812, 20 March 1815. For an overview of librarianship in this period, see P.S. Morrish, 'Library Management in the Pre-professional Age', in *The Cambridge History of Libraries in Britain and Ireland, Volume II 1640-1850*, eds. Giles Mandelbrote and Keith A. Manley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp.479-93. For the library's opening hours in the eighteenth century, see Skjönsberg and Towsey, 'Introduction', in *Bristol Minute Book*, p.xxiii. An overview of changes made to the library's opening times since its founding is also given in a footnote in the 1814 catalogue. By this time, the library was open at various hours across six days of the week. *Catalogue of the… Bristol Library Society* (1814), p.xiv. In 1829, this was extended to seven days a week. BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 23 March 1829.

[81] For example, at the library's general meeting in 1804, it was successfully moved 'that the Committee be empowered at their discretion to expend any Sum not exceeding Thirty Pounds in providing Shelves for the Books which at present for want of Room are lying scattered about the Library.' In the main, the names of those who proposed motions at these meetings were not recorded in the minute book. BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 19 March 1804.

[82] *Catalogue of the… Bristol Library Society* (1814), p.xiii.

[83] Morris, 'Clubs, Societies and Associations', p.412. This letter, written by Richard Champion (1743-91), is transcribed in appendix three of the *Bristol Minute Book*, eds. Skjönsberg and Towsey, pp.275-76.

committee seats were probably unlikely as the 1814 catalogue made clear with its confession that, 'The Society have notwithstanding generally re-elected the same Gentlemen, only filling up the vacancies.'[84] This is despite some committee members being frequently absent from its meetings.[85] As the nineteenth century progressed, the conduct and attendance record of committee members was subjected to greater and greater scrutiny. Members also continued to complain about the method through which the committee were chosen, the lack of an open contest and the frequent re-election of the same individuals.[86]

The calibre of the committee was important because it oversaw the day-to-day administration of the library, and decided which books should be purchased, approving or rejecting suggestions made by the general membership.[87] The committee, which typically met on every second Tuesday, was also tasked with auditing the librarian's accounts and approving requests by members to borrow a reference work or introduce a stranger to the collection.[88] It also oversaw the transfer of library shares, many of which occurred in early March in advance of

[84] *Catalogue of the… Bristol Library Society* (1814), p.xiii. The catalogue even noted that an objection to this mode of election had been raised in 1789, which it quotes, but was voted down.
[85] Take, for example, the case of John Noble (d. 1828), a merchant, alderman, and founding member of the Library Society. Despite being continuously elected to the library's committee between 1773 and 1809, Noble only attended four committee meetings in the entirety of his tenure, all of which came in his first year in the post. *Bristol Minute Book*, eds. Skjönsberg and Towsey, pp.36, 38-39, 263. For more on Noble, see, below, Chapter Five, pp.248-49. See also Allan, *Nation of Readers*, pp.83-84; Skjönsberg and Towsey, 'Introduction', in *Bristol Minute Book*, pp.xxiv-xxvi.
[86] Many of these debates stemmed from the eighteenth century, but grew increasingly more prominent, and fractious, in the following century. See, below, Chapter Six.
[87] New books were ordered at every meeting of the committee. Two surviving proposal books give some indication of the process through which members proposed new books. Ledgers were left open in the library for members to make requests anonymously. This book would then be brought to a committee meeting, whereupon the committee would vote on each request, either approving, rejecting, or delaying proposals until they could be purchased for a cheaper price. In the event of a tie, the president or vice-president would have the casting vote. In both of their absence, an equal division would be determined in the negative. BCL, B26780, Bristol Library Society, Proposal book, 2 January 1816-7 September 1830; BCL, B26781, Bristol Library Society, Proposal book, 5 October 1830-1 April 1845; *Catalogue of the… Bristol Library Society* (1814), p.xii. By contrast, at the Liverpool Library, it seems that the librarian wrote member's requests into the proposal book himself. See variously LRO, 027 LYC/2/1-5, Records of the Liverpool Library, Lyceum, Suggestions and proposals books, 1777-1808, 5 vols.
[88] Six attendees were required for a quorum. *Catalogue of the… Bristol Library Society* (1814), p.xii; Skjönsberg and Towsey, 'Introduction', in *Bristol Minute Book*, p.xxvi. For example, BA, 32079/LS/M/3, Bristol Library Society, Minute book of Committee, 31 March 1789–10 March 1807 [hereafter BA, LS/M/3, Committee minute book, 1789-1807], 18 August 1801, 15 September 1801, 10 November 1801.

the year's general meeting.[89] In the absence of any surviving shares book, committee minute books are the only source which detail this proprietorial aspect of library membership, revealing networks between library members and Bristol residents as they transferred shares to family members, friends, and business partners.

As a proprietorial library, ownership of the Bristol Library Society was vested in its members who purchased a share with the payment of their entrance fee when they first joined the library.[90] In this respect, library membership was a financial investment, placing an even greater importance on the careful administration of the library. Unlike in some other institutions, the ownership of additional shares provided a member with no additional administrative influence, the library operating upon a system of one member, one vote.[91] Yet as the size of the library collection grew, so too did the cost of the entrance fee and price of a share to reflect the increased value of the collection that later members bought into.[92] At the Bristol Library, this was undoubtedly the main barrier to entry for new members, the cost of a share steadily rising from one guinea in 1773, to two guineas in 1774, four guineas in 1784, six guineas in 1801, eight guineas in 1806 and finally ten guineas in 1819.[93] The degree of this

[89] By the 1820s, such transfers were no longer confined to immediately prior to the general meeting and took place throughout the year. For example, BA, 32079/LS/M/5, Bristol Library Society, Minute book of Committee, 1 April 1823–20 December 1836 [hereafter BA, LS/M/5, Committee minute book, 1823-36], 15 April 1823, 30 October 1823, 25 November 1823.

[90] Individuals paid their annual subscription at the same time. Regardless of when they joined, subscriptions were due each March. It is unclear whether members received anything to prove their ownership of a share, although they did receive a receipt acknowledging their payment. One such receipt, written by Thomas Johnes (d. 1826), the librarian, for Richard Smith (1772-1843) survives in his 'Biographical Memoirs'. Smith paid four guineas in entrance fee and one guinea in annual subscription. BA, 25893/36/c_i, Records of Bristol Royal Infirmary, Richard Smith papers, Biographical Memoirs Volume 3, 1766-1780, c.1800-1840, p.110.

[91] Different levels of membership were a feature of nineteenth-century subscription libraries. The New York Society Library (established 1754) operated on the same principle as at the Bristol Library (one subscriber, one vote). In contrast, the New York Athenaeum (established 1824), another subscription library with a greater educational focus, had a much more complex organisational structure. Here, a member paying $200 could be a 'patron', allowed four votes at the annual meeting, as well as greater control over the library's financial administration. The two institutions would eventually merge in July 1838. Austin Baxter Keep, *History of the New York Society Library* (New York: De Vinne Press, 1908), p.138; Tom Glynn, *Reading Publics: New York City's Public Libraries, 1754-1911* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), pp.34-40.

[92] Allan, *Nation of Readers*, p.93.

[93] Skjönsberg and Towsey, 'Introduction', in *Bristol Minute Book*, p.xxiii; BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 24 March 1806, 22 March 1819.

increase ensured that it was far cheaper for a new member to be transferred a share, than to purchase one outright. As such, although shares were typically transferred upon the death of a library member, they could also be shared around the family unit to share the benefits of library membership. By the 1830s, the library was openly encouraging this potential for it to be used as a familial resource, but there is evidence to suggest that members already saw it in this way even before this date.[94] Maria Edgeworth (1768-1849) proudly boasted of using her father's membership of the library to access its books in 1791, a practice that others employed to good effect at other libraries.[95] Moreover, some clearly had a flexible conception of the terms of use of a library membership, as evidenced by the fact that some books were taken out of the library on behalf of dead library members. On 22 February 1812, the 'late Mr J. Morgan' apparently borrowed John Bigland's *Letters on History* (1804).[96] Indeed, books were taken out in the name of John Morgan on a further thirty-five instances throughout 1812, on three occasions clearly recording that he was in fact dead.[97] The committee was clearly perturbed by the potential for deceased members to keep library books from the living and, in September 1812, ordered 'that the Librarian shall not permit any book to be taken out of the library in the name of a deceased member.'[98] It is likely that Morgan's borrowings were being made on his behalf by Mrs Anne

[94] In an address given at the library's general meeting in 1832, the Rev. John Eden, the vice-president, expressed his hope that the library would inspire 'the younger members of families with a taste for useful and solid reading'. *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal*, 24 March 1832. In 1828, the library debated proposals that would have allowed members to introduce a younger member of their family to the library. See, below, Chapter Six, p.348.

[95] Maria Edgeworth to John Ruxton, 29 December 1791, in *Maria Edgeworth: Chosen Letters*, ed. F.V. Barry (London: Jonathan Cape, 1931), p.47, quoted in Richard De Ritter, *Imagining Women Readers, 1789-1820: Well-Regulated Minds* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), p.130. See, also, the examples of Abigail Adams and Anne Grant of a similar practice, cited above, on p.21, n.48.

[96] Morgan 'renewed' his borrowing on 17 September, before 'returning' it on 5 October. BCL, B7483, Bristol Library Society, Borrowing register, fol. 31, October 1811-August 1812, p.88.

[97] These were made on 22 June and 5 October. BCL, B7483, Borrowing register, 1811-12, p.157, and B7484, Bristol Library Society, Borrowing register, fol. 32, August 1812-July 1813, p.28.

[98] BA, 32079/LS/M/4, Bristol Library Society, Minute book of Committee, 24 March 1807–22 March 1823 [hereafter BA, LS/M/4, Committee minute book, 1807-23], 29 September 1812. This ruling seemed to have little immediate effect, and 'John Morgan' made a further three borrowings that year. BCL, B7484, Borrowing register, 1812-13, pp.24, 28, 64.

Morgan, from whom he had previously been transferred his library share.[99] Indeed, these transfers are indicative of the flexibility with which individuals approached subscription library membership. Anne Morgan had first been admitted a member of the Bristol Library on 18 April 1809 when she had been transferred a share by the wife and executrix of Dr. John Heathfield Hickes (d. 1808).[100] Two months later, Anne transferred her share to John Morgan, but received it once again after his death.[101] As well as borrowing books in the names of their male relatives, women could also take full advantage of the unregulated approach with which the Bristol Library managed the transfer of shares and become library members in their own right.[102] This was certainly the case for Phoebe Bright (1785-1875), the eldest daughter of Richard Bright (1754-1840), one of Bristol's wealthiest sugar importers and the owner of numerous slave plantations in Jamaica.[103] Phoebe was at the centre of a transfer of library shares between different members of the Bright family during the course of the 1810s and 1820s. She first joined the library on 16 April 1811, receiving a share from her younger brother, Benjamin Heywood Bright (1787-1843), that had also been previously held by her older brother, Henry

[99] BA, LS/M/4, Committee minute book, 1807-23, 13 June 1809.
[100] Listed as 'Mrs Hickes'. BA, LS/M/4, Committee minute book, 1807-23, 18 April 1809.
[101] BA, LS/M/4, Committee minute book, 1807-23, 13 June 1809, 2 February 1813.
[102] It was only in 1814 that the library finally made a provision for shares held in arrears (those whose owners had not paid their annual subscription), with the committee empowered to sell off all of those in that state for five years or more. After 1830, such shares would be 'forfeited for the general use of the Society', rather than sold. BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 21 March 1814, 22 March 1830. By contrast, the transfer of shares elsewhere, and particularly at Scottish libraries, was more tightly enforced. See Manley, *Books, Borrowers, and Shareholders*, pp.38-40. The rules of the Charleston Library Society expressly banned the transfer of shares to existing members. Raven, *London Booksellers and American Customers*, p.69.
[103] On Richard Bright, see Graham Bush, *Bristol and its Municipal Government, 1820-1851* (Bristol: Bristol Record Society, 1976), p.26; Kenneth Morgan, 'Introduction', in *The Bright-Meyler Papers: A Bristol-West India Connection, 1732-1837* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp.56-58, 63-69 and *passim*; 'Richard Bright of Ham Green', *Legacies of British Slavery*, <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/15207>, [accessed 19/08/23]. Bright was a library committee member between 1774 and 1811, although he attended meetings infrequently during the 1770s. *Bristol Minute Book*, eds. Skjönsberg and Towsey, p.8 and *passim*; BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 19 March 1810. Funding from Bright and his cousin, Lowbridge Bright (1741-1818), was instrumental in supporting the construction of the library's extension in 1786, after which the pair let the ground floor rooms of the library. *Bristol Minute Book*, eds. Skjönsberg and Towsey, p.142. In 1810, the library committee decided to raise this rent to thirty-five pounds, which Lowbridge and Richard Bright grudgingly acquiesced to, although they thought 'it more than ought to have been charged.' BA, LS/M/4, Committee minute book, 1807-23, 13 June 1809, 21 August 1810. It is noteworthy, that at the next general meeting, Richard Bright opted not to be re-elected onto the library's committee. BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 18 March 1811.

Bright (1784-1869).[104] Three years later, Phoebe transferred the share to another younger brother, Robert Bright (1795-1869), receiving it back again two years later, before transferring it again the year after.[105] Nine years later, the share came full circle when Phoebe returned it to her brother, Benjamin Heywood, on 11 April 1826.[106] The library's committee were clearly well aware of this sort of practice. In 1815, it recommended to the next general meeting, subsequently approved in 1819, that 'every purchaser of a transferred share shall before his admission into the Society pay to the Treasurer the sum of one guinea.'[107] Nevertheless, this was still a far smaller price to pay than the outright purchase of a new share.

III

This proprietorial aspect of ownership at the Bristol Library, and the manoeuvrings it could entail, is one of the key points of difference between it and the Leighton Library. At the Leighton, ownership of the library was vested in a body of trustees which was established in 1701.[108] This consisted of the minister of Dunblane, a library trustee *ex officio*, as well as two

[104] BA, LS/M/4, Committee minute book, 1807-23, 16 April 1811. Henry Bright, who had been a library member since 1800, transferred his additional share to Benjamin Heywood Bright on 11 March 1806. BA, LS/M/3, Committee minute book, 1789-1807, 11 March 1806; BA, 32079/LS/F/1, Bristol Library Society, Cash book, 2 December 1772–24 April 1871 [hereafter BA, LS/F/1, Cash book], p.13. Henry Bright served as one of Bristol's MPs between 1820 and 1830. He was a conservative Whig, an opponent of Catholic Emancipation, a lukewarm supporter of parliamentary reform, and a vocal representative for Bristol's West India merchants. George Canning compared 'the snapping, barking, cur-looking Member for Bristol to a dog tied by a string under a pedlar's cart'. Terry Jenkins, 'Bright, Henry (1784-1869), of 2 Stone Buildings, Lincoln's Inn, Mdx.', *HoP*, <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1820-1832/member/bright-henry-1784-1869>, [accessed 22/06/24]; 'Henry Bright', *Legacies of British Slavery*, <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/-759123497>, [accessed 22/06/24]. For Canning quote, see Hatherton diary, 17 March 1836, quoted in Jenkins, 'Bright, Henry (1784-1869)', *HoP*.

[105] See variously BA, LS/M/4, Committee minute book, 1807-23, 4 January 1814, 21 May 1816, 16 December 1817.

[106] BA, LS/M/5, Committee minute book, 1823-36, 11 April 1826.

[107] BA, LS/M/4, Committee minute book, 1807-23, 11 April 1815; BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 22 March 1819.

[108] As Gordon Willis notes, the original 'deed of gift' establishing the body of trustees was last seen in 1917 and is now lost. Its contents are summarised in the minutes of the Synod of Perth and Stirling, 12 October 1703. Willis, 'Leighton Library', p.155, n.16; USA, Leighton MS 3, Leighton Library, Act of the Synod of Perth and Stirling, nominating Alexander Douglas, minister of Logie, and Matthew Wallace, minister of Kincardine, to join the "Overseers of the Library of Dunblane", transcribed in *Bannatyne Miscellany*, III, pp.266-67. For the original minutes, see Stirling Council Archives, CH2/449/3, Perth and Stirling synod, Minutes (1691-1707), 12 October 1703.

ministers from the Presbytery of Dunblane as appointed by the Synod of Perth and Stirling.[109] In addition to this, five representatives from the landed families who had been instrumental in the library's founding in the 1680s were also represented, including the heirs of Cromlix, Aberuchill, and Bannockburn House.[110] In the early nineteenth century, the library's trustees were typically composed of three church ministers, one of whom would always be the minister of Dunblane, as well as representatives from the Campbell and Hay-Drummond families.[111] The decision-making group at the Leighton was thus far smaller than that at Bristol, and this remained the case for the period under study. It was only in 1841 that the library reformed to offer paid subscribers some means of say over the library's administration.[112] Nevertheless, this limited representative element did not mean that the library was managed in a narrowly restrictive fashion. Ministers of the Church of Scotland, as well as itinerant preachers and students in divinity received favourable terms of membership and access to the library, but it was neither narrowly sectarian nor overly exclusive in this regard.[113] Trustees were conscious

[109] In the later eighteenth century and early nineteenth century, the library's trustees consisted of ministers from the parishes of Dunblane, Kilmadock, Kincardine-in-Menteith, Logie, Port of Menteith, and Tulliallan. Leighton MS 16, Minutes, 1734-1822.

[110] Willis, 'Leighton Library', p.142. The Leighton's landed trustees involved in the library's administration from the 1770s onwards included Robert Henry Hay (1711-76), later Hay-Drummond, his son, Robert Auriol Hay-Drummond (1751-1804), later 10th Earl of Kinnoull, and grandson, Thomas Robert Hay-Drummond (1785-1866), 11th Earl of Kinnoull, as well as Sir James Campbell of Aberuchill, 3rd Bt. (1723-1812), and his son, Sir Alexander Campbell, 4th Baronet, of Aberuchill (1757-1824). Leighton MS 16, Minutes, 1734-1822; Burke, *Burke's Genealogical and Heraldic History*, pp.482, 1455-57.

[111] For example, the trustee meeting held on 25 March 1822 was attended by Sir Alexander Campbell, the Rev. Dr. Patrick Murray (1759-1837), minister of Kilmadock, the Rev. William MacGregor Stirling (1771-1833), minister of Port of Menteith, the Rev. John Grierson (1787-1840), minister of Dunblane, and James Lorimer (1779-1868), factor for the Earl of Kinnoull, who served as his proxy. Leighton MS 16, Minutes, 1734-1822, 25 March 1822.

[112] This occurred when the Leighton opened itself as a 'Reading Room' and allowed five reading room subscribers to join the library committee, to be elected by their fellow subscribers, provided they paid more than a guinea in subscription annually. USA, Leighton MS 17, Leighton Library, Minutes, 11 December 1840 onwards [hereafter Leighton MS 17, Minutes 1840 onwards] 7 May 1841.

[113] From 1796, preachers and students in divinity were entitled to free use of the library's collection for as long as they resided within the local area and received the written support of their church minister. From 1803, ministers of the Church of Scotland were entitled to borrow a book for up to a period of six months, as opposed to two months for all other members. Leighton MS 16, Minutes, 1734-1822, 3 May 1796, 7 September 1803.

of their responsibility of administering the library as a resource for its wider community of subscribers, if only because these individuals were a vital source of funding.[114]

The simpler administrative structuring at the Leighton Library ensured that the trustees typically met only once a year to oversee the library's administration.[115] These differences not only reflected the Leighton and Dunblane's smaller size, but also its political infrastructure in which civic and electoral power was more tightly confined within a smaller number of individuals.[116] Each meeting opened with the election of a 'praeses' who would be tasked with chairing the meeting and taking notes. The use of a 'praeses' was of a specific Scottish tradition used in meetings of all kinds, including that of the Scottish Privy Council, as well as during meetings of the Church of Scotland, in which many of the Leighton's trustees already met together.[117] Following the election of a chair, the trustees proceeded to audit the library's accounts, as prepared by the librarian, admit new library members, give thanks for any donations received, and order the purchase of new books.[118] Even if library members played

[114] In 1790, the Leighton's trustees circulated subscription sheets amongst the library's subscribers, requesting financial support for the printing of a catalogue as 'only one half of the expences [sic.] may be a burden of the funds of the library'. Leighton MS 16, Minutes, 1734-1822, 21 December 1790. In 1793, this circulation had raised nine pounds and six shillings. Leighton MS 16, Minutes, 1734-1822, 2 July 1793.

[115] From 1779 until 1796, the trustees met at least once a year. No meetings were held in 1797 or 1798, but they resumed again, yearly, between 1799 and 1810, apart from the years 1801 and 1807. After 1810, they grew increasingly sporadic, and were only held in 1812, 1815, 1817, 1818 and 1822. Leighton MS 16, Minutes, 1734-1822. Although the succeeding minute book is now lost, we know that trustee meetings continued to occur after 1822. For example, the library's latest minute book, begun in 1840, makes reference to the minutes of a trustee meeting held on 10 June 1828, at which John Grierson, was appointed the library's keeper. Leighton MS 17, Minutes 1840 onwards, 19 May 1841.

[116] See below for a discussion of Stirlingshire and Perthshire as electoral counties, pp.95-99.

[117] Robbie Tree, 'A Day in the Life of the Scottish Privy Council: Places, Personnel and Procedure', paper delivered at 'Government and Governance in Scotland from Revolution to Union' day conference, University of Stirling, 26/10/23. See also *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "praeses (*n.*)," July 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/8611891737>, [accessed 06/09/24]. As noted below, library meetings were sometimes held on the same day as presbytery meetings. See below, Chapter Two, p.142, n.189.

[118] A large proportion of the trustees' time was spent managing the lending of the Leighton's cash reserves, £200 donated by Robert Leighton's executors, augmented by a further £100 in 1704. The interest accrued from these loans afforded the library a stable income which it used to pay the librarian's wage and fund the purchase of new books. The sums were lent to various individuals over the period, predominantly the Stirlings of Keir, but also the library's trustees, Sir James Campbell and Robert Auriol Hay-Drummond, and a Glasgow West India merchant, David Russell (b. 1747). Leighton MS 16, Minutes, 1734-1822. On Russell, see T.M. Devine, 'An Eighteenth-Century Business élite: Glasgow-West India Merchants, c. 1750-1815', *The Scottish*

no formal role in any of these meetings, they may still have been present to witness such proceedings, whether to donate a book to the library or be admitted as a new member.[119]

The different administrative structures at Leighton and Bristol are illustrative of the ways in which the subscription library format could be adapted to suit the circumstances of a specific local context, even in smaller rural communities.[120] Institutions in locations such as Dunblane operated in very different circumstances to those in the larger cities, the home to the grandest libraries, with the largest collections, that have also left the largest array of surviving source material. A study of these large libraries alone misrepresents how the subscription library worked in the smaller towns and villages across the British Isles and North America.[121]

IV

It should be noted, whatever its context, that the subscription library never constituted the whole of the reading habits of its members. Indeed, in both Bristol and Dunblane, readers entertained a choice of venues from which they could borrow reading material, in addition to purchasing it for themselves. In Dunblane, other reading associations were specialist institutions, aimed at particular audiences, which emerged from the 1820s onwards.[122] Leighton members were involved in many of these other libraries. The 'Library of Useful & Religious Knowledge' was closely associated with the town's Burgher congregation, being managed by the Rev. James Anderson (d. 1858), the Secession minister of Dunblane and also

Historical Review, 57.163 (April 1978), pp.64-67. For more on the income the Leighton received from the Stirling family, who were also West Indian merchants, see below, Chapter Six, pp.292-93.

[119] For example, Walter Reid of Thornhill, a student in divinity, was recorded as being present at the trustees' meeting on 3 May 1796 when he was admitted as a member having promised 'to fulfil the Regulations now and formerly specified'. Leighton MS 16, Minutes, 1734-1822, 3 May 1796. Reid made his first borrowings from the library on this day, taking out the two volumes of William Crookshank's *History of the State and Sufferings of the Church of Scotland* (1749), William Nimmo's *General History of Stirlingshire* (1777), and the two volumes of James Beattie's *Evidences of the Christian Religion* (1786). *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Leighton Library: Register Ledger 1, page 96 (image and text view),", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/library/leighton/registers/15/102689/image-and-text>, [accessed 29/08/24].

[120] Allan, *Nation of Readers*, p.97-99.

[121] Allan 'Advantages of Literature', p.110.

[122] John Monteath, *Statistics of the Parish of Dunblane: October, 1831* (Dunblane, 1831), pp.9-11.

a Leighton borrower.[123] In 1831, the library was described as being 'in a progressively flourishing condition', containing 'about 400 volumes' of religious reading, but also 'a good deal of History… and a considerable variety of Standard Works', along with *Constable's Miscellany* (1826-34) and other periodicals.[124] The rate of subscription was cheaper than at the Leighton, only two shillings per annum in comparison to five shillings, although the library was only open for one hour on Wednesday evenings. Open at the same time of the week was Dunblane's Reading Society. Despite its title, this was little more than a library for the children of the parish who attended the 'Sabbath Evening School', and was managed by the Leighton's librarian at the time, Daniel Stewart (1784-1870), in his role as the parish schoolmaster.[125] Its collection consisted of over 200 'well-selected and chiefly Religious' volumes donated by the Stirlings of Keir and Kippenross and could be accessed by paying a two shilling entry fee and then sixpence for every quarter afterwards.[126] Completing Dunblane's collection of reading associations was a 'Reading-Room' kept by Jane Stirling which had opened in early 1830.[127] Open every day, excepting Sundays, from eight in the morning until ten in the evening, this newsroom supplied London and 'Provincial' newspapers, and a place to read them, to subscribers who paid a one guinea annual subscription.[128] Clearly, each of these institutions aimed at providing a specific service that a general collection like the Leighton Library could not fulfil, either a specific collection of books for a congregation, a children's library, or a newspaper reading room.

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[123] Its librarian was Robert Morison, an elder in that church. Monteath, *Statistics of the Parish of Dunblane*, p.10. For Anderson's borrowings, see *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Advanced search for 'Borrower: Reverend Mr James Anderson '," <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/search/p-1/0/0/advanced/brids|29445>, [accessed 22/05/24].

[124] Monteath, *Statistics of the Parish of Dunblane*, p.10. Monteath does not note the library's location.

[125] Monteath, *Statistics of the Parish of Dunblane*, p.10. Stewart was also the presbytery's clerk and was described by Alexander Barty as a 'man of grave but genial manners'. Alexander B. Barty, *The History of Dunblane*, rev. ed. (1944; Stirling: Stirling District Libraries, 1994), p.210, for quote see p.273.

[126] Monteath, *Statistics of the Parish of Dunblane*, p.10.

[127] Monteath, *Statistics of the Parish of Dunblane*, p.11.

[128] Monteath, *Statistics of the Parish of Dunblane*, p.10. Visitors accessing Dunblane's mineral springs may have been able to obtain access at a lower rate.

Bristol had its own specialist library provision, many of which used a subscription format, as well as a large commercial lending sector.[129] In 1819, the Bristol Law Library Society was founded to provide specific reading material for the city's legal community and clearly took a great deal of inspiration from the practices of the Bristol Library Society, of which many of its members were a part.[130] It was also proprietorial, with prospective members paying an entrance fee of five guineas and then an annual subscription of two guineas.[131] As at the Library Society, members could transfer their shares with the payment of a one guinea fee. The Law Library Society's head was also a largely ceremonial position and was customarily offered to the recorder of Bristol, who was asked to serve as its 'Perpetual President'.[132] From 1820, a small collection of books held at Broadmead Baptist Church were lent out under the care of the Vestry Library Society, the subscribers to which included Elizabeth Protheroe (1776-1844), younger sister of library member and Bristol MP Edward Protheroe (1774-1856).[133] Bristol Cathedral could also boast one of the largest ecclesiastical libraries in the country until its destruction during the 1831 riots.[134] From 1823, another establishment with a close association to the Bristol Library, the Bristol Institution, provided its members with access to 'weekly News-

[129] This included the Bristol Infirmary Reading Society (founded 1795), the Bristol Institution for the Advancement of Science (1808), the Bristol Medical Book Society (1795), the Bristol Medical Reading Society (1807) and the Bristol Medico-Chirurgical Society (1812). These titles and foundation dates are taken from Robin Alston's 'The Library History Database: British Isles to 1850', currently held offline by the Institute of English Studies, University of London. It can be accessed via the Wayback Machine at <https://web.archive.org/web/20090523101524/http://www.r-alston.co.uk/library.htm> [accessed 20/01/23].
[130] Members of both libraries included Andrew Drummond, John Bush, Isaac Cooke, George Bengough, Samuel Simon Wayte, Henry Ball, Francis Jarman, Thomas Jarman, William Diaper Brice (d. 1849), William Blackwell Cross (1789-1854), Edward Daniel, Mortimer Maurice, William Brame Elwyn and William Pyle Taunton (d. 1850). BA, 41956/Lib/2/1, Records of Bristol Law Society, Rules of the Bristol Law Library Society, as adopted in 1819, 1819-1820 [hereafter BA, 41956/Lib/2/1, Rules of the Bristol Law Library Society, 1819-20]. The Law Library emerged out of the Bristol Law Society, founded in 1770. Guy Holborn, 'Lawyers and their Libraries', in *The Cambridge History of Libraries in Britain and Ireland: Volume III 1850-2000*, eds. Alistair Black and Peter Hoare (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p.460.
[131] The rules of the society stated that its membership was only to consist of barristers, 'Gentlemen entered at one of the Inns of Court for the purpose of being called to the Bar', solicitors, and 'attornies at law'. BA, 41956/Lib/2/1, Rules of the Bristol Law Library Society, 1819-20.
[132] BA, 41956/Lib/2/1, Rules of the Bristol Law Library Society, 1819-20.
[133] BA, 30251/Bd/S1, Records of Broadmead Baptist Church, Minute book of the Broadmead Vestry Library Society, 1820-1827. See also Allan, *Nation of Readers*, p.179.
[134] Beriah Botfield, *Notes on the Cathedral Libraries of England* (London, 1849), pp.1-4; Joan Williams, 'Ecclesiastical Libraries', in *Cambridge History of Libraries in Britain and Ireland, Volume II 1640-1850*, p.313.

papers, English and Foreign periodical Publications, Maps, and a Library of Reference'.[135] In 1808, the library contemplated uniting with the Institution's predecessor, the Literary and Philosophical Society, but this was ultimately rejected at a general meeting held on 14 December 1809 despite it attaining the support a number of the library's hierarchy.[136] Nevertheless, library members were at the forefront of the Bristol Institution, both financially and intellectually.[137] At the other end of the social spectrum, the Bristol Mechanics' Institution (established 1825) provided a library of reading material and informative public lectures, on

[135] Joseph Mathews, *The Bristol Guide; Being a Complete Ancient and Modern History of the City of Bristol, The Hotwells and Clifton* (Bristol, 1825), p.161. It is noteworthy that Mathews' guide provides a far larger section for the Institution than the Library Society. Mathews, *Bristol Guide*, p.160. The Bristol Institution was actually formed of two societies, the Institution proper and the Philosophical and Literary Society, described by Michael Neve as being 'an enclave within the Institution'. Michael Raymond Neve, 'Natural Philosophy, Medicine and the Culture of Science in Provincial England: the cases of Bristol, 1790-1850', unpublished PhD thesis, (University College London, 1984), p.142. There were twenty-three members of the Institution, who were all obliged to be shareholders through the purchase of shares at a cost of twenty-five pounds each. These individuals oversaw the management of the Institution and the election of 'annual subscribers' to the Society. Subscribers, paying an annual rate of two guineas, were able to attend papers read to the Philosophical and Literary Society, but played no role in its administration. Neve, 'Natural Philosophy', pp.141-42.

[136] BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 14 December 1809; Neve, 'Natural Philosophy', p.143; Skjönsberg and Towsey, 'Introduction', in *Bristol Minute Book*, pp.xlvii-xlviii. Both Samuel Seyer, the library's vice-president, and John Haythorne (1767-1845), the city's mayor, chaired public meetings in December 1808 to drum up support, and subscriptions, for a fund to erect or purchase a building in which the two societies could be united. *Bristol Mirror*, 10 December 1808; *Bristol Mirror*, 24 December 1808. The matter was quite possibly discussed at two library committee meetings in which the men were present, on 29 November and 13 December 1808. BA, LS/M/4, Committee minute book, 1807-23, 29 November 1808, 13 December 1808. As Max Skjönsberg and Mark Towsey suggest, some may have been wary of any challenges to the library's independence. On 10 March 1809, a meeting was held at the White Lion Inn by the 'Subscribers to an Intended Building for Philosophical and Literary Purposes' and a committee was chosen that consisted almost entirely of library members, including Peter Baillie, Richard Bright, John Paine Berjew (1748–1833), Richard Hart Davis (1766-1842), Thomas Daniel (1762-1854), Thomas Eagles (1746-1812), John Prior Estlin, John Eden, John Haythorne, Samuel Seyer, and Richard Smith. The committee was tasked with submitting a future 'Plan of an Institution' but also to ensuring the preservation of the 'present rights and privileges' of both societies. *Bristol Mirror*, 11 March 1809. Evidently, this was not enough, and the union was subsequently vetoed by the Library Society's membership.

[137] According to Michael Neve, the Institution's financial and organisational backers included Thomas Daniel, Christopher George (1786-1866), Richard Vaughan (1767-1833), Richard Bright, John Mathew Gutch (1776-1861), and Henry Beeke (1751-1837). Intellectually, the Institution was furthered by the support of, principally, John Scandrett Harford (1787-1866), but also James Cowles Prichard (1786-1848), Andrew Carrick (1767-1837), John Edmonds Stock (1775-1835), John Addington Symonds, John Bishop Estlin and Lant Carpenter (1780-1840). Neve, 'Natural Philosophy', pp.136-39, 145, 148. All of these individuals were members of the Bristol Library. Other members of both societies included John Paine Berjew, William Daniel Conybeare (1787-1857), Isaac Cooke, John Brent Cross, John Joseph Goodenough (1779?-1855), Robert Gray (1762-1834), Edward Kentish, Joseph Metford junior (1755-1833), Joseph Porter (d. 1833), and William Pyle Taunton. For a list of the shareholders of the Bristol Institution, see Neve, 'Natural Philosophy', pp.383-437. The Library Society would finally amalgamate with the Institution in April 1871 to form the Philosophical and Literary Institution. Kathleen Hapgood, *The Friends to Literature: Bristol Library Society 1772-1894* (Bristol: Avon Local History & Archaeology, 2014), pp.35-36.

topics including natural and experimental philosophy, practical mechanics, chemistry, astronomy, literature, and the arts, for Bristol's working classes.[138] Here, administrative control was vested in a committee formed of Bristol's middling classes, many of whom were members of the Bristol Library, rather than in its working-class subscribers.[139] The Institution was defunct by 1842 and in 1845 its books were transferred to the Bristol Athenaeum. Just as at the Mechanics' Institution, the main purpose of this society was educational rather than social, providing a space for lectures and classes as well as a reading room for periodicals and newspapers.[140] The city also had a sizeable commercial borrowing sector with up to sixty-six circulating libraries active between 1786 and 1845.[141] Indeed, the proprietors of the Bristol Library were clearly wary of this potential for their books to be sub-let for the benefit of other commercial enterprises and instituted a rule in 1814 that 'no person keeping a Circulating Library or letting out books for hire shall be eligible as a member of this Society.'[142]

Readers, like books, were never static, and many sought their reading material from a host of sources, even when this involved a degree of travel.[143] The Rev. William MacGregor Stirling (1771-1833), the presbyterian minister of Port of Menteith, served as a trustee of the Leighton Library from 1812 until his resignation in 1824.[144] Despite poor weather, and poorer roads,

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[138] *The Printing Machine; or, Companion to the Library, and Register of Progressive Knowledge*, 3 vols. (London, 1834), I, p.92.

[139] BCL, B1523, *Rules and Orders of the Bristol Mechanics' Institution, for the Promotion of Useful Knowledge among the Working Classes.* (Bristol, 1825).

[140] The Bristol Athenaeum was not proprietorial, and its library also came partly from the Bristol Established Church Book Association. John Chilcott, *Chilcott's Descriptive History of Bristol, Ancient and Modern* (Bristol, 1846), pp.241-42.

[141] These included those operated by James Aitkins (from 1810), Batholomew Barry (1802), Mary Bird (1801), Ann Bullock (1795), John Cawless (1808), Alexander Donaldson (1798), John Matthew Gutch (1810), Joseph Lansdown (1805), John Mintorn (1798), Elizabeth Prust (1800), Rachel Reading (1805) and Mary Shiercliff (1799).

[142] *Catalogue of the… Bristol Library Society* (1814), pp.vii-viii. This rule is further discussed below, in Chapter Two, pp.133-34.

[143] Allan, *Nation of Readers*, pp.216-17.

[144] Stirling was appointed as a library trustee at a meeting of the Synod of Perth and Stirling on 21 April 1812 and confirmed at the next library meeting in 1815. Leighton MS 16, Minutes, 1734-1822, 2 May 1815. Stirling's resignation in 1824 came after he conceived a child out of wedlock. 'Synod of Perth and Stirling, *Fife Herald*, 29 April 1824; A.F. Hutchison, *The Lake of Menteith: Its Islands and Vicinity with Historical Accounts of The Priory of Inchmahome and the Earldom of Menteith* (Stirling, 1899), pp.38-39; *Fasti*, IV, p.360.

Stirling regularly made the fifteen-mile journey from Menteith to Dunblane to attend presbytery and library meetings, and to borrow the Leighton's books.[145] A historian and author himself, Stirling frequently travelled further to Edinburgh and Glasgow to conduct research in libraries in each city, and to Stirling to correct proofs of his manuscripts.[146] He was also a regular purchaser from booksellers in Stirling and Edinburgh, buying his own books and subscribing to a number of periodicals.[147] He was probably a member of the Stirling Subscription Library (established 1817), and gave a detailed account of its membership, holdings and administrative structure in an edited and expanded edition of William Nimmo's *History of Stirlingshire* (1817).[148] Whether Stirling was a library member or not, he knew he could rely on his friends to acquire reading material for him.[149] In 1818, his friend and publisher

[145] Duncan MacFarlane to William MacGregor Stirling, 2 June 1824, NRA S2362/187, Stirling Family, of Garden, Stirlingshire, Correspondence of Rev. William MacGregor Stirling, minister of Port of Menteith, concerning personal matters, parish affairs, Stirlingshire antiquities and his book *Priory of Inchmahome*, 1821-25, records held privately. Stirling signed the matriculation book on 19 March 1803, paying ten shillings and sixpence. Leighton MS 25, Matriculation book. However, he had been borrowing from the library since at least 1797, probably making use of the decision, from May 1796, to allow itinerant preachers free use of the library's books provided they receive the written support of their church minister. Leighton MS 16, Minutes, 1734-1822, 3 May 1796. Stirling had taken and passed his presbytery trials on 12 February 1794. Stirling Council Archives, CH2/723/13, Dunblane presbytery, Minutes (1793-1804), 12 February 1794. For Stirling's Leighton borrowings, see *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Advanced search for 'Borrower: Reverend Mr William MacGregor Stirling ',", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/search/p-1/0/0/advanced/brids|14208>, [accessed 02/04/24].

[146] *The Stirling Observer*, 8 November 1879. Patrick Fraser Tytler called Stirling a 'gentlemen of rare but unobtrusive talent in the investigation of the sources of Scottish history'. Patrick Fraser Tytler, *Lives of Scottish Worthies*., 3 vols. (London, 1831-33), III, p.331.

[147] In 1818, Stirling ordered fifteen volumes of the *Monthly Magazine* and one volume of *Blackwood's Magazine* from his Stirling printer, Andrew Bean. Andrew Bean to William MacGregor Stirling, 13 May 1818, NRA S2362/186, Stirling Family, of Garden, Stirlingshire, Correspondence of William MacGregor Stirling, concerning personal matters, parish affairs, Stirlingshire antiquities and his book *Priory of Inchmahome*, 1815-20, records held privately. See also, William Blackwood to William MacGregor Stirling, account balance, 1815-20, NRA S2362/193, Stirling Family, of Garden, Stirlingshire, Miscellaneous accounts and receipts of Rev. William MacGregor Stirling, 1800-23; Andrew Bean to William MacGregor Stirling, accounts, 1816-18 and Andrew Bean to Stirling, accounts, 30 July 1819, in NRA S2362/366, Letters to MacGregor Stirling from Andrew Bean, [printer] in Stirling, with accounts for books and periodicals supplied and for the publication of a new edition of Nimmo's *Stirlingshire*, 1816-19.

[148] William Nimmo, *History of Stirlingshire*, rev. ed., ed. William MacGregor Stirling, 2 vols. (Stirling, 1817), I, pp.381-82. This was published by Andrew Bean.

[149] As David Allan has noted, it is only through anecdotal evidence that we often get a hint of the vast and vital significance of the personal loan of books in this period. Allan, *Nation of Readers*, pp.212-14.

Andrew Bean promised to acquire a work by John Pinkerton (1758-1826), the next time a copy of it came free in the Stirling Library.[150]

V

Readers made use of a number of resources to fill up their time. Even if reading from the subscription library may not have constituted the majority of an individual's reading intake, evidence suggests that the institutional significance of borrowing from the subscription library lent the reading of these books a greater importance.[151] As we shall see throughout this thesis, library members valued the subscription library and willingly gave their time to participate in its administration. Despite differences in scale, the collections of subscription libraries conformed to a series of general trends. In 1769, David Hume noted that 'history now is the favourite reading'.[152] A number of scholars have noted the ubiquitous presence of the works of historians such as Edward Gibbon, David Hume, and William Robertson in the collections of subscription libraries.[153] As a genre, history was both popularly stocked and borrowed.[154] Many of these works comprise an almost canonical series of texts for subscription libraries which

[150] Andrew Bean to William MacGregor Stirling, 27 November 1818**,** NRA S2362/366, Stirling Family, of Garden, Stirlingshire, Letters to Rev. William MacGregor Stirling from Andrew Bean, [printer] in Stirling, with accounts for books and periodicals supplied and for the publication of a new edition of Nimmo's Stirlingshire, records held privately.

[151] See, for example, the cases of Joseph Hunter and Peter Baillie, discussed below, in Chapter Three.

[152] David Hume, *Letters of David Hume*, ed. J.Y.T. Greig, 2 vols. (1932; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), II, pp.196-97.

[153] Mark Towsey, 'All Partners May Be Enlightened and Improved by Reading Them: The Distribution of Enlightenment Books in Scottish Subscription Library Catalogues, 1750-c.1820', *Journal of Scottish Historical Studies*, 28 (2007), pp.29-31; Allan, *Nation of* Readers, pp.101-02; Mark Towsey, *Reading History in Britain and America, c.1750-c.1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp.8-10 and *passim*.

[154] Amongst the subscription library books in the Books and Borrowing database, works of history were the second most popularly stocked and borrowed genre. The subscription libraries in the Books and Borrowing database consist of the Dumfries Presbytery Library, the Leighton Library, Orkney Library, Westerkirk, and the Wigtown Subscription Library. In total, the records of these libraries consist of 3,548 books, across 56,099 borrowing events recorded between the years 1732 and 1840. Across these records, works of history accounted for 13 percent of books present and borrowed at these libraries. *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Facts & figures for Dumfries Presbytery Library, Leighton Library, Orkney Library, Selkirk Library, Westerkirk, Wigtown Subscription Library,", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/facts/dumfries-presbytery|leighton|orkney|selkirk|westerkirk|wigtown>, [accessed 03/09/24].

David Allan has described as 'ranging from natural history at one extreme to geography and exploration and then on to historiography and political economy'.[155] The Leighton Library was clearly well attuned to the latest bibliographical trends and at a single meeting in 1776 ordered what came to be considered some of the mainstays of the subscription library, including William Robertson's *History of America* (1776), Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* (1776), and Edward Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776) all purchased in the year they were published.[156] Other genres remained persistently popular throughout this period, especially travel literature.[157] Paul Kaufman's analysis of borrowings from the Bristol Library in the eighteenth century found 'Travel' to be the most popular subject and it retained its dominance into the nineteenth century.[158] The same was no less true at other comparative libraries across the British Isles.[159] At the Leighton Library, William Coxe's *Travels into Poland, Russia, Sweden, and Denmark* (3rd ed., 1787) and Jean Jacques Barthélemy's *Travels of Anacharsis the Younger in Greece* (1790-91) were the tenth and eleventh most borrowed books across the period 1780 to 1840, whilst John Moore (1729-1802) proved the second most popular borrowed author in no small part thanks to the popularity of his *A View of Society and Manners in France, Switzerland, and Germany* (1780) and his *A View of Society and Manners in Italy* (1781).[160] Travel writing's popularity came in part from the broad category of works it

[155] Allan, *Nation of Readers*, p.103. See also, St Clair, *Reading Nation*, p.253.
[156] Leighton MS 16, Minutes, 1734-1822, 1 October 1776. For the popularity and legacy of Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*, see also below, Chapter Five, pp.281-84.
[157] Allan, *Nation of Readers*, pp.102-03; Sean D. Moore, *Slavery and the Making of Early American Libraries: British Literature, Political Thought, and the Transatlantic Book Trade, 1731-1814* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), pp.29-30, 133-35, 188-90.
[158] Paul Kaufman, *Borrowings from the Bristol Library, 1773-1784: A Unique Record of Reading Vogues* (Charlottesville, VA: Bibliographical Society of the University of Virginia, 1960), p.121. 'Travel' was the most popularly borrowed genre amongst Bristol borrowers in 1812. See below, Chapter Five, p.272.
[159] Travel was the third most popular borrowing amongst subscription libraries in the Books and Borrowing database, accounting for 10 percent of borrowings, despite being only the fifth commonly stocked genre (9 percent). *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Facts & figures for Dumfries Presbytery Library, Leighton Library, Orkney Library, Selkirk Library, Westerkirk, Wigtown Subscription Library,".
[160] *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Leighton Library: Books ordered by borrowings,", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/library/leighton/books/borrowings>, [accessed

could encompass which fell into three intersectional categories: the 'home' tour or domestic survey, whether at a national, regional or county level; the European 'Grand Tour' or continental survey; and accounts of global and colonial travel or voyages.[161] Tours of Great Britain or geographical surveys of local counties, especially those by local authors, were also a regular presence in these collections.[162]

Whilst cheaper works, more ephemeral in nature, might be found upon the subscription library shelves, they were principally spread beyond its confines.[163] The same might be said for pamphlets more generally. The most famous conservative work of the age, Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), whilst neither cheap nor ephemeral, and despite the author's local connections, was only borrowed at Bristol on seventeen instances in the

21/08/24]. Coxe's *Travels* were borrowed on sixty-eight occasions, with Barthélemy's *Travels* on 148 occasions across its eight volumes. Works by John Moore were borrowed on 178 occasions, behind only Sir John Sinclair in the list of most popular authors at the library. *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Leighton Library: Facts & figures,", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/library/leighton/facts>, [accessed 21/08/24]. Moore's *View of… France* was borrowed on seventy-one occasions, the seventh most popular Leighton borrowing overall, with his *View of… Italy* borrowed on thirty-five occasions.

[161] For this categorisation, see Nigel Leask, 'Eighteenth Century Travel Writing', in *The Cambridge History of Travel Writing*, eds. Nandini Das and Tim Youngs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp.93-107. See also Carl Thompson, *Travel Writing: The New Critical Idiom* (London: Routledge, 2011), pp.44-52; Nigel Leask, *Stepping Westward: Writing the Highland Tour c.1720-1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), pp.7-11. All works, of these different kinds, could be found in the collections of subscription libraries. For example, the 1814 catalogue of the Bristol Library had a separate section of works it defined as 'Geography, Modern and General: Voyages and Travels into Foreign Countries', but works of travel literature could also be found under 'British Affairs' as 'British Topography and Geography', both alphabetic and in collections, as well as under 'Modern History & Chronology' as 'History and Description of Modern Nations'. *Catalogue of the… Bristol Library Society* (1814).

[162] These works were often donated by the authors themselves, or by their close acquaintances. Elizabeth Sotheby, a Bristol Library member, donated a number of works by her brother, William Sotheby (1757-1833), including his *Tour Through Parts of Wales* (1794) on 21 August 1794. BCL, B26792, Bristol Library Society, Donation book, 1 July 1773-2 June 1829, p.43. Although William Sotheby seems not to have been a library member, his younger brother, Thomas Sotheby (1759-1831), was, having been transferred his sister's share in the library on 12 March 1805. BA, LS/M/3, Committee minute book, 1789-1807, 12 March 1805. At that time, Thomas Sotheby was a captain in the Royal Navy but would eventually attain the rank of Admiral of the Blue in 1821. John Marshall, *Royal Navy Biography*, 4 vols. (London, 1823-35), I, pp.323-24.

[163] Ian Haywood, *The Revolution in Popular Literature: Print, Politics and the People, 1790–186*0 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp.27-39; St Clair, *Reading Nation*, pp.256-58; Gregory Claeys, *The French Revolution Debate in Britain: The Origins of Modern Politics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp.23-24, 47-48; Mark Philp, 'Vulgar Conservatism 1792/3', in *Reforming Ideas in Britain: Politics and Language in the Shadow of the French Revolution, 1789-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp.46-49.

decade after its publication.[164] Nevertheless, it was still vital that a subscription library keep such a work in stock, if only as a source of reference for the politicians of tomorrow, as evidenced by the borrowing of Burke's *Reflections* on 13 January 1804 by a young Henry Bright, the future MP for Bristol.[165]

The collections, and reading trends, at subscription libraries did see some change over this period, particularly in the increasing prominence of works of fiction, which eventually supplanted history's popularity.[166] In this, the popularity of works by Walter Scott proved key. As David Allan has noted, works of fiction, especially those by 'respectable' novelists such as Laurence Sterne, Henry Fielding, Henry Mackenzie, and Samuel Richardson, did predate Scott within the holdings of the subscription library, and the assumption that fiction was only the preserve of the circulating library is a mistake.[167] Fiction was a small but popular element within the borrowings of the Leighton Library between the period 1780 and 1840, including older works such as Richard Graves's *Spiritual Quixote* (1774) and Charles Johnstone's *Chrysal* (1785), as well as modern novels by authors with local connections, such as John Moore's *Zeluco* (1789) or Elizabeth Hamilton's *Cottagers of Glenburnie* (1808).[168] Despite the religious nature of the Leighton, the library's trustees were not averse to this novel reading.[169]

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[164] 'Borrowing Record for *Reflections On Revolution In France* by Burke, Edmund (b. 1729 - d. 1797)', ECLO. Burke's *Reflections* cost five shillings on publication in November 1790 and was an immediate best-seller. J.C.D. Clark, 'Introduction', in Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France: A Critical Edition*, ed. J.C.D. Clark (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), p.68; Iain Hampsher-Monk, '*Reflections on the Revolution in France*', in *The Cambridge Companion to Edmund Burke*, eds. David Dwan and Christopher Insole (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp.195-98.

[165] BCL, B7473, Bristol Library Society, Borrowing register, fol. 21, July 1803-March 1804, p.129.

[166] Gerard McKeever observed this looking specifically at the records of the Wigtown Subscription Library. Gerard Lee McKeever, 'Reading Walter Scott on the Solway Firth: Books and Borrowing at the Wigtown Subscription Library, 1828-36', *Studies in Romanticism*, 62.3 (2023), p.365.

[167] Allan, *Nation of Readers*, p.104.

[168] *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Leighton Library: Books ordered by borrowings, limited to genre: Fiction,", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/library/leighton/books/borrowings/null/1>, [accessed 22/08/24].

[169] For conceptions of the novel in this period, see Marilyn Butler, *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries: English Literature and Its Background* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), pp.155-62; Gary Kelly, *English Fiction of the Romantic Period, 1789-1830* (London: Longmans, 1989), pp.6-9; Jacqueline Pearson, *Women's Reading in Britain, 1750-1835: A Dangerous Recreation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp.82-86.

Indeed, Hamilton's work had been introduced to the library by the minister of Dunblane himself, when he sold his own copy to the library in 1808 for the discounted price of seven shillings and sixpence.[170]

As the presence of Hamilton's novel suggests, works by female authors occupied a not insignificant place within the collections of the subscription library. At the Bristol Library Society, although the borrowings of works of fiction accounted for only a small percentage of the overall total in 1812 (3 percent), it was Hamilton who was the most popular of these with her *Letters of a Hindoo Rajah* (1796) and *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers* (1800).[171] Nevertheless, as a number of scholars have noted previously, it was the popularity of Walter Scott which fundamentally altered this balance, both within the library and the wider print market.[172] The Bristol Library was an eager purchaser of Scott's poetry, ordering his *Lady of the Lake* (1810), *The Vision of Don Roderick* (1811), *Rokeby* (1813), and *Lord of the Isles* (1814) in the years they were published.[173] At the same meeting as the latter was ordered, the committee approved the purchase of three volumes of 'Waverly' [sic.], in size octavo.[174] Less than three years later, another member would write in the proposal book to request the purchase of *Guy Mannering* (1815), *The Antiquary* (1816), and the first series of *Tales of My Landlord*

[170] Leighton MS 16, Minutes, 1734-1822, 5 September 1809.
[171] These were borrowed on eight and eleven occasions respectively. BCL, Bristol Library Society, Borrowing registers, B7483, fol. 31, October 1811-August 1812 and B7484, fol. 32, August 1812-July 1813.
[172] Paul Johnson, *The Birth of the Modern: World Society 1815-1830* (London: Phœnix, 1991), pp.425-26; Emily B. Todd, 'Walter Scott and the Nineteenth-Century American Literary Marketplace: Antebellum Richmond Readers and the Collected Editions of the Waverley Novels', *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, 93.4 (December 1999), pp.495-517; Peter Garside, 'The English Novel in the Romantic Era: Consolidation and Dispersal', in *The English Novel 1770-1829: A Bibliographical Survey of Prose Fiction Published in the British Isles. Vol. 2, 1800-1829*, eds. Peter Garside and Rainer Schöwerling (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p.44-46; St Clair, *Reading Nation*, pp.208-09, 221, 245-46, 254; Ian Duncan, *Scott's Shadow: The Novel in Romantic Edinburgh* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), pp.xi-xv and *passim*; McKeever, 'Reading Walter Scott on the Solway Firth', pp.366-76.
[173] BA, LS/M/4, Committee minute book, 1807-23, 21 August 1810, 23 July 1811, 29 September 1812, 6 December 1814. See also, St Clair, *Reading Nation*, p.251.
[174] BA, LS/M/4, Committee minute book, 1807-23, 6 December 1814.

(1816), which were all eventually ordered by the committee on 27 January 1818.[175] Thereafter, later editions of Scott's novels were requested and rapidly purchased, including the second series of *Tales of my Landlord* (1818), requested as 'New Tales' in August 1818, and *Ivanhoe* (1819) in January 1820.[176] By 1830, Scott was quite possibly the library's most popular author, his poetry and novels joined later by his histories and lives and letters. The span of one month in January 1830 saw the borrowing, sometimes on multiple instances, of his novels *Waverley* (1814), *The Antiquary*, both the first and second series of *Tales of My Landlord*, *Rob Roy* (1817), *Ivanhoe*, *Anne of Geierstein* (1829), as well as his history of *The Life of Napoleon Buonaparte* (1827) and his poems *Marmion* (1808) and *The Lady of the Lake*.[177] The influence of Scott at the Leighton Library was far more marginal, but this was a result of the library's reduced finances after 1815 rather than any cultural aversion to the Scottish author, with library members enjoying his *Lady of the Lake*, a poem of specific local interest.[178] Scott's popularity was also notable at other libraries beyond those in the large cities. Gerard McKeever found that Scott's works were responsible for a staggering 19 percent of all borrowings from the Wigtown

[175] BCL, B26780, Proposal book, 1816-30, p.27; BA, LS/M/4, Committee minute book, 1807-23, 27 January 1818.
[176] BCL, B26780, Proposal book, 1816-30, pp.38, 56-57.
[177] BCL, Bristol Library Society, Borrowing registers, B7504, fol. 52, April 1829-January 1830, pp.176-191; B7505, fol. 53, January-November 1830, pp.1-8.
[178] Between 1817 and 1822, the Leighton's trustees expended £111, 17s, 8d, paying for major repairs to the library building, necessitating its closure for two years from 1815. Leighton MS 16, Minutes, 1734-1822, 2 May 1815, 20 May 1817, 19 August 1817, 25 March 1822. It is interesting to note that despite this closure, borrowings continued to be made from the library, albeit at a much-reduced number, twelve and fifty-eight in 1816 and 1817, compared to 148 borrowings in 1815. *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Leighton Library: Introduction,", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/library/leighton>, [accessed 03/09/24]. Scott's *Lady of the Lake* was borrowed on twenty-three instances from the Leighton between 1811 and 1819. *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Advanced search for 'Book Holding: The lady of the lake: a poem.',", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/search/p-1/0/0/advanced/bhids|17798>, [accessed 03/09/24]. An anecdote recorded in *The Stirling Observer* in 1879 claimed that Scott had originally intended to set his poem at the Lake of Menteith but later changed its location to Loch Katrine after he visited William MacGregor Stirling and discovered that he was working 'on a local work', possibly his *Notes, Historical and Descriptive on the Priory of Inchmahome* (1815). The *Observer* also noted that Scott's popularity in the local area had dramatically waned: 'The fact is the people nowadays have not the time to read books in the rush after gain, and the morning and evening papers, for weekly journal, and monthly periodicals fully supply the demand. With the exception of the "extracts" taught in the schools to the rising generation, the works of the great minstrel will be but little known.' *The Stirling Observer*, 8 November 1879.

Subscription Library between 1828 and 1836.[179] Indeed, amongst the subscription libraries in the Books and Borrowing database (which includes the Wigtown borrowing data), Scott is by far the most popular author, with his works borrowed on 3,254 occasions, far ahead of the second placed Tobias Smollett, borrowed on 833 occasions.[180]

As his borrowing from the Bristol Library suggested, Scott's success was built upon the popular borrowing of a mass of his publications, rather than a single breakout success.[181] In this respect, it differed from the method with which periodicals were borrowed, the increasing dominance of which was another major feature of the nineteenth-century subscription library. Within this, the Edinburgh periodicals were particularly popular: the *Edinburgh Review* and, to an even greater extent, *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*.[182] Works of reference (dictionaries, biographies, encyclopaedias) had always proved popular acquisitions by libraries and were an answer to one of the subscription library's key objectives, the purchase of books that were either too expensive or impractical for an individual reader to buy.[183] At the Leighton, works such as the *Statistical Account of Scotland* (1791-99) and the third edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1788-97) were the two most popular texts to be borrowed across the period 1780

[179] McKeever, 'Reading Walter Scott on the Solway Firth', p.358.
[180] *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Facts & figures for Dumfries Presbytery Library, Leighton Library, Orkney Library, Selkirk Library, Westerkirk, Wigtown Subscription Library,".
[181] For example, despite his overall popularity as an author, none of Scott's works are amongst the ten most popularly borrowed books in the subscription libraries in the Books and Borrowing database. *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Facts & figures for Dumfries Presbytery Library, Leighton Library, Orkney Library, Selkirk Library, Westerkirk, Wigtown Subscription Library,".
[182] *Blackwood's* was the most popular borrowing at subscription libraries in both Wigtown and Orkney, borrowed on 672 and 1,172 instances respectively. Indeed, periodicals dominate the top ten most popularly borrowed books at both libraries, the records of which mostly cover the first three decades of the nineteenth century (1796-1836). *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Wigtown Subscription Library: Facts & figures,", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/library/wigtown/facts>, [accessed 03/09/24]; *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Orkney Library: Facts & figures,", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/library/orkney/facts>, [accessed 03/09/24].
[183] Allan, *Nation of Readers*, p.86. See also the Bristol Library's collection of dictionaries, in Greek, Latin, and Hebrew, under the category 'Grammar', and 'Dictionaries and other Books of General Knowledge', within the category of 'Miscellanies', in its 1814 catalogue. *Catalogue of the… Bristol Library Society* (1814), pp.166-70, 195-96.

to 1840.[184] Yet the supply of periodicals, and perhaps a shift to a more 'reading room' oriented experience, soon came to be expected of a subscription library, with both Leighton and Bristol seeking to accumulate complete runs of periodicals or review publications. These reviews were popular reading, but they also provided subscription library members with the necessary bibliographical intelligence to construct worthwhile collections.[185] It was also customary for members to cite a periodical when proposing a book, lending their requests a certain authority and raising the possibility that committee members returned to these reviews as a part of their deliberations as to whether to approve the purchase of a text.[186]

The Leighton owned extensive runs of four periodicals: the *Annual Register*, the *New Annual Register*, the *Edinburgh Review*, and the *Quarterly Review*.[187] The periodical collection at the

[184] Volumes of *The Statistical Account* were borrowed on 194 separate borrowing occasions by Leighton members between 1791 and 1830. *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Advanced search for 'Book Holding: The statistical account of Scotland. Drawn up from the communications of the ministers of the different parishes.',", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/search/p-1/0/0/advanced/bhids|17891>, [accessed 31/03/24]. Volumes of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* were borrowed by Leighton readers on 156 occasions between 1792 and 1840. *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Advanced search for 'Book Holding: Encyclopaedia britannica; or, A dictionary of arts, sciences, and miscellaneous literature.',", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/search/p-1/0/0/advanced/bhids|25145>, [accessed 21/08/24].

[185] Allan, *Nation of Readers*, p.86.

[186] For an example, see the request of a member at Bristol, possibly made in either August or September 1816, that the library purchase Thomas Holcroft's *Memoirs* (1816) and who referred back to a favourable review in the *British Critic*. The same member had also requested the work in July with the following statement: 'Holcroft was a man of ability and source [of] genius, it is therefore fair to presume that his own memoirs will contain some curious and interesting particulars.' BCL, B26780, Proposal book, 1816-30, pp.14-15, for quote, see pp.11-12. For the review of Holcroft, see *British Critic*, VI (July 1816), pp.98-103. At the Liverpool Library, after 1814, it was mandated that every member write the title, price, and 'references to the characters of those [books] which have been recently published' before any request. *Catalogue of the Liverpool Library* (1814), p.17.

[187] For the borrowings of each at the Leighton, see, respectively, *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Advanced search for 'Book Holding: The annual Register, or a view of the history, politicks, and literature, of the year 1758 [-1790]',", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/search/p-1/0/0/advanced/bhids|49945>, [accessed 21/08/24]; *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Advanced search for 'Book Holding: The new annual register, or General repository of history, politics, and literature, for the year 1780 [-1825]',", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/search/p-1/0/0/advanced/bhids|11633>, [accessed 21/08/24]; *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Advanced search for 'Book Holding: The Edinburgh review, or Critical journal.',", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/search/p-1/0/0/advanced/bhids|20153>, [accessed 21/08/24]; *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Advanced search for 'Book Holding: The Quarterly Review.',", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/search/p-1/0/0/advanced/bhids|17765>, [accessed 21/08/24]. The same was no less true at other small subscription libraries. The Orkney Library Society in Kirkwall, possibly the most northerly located subscription library on the British Isles, had an equally impressive

Bristol Library was even more impressive, so much so that from 1822 the library started recording the range, and runs, of periodicals it owned in a separate manuscript ledger.[188] By the later 1820s, this collection included the *Anti-Jacobin Review*, *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, the *British Critic*, the *Edinburgh Review*, the *Gentleman's Magazine*, the *London Magazine*, the *Monthly Review*, the *Monthly Magazine*, the *North American Review* and the *Quarterly Review*. Despite the relative wealth and purchasing power of the Library Society, the committee at Bristol were not afraid to discontinue subscriptions to periodicals whose popularity was deemed to be waning. Thus the *Monthly Magazine* was discontinued in January 1811, the *Anti-Jacobin Review* in October 1814, the *Critical Review* in June 1815, the *London Magazine* in November 1822, and the *Monthly Review* in January 1832.[189] Critically, and unlike a book club, even when these subscriptions ceased, the library retained the previous copies of a journal. The rise in popularity of these periodicals, which is supported by borrowing data across a number of libraries, may also be illustrative of the manner in which subscription library culture was changing in the early decades of the nineteenth century, with an increasing emphasis placed upon the associational and clubbable elements of library membership, the provision of periodicals in a comfortable reading room which also served to separate library members from other social classes excluded from this sociability.[190] A desire to cater for this form of reading is clearly found at Bristol when, in 1823, the library acquiesced in the proposal

range of periodicals which included the *Edinburgh Review*, the *Quarterly Review*, the *Edinburgh Magazine*, the *Literary and Statistical Magazine*, the *Christian Instructor*, the *Eclectic Review*, the *New Review* and the *Edinburgh Annual Register*. I am grateful to Katie Halsey for this information.

[188] BCL, B26785, Bristol Library Society, Library MSS, Maps, Periodicals acquisitions and donations, 1822 onwards.

[189] BA, LS/M/4, Committee minute book, 1807-23, 8 January 1811, 11 October 1814, 20 June 1815, 26 November 1822; BA, LS/M/5, Committee minute book, 1823-36, 10 January 1832.

[190] Allan, *Nation of Readers*, p.86; Rebecca Bowd, 'Useful Knowledge or Polite Learning? A Reappraisal of Approaches to Subscription Library History', *Library & Information History*, 29.3 (September 2013), p.186; Moore, *Slavery and the Making of Early American Libraries*, p.24; McKeever, 'Reading Walter Scott on the Solway Firth', p.364.

of a member that it purchase additional copies of both the *Edinburgh* and *Quarterly Review* in order to cater for readers inside and outside the library space at the same time.[191]

As this request demonstrates, the organisation of the subscription library revolved around the concept of collective consent, and the channels of communication built into the administrative system allowed ordinary library members to influence or oppose decisions made by the library's elected officials. The new periodical market of the 1820s reflected a new source of division amongst Bristol Library members, with the dominance of the *Monthly* and *Critical Review*, and afterwards the *Edinburgh* and *Quarterly Review*, challenged amidst a proliferation of literary and essay magazines appealing to a wider readership.[192] Thus whilst these periodicals allowed a reader to feel a part of a national reading community, it could also appeal to and highlight the divisions and disparate audiences within it.[193] Mark Schoenfield employs the metaphor of an 'intellectual' or 'cultural' war amongst the publications, reviewers, and editors of the Romantic era periodicals in his identification of this conflict over the reading public.[194] In this respect, the periodical was particularly damaging to the social solidity of the subscription library because it worked counter to its attempts to foster a social cohesion through consciously directed sociability.[195] Of the newer publications, it was *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* which typified this confrontational spirit with its personalised satire and literary

[191] BCL, B26780, Proposal book, 1816-30, p.97.
[192] Derek Roper, *Reviewing before the 'Edinburgh', 1788-1802* (London: Methuen, 1978), p.27; Massimiliano Demata and Duncan Wu, 'Introduction', in *British Romanticism and the Edinburgh Review: Bicentenary Essays* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p.2; David Minden Higgins, *Romantic Genius and the Literary Magazine: Biography, Celebrity and Politics* (London: Routledge, 2005), pp.6-7.
[193] Jon P. Klancher, *The Making of English Reading Audiences, 1790-1830* (Madison: Wisconsin University Press, 1987); St Clair, *Reading Nation*, p.254.
[194] Mark Schoenfield, *British Periodicals and Romantic Identity: the 'Literary Lower Empire'* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).
[195] David Allan, 'Politeness and the Politics of Culture: An Intellectual History of the Eighteenth-Century Subscription Library', *Library & Information History*, 29.3 (September 2013), pp.161-67; Allan, 'Advantages of Literature', pp.115-18.

assaults on public figures.[196] It was the magazine's satire upon members of Edinburgh society and the 'Cockney School of Poetry' which led William MacGregor Stirling to cancel his personal subscription to *Blackwood's* in early 1818. A letter from his bookseller outlines the national notoriety of the journal and its editor, William Blackwood:

> I have discontinued the Magazine the truth is Blackwood should not get the least encouragement he is always lampooning or quarrelling with some person, he has had a famous fight on the public streets of Edinburgh with a Mr Douglas from Glasgow.[197]

Blackwood's presence at the Bristol Library was also its own source of contention. The magazine was first proposed by a library member in November 1820 and then approved at a meeting of the committee on 28 November.[198] Nevertheless, its presence was challenged less than two months later by a member writing in the proposal book that they:

> respectfully propose to the better judgement of the Committee to take in the *New Monthly Magazine* edited by Mr Campbell instead of *Blackwood's Edin. Magazine*. The latter is a series of wretched ribaldry; & the char[acter] of Mr C[ampbell] warrants the respectability of the former.[199]

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[196] On *Blackwood's*, see J.M. Milne, 'The Politics of *Blackwood's*, 1817-1846: A Study of the Political, Economic and Social Articles in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, and of selected contributors.', unpublished PhD thesis (University of Newcastle, 1984); David Finkelstein, ed., *Print Culture and the Blackwood Tradition, 1805-1930* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2006); David Finkelstein, 'Periodicals in Scotland', in *The Routledge Handbook to Nineteenth-Century British Periodicals and Newspapers*, eds. Andrew King, Alexis Easley and John Morton (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), pp.188-89.

[197] Andrew Bean to William MacGregor Stirling, 18 May 1818, NRA S2362/186, Stirling Family, of Garden, Stirlingshire, Correspondence of William MacGregor Stirling, concerning personal matters, parish affairs, Stirlingshire antiquities and his book *Priory of Inchmahome*, 1815-20, records held privately. This refers to an occasion in May 1818, in which Blackwood was attacked in Edinburgh by 'Mr Douglas', a disgruntled reader armed with a riding whip. He escaped and returned sometime later armed with a 'great stick' or a 'hazel sapling', accompanied by John Wilson, James Wilson and James Hogg, whereupon Douglas was thrashed. Robert Morrison, 'William Blackwood and the Dynamics of Success', in *Print Culture and the Blackwood Tradition*, p.23; Emily Lorraine de Montluzin, 'William Blackwood: The Human Face Behind the Mask of "Ebony"', *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 36 (1987), p.164. The incident was a cause of great sensation and Bean references the story's inclusion in both the Edinburgh and Glasgow papers.

[198] BCL, B26780, Proposal book, 1816-30, p.64; BA, LS/M/4, Committee minute book, 1807-23, 28 November 1820.

[199] BCL, B26780, Proposal book, 1816-30, p.65.

Other libraries elsewhere in the British Isles were conducting their own debates about the suitability of *Blackwood's Magazine*.[200] At Bristol, one of its defenders sprang into action, writing with an immediate retort in the library's proposal book that:

> [he] respectfully submits that the above answer is unmerited, & can by no means be conceived to be applicable to a work conducted by Mr Wilson & Mr Lockhart the authors of *Peter's Letters to his Kinsfolk*.[201]

Whatever the committee's views on the dispute, it did not act at its next meeting on 23 January 1821, refusing either to discontinue its subscription to *Blackwood's* or to take in the *New Monthly Magazine*.[202] Undeterred, the first subscriber again returned to the request book in early February 1821, this time to propose the *London Magazine*, describing it and the *New Monthly* as 'Two Magazines decidedly superior to *Blackwood's Edin*[burgh]', adding for good measure that 'a good Eng[lish] Mag[azine] appears a desideratum in the Brist[ol] Lib[rary]'.[203] It was not until a further request to stock the *London Magazine* was made in December 1821 that the committee relented and agreed to its purchase.[204] However, success for the readers of the *London Magazine* was short lived. Following a suggestion in November 1822 that the Bristol Library need only subscribe to one magazine, the committee chose to discontinue its subscription to the *London*, later resisting further requests from members to reconsider its decision.[205]

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[200] In 1821, the Kelso Library discontinued its subscription to *Blackwood's* because of its 'filth and frivolity'. *Freeman's Journal*, 22 February 1821, quoted in Manley, *Books, Borrowers, and Shareholders*, p.102.
[201] BCL, B26780, Proposal book, 1816-30, p.65.
[202] BA, LS/M/4, Committee minute book, 1807-23, 23 January 1821.
[203] BCL, B26780, Proposal book, 1816-30, p.66. Emphasis as in original. No doubt, the highlighting of *Blackwood's* as a Scottish magazine having a place in an English urban library at the expense of a 'good English Magazine' is significant here.
[204] BCL, B26780, Proposal book, 1816-30, p.79; BA, LS/M/4, Committee minute book, 1807-23, 11 December 1821.
[205] BCL, B26780, Proposal book, 1816-30, pp.93, 95.

These exchanges were political; members, using the internal mechanics of the subscription library, debated amongst themselves, what and to whom the subscription library was for. In many other respects, the membership of these subscription libraries was a politically engaged readership, with the library often centrally located, both geographically and socially, amongst the civic and political networks of a local community. The remainder of this chapter will therefore examine who were the library members in both Bristol and Dunblane, as well as the proximity of the subscription library to the civic and electoral networks in each community. Although some dispute whether one can talk of such a thing as a 'standard model for the membership of a Georgian subscription library', even in libraries and contexts as varied as Leighton and Bristol there are similarities to be found in those who chose to become subscription library members.[206] Anne Grant (1755-1838), a borrower at the Leighton, described her fellow library members as representing the 'aristocracy of the town.'[207] She wrote of Dunblane:

> There are half a dozen pretty, genteel houses surrounded with far prettier gardens, in the town, where the under-sheriff and his brother, who is librarian to Bishop Leighton's excellent library, and postmaster besides, - the clergyman, and a wealthy architect who has a fine house and garden, all reside and form the aristocracy of the town. In such a humble aristocracy I should have included the schoolmaster, who is a man of letters, and the collector.[208]

Of course, all those who Grant referenced were, or would become, subscription library members.[209] In her reference to the 'aristocracy of the town', Grant was not referring to a landed

[206] Allan, 'Advantages of Literature', p.110.
[207] Anne Grant to Mrs Brown, 3 July 1816, in *Memoir and Correspondence of Mrs. Grant of Laggan*, ed. J.P. Grant, 3 vols. (London, 1844), II, p.145.
[208] Grant to Brown, 3 July 1816, *Memoir and Correspondence of Mrs. Grant of Laggan*, II, p.145.
[209] The 'under-sheriff' was John Coldstream (d. 1823), a library member since 1791, and brother of Malcolm Coldstream (d. 1821), the Leighton's librarian since 1787. The 'clergyman' is most likely the Rev. Robert Stirling,

aristocracy, although these too were to be found in the membership of both libraries. Although Bristol had only a small urban aristocracy, aristocratic representatives at the library included Robert Nugent, Lord Clare (1709-88), and John Lysaght, 2nd Baron Lisle of Mountnorth (1729-98) in the eighteenth century, and John Baker Holroyd, 1st Earl of Sheffield (1735-1821) and Elizabeth Davies, Dowager Countess of Cavan (c.1738-1811) in the nineteenth century.[210] Similarly, the Leighton too had its truly elite members, including the 9th (1737-1810) and 10th (1771-1848) Earls of Moray.[211] At both libraries, such individuals were patrons, rarely borrowing the library's books, but supporting the library by maintaining their subscription or donating books.[212] Nevertheless, the mainstay of the membership of these subscription libraries was what might be termed the 'middling sorts', those individuals in sustained non-manual employment who could afford the cost of an annual subscription.[213] In this respect, elite subscription libraries represented another 'emanation of the high monopoly period' of print, helping to widen reading amongst the upper strata of society, rather than deepen its reach down

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the minister of Dunblane and library trustee, whilst the 'wealthy architect' is William Stirling (1772-1838) who undertook repairs to the library building in 1815 and lived on the small estate at Holmehill, in the centre of Dunblane. The schoolmaster in 1816 was Daniel Stewart, who would later be appointed the Leighton's librarian in 1841. Leighton MS 16, Minutes, 1734-1822, 6 February 1787, 27 December 1791; *Fasti*, IV, p.344; 'William Stirling I', *Dictionary of Scottish Architects (1660-1980)*, <https://www.scottisharchitects.org.uk/apex/r/dsa/dsa/architects?p8_id=205839&session=15440139646131>, [06/09/24]; Leighton MS 17, Minutes 1840 onwards, 7 May 1841.

[210] Skjönsberg and Towsey, 'Introduction', in *Bristol Minute Book*, pp.xv; BA, LS/M/3, Committee minute book, 1789-1803, 14 April 1801, 16 March 1802.

[211] Burke, *Burke's Genealogical and Heraldic History of the Peerage*, p.1781.

[212] At the Leighton Library, Francis Stuart, 9th Earl of Moray, subscribed to the library for two years from 1807 and had his name entered into the borrowing register but borrowed no books. *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Leighton Library: Register Ledger 1, page 220 (image and text view),", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/library/leighton/registers/15/103058/image-and-text>, [accessed 09/09/24]; Leighton MS 16, Minutes, 1734-1822, 5 September 1809. John Baker Holroyd donated a number of his own works to the Bristol Library, including his *Remarks on the Deficiency of Grain* (1800-01), *Strictures on the Necessity of Inviolably Maintaining the Navigation and Colonial System of Great Britain*. (1806), and *A Letter on the Corn Laws* (1815). *Bristol Minute Book*, eds. Skjönsberg and Towsey, p.249; BA, LS/M/3, Committee minute book, 1789-1807, 14 April 1801, 6 May 1806; BA, LS/M/4, Committee minute book, 1807-23, 28 March 1815.

[213] Penelope Corfield refers to this group as the 'professions', defining them as 'the skilled service occupations, that entailed a professional training in specialist knowledge to be applied in the service of others.' P. J. Corfield, *Power and the Professions in Britain, 1700-1850* (London: Routledge, 2001), p.19 and *passim*. See also Allan, *Nation of Readers*, pp.70-78.

the socio-economic scale.[214] Not all libraries were administered in this fashion. Keith Manley has noted a specifically Scottish tradition for working-class subscription libraries, at least fifty of which were in operation before 1800, with many more founded in the following century.[215] Other libraries purposely kept their entry and subscription fees low, specifically to appeal to a wider audience.[216] In many instances, such libraries consciously modelled themselves on, or were set up in opposition to, a pre-existing subscription library which did not have a socially diverse membership.[217] The rate of annual subscription at the Bristol Library, a guinea and a half from 1806, placed it amongst the upper echelons of library subscription fees and was three times the rate of the Liverpool Library.[218] As this thesis will discuss, within the membership of both libraries included authors, booksellers, publishers, chemists, doctors, lawyers, merchants, civic officials, and church ministers. Many of these individuals, especially those in leadership roles within their communities, involved themselves in the administration of the library space.[219] Hierarchies within the library replicated those found in the wider community. Understanding the identities and networks of these individuals as library members is thus a means to understanding the local political apparatus in which these libraries were based. The remainder of this chapter will therefore continue this analysis with an overview of the political and civic networks present in both Bristol and Dunblane and their proximities to their local subscription libraries.

[214] St Clair, *Reading Nation*, p.241.
[215] Manley, *Books, Borrowers, and Shareholders*, pp.69-84.
[216] St Clair, *Reading Nation*, p.249; Allan, *Nation of Readers*, pp.92-94; Manley, *Books, Borrowers, and Shareholders*, pp.40-45.
[217] See, below, Chapter Two, pp.121-22.
[218] *Catalogue of the… Bristol Library Society* (1814), p.viii; *Catalogue of the Liverpool Library* (1814), p.6. The Liverpool Library had the far larger membership which it capped at 893 members.
[219] Allan, *Nation of Readers*, pp.83-84.

VI

In Bristol during this period local civic power was vested in a number of different administrative bodies. Chief amongst these was the Corporation, a tightly controlled and self-electing body formed of the city's eminent families. In theory, this consisted of the 'Mayor, Burgesses and Commonalty of the City of Bristol', but in practice referred only to its governing body, 'the Common Council', with both this, and the term 'Corporation', regularly used synonymously and interchangeably.[220] As a body, the Common Council consisted of forty-three individuals, thirty Common Councillors elected for life by the Common Council from amongst the freemen of the city, twelve aldermen, also elected for life from the Common Councillors by the aldermen and mayor, and the mayor himself, elected annually from the body of Common Councillors. The self-perpetuating nature of the Corporation's model, in addition to its broad and growing involvement in Bristol's civic administration produced decades of cross-partisan hostility towards it.[221] Nevertheless, this was a body of men with substantial local government experience, who regularly attended Corporation meetings, were drawn from the city's established wealth and, at least in the case of those who served as aldermen between 1790 and

[220] For a description of Bristol's civic governance in this period, see Bush, *Bristol and its Municipal Government*, pp.6-11, 17-28. See also W.E. Minchinton, 'Introduction', in *Politics and the Port of Bristol in the Eighteenth Century: The Petitions of the Society of Merchant Venturers 1698–1803* (Bristol: Bristol Record Society, 1963), pp.xi–xviii; Mark Harrison, *Crowds and History: Mass Phenomena in English Towns, 1790-1835* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp.62-64; Jonathan Barry, 'Bristol Pride: Civic Identity in Bristol, c.1640-1775' and Steve Poole, 'To be a Bristolian: Civic Identity and the Social Order, 1750-1850', in *The Making of Modern Bristol*, eds. Madge Dresser and Philip Ollerenshaw (Bristol: Redcliffe, 2005), pp.25-47, 76-95; Martin Gorsky, *Patterns of Philanthropy: Charity and Society in Nineteenth-Century Bristol* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1999); Steve Poole and Nicolas Rogers, *Bristol from Below: Law, Authority and Protest in a Georgian City* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2017), pp.85–101. For a description of Bristol's local government from 1499 to 1664, see Steve Fleming, 'The Emergence of Modern Bristol', in *Making of Modern Bristol*, pp.13-16.

[221] Including from Bristol Library members themselves such as John Mathew Gutch, a journalist, author, bookseller and library committee member from 1816 to 1828. Gutch was the owner and editor of the Tory newspaper *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal*, a resolute critic of the Corporation and the Society of Merchant Venturers, and the legality of Corporation elections. See Bush, *Bristol and its Municipal Government*, pp.22-23; Elizabeth Baigent, 'Gutch, John Mathew (1776-1861)', *ODNB* (2016). However, it should be noted that many of those who pointed to venality and corruption in local government were committed reformers themselves, and therefore had an incentive to overstress the abuses they faced. Rosemary Sweet, *The English Town, 1680-1840: Government, Society and Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2014), pp.141-52.

1835, consisted almost evenly of Whigs and Tories.[222] During elections, it was the responsibility of the Corporation and its Common Councillors to maintain public order and manage the electoral process. Corporation members were as involved in Bristol's competing Tory and Whig clubs, the Steadfast Society and the Independent Club respectively, which had both been in existence since the middle of the eighteenth century. Each association served as the centre of electoral organisation for their respective groups, raising funds, canvassing, and managing voters, and played significant roles in deciding electoral contests in the city.[223]

Corporation members and Bristol's wider political class were also socially active amongst the city's clubs and charitable institutions. These latter institutions enjoyed a close relationship to the Corporation, with both the Colston Society, and its three charitable offshoots, the Dolphin, Anchor and Grateful societies, regularly presided over and administered by Corporation members.[224] This interrelation between the membership of civic and associational bodies, shared amongst a number of civic dynasties, was a major feature of Bristol society.[225] A more significant political force in the city was the Society of Merchant Venturers, another association with an overlap in membership with the Corporation.[226] During the eighteenth century, West

[222] Harrison, *Crowds and History*, pp.65-67.
[223] David R. Fisher, 'Bristol, 1790-1820', *HoP*, <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1790-1820/constituencies/bristol>, [accessed 25/07/23]; Terry Jenkins, 'Bristol, 1820-1832', *HoP*, <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1820-1832/constituencies/bristol>, [accessed 25/07/23]; 'Bristol', ECPPEC, <https://ecppec.ncl.ac.uk/case-study-constituencies/bristol/>, [accessed 25/07/23].
[224] For the lists of presidents for each society, see Alfred Beaven, *Bristol Lists. Municipal and Miscellaneous* (Bristol, 1899), pp.138-52; Jonathan Barry, 'The Cultural Life of Bristol, 1640-1775', unpublished PhD thesis (University of Oxford, 1985), pp.178-81.
[225] This may not have been a phenomenon confined to Bristol, see Edward Anthony Wrigley, *Continuity, Chance and Change: The Character of the Industrial Revolution in England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p.15. It was certainly a feature of civic life in Perth, see Valerie Honeyman, 'Burgh Politics in Perth: 1780-1840', unpublished MRes diss. (University of Stirling, 2004), pp.13-14.
[226] Minchinton, 'Introduction', in *Politics and the Port of Bristol*, pp.xi-xviii; Poole and Rogers, *Bristol from Below*, p.87. The political significance of the Society of Merchant Venturers has been repeatedly cited. For example, see Minchinton, 'Introduction', in *Politics and the Port of Bristol*, p.xvi; John Brooke, 'Bristol: 1754-1790', *HoP*, <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1754-1790/constituencies/bristol>, [accessed 14/11/22]; James E. Bradley, *Religion, Revolution, and English Radicalism: Nonconformity in Eighteenth-Century Politics and Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p.209; Poole and Rogers, *Bristol from Below*, pp.87-88. Library members to have held leadership positions within the Society of Merchant Venturers (either as master, warden, or treasurer) during this period include Richard Bright, William Miles (1728-1803), Thomas

India merchants enjoyed a particular prominence over the workings of the society, which was part social club, part lobbying association for Bristol merchants.[227] The Society and its members profited immensely from its personal connections. It was able to levy dues on Bristol shipping and had a controlling interest in infrastructural improvements, such as the construction of Bristol's floating dock from 1802, for which it met very little of the expense.[228]

Membership in civic and social associations provided Bristol's urban political class with not only direct political influence but also social spaces in which they could, as a social class, socialise and organise together. Moreover, adopting a visible and active role within social and charitable associations provided these individuals with a political and social status and legitimacy as the representatives of respectable urban society.[229] A subscription library could serve many of these same functions and played a significant role in the civic society of an urban or rural space. The Bristol Library Society exhibited many of the same features of Bristol's other civic, social or charitable institutions: an overlap in its membership with that of the Corporation, especially in administrative positions within the Library Society; dynastic family

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Daniel, John Scandrett Harford Sr. (1754-1815), Edward Protheroe, Robert Bush junior, Benjamin Bickley (1763?-1846), Stephen Cave, Abraham Hilhouse (1787-1867) and Philip Protheroe (1779-1846). For the Merchant Venturers' lists, see Beaven, *Bristol Lists*, pp.122-34.

[227] Bristol was also home to a West India Association, first established as a West India Society in 1777, the main focus of which was to lobby against the emancipation of the slave trade. It seems to have been dwarfed, both numerically and in terms of its influence, by the Society of Merchant Venturers. Certainly, Bristol's historians have predominantly focused their attention on the latter society. Minchinton, 'Introduction', in *Politics and the Port of Bristol*, p.xxxvii; Peter Marshall, *Bristol and the Abolition of Slavery: The Politics of Emancipation* (Bristol: Historical Association, 1975), p.3. William Miles, a library member, served as the West India Association's first chairman. In 1788, a petition signed by Miles on behalf of the city's West India planters and merchants was delivered to the House of Lords in opposition to a proposal to regulate the slave trade. Minchinton, *Politics and the Port of Bristol*, p.162; Stephen Farrell and David R. Fisher, 'Miles, Philip John (1774-1845), of Leigh Court, Abbots Leigh, Som.', *HoP*, <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1820-1832/member/miles-philip-1774-1845>, [accessed 04/06/24]. According to Michael Taylor, Bristol's West India Association was dominated by the Bright and Miles families, many of whom were also library members. Michael Taylor, *The Interest: How the British Establishment Resisted the Abolition of Slavery* (London: Vintage, 2021), p.53. A West India Club, whose purpose was solely social, was also in existence from 1777. Minchinton, 'Introduction', in *Politics and the Port of Bristol*, p.xviii.

[228] Bush, *Bristol and its Municipal Government*, pp.8-9; Poole and Rogers, *Bristol from Below*, pp.26-27.

[229] In a similar respect, patronisation of literary and philosophical societies represented an attempt to use science as a tool of cultural assertion, what Robert Morris described 'as part of a bid for legitimacy and power' by a middle class and urban elite. Morris, 'Clubs, Societies and Associations', p.410. The same could be said for the subscription library, many of which predated the literary and philosophical societies.

networks within its membership, generationally between fathers, sons and daughters but also laterally with marriages and business associations; and finally, an increasingly stale and homogenous membership which, during the early nineteenth century, failed to keep growth with Bristol's expanding population.[230] Despite this, the oligarchical nature of Bristol politics ensured that the Bristol Library Society and its members continued to enjoy a significant influence within the city until its civic administration was substantially reformed in 1835, in common with those of other towns and cities under the Municipal Reform Act.[231]

Centrally located on King Street, the Bristol Library Society was in close geographical proximity to these centres of civic and associational power, in an area close to the city's commercial and civic hub, as well as a natural confluence point for multiple main roads.[232] As well as being involved in Bristol's civic administration, Bristol Library members were active within the city's managed, yet lively, political culture at all levels, whether as parliamentarians, political club members, civic officials, voters or unenfranchised participants.[233] All bar one of Bristol's MPs between 1772 and 1830 were either library members or involved with the library

[230] For example, of the thirty-eight socially prominent individuals occupying positions in the Corporation (either as aldermen, sheriffs, mayors or Common Councillors) listed by Mark Harrison, at least twenty-five were library members. Harrison, *Crowds and History*, p.80. For examples of dynastic family and social relationships involving library members, see the Brights, cited above p.61-62, and the Baillies, discussed below in chapter three. Similar familial networks were present at the Leighton Library. William Coldstream (d. 1786) was the Leighton's librarian, as well as the village schoolmaster and clerk to the Presbytery, for much of the eighteenth century. He was succeeded in all these roles by his son, Malcolm Coldstream. Another son, John Coldstream, was the town's sheriff-substitute between 1789 and 1823 and a library member. William Coldstream also acted as a tutor to Colin Campbell (d. 1811) and Alexander Campbell, later the 4th Baronet and a Leighton trustee. In 1816, Alexander married William's granddaughter, Margaret Coldstream (d. 1871). See variously Leighton MS 16, Minutes, 1734-1822; Burke, *Burke's Genealogical and Heraldic History*, p.483; Barty, *History of Dunblane*. Like many subscription libraries, the membership of the Bristol Library failed to keep pace with wider population growth during the early nineteenth century. See below, Chapter Two, p.124.

[231] See variously G. Finlayson, 'The Politics of Municipal Reform, 1835', *The English Historical Review*, 81.321 (October 1966), pp.673-92; James Moore and John Smith, 'Corruption and Urban Governance', in *Corruption in Urban Politics and Society, Britain 1780-1950* (London: Routledge, 2007), pp.10-16; Frédéric Moret, *The End of the Urban Ancient Regime in England* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015).

[232] For a discussion of the Bristol and Leighton libraries' geographical locales, see below, Chapter Two, pp.114-16.

[233] An overview of Bristol as an electoral constituency is provided, below, in Chapter Five.

in some form.[234] No doubt many did so to cultivate popular support and influential connections within the city. It was not uncommon for victorious parliamentarians to demonstrate their magnanimity towards local culture by choosing to subscribe to the library as a member for life, rather than an ordinary member, and pay a subscription fee of fifteen guineas or more, a rate fifteen times higher than the regular entrance fee in 1773. Many of the Society's earliest parliamentarians did just this, including Robert Nugent, Matthew Brickdale (1735-1831), and Edmund Burke (1729-97) who all subscribed to the library for vastly more than the one guinea subscription fee then required.[235] In much the same vein, on 3 August 1802, the library committee minutes record with pride the receipt of twenty-one pounds each from the two successful candidates at that year's election, Charles Bragge (1754-1831), and Evan Baillie (1741-1835), in addition to 'a very obliging Letter from each of those Gentlemen'. The committee ordered that the gentlemen's names be inserted 'at the Head of the List of Subscribers, as Members for Life by virtue of their Donation' and thanks to be transmitted to them both.[236]

Most of Bristol's MPs assumed their membership at the library with rather less fanfare simply because library membership often preceded a parliamentary career. Both of Bragge's and Baillie's parliamentary successors in 1812, Richard Hart Davis (1766-1842) and Edward Protheroe, had been library members for almost a decade by the time they were elected to parliament, subscribing respectively in 1805 and 1802 at the regular subscription rate at the time of six guineas, with the same true for the two Whig MPs who succeeded them, Henry

[234] The only exception to this is Henry Charles Somerset (1766-1835), the later 6th Duke of Beaufort, and MP for Bristol between 1790 and 1796, who seems to have neither been a library member, nor to have engaged in anyway with the library. John Baker Holroyd, 1st Earl of Sheffield, the MP for Bristol between 1790 and 1802, may not have been a library member but did donate several works to the library. *Bristol Minute Book*, eds. Skjönsberg and Towsey; BA, LS/M/3, Committee minute book, 1789-1807; BA, LS/F/1, Cash book. For Holroyd's donations, see above p.84, n.212.

[235] Skjönsberg and Towsey, 'Introduction', in *Bristol Minute Book*, pp.xxxiii-xxxv.

[236] BA, LS/M/3, Committee minute book, 1789-1807, 3 August 1802. Emphasis in original.

Bright, MP between 1820 and 1830, and James Evan Baillie (1781-1863), MP between 1830 and 1834.[237] Both Bristol politics and library membership could be dynastic in their nature. As we have seen, many of Bright's relatives were library members, including at least three of his siblings, as well as his father, Richard Bright, who served as a library committee member from 1774 until 1811, and his grandfather Henry Bright (1715-77).[238] Baillie followed in the footsteps of his father in both respects, as an MP and library member, but also shared the library space with his older brother, Peter, who was a committee member between 1803 and 1811 and also the MP for Inverness Burghs from 1807 until his death.[239] Other familial library members were important aids to their parliamentary siblings. Edward Protheroe's closest male relatives, his father, Philip Protheroe the elder (d. 1803) and two younger brothers, Sir Henry Protheroe (1777-1840) and Philip Protheroe junior (1779-1846), were all library members. Both Henry and Philip offered financial aid to their elder brother, and Henry openly campaigned for him.[240] Unsurprisingly, these individuals all served together as either Corporation members, Merchant Venturers, or as the administrative officials for charitable associations.[241]

The library entertained more links to Bristol's civic administration than just a shared membership and was both politically and financially beholden to the Corporation. It was the Corporation that owned the library building in King Street, and which had paid for its construction in 1740 at a cost of £1301 8s 1d.[242] Since 1773, the building had been provided free of use to the Library Society, a situation that would continue until the Society was forced

[237] BA, LS/F/1, Cash book. For Davis and Protheroe, see pp.15, 18. For Bright and Baillie, see pp.13, 16.
[238] *Bristol Minute Book*, eds. Skjönsberg and Towsey, pp.254, 266; BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 18 March 1811. On Henry Bright, see Morgan, 'Introduction', in *The Bright-Meyler Papers*, pp.24-46.
[239] BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 21 March 1803, 23 March 1812; David R. Fisher, 'Baillie, Peter (1771-1811)', *HoP*, <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1790-1820/member/baillie-peter-1771-1811>, [accessed 14/11/22]. Peter Baillie's reading habits and associational lifestyle is discussed to greater extent in Chapter Three.
[240] John Latimer, *The Annals of Bristol in the Nineteenth Century* (Bristol, 1887), p.52.
[241] Beaven, *Bristol Lists*.
[242] Skjönsberg and Towsey, 'Introduction', in *Bristol Minute Book*, p.xv.

to vacate the building in 1855.[243] The Society was also responsible for the 2,000 or so books that were owned by the Corporation and which had been a public library on the same site since 1613.[244] In theory, these books were still open to any of Bristol's citizens, though their accessibility cannot have been helped by their location within what was essentially a private members' club.[245] Whilst the Corporation continued to employ a 'Keeper of the Library belonging to the Corporation', this was, in essence, a sinecure, which was always given to the Society's librarian, following a recommendation by the committee.[246] In addition to these benefits, the Library Society received regular financial support from the different civic bodies of Bristol. Both the Corporation and the Society of Merchant Venturers had contributed to the expenses of preparing the King Street library building for the Society's arrival.[247] When from 1784, for want of book space, the Library Society made the decision to expand its premises with the construction of an additional wing, the Corporation freely granted it the 'void ground' it was to be built upon, along with an additional £100 donation.[248] In 1814, the Library received a further £105 from the Corporation to erect a new gallery to store its increasing number of books.[249] Moreover, the Society of Merchant Venturers maintained a regular annual donation to the library society of ten guineas, which it paid continuously from 1777 until 1849.[250] For

[243] Kathleen Hapgood, *The Friends to Literature: Bristol Library Society 1772-1894* (Bristol: Greyhound Print, 2014), pp.26-27.
[244] Hapgood, *Friends to Literature*, pp.2-3.
[245] It is possible that restrictions on accessing these books were in place right from the library's founding. The largest bequest was made by Tobias Matthew (1544?-1628), who left his books for the specific 'use of the Alderman and Shopkeepers'. Quoted in Charles Tovey, *The Bristol City Library: Its Founders and Benefactors; Its Present Position in Connection with the Library Society; and Its Future Prospects; To which is Added, Plans and Estimates for Converting the Building into a Free Library; With a Catalogue of the Books Belonging to the Citizens*. (London, 1853), p.12. In 1824, perhaps responding to criticism that the Library Society's presence hampered access to the public library, John Evans, a local historian and library member, wrote that 'we have never heard of any obstruction to a gentlemanly application for access to the books… even on the part of those citizens who are *not* free burgesses.' John Evans, *A Chronological Outline of the History of Bristol, and the Stranger's Guide through its Streets and Neighbourhood* (Bristol, 1824), p.291. Emphasis in original.
[246] For example, see BA, LS/M/4, Committee minute book, 1807-23, 4 April 1809, 28 March 1815.
[247] Skjönsberg and Towsey, 'Introduction', in *Bristol Minute Book*, p.xv.
[248] Skjönsberg and Towsey, 'Introduction', in *Bristol Minute Book*, p.xxxii.
[249] BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 21 March 1814.
[250] BA, LS/F/1, Cash book.

this support, both the Corporation and Society of Merchant Venturers received the library's regular thanks at its annual general meetings. From 1792, it also provided library membership for the mayor, sheriffs and chamberlain of the Corporation and the master, wardens and treasurer of the Society of Merchant Venturers.[251]

Whilst Bristol's political class were well represented within the ranks of the library's membership, not all members had such direct links to either the Corporation or the city's political clubs. The number of active library subscribers, those who owned shares in the library and who chose to pay the rate of annual subscription, steadily increased year on year, from 288 members in 1810, to 321 members at the end of the decade.[252] This tally, taken from the library's cash book, undercounts the total number of Bristol library members, in that it excludes those who purchased membership for life, and did not have to pay an annual subscription fee, as well as those provided library membership by virtue of their civic office in either the Corporation or the Society of Merchant Venturers. Many on the library committee were in professional occupations, often legal or medical, with no clear links to either of Bristol's political factions, but politically engaged none the less. William Brame Elwyn (1774-1841) had, during the French Revolution, served as a captain of the Bristol Volunteer Cavalry and had contributed thirty pounds towards the 'Defence of the State' in 1798.[253] During the 1810s, he served as the recorder of Deal, in Kent, and in the following decade would become a barrister in Bristol.[254] He remained a library committee member throughout this period, and served as

[251] *Bristol Minute Book*, eds. Skjönsberg and Towsey, pp.22.
[252] BA LS/F/1, Cash book.
[253] *Bristol Minute Book*, eds. Skjönsberg and Towsey, p.245.
[254] Elwyn subscribed to a number of publications by the Library Society's vice-president, Samuel Seyer, where his occupation is listed. He was far from the only library member to do so. The Library Society also subscribed to both publications. Samuel Seyer, *The Charters and Letters Patent, Granted by the Kings and Queens of England to the Town and City of Bristol* (Bristol, 1812), p.xvii; Samuel Seyer, *Memoirs Historical and Topographical of Bristol and its Neighbourhood*., 2 vols. (Bristol, 1821-23), I, pp.537-38. Both works were published by John Mathew Gutch, another library member.

the Society's treasurer between 1821 and 1824, eventually retiring on account of ill health.[255] Other library members were electorally active as voters, but not as partisan campaigners. The chocolate and confectionary manufacturer Joseph Storr Fry (1767-1835) had been a library member since first subscribing in 1802 and does not seem to have had any direct link with either of Bristol's political clubs.[256] Nevertheless, Fry voted in a number of elections, including those of 1812 and 1830.[257] Other library members who did not, or could not, vote in elections could have participated in the political system as audience members at public hustings or following the count as participants in the chairing of the victorious candidate.[258] Yet in being library members and accepted participants in the social and political world of urban Bristol, both franchised and unfranchised library members alike bumped shoulders with and borrowed the same books as Bristol's political class, in whom electoral power principally rested. Indeed, this was part of the nature of a subscription library like the Bristol Library Society. Although principally a private members' club and thus closed off from the majority of the local population, it was sufficiently open to respond to and allow in an increasingly political class of people, many in professional occupations, who found themselves excluded from the electoral system.[259] The subscription library in part accomplished this by being situated, both geographically and socially, at the centre of its wider community.

VII

[255] *Bristol Minute Book*, eds. Skjönsberg and Towsey, p.30, 32; BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 19 March 1821, 22 March 1824, 21 March 1825.
[256] BA, LS/F/1, Cash book, p.15.
[257] 'Oct 1812 Bristol', ECPPEC, <https://ecppec.ncl.ac.uk/case-study-constituencies/bristol/election/Oct-1812/>, [accessed 24/03/23]; 'Aug 1830 Bristol', ECPPEC, <https://ecppec.ncl.ac.uk/case-study-constituencies/bristol/election/Aug-1830/>, [accessed 20/08/24].
[258] Frank O'Gorman, *Voters, Patrons, and Parties: The Unreformed Electoral System of Hanoverian England, 1743–1832* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p.386.
[259] It also offered a first route into politics for younger generations of a family. For example, see the case of Peter Baillie, discussed below, in Chapter Three.

The electoral situation in Dunblane was, in more ways than one, a world away from the urban mercantile centre of Bristol, but even a small community like the Leighton Library could have its own links with the local electoral apparatus. The Scottish political system pre-Reform was infamous for its tiny electorates, absentee freeholders, and candidates drawn from old, landed families.[260] Though located within Perthshire, Dunblane was geographically close to Stirlingshire and the Leighton Library had links to the aristocratic politics of both counties. Electorally speaking, Perthshire was one of the larger Scottish counties and was one of only four to have an electorate higher than two hundred in the period 1790 to 1832, even if this only numbered 239 electors in 1830.[261] Even then, the number of those exercising their right to vote was often far lower than this, reaching 143 in October 1812, one of only three instances in the period in which the seat was contested.[262] In truth, these were mostly decided well ahead of election days, at annual Michaelmas courts in which freeholders were enrolled, and only then if they owned land equal to the qualification requirement. However, as Frank O'Gorman reminds us, we should not view the absence of contested elections, or a small number of voters, as the absence of electoral politics *per se*, even if the franchise and political power were restricted to a small number of very substantial landowners.[263]

The chief interest in the county of Perthshire during the early nineteenth century remained John Murray, 4th Duke of Atholl (1755-1830), a Tory, whose family had maintained their supremacy

[260] Ronald Sunter, *Patronage and Politics in Scotland, 1707-1832* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1986), pp.2-20; David Allan, *Scotland in the Eighteenth Century: Union and Enlightenment* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp.25-27; Gordon Pentland, *Radicalism, Reform and National Identity in Scotland, 1820-1833* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2008), pp.10-25; Michael Fry, *A New Race of Men: Scotland 1815-1914* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2013), pp.243-66.
[261] R.G. Thorne, 'I. The Constituencies: 1790-1820', *HoP*, <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1790-1820/survey/i-constituencies>, [accessed 14/11/22]; David R. Fisher, 'III. Scotland: 1820-1832', *HoP*, <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1820-1832/survey/iii-scotland>, [accessed 10/09/24]; David R. Fisher, 'Perthshire: 1820-1832', *HoP*, <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1820-1832/constituencies/perthshire>, [accessed 10/09/24].
[262] David R. Fisher, 'Perthshire: 1790-1820', *HoP*, <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1790-1820/constituencies/perthshire>, [accessed 14/11/22].
[263] O'Gorman, *Voters, Patrons, and Parties*, p.386.

in the county for much of the eighteenth century. However, Perthshire was far from a settled seat, and Atholl's ascendancy was challenged by both local Whigs, such as John Campbell, 4th Earl of Breadalbane (1762-1834), and other independent landowners. Amongst this latter group was Robert Auriol Hay-Drummond, 10th Earl of Kinnoull (1751-1804) and a Leighton trustee through his inheritance of the lands of Cromlix from his father, Robert Hay (1711-76), later Hay-Drummond, the archbishop of York.[264] Kinnoull physically attended at least one trustee meeting at the Leighton, doing so on 27 October 1779, and sent a proxy to act for him in a further meeting on 6 February 1787 in which Malcolm Coldstream (d. 1821), the new librarian was appointed.[265] Kinnoull's successor, Thomas Robert Hay-Drummond (1785-1866), the 11th Earl and a Leighton trustee, was also politically active in the county and continued his father's efforts to challenge Atholl control, doing so in contests in March and October 1812, although the lack of formal organisation amongst the anti-Atholl network hampered further successful electoral challenges in that or the following decade.[266] The 11th Earl also served as the colonel of the Perth militia between 1809 and 1855 and, in 1830, succeeded the 4th Duke of Atholl as the lord lieutenant of Perthshire.[267] The Earl also remained, albeit from a distance, an active trustee of the Leighton Library, sending proxies to represent him at trustee meetings in 1810, 1817, 1818, and 1822.[268] It is likely that both Kinnoulls took little part in the day-to-day management of the library; these tasks were more often accomplished by either the librarian or

[264] Burke, *Burke's Genealogical and Heraldic History*, pp.1455-57. Kinnoull supported challengers to the Atholl interest at elections in both 1790 and 1794, including John Drummond of Megginch (1754-1835), the then MP for Shaftesbury, in 1790 and Thomas Graham of Balgowan (1748-1843) in 1794. Fisher, 'Perthshire: 1790-1820', *HoP*. Robert Henry Hay-Drummond had also been a trustee to the Leighton Library, although he, like his son, frequently sent a proxy to attend trustee meetings in his place. For example, see Leighton MS 16, Minutes, 1734-1822, 20 August 1740, 7 October 1740, 15 April 1746, 22 May 1752, 27 October 1757, 1 October 1776. He also served as governor to Innerpeffray Library and was active in the planning and construction of a new library building, as well as the creation of a new catalogue and purchase of new books. Jill Dye, 'Books and their Borrowers at the Library of Innerpeffray c. 1680-1855', unpublished PhD thesis (University of Stirling, 2018), pp.48-58.

[265] Leighton MS 16, Minutes, 1734-1822, 27 October 1779, 6 February 1787.

[266] Burke, *Burke's Genealogical and Heraldic History*, p.1457; Fisher, 'Perthshire: 1820-1832', *HoP*.

[267] James Balfour Paul, ed., *The Scots Peerage*, 9 vols. (Edinburgh: David Douglas, 1909), V, p.235.

[268] Leighton MS 16, Minutes, 1734-1822, 4 December 1810, 19 August 1817, 3 February 1818, 25 March 1822.

the library's clerical trustees. Yet their role and participation as trustees, afforded the library a vital link to the elite political representatives of the county.

Most Leighton Library members were not qualified to either stand as candidates or vote in electoral contests, and this included the largest contingent of Leighton members, the clergy who were ineligible to vote by reason of their office. As we shall further see in Chapter Four, this community was still highly political, and could appeal to their elected representatives, as well as organise petitions or loyal addresses at kirk, presbytery or synod level.[269] Moreover, through their Leighton membership, they were able to associate themselves more closely with current and future political representatives. A few library members did enjoy the financial and social status to be able to be active participants within the county's electoral politics and these included Francis Stuart, 9th Earl of Moray, and his son, Francis Stuart, 10th Earl of Moray (1771-1848). Both father and son subscribed to the Leighton for one guinea for two years, not the usual annual fee of ten shillings and sixpence, in 1807 and 1812 respectively, although only the 10th Earl made use of his subscription, making a total of twenty-one borrowings from the library between December 1812 and at least August 1813.[270]

Leighton members also had political links to the local county south of Dunblane, Stirlingshire. Though electorally smaller than Perthshire, Stirlingshire was similarly a contest of competing interest between Tory, Whig, and independent landowners.[271] At a by-election in the county in May 1821, it was a former Leighton Library borrower, Henry Home Drummond (1783-1867) who achieved electoral success, supported by a coalition of Whigs and Tories, dissatisfied with

[269] For example, in 1829, the Presbytery of Dunblane petitioned both Houses of Parliament in opposition to Catholic Emancipation, whilst in 1831, it did likewise to call for the franchise to be extended to Church of Scotland ministers. Stirling Council Archives, CH2/723/16, Dunblane presbytery, Minutes (1824-43), 10 March 1829, 29 March 1831. See also below, Chapter Four.
[270] Leighton MS 16, Minutes, 1734-1822, 5 September 1809; *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Advanced search for 'Borrower: Francis Stuart 10th Earl of Moray ',", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/search/p-1/0/0/advanced/brids|27119>, [accessed 10/09/24].
[271] Terry Jenkins, 'Stirlingshire: 1820-32', *HoP*, <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1820-1832/constituencies/stirlingshire>, [accessed 14/11/22].

the local magnate, James Graham, 3rd Duke of Montrose (1755-1836). Home Drummond was the grandson of the famed judge, writer and Stirlingshire agricultural improver, Henry Home, Lord Kames (1696-1782), and a respected advocate, who was viewed by government ministers as an influential member of the Scottish contingent of parliamentary members and even an unofficial minister in the promotion of legislation during the Wellington ministry.[272] In 1810 he subscribed to the library for two years, paying one guinea, possibly following the example of the 9th Earl of Moray, though he borrowed few books.[273] Two years later, in January 1812, Home Drummond donated 'Bell's Enquiry respecting the Distilleries' to the Leighton, probably Hugh Bell's *Impartial Account of the Conduct of the Excise towards the Breweries in Scotland* (1791) which strongly criticised the imposition of regulations upon the distillery industry.[274] Home Drummond's association with the Leighton came almost a full decade before he embarked upon his career as a parliamentarian. It is therefore unlikely that he subscribed to the library for the political performance of patronising a local institution that may have motivated the 9th Earl of Moray to subscribe but not borrow books or, within another context, for some Bristol MPs to publicly patronise the Bristol Library Society.[275] Indeed, Home Drummond's record of borrowings, as well as that of the 10th Earl of Moray, implies that both had a

[272] Peter Jupp, *British Politics on the Eve of Reform: The Duke of Wellington's Administration, 1828-30* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), p.177 cited in Terry Jenkins, 'Home Drummond, Henry (1783-1867)', *HoP*, <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1820-1832/member/home-drummond-henry-1783-1867#footnoteref32_gk5oijo>, [accessed 14/11/22].

[273] *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Advanced search for 'Borrower: Henry Home Drummond ',", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/search/p-1/0/0/advanced/brids|29150>, [accessed 10/09/24].

[274] Hugh Bell, *An Impartial Account of the Conduct of the Excise towards the Breweries in Scotland, particularly in Edinburgh* (Edinburgh, 1791). See also Vivien E. Dietz, 'The Politics of Whisky: Scottish Distillers, the Excise, and the Pittite State', *Journal of British Studies*, 36.1 (January 1997), pp.35-69. Home Drummond's donation seems not to have been welcomed by the Leighton's trustees, it does not appear in the library's printed catalogue from 1843, nor is it present in the collection today.

[275] For example, see the case of Edmund Burke, who became a life member at the Bristol Library Society and donated several books to it, but made no borrowings. Max Skjönsberg, '"This Revolution in the Town": Richard Champion and the Early Years of the Bristol Library Society', *Library & Information History*, 37.2 (2021), p.157. See also, the examples of Evan Baillie and Charles Bragge, noted above p.90.

bibliographical motive in joining the library.[276] In doing so they were joining a society of subscription library members from the churches, estates, villages and towns of southern Perthshire and Stirlingshire, and a social class that was literate and of sufficient wealth to be able to afford the subscription to a social association.

Just as at Bristol, participation in the subscription library in Dunblane brought together those individuals who could vote with those who could not. These additional connections between individuals engineered a degree of social cohesion amongst those who wielded electoral power and those who were excluded from this process in the early nineteenth century. This is one political significance of the subscription library as an association. Library members both recognised the social and political importance of a space such as this, but they also recognised their implicit significance as self-governing societies. In this respect, subscription libraries bore many similarities, but also no small degree of differences, from associational culture more broadly; the myriad networks of clubs and societies that sprung up across Georgian Britain in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The next chapter will examine the place of the subscription library within this wider context and the politics implicit in their administration as societies in which their members could meet, read, and converse with an aim towards rational and enlightened improvement.

[276] *Books and Borrowing*, s.v., "Advanced search for 'Borrower: Henry Home Drummond'" and "Advanced search for 'Borrower: Francis Stuart 10th Earl of Moray'".

Chapter Two: The Politics of Association and the Subscription Library

> *Ours is the age of societies. For the redress of every oppression that is done under the sun, there is a public meeting. For the cure of every sorrow by which our land or our race can be visited, there are patrons, vice-presidents, and secretaries. For the diffusion of every blessing of which mankind can partake in common, there is a committee.*[1]
>
> Sir James Stephen, *Essays on Ecclesiastical Biography* (1849).

On 18 April 1814 'a numerous and respectable assemblage of Gentlemen', members of the Bristol Library Society, met and dined together at Mangeon's Hotel in Clifton, Bristol.[2] No formal business of the library was conducted, with the evening centred around dinner and drinks and the discussion of 'several subjects of importance' before much 'hilarity' ensued from a resulting series of toasts. These began in typical fashion, toasting first the King, then the Prince Regent, the prosperity and president of the Society, then the Mayor and Corporation of the city of Bristol. Thereafter, toasts were made with a more decided bibliographical tinge: 'Success to the lovers of British Antiquities' to Bristol authors, to 'More Books, and more Room to place them', to 'Book-printers, Booksellers, Bookbinders, and Book-readers' and finally to 'Bibliophilia and her wild sister Bibliomania'. After much mirth, and alcohol, the members agreed to meet again next year and elected Thomas Daniel (1762-1854), the senior Tory alderman and library committee member, to serve as their next chairman.

The meeting of Bristol Library members at Clifton in 1814 represents the clearest example of the world of subscription library association meeting that of urban sociability. It was the

[1] James Stephen, 'The Clapham Sect', in *Essays in Ecclesiastical Biography*., 2nd ed., 2 vols. (London, 1849), II, p.382.
[2] *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal*, 23 April 1814.

collective endeavour of involvement in the Library Society that brought these men together for food, drink, and discussion. Situating the subscription library within this wider associational context is necessary to understand its place within Georgian society. Associational scholars have discussed the subscription library in the context of other print culture associations, such as the circulating library, book club or coffeehouse, for their facility in circulating print material to the urban consumer.[3] According to the Habermasian model, this circulation of print provided the basis for a debating and conversational culture which were vital components of an emerging bourgeois public sphere.[4] This chapter begins with an examination of this associational scholarship, noting that whilst theorists and historians alike have recognised that the subscription library played a role in this emergence, providing access to printed material as well as the space for its discussion and debate, the analysis of the subscription library alongside other types of clubs and societies has tended to dilute the subscription library's specific political and cultural significance.[5] Moreover, in a trend mirrored in early library scholarship, the decision to examine associational culture only up until 1800 has precluded an examination of the subscription library movement in the period in which it saw its fastest growth.[6] A specific analysis of the subscription library can both confirm and complicate our understanding of associational culture at the end of the long eighteenth century. In doing so, this chapter, and the

[3] For example, see Peter Clark, *British Clubs and Societies, 1580-1800: The Origins of an Associational World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp.109-10; Peter Borsay, *The English Urban Renaissance: Culture and Society in the Provincial Town, 1660-1770*, rev. ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 2002), pp.128-39.
[4] Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, MA: Polity Press, 1989); Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London: Verso, 2006), pp.33-46.
[5] Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, pp.50-51; David S. Shields, *Civil Tongues and Polite Letters in British America* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), pp.322-23; James Raven, *London Booksellers and American Customers: Transatlantic Literary Community and the Charleston Library Society, 1748-1811* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 2002), pp.14-16.
[6] For example, Clark, *British Clubs and Societies*. Paul Kaufman, though pioneering in many other aspects, limited his analysis of library culture to 1800 and in doing so missed the vast increase in subscription libraries that occurred in the early nineteenth century. David Allan, *A Nation of Readers: The Lending Library in Georgian England* (London: The British Library, 2008), p.22; Keith A. Manley, *Books, Borrowers, and Shareholders. Scottish Circulating and Subscription Libraries before 1825: A Survey and Listing* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Bibliographical Society, 2012), p.ix.

wider thesis, adapts a lens of analysis used by historians of the British diaspora and American associational culture to recognise the civic and ideological importance of the subscription library.

The chapter continues by examining the principal features of subscription library association: its proximity to other clubs and societies, the 'public' nature and prominence of the subscription library within the local community, their exclusivity and the means through which this was regulated, and library sociability and the library space. Together these features characterised the experience of subscription library membership. A fixation upon the concepts of 'politeness' and 'sociability' by library historians has had the unintended effect of neglecting a discussion of what library association provided for those involved in it and the political significance of this, whilst also divorcing subscription libraries from the social and political contexts in which they were located. This chapter briefly broadens its analysis past the two case study libraries this thesis is primarily concerned with, examining subscription libraries across the Atlantic world, to illustrate the general political features of these kinds of libraries. This is a necessary context for the wider study, to demonstrate that the politics of the subscription libraries in Bristol and Dunblane were not exclusive to them, before later chapters of the thesis, through a series of different methodological studies, examine these in depth.

The chapter concludes by reiterating the traditionally political aspects of the subscription library but also its differences from wider associational culture and particularly the more open admittance of female members. Subscription libraries had the capacity to politically educate their members through the circulation of political reading material. The act of library association (the administration of which combined both democratic and representational aspects, with an emphasis on regulations, rights and conventions) was also politically

educational.[7] The subscription library operated within a busy associational culture, amongst a plethora, not only of social clubs and societies, but political associations. The subscription library escaped the direct censure that affected these latter associations, catering to a politically diverse membership and enjoying the freedom to stock both conservative and politically contentious books. Critically, book choices were decisions that library members made for themselves, constructing the subscription library as a managed and ordered space which both reflected and supported societal hierarchies. As Graeme Morton observed, 'these societies tell us about the kinds of values created among those who established, ran and funded them'.[8] In the case of the subscription library, these members, both male and female, were consciously aware of the political dimensions, the politics of reading, that underpinned the administration of their local library.

I

As Sir James Stephen (1789-1859) noted in 1849, nineteenth-century Britain was an associational world.[9] Yet, the core features of this culture had been fixed in the century earlier, with the subscription library an essential feature of it.[10] Library association is something of an anachronistic term. Though libraries titled themselves using a variety of names, 'public', 'subscription', 'circulating' and 'free', 'association' was not among them. Other terms, such as 'club' and 'society' remained fluidly defined during the entirety of the early modern era, the former emerging first to mean an informal gathering and only later, during the seventeenth century, being more formally defined as a regular group meeting.[11] Both were soon used interchangeably to denote this more formalised sociable activity, and for clubs and societies

[7] This latter experience is the particular focus of Chapter Three, and the example of Peter Baillie.
[8] Graeme Morton, 'Identity Out of Place', in *A History of Everyday Life in Scotland, 1800 to 1900*, eds. Trevor Griffiths and Graeme Morton (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), p.265.
[9] Stephen, 'Clapham Sect', p.382.
[10] Clark, *British Clubs and Societies*, p.ix.
[11] Clark, *British Clubs and Societies*, pp.10-13.

concerned with circulating printed material, whether this was the book club or library society. The term associational culture enjoys regular use in the scholarship of clubs and societies in the Georgian period, denoting the voluntary association together of individuals, in whatever form, in the urban environment.[12] Using the term 'voluntary association' allows for the consideration of clearly sociable clubs and societies with associations founded to serve a particular social or political purpose. All clubs involved some degree of organisation and civic participation, and sociable clubs existed on the same associational spectrum as exclusively political clubs. Use of the term library association, whether to refer to the subscription library or book club, acknowledges these political elements of the reading institution.

Though a vast degree of comment, criticism and satire concerning associational culture exists in print, it was not until the later twentieth century that the phenomenon received sustained scholarly focus. The first modern history of Scottish clubs and societies, Davis D. McElroy's *Scotland's Age of Improvement* (1969) is still regularly cited today and traced the growth of such associations in Scotland from 1700.[13] Smaller, more specialised studies of Scottish associational culture have followed McElroy, particularly focused upon the intellectual and sociable clubs of Edinburgh in the eighteenth century.[14] These works were also key to a critical

[12] For some examples, see Clark, *British Clubs and Societies*; James Kelly and Martyn J. Powell, eds., *Clubs and Societies in Eighteenth-Century Ireland* (Dublin: Four Courts, 2010); Morton, 'Identity Out of Place', pp.256-87; Micah Alpaugh, 'The British Origins of the French Jacobins: Radical Sociability and the Development of Political Club Networks, 1787-1793', *European History Quarterly*, 44 (2014), pp.593-619; Rosalind Carr, *Gender and Enlightenment Culture in Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014); Ina Ferris, *Book-Men, Book Clubs, and the Romantic Literary Sphere* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Keisuke Masaki, 'Within the Bounds of Acceptability: Tory Associational Culture in Early-19th-Century Britain', *Parliamentary History*, 37.3 (October 2018), pp.389-414.

[13] Davis D. McElroy, *Scotland's Age of Improvement: A Survey of Eighteenth-century Literary Clubs and Societies* (Washington: Washington State University Press, 1969).

[14] For example, see Roger L. Emerson, 'The Social Composition of Enlightened Scotland: The Select Society of Edinburgh, 1754-1764', *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, 114 (1973), pp.291-329; Roger L. Emerson, 'The Philosophical Society of Edinburgh, 1737-1747', *British Journal for the History of Science*, 12 (1979), pp.154-91; Roger L. Emerson, 'The Philosophical Society of Edinburgh, 1747-1768', *British Journal for the History of Science*, 14 (1981), pp.133-76; Roger L. Emerson, 'The Philosophical Society of Edinburgh, 1768-1783', *British Journal for the History of Science*, 18 (1985), pp.255-303; John Dwyer, *Virtuous Discourse: Sensibility and Community in Late Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1987).

revaluation of the Scottish Enlightenment, one of the major impetuses for Scottish associational culture.[15] At the same time, a host of new works were engaged in a re-examination of English urban society during the eighteenth century, including an analysis of a 'renaissance' in the development of English towns and cities after 1660 which fuelled the expansion of clubs and societies.[16] Building upon these, in 2000, came Peter Clark's pivotal *British Clubs and Societies*, the first wide ranging study of the 'associational world' across the British Isles and Anglophone colonies in the eighteenth century.[17] The method with which Clark analyses the subscription library is worth briefly dwelling upon, partly because his approach is typical of that of associational scholars. First, Clark's definition of what constituted the culture of voluntary association only partly fits the subscription library.[18] Whilst these libraries were overwhelmingly male, they were not exclusively so, nor did the whole library membership regularly meet. Most meetings of the whole membership occurred only annually, and whilst they could take place in a public-drinking space, this means of 'common sociability' was only a small aspect of the library society as a whole.[19] Second, Clark underplays the significance and extent of the subscription library movement. Briefly considered in parallel with the book

[15] Mark C. Wallace and Jane Rendall, 'Introduction', in *Association and Enlightenment: Scottish Clubs and Societies, 1700-1830* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2020), pp.2-4.

[16] Peter Borsay first introduced the concept of an English 'urban renaissance' in a 1977 article, later expanded in his 1989 monograph. Peter Borsay, 'The English Urban Renaissance: The Development of Provincial Urban Culture', *Social History*, 2.2 (1977), pp.581-603; Peter Borsay, *The English Urban Renaissance: Culture and Society in the Provincial Town, 1660-1770*, rev. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). See also P.J. Corfield, *The Impact of English Towns 1700-1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982); Robert J. Morris, 'Voluntary Societies and British Urban Elites, 1780-1850: An Analysis', *The Historical Journal*, 26 (1983), pp.95-118; Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People: England, 1727-1783*, rev. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); Joyce M. Ellis, *The Georgian Town 1680-1840* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001); Neil McKendrick, John Brewer and J.H. Plumb, eds., *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-century England* (Brighton: Edward Everett Root Publishers, 2018). For a study of an 'urban renaissance' in Bristol, see Madge Dresser, *Slavery Obscured: The Social History of the Slave Trade in an English Provincial Port* (London: Bloomsbury, 2001), pp.96-128.

[17] Peter Clark, *British Clubs and Societies, 1580-1800: The Origins of an Associational World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[18] Clark defines this culture as 'private associations, overwhelmingly male, meeting on a regular, organized basis, mostly public drinking-places, where they combined a common sociability with a more specific purpose, whether recreational, locational, educational, political, philanthropic, or whatever.' Clark, *British Clubs and Societies*, p.12.

[19] Library historians have differed on their views of the importance of sociability to library association, as discussed below, see pp.136-37.

club, Clark refers to what he calls 'permanent library societies' as having 'arrived in North America in George II's reign'.[20] Yet rather than having 'arrived' there (from where, Clark does not say), subscription libraries, certainly proprietorial libraries, were first founded in North America.[21] Moreover, he considers these libraries as being 'mainly a phenomenon of the last years of the century', ignoring the fact that their reach and influence clearly extended into the middle decades of the nineteenth century.[22] Clark is also imprecise in his use of terminology, and does not use the term 'subscription library'.[23] Although he notes the existence of the miners' libraries of Wanlockhead and Leadhills, he, erroneously, considers Scotland to have had 'fewer book clubs or library societies … because of the importance of town and circulating libraries', although he does not expand on what these 'town' libraries were.[24] Of course, research on these libraries has progressed somewhat since Clark's study.[25] For example, we now know that Ireland hosted far more than the 'three library societies' he believed they did.[26] Clark's work is a survey of the entire associational world, and such errors are bound to occur when one's task is an analysis of the vast swathe of British clubs and societies. Yet his method, the manner in which he discusses the subscription library, is typical of that of other

[20] Clark, *British Clubs and Societies*, p.110.
[21] The first being the Library Company of Philadelphia, established in 1731. See above, Chapter One, p.44.
[22] Clark, *British Clubs and Societies*, p.110. For a discussion of which, see above, Chapter One, pp.47-49.
[23] This is a common feature of references to the subscription library. See below, on their description as 'public libraries', pp.118-19.
[24] Clark, *British Clubs and Societies*, p.110. For subscription libraries in Scotland, see Manley, *Books, Borrowers, and Shareholders*, pp.17-45; Bob Harris and Charles McKean, *The Scottish Town in the Age of Enlightenment 1740-1820* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), pp.381-89. On the Wanlockhead and Leadhills Libraries, see John C. Crawford, 'The Ideology of Mutual Improvement in Scottish Working Class Libraries', *Library History*, 12 (1996), pp.49-61; John C. Crawford, 'The Community Library in Scottish History', *IFLA Journal*, 28.5–6 (2002), pp.248-51.
[25] See also William St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Allan, *Nation of Readers*; Manley, *Books, Borrowers, and Shareholders*.
[26] In addition to libraries in Belfast, Cork, and Dublin, Keith Manley has also noted subscription libraries in Ballbay, Banbridge, Bandon, Clonmel, Coleraine, Downpatrick, Drogheda, Enniskerry, Kilkenny, Limerick, Londonderry, Mitchelstown, Newtownlimavady, Sligo, Tipperary and Waterford. Keith A. Manley, *Irish Reading Societies and Circulating Libraries Founded Before 1825: Useful Knowledge and Agreeable Entertainment* (Dublin: Four Courts, 2018), pp.106-19.

associational and urban historians in that the particular significance of the subscription library is lost in such general examinations.

Since Clark's, more limited and specialised studies have emerged, focusing upon specific types of associational organisation, examining the movement's spread in different national contexts, and extending the survey of clubs and societies beyond 1800 to 1830.[27] There is certainly no doubting the fact that associational culture was well embedded within Georgian society by the end of the eighteenth century. Indeed, it had been so for much of the last one hundred years, with Clark estimating that there had existed up to 25,000 different clubs and societies meeting in the English-speaking world, and over 130 types of society operating in the British Isles alone during the eighteenth century.[28] As Clark himself notes:

> The nineteenth century has often been seen as the great age of British societies, when their numbers multiplied and they made a central contribution to public policy and community life. In fact, the origins of the movement are considerably earlier.[29]

Yet seeking to correct this imbalance has, inadvertently, hampered our sense of the associational world in the nineteenth century. Many of the trends that defined associational culture during the latter half of the eighteenth century are assumed to have continued on into

[27] Simon Cordery, *British Friendly Societies, 1750-1914* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Brian William Cowan, *The Social Life of Coffee: The Emergence of the British Coffeehouse* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005); Kelly and Powell, *Clubs and Societies in Eighteenth-Century Ireland*; Ileana Baird, ed., *Social Networks in the Long Eighteenth Century: Clubs, Literary Salons, Textual Coteries* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publisher, 2014); Jon Mee and Jennifer Wilkes, 'Transpennine Enlightenment: The Literary and Philosophical Societies and Knowledge Networks in the North, 1781-1830', *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 38.4 (2015), pp.599-612; Graeme Morton, R.J. Morris and Boudien De Vries, eds., *Civil Society, Associations, and Urban Places: Class, Nation, and Culture in Nineteenth-century Europe* (London: Routledge, 2016); Valérie Capdeville and Alain Kerhervé, eds., *British Sociability in the Long Eighteenth Century: Challenging the Anglo-French Connection* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2019); Wallace and Rendall, *Association and Enlightenment*.

[28] Clark, *British Clubs and Societies*, p.2.

[29] Clark, *British Clubs and Societies*, p.viii.

the nineteenth alongside an increase in the number and variety of clubs and societies.[30] This, coupled with the mass of source material for the period, increasing amounts of periodical and newspaper print replete with references to clubs, societies and associations of all kinds, further complicates the picture, as does the gradual arrival of state-funded societies into the voluntary associational world from the mid-nineteenth century onwards.[31] More recent scholarship has implied that associational culture may have undergone a great deal of change during the early decades of the nineteenth century, not only in its overall size and variety but in the themes that underpinned it. The influence of an evangelical movement across Protestant denominations had a significant effect upon associational culture, particularly with the emergence of philanthropic and religious societies.[32] Indeed, one may go further in an analysis of associational culture by contrasting private clubs and societies from these 'communities of conscience', as David Shields has termed them.[33] Many of these were driven by a specific social purpose, often the alleviation of the problems of urban growth or with the promotion of those who were not its members.[34] These associations also placed less emphasis on the sociable aspects of gathering, particularly the drinking of alcohol.[35] Women were actively involved in this increase in voluntary association, with Jane Rendall identifying 255 'women's associations' founded in Scotland between 1789 and 1830.[36] The visible involvement of women in such associational

[30] Martin Gorsky, *Patterns of Philanthropy: Charity and Society in Nineteenth-Century Bristol* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1999), pp.133-34; Clark, *British Clubs and Societies*, pp.471-87; James Kelly, and Martyn J. Powell, 'Introduction', in *Clubs and Societies in Eighteenth-Century Ireland*, pp.23-35; Wallace and Rendall, 'Introduction', in *Association and Enlightenment*, pp.13-15.

[31] Clark, *British Clubs and* Societies, p.469. For an overview of the historiography of this voluntarism, see Gorsky, *Patterns of Philanthropy*, pp.1-12, see also pp.228-29.

[32] Clark, *British Clubs and Societies*, p.474; Morton, 'Identity Out of Place', pp.264-70; Jane Rendall, 'Gender and the Practices of Polite Sociability in Late Eighteenth-Century Edinburgh', in *British Sociability in the Long Eighteenth Century*, p.176.

[33] Shields, *Civil Tongues*, p.xv. Although Shields credits Jürgen Habermas with the term, I have been unable to find any instance in which Habermas uses it.

[34] Shields, *Civil Tongues*, pp.xv-xvi; Gorsky, *Patterns of Philanthropy*, pp.122-33; Jane Rendall, 'Women's Associations in Scotland, 1790-1830', in *Association and Enlightenment*, pp.209-18.

[35] Clark, *British Clubs and Societies*, p.451.

[36] Rendall, 'Women's Associations in Scotland', p.207. See also F.K. Prochaska, 'Women in English Philanthropy, 1790-1830', *International Review of Social History*, 9 (1974), pp.426-45; Gorsky, *Patterns of Philanthropy*,

activity complicates the perception that the 'male-dominated' associational world carried over into the succeeding century. Analysing the associational world in only the eighteenth century overlooks these changes.

There was an expansion in reading societies of all kinds at this moment in which associational culture was changing, and libraries represented a remarkably successful form of associational culture.[37] Culturally, those subscription libraries of the early nineteenth century did not greatly differ from those which emerged in the earlier century. Indeed, both types of libraries sought to tap into the same social and cultural trends by placing an emphasis upon polite sociability and genteel learning.[38] As associational historians have overlooked the specific significance of the subscription library, so have library historians overlooked its associational significance, historians of both have overlooked the format's political dimension. Libraries were integrated amongst the social and associational networks of Georgian society, and, like the myriad of other clubs and societies, provided their patrons with spaces to connect and socialise together, places in which the social politics of Georgian society could happen.[39] Combining elements of democratic and representational forms of administration, the management of the subscription library relied upon codified constitutions, established practices, conventions and management by representative committees coupled with the regular and collective consent conferred by the general ballot of its members. Significantly, unlike the private members' clubs of the earlier

pp.162-77; Kathryn Gleadle, *Borderline Citizens: Women, Gender, and Political Culture in Britain, 1815-1867* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp.137-46.

[37] St Clair, *Reading Nation*, p.247; Harris and McKean, *Scottish Town in the Age of Enlightenment*, pp.381-89; Bob Harris, 'Buildings, Associations, and Culture in the Scottish Provincial Town, c. 1700-1830', in *Association and Enlightenment*, pp.54-55.

[38] James Raven, 'Libraries for Sociability: The Advance of the Subscription Library', in *The Cambridge History of Libraries in Britain and Ireland, Volume II 1640-1850*, eds. Giles Mandelbrote and Keith A. Manley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp.250-51; David Allan, 'Politeness and the Politics of Culture: An Intellectual History of the Eighteenth-Century Subscription Library', *Library & Information History*, 29.3 (September 2013), pp.161-67.

[39] For discussions of this social politics, see Elaine Chalus, *Elite Women in English Political Life, c.1754-1790* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2005), pp.75-105; Gleadle, *Borderline Citizens*, pp.147-54; John Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 2013), pp.34-54

eighteenth century, subscription libraries were semi-public spaces which women were able to access independent of a male chaperone and were afforded all the same rights and privileges, as library members, as their male counterparts. This was a constitutionalist form of library administration, the creation of an exclusive literary space, but one managed by the collective of a community of subscribers, whose political and religious views were far from uniform. That subscription libraries were used by both those who did and those who did not have the vote, lends the widespread acceptance of the subscription library format an even greater significance. Indeed, subscription libraries provided their members with direct experience in civic administration, through participation in committees, meetings and the mechanics of voluntary association, as well as providing them with the sense of identity that came with involvement in semi-public life.

In this respect, adopting a lens of analysis used by historians of the British diaspora, associational involvement was also a form of identity construction, providing a civic identity to its participants which justified their prominent and public positions in a rapidly emerging civil society.[40] Studies of subscription libraries beyond the imperial centre have recognised this aspect of their association. James Raven has shown how the Charleston Library Society provided its members with a civilised 'Carolinian sense of self' on the North American frontier, as well as a direct link back to bibliographical metropole of London.[41] This recognition of the political importance of clubs and societies in a North American context has a long history. Alexis de Tocqueville, in the early nineteenth century, believed that 'in no country in the world had the principle of association been more successfully used, or more unsparingly applied to a multitude of different objects than in America', crediting it with being able to restrain the

[40] Tanja Bueltmann, Andrew Hinson and Graeme Morton, *The Scottish Diaspora* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), p.124; Morton, 'Identity Out of Place', pp.258-59.
[41] Raven, *London Booksellers and American Customers*, p.16, also pp.15-18.

dangers inherent in democratic government.[42] As such, and following Tocqueville's example, scholars examining North American associational culture have been far quicker than researchers of British history in recognising the political elements of voluntary association. A number of studies, examining clubs and societies in Boston, Charleston and Philadelphia, have stressed the significance of associational culture not only in the creation of an elite civic and class status but also for a wider 'political socialisation' of the adult male population.[43]

A number of these scholars have noticed a different level of engagement in the degree and types of associational voluntarism between Federalist and Republican politicians in the American Republic in the early nineteenth century, a partisan divide that does not seem to have occurred within British associational culture.[44] Nevertheless, as in the case of scholarship on associational culture in a British context, the significance of the subscription library has received little more than a passing reference. As part of his examination of Philadelphian associational culture, Albrecht Koschnik does provide an analysis of the Philadelphia Athenaeum but appears to be unaware that it was intended to be a more exclusive subscription library than the Library Company of Philadelphia. As such, like its main inspiration, the Liverpool Athenaeum, it had an older associational legacy.[45] David Shields, in his analysis of

[42] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*., 3rd ed., trans. Henry Reeve (New York, 1839), p.185. See also Albrecht Koschnik, *"Let a Common Interest Bind Us Together": Associations, Partisanship, and Culture in Philadelphia, 1775-1840* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007), pp.1-2; Armin Mattes, *Citizens of a Common Intellectual Homeland: The Transatlantic Origins of American Democracy and Nationhood* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2015), pp.192-93.

[43] For this particular term, see Koschnik, *Common Interest*, p.2. See also Shields, *Civil Tongues*; John L. Brooke, 'Ancient Lodges and Self-Created Societies: Voluntary Association and the Public Sphere in the Early Republic', in *Launching the "Extended Republic": The Federalist Era*, eds. Ronald Hoffman and Peter J. Albert (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996), pp.273-359; Marshall Foletta, *Coming to Terms with Democracy: Federalist Intellectuals and the Shaping of an American Culture* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001).

[44] Shields, *Civil Tongues*, p.xxix; Foletta, *Coming to Terms*, pp.135-36; Koschnik, *Common Interest*, pp.2-3.

[45] Koschnik, *Common Interest*, pp.211-16. For Philadelphia's library environment in the eighteenth century, see James Green, 'Subscription Libraries and Commercial Circulating Libraries in Colonial Philadelphia and New York', in *Institutions of Reading: The Social Life of Libraries in the United States*, eds. Thomas Augst and Kenneth Carpenter (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007), pp.60-61. On the founding of the Liverpool Athenaeum, see David Brazendale and Mark Towsey, 'Introduction', in *The First Minute Book of the Liverpool Athenaeum, 1797-1809* (Lancaster: The Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, 2020), pp.1-12.

the civil discourses of associational life, makes only one reference to 'library societies' as the circulators of printed material, despite examining associational culture in Charleston, Boston and Philadelphia, three locations home to prominent and renowned subscription libraries.[46] An appreciation of the significance of these institutions can also add a layer of complexity to our understanding of associational culture. Shields argues that clubs and societies in British America were inexorably linked to the 'Old World' and thus became the targets of 'republican nationalists'.[47] The inability of this group to imagine their own native associational institutions drove them to 'ever more extreme espousals of antiurban agrarianism'.[48] Yet, as discussed earlier, rather than imported from the 'Old World', proprietorial subscription libraries were actually an American invention, the first being the Library Company of Philadelphia in 1731, with other institutions far more likely to copy the structures and cultures of local associations, rather than those situated across the Atlantic.[49] Moreover, as in Britain, we can see that the membership of the subscription library was drawn from across the political spectrum. Far from subscription libraries being the monopoly of a Federalist urban elite, even Thomas Jefferson, the arch-republican and anti-urbanist, could be an avid supporter. Indeed, Jefferson supported the establishment of two such libraries in his native Virginia, taking a particularly active role in his local subscription library in Charlottesville, the Albemarle Library Society.[50]

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[46] Shields, *Civil Tongues*, p.322. For the subscription libraries in Charleston and Philadelphia, see respectively, Raven, *London Booksellers and American Customers* and *"At the Instance of Benjamin Franklin": A Brief History of the Library Company of Philadelphia*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: The Library Company of Philadelphia, 2015). No history of the Boston Library Society exists, see instead Lynda K. Yankaskas, 'Origin Stories: The Boston Athenaeum, Transatlantic Literary Culture, and Regional Rivalry in the Early Republic', *The New England Quarterly*, 89.4 (December 2016), pp.618-19.

[47] Shields, *Civil Tongues*, p.xxix.

[48] Shields, *Civil Tongues*, p.xxix.

[49] For example, Lynda Yankaskas argues that the Boston Athenaeum took more practical inspiration in its focus and administrative structuring from local American associations, rather than the Liverpool Athaenaum, as has been traditionally assumed. The invention of the link with Liverpool was far more about domestic politics and cultivating the status of Boston as a port city distinct from New York and Philadelphia. Yankaskas, 'Origin Stories', pp.614-42.

[50] In 1809, Jefferson provided a list of recommended books and a set of notes on the proposed constitution of the Westwardmill Library Society, in Brunswick County, Virginia. Thomas Jefferson to John Wyche, 19 May 1809, Founders Online, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/03-01-02-

Nevertheless, scholars examining clubs and societies in an American context have more generally recognised their significance for the formation of civic identity. Subscription libraries in the British Isles accomplished the same purpose, providing multiple generations with the civic experience and sense of identity for those who would be the social and political leaders of their local communities.

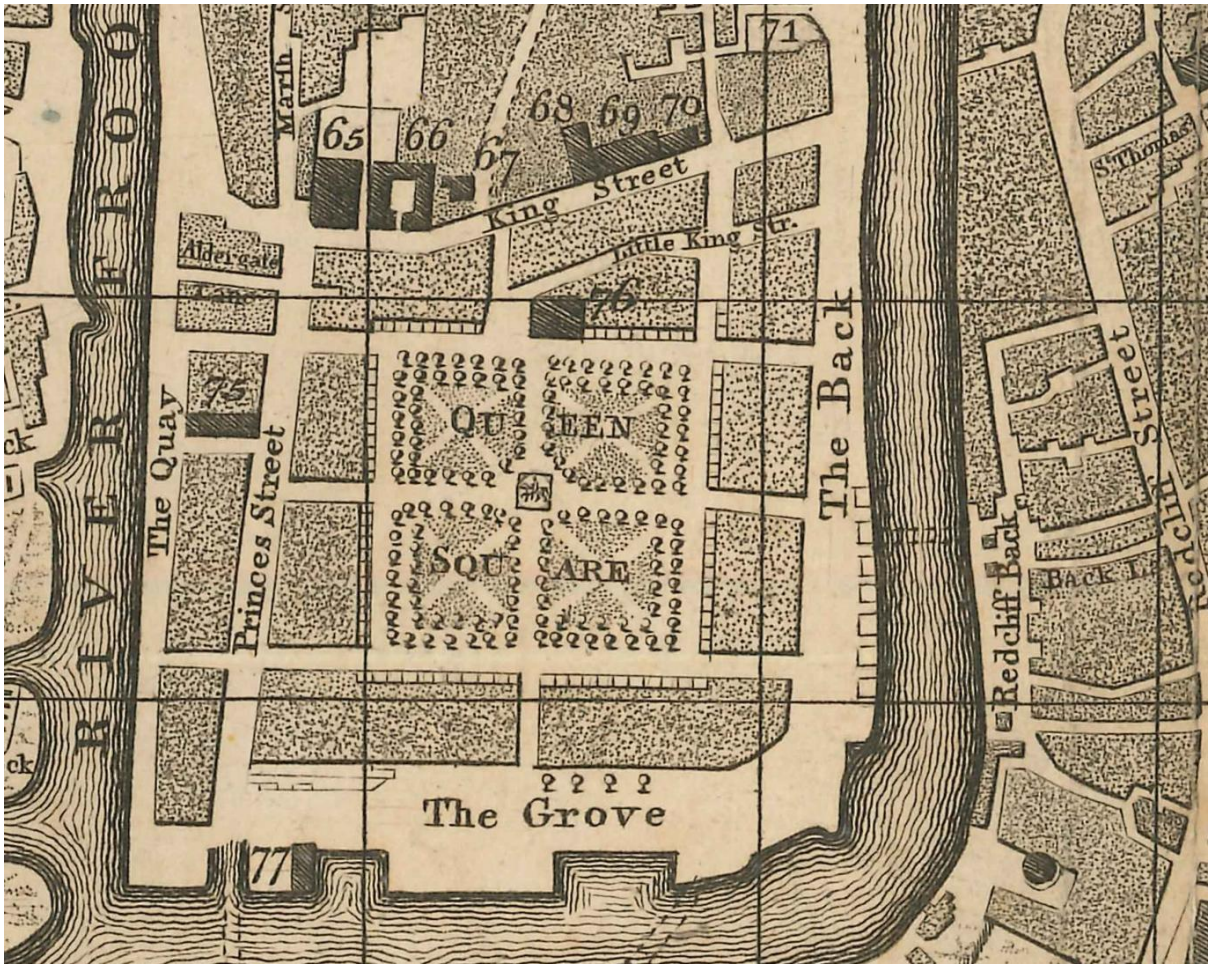
II

The subscription library was a central element of an urban nexus, sharing the same membership as other clubs and societies and located in close proximity to the other attractions and venues of the urban space. One reason for this was spatial: for example, in both Bristol and Dunblane the library was located centrally, amidst other cultural buildings and spaces.[51] A map of Bristol in 1773 demonstrates the Library Society's close connection to an 'urban renaissance', as Peter Borsay has termed it, of development and improvement in the urban space which occurred in towns and cities across the British Isles.[52]

0170>, [accessed 12/09/23]. Jefferson purchased four shares, at $10 each, in his local Albemarle Library Society, established 1823. Memorandum Books, 1823, Founders Online, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/02-02-02-0033>, [accessed 12/09/23]. He discussed the library in his correspondence with Frederick Winslow Hatch, an Episcopalian minister in Charlottesville and another library member, and provided notes on the library's constitution and recommendations of books to purchase. Thomas Jefferson to Frederick Winslow Hatch, 13 March 1823, Founders Online, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/98-01-02-3390>, [accessed 12/09/23]; Thomas Jefferson to Frederick Winslow Hatch, 22 April 1823, Founders Online, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/98-01-02-3473>, [accessed 12/09/23]; Frederick Winslow Hatch to Thomas Jefferson, 30 May 1823, Founders Online, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/98-01-02-3543>, [accessed 12/09/23]. He may also have served on a committee to compile the library's first catalogue, serving alongside the Rev. Francis Bowman and John Ormond (1795-1866). Edgar Woods, *Albemarle County in Virginia* (Charlottesville: The Michie Company, 1901), p.103. Jefferson's role in the founding of both libraries, as well as their particular natures, as private subscription rather than public libraries, has been frequently misinterpreted and misunderstood. See, for example, Robert C. Baron, 'Introduction', in *The Libraries, Leadership, & Legacy of John Adams and Thomas Jefferson*, eds. Robert C. Baron and Conrad Edick Wright (Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing, 2010), p.xvii; Kevin J. Hayes, *The Road to Monticello: The Life and Mind of Thomas Jefferson* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), p.166.

[51] For an example of the study of associational culture through an analysis of the structures and space of the urban townscape, see Harris, 'Buildings, Associations, and Culture', in *Association and Enlightenment*, pp.49-66.

[52] Borsay, *English Urban Renaissance*, pp.16-28; Ellis, *Georgian Town*, pp.97-100; Harris and McKean, *Scottish Town in the Age of Enlightenment*, pp.78-150; Brian Cowan, '"Restoration" England and the History of



Detail from Benjamin Donne, 'A Plan of the City of Bristol', 1773, BCL, Braikenridge Collection, IV, 13, 14a. Note the library's location at number sixty-seven and its close proximity to Merchants Hall (number sixty-five) of the Society of Merchant Venturers and the King Street Theatre (sixty-eight).

Located at what was once the city's southern edge, in the two decades prior to the Library Society's founding an area that had once consisted of marsh and boggy land had been replaced with the ordered terraces and manicured open space of Queen Square.[53] Located one street north of this, the Bristol Library sat on a busy associational crossroad. Sharing King Street with the Bristol Library was John Inman's printing workshop, Miss M.A. French's 'Ladies School', Thomas Reading's lodging house and three taverns: the Britannia, owned by Richard Canton, the Old Duke, owned by Joseph Martin, and Edward Morrish's Coopers' Arms.[54] The area was

Sociability', in *British Sociability in the Long Eighteenth Century*, pp.12-13; Harris, 'Buildings, Associations, and Culture', pp.55-61.

[53] Dresser, *Slavery Obscured*, pp.96-128; Mark Harrison, *Crowds and History: Mass Phenomena in English Towns, 1790-1835* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp.143-49.

[54] *Mathews's Annual Bristol Directory, and Commercial List, for the Year 1828.* (Bristol, 1828), pp.49, 74, 99, 116, 122, 139.

also home to a number of more prestigious social and cultural landmarks. To the east of the library was Coopers' Hall and the Theatre Royal, to its west was the Hall of the Society of Merchant Venturers, the social club of Bristol's West India merchants.[55] Venues such as these, and the Library Society, played host to Bristol's lively associational culture. These networks were not just confined to the largest cities. Despite the relatively small size of its urban population in comparison to England, Scotland also played host to a number of clubs and societies. Edinburgh boasted 200 or more societies during the course of the eighteenth century and was closely followed in associational diversity by Glasgow.[56] Moreover, there were eighteen societies in Dundee between the 1790s and 1819, ten in Montrose and twelve in Inverness between 1800 and 1822.[57] Even a village as small as Dunblane, with a total urban population of 1,858 individuals in 1831 could host a small network of clubs and societies.[58] By the 1830s this included the Leighton Library and three other reading associations, a masonic lodge, a curling club, a militia society, a 'Gardeners' Friendly Society', a funeral society, a temperance society, a philosophical society, and an agricultural society, the Strathallan Farmers' Club, founded in 1804.[59] These types of association were, like the subscription libraries, 'a highly visible, public commitment to the Enlightenment and its diffusion'.[60] Like the subscription library, the agricultural society combined opportunities for sociability and entertainment, such as the club's annual ploughing match, with a desire to spread learning and

[55] *Bristol Directory… 1828*, p.23. On the Theatre Royal, see Kathleen Barker, 'The Theatre Royal Bristol: The First Seventy Years', in *Bristol in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Patrick McGrath (London: David & Charles, 1972), pp.65-88; Kathleen Barker, *The Theatre Royal Bristol 1766-1966: Two Centuries of Stage History* (London: The Society for Theatre Research, 1974). In the eighteenth century, the Merchants' Hall boasted a recently renovated frontage with ornamental gates and railings. Patrick McGrath, *The Merchant Venturers of Bristol: A History of the Society of Merchant Venturers of the City of Bristol from its Origin to the Present Day* (Bristol: Society of Merchant Venturers, 1975), p.111. See also, below, Chapter Three, p.179, n.68.
[56] Clark, *British Clubs and Societies*, pp.131-37.
[57] Wallace and Rendall, 'Introduction', in *Association and Enlightenment*, pp.13-14.
[58] John Monteath, *Statistics of the Parish of Dunblane: October, 1831* (Dunblane, 1831), p.3.
[59] For Dunblane's book associations, see above, Chapter One, pp.66-67. Monteath, *Statistics of the Parish of Dunblane*, pp.9-14; Alexander B. Barty, *The History of Dunblane*, rev. ed. (1944; Stirling: Stirling District Libraries, 1994), pp.149, 217-18; Bill Inglis, *A Scottish Town: Dunblane, 1560-1919* (Stirling: Jamieson and Munro, 2016), pp.316-20.
[60] Harris and McKean, *Scottish Town in the Age of Enlightenment*, p.389.

increase the general agricultural knowledge of the farming community.[61] Such objectives could be naturally complemented by membership of the subscription library. Many of Dunblane's residents, like those in Bristol, were members of more than one of these associational enterprises. John Coldstream (d. 1823), the town's sheriff substitute, for example, was a Leighton borrower and also served as the secretary of the Strathallan Farmers' Club from 1804 until his death.[62] Indeed, the existence of an agricultural society in Dunblane explains the popularity of library works such as *The Statistical Account of Scotland* (1791-99), as library members sought to learn more, and in different ways, about the geography, soil, and agriculture of their local area.[63]

Yet whilst subscription libraries cohabited and shared many similarities with other clubs and societies, they also differed from these in a number of ways. Indeed, the subscription library was an outlier in terms of associational clubs and societies in the manner in which it emerged. While many clubs began within the metropolis of the imperial centre, London and England, and then grew outwards to other cities, towns and regional bases, the inverse is true in terms of

[61] Stirling Council Archives, GB224/PD61, Strathallan Farmers' Society, Minutes, 1804-1945; Barty, *History of Dunblane*, pp.244-46. On farmers' clubs more generally, see David D. McElroy, *Scotland's Age of Improvement: A Survey of Eighteenth-century Literary Clubs and Societies* (Washington: Washington State University Press, 1969), pp.81-83; R.C. Boud, 'Scottish Agricultural Improvement Societies, 1723-1835', *Review of Scottish Culture*, 1 (1984), pp.70-90; Clark, *British Clubs and Societies*, pp.112-14; Harris and McKean, *Scottish Town in the Age of Enlightenment*, p.42.

[62] Barty, *History of Dunblane*, pp.244-45. For Coldstream's borrowings, see *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Advanced search for 'Borrower: Mr John Coldstream '," <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/search/p-1/0/sortDate/advanced/brids|26153>, [accessed 22/05/24]. Coldstream was the son and brother of successive Leighton librarians. Another library member, Cornelius Stewart, was later admitted into the agricultural society after, along with a number of others, petitioning to join it in 1805. Barty, *History of Dunblane*, p.245. For more on Stewart, and his library borrowings, see Barty, *History of Dunblane*, p.233; Jill Dye, 'Leighton Library Borrowers', *Journal of the Society of Friends of Dunblane Cathedral*, 21.4 (2017), pp.136-40; Jill Dye, 'Books and their Borrowers at the Library of Innerpeffray c. 1680-1855', unpublished PhD thesis (University of Stirling, 2018), pp.104, 209; *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Advanced search for 'Borrower: Mr Cornelius Stewart ',", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/search/p-1/0/0/advanced/brids|29348>, [accessed 29/05/24]

[63] For the popularity of the *Statistical Account* at the Leighton, see above, Chapter One, p.78. Some agricultural societies went a step further than this and purposely maintained a small stock of books, such as the Strathearn Agricultural Society, established 1809. In 1819, these books were deposited in the Crieff Public Library (established 1818). An earlier 'Agricultural library' was also located in Crieff by 1774. Manley, *Books, Borrowers, and Shareholders*, p.209. See also H. Holmes, 'The Circulation of Scottish Agricultural Books During the Eighteenth Century', *Agricultural History Review*, 54 (2006), pp.45-78.

the subscription library, beginning first in locations away from the publishing centres and at the colonial periphery in Philadelphia.[64] London's first subscription library was only founded in 1785, some four decades after the founding of the first in the British Isles, with Edinburgh's only appearing in 1794.[65] Both cities were major publishing centres, and neither needed the subscription library for its practical bibliographical purpose, both being amply supplied by coffee shops and institutional or commercial libraries.[66] Nevertheless, the fact that subscription libraries were founded in such places at all demonstrates the desirability of such libraries as social spaces as well as a source of books.

III

Unlike how it was theorised in the Habermasian public sphere, subscription libraries, like associational culture more widely, provided no clear demarcation line between the public and the private.[67] In an eighteenth-century sense, these libraries were 'public' institutions as spaces in which 'civic, religious, and commercial values converged and overlapped'.[68] Public worthiness provided a positive and justifiable purpose to the subscription library. In light of

[64] Clark, *British Clubs and Societies*, pp.131-37. On the spread of the subscription library movement, see above, Chapter One, pp.47-49.
[65] ECLO. For the London Library Society, see Paul Kaufman, 'The Eighteenth-Century Forerunner of the London Library', *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, 54.2 (1960), pp.89-100; Paul Kaufman, 'The Eighteenth-Century London and Westminster Library Societies: A Sequel', *The Library*, 5.25 (1970), pp.237-47; Keith A. Manley, 'The London and Westminster Libraries, 1785-1823', *The Library*, 7.2 (June 1985), pp.137-59. For the Edinburgh Subscription Library, see Manley, *Books, Borrowers, and Shareholders*, pp.164-65.
[66] On the publishing industries of Edinburgh and London, see above, Chapter One, p.47, n.29. For the other bibliographical and social attractions of either Edinburgh or London, see Manley, 'London and Westminster Libraries', pp.156-57; Brian William Cowan, *The Social Life of Coffee: The Emergence of the British Coffeehouse* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), pp.152-84; Markman Ellis, 'Coffee-house Libraries in Mid Eighteenth-Century London', *The Library*, 10.1 (2009), pp.3-40.
[67] For critiques of the Habermasian distinction between the public and private spheres, see Dena Goodman, 'Public Sphere and Private Life: Toward a Synthesis of Current Historiographical Approaches to the Old Regime', *History and Theory*, 31.1 (February 1992), pp.1-20; Amanda Vickery, 'Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronology of English Women's History', *The Historical Journal*, 36.2 (June 1993), pp.383-414; Clark, *British Clubs and Societies*, pp.463-64.
[68] Ross W. Beales and James N. Green, 'Libraries and Their Users', in *A History of the Book in America, Vol. 1: The Colonial Book in the Atlantic World*, eds. Hugh Amory and David D. Hall (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p.400. See also, Mark Towsey and Kyle B. Roberts, 'Introduction', in *Before the Public Library: Reading, Community, and Identity in the Atlantic World, 1650–1850* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), p.7.

this, many chose to call themselves 'public' libraries, inviting future confusion as to their true nature.[69] As noted earlier, despite this, these libraries were 'public' only in the sense that they were open to all who could afford the cost of subscription and other requirements. The barriers to entry could be both social and financial and were prohibitive to many, designed purposely so to restrict library membership.[70] Nevertheless, the enlightened and cultural purposes of these subscription libraries, even if restricted to a relatively narrow stratum of society, also afforded it a 'public' role in the wider cultural 'renovation' underway in eighteenth-century society, an increasing commercialisation of culture and a revised value system revolving principally around the notions of politeness, sociability, and gentility shaped partly by the writings of Anthony Ashley Cooper, the third earl of Shaftesbury, Richard Steele, and Joseph Addison.[71] This ideology had its own political purpose in that it was intended to provide an alternative mechanism for overcoming societal divisions than the violence and bloodletting which had marked the seventeenth century.[72] Libraries were noticeable purveyors of this associational world centred around amiability, conversation and improvement, taking names such as the

[69] Joanna Innes has noted the existence of seventy libraries using 'public' in their title by 1850. Joanna Innes, 'Libraries in Context: Social, Cultural and Intellectual Background', in *Cambridge History of Libraries in Britain and Ireland, Volume II 1640-1850*, p.287. See also Benjamin Franklin's reference to the Library Company of Philadelphia, the earliest founded proprietary subscription library, as the 'Philadelphia publick Library'. *Benjamin Franklin's Autobiography*, eds. J.A. Leo Lemay and P.M. Zall (New York: Norton, 1986), p.62. The use of 'public' to describe such libraries has led some to misinterpret these institutions as truly public libraries that were freely accessible to all. For some specific examples of this, albeit for an American context, see descriptions of the Albemarle Library Society as Charlottesville's first public library. Woods, *Albemarle County in Virginia*, p.103; Andrew J. O'Shaughnessy, *The Illimitable Freedom of the Human Mind: Thomas Jefferson's Idea of a University* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2021), p.50. Indeed, the Albemarle Library Society, like all subscription libraries, charged its patrons for the privilege of use and was not freely accessible to the public. Robert M. Hubbard, 'Libraries in Charlottesville and Albemarle: A Brief History', *The Magazine of Albemarle History*, 37-38 (1979-80), pp.7-9.

[70] For a discussion of these in relation to the Bristol and Leighton libraries, see Chapters One and Two.

[71] Allan, *Nation of Readers*, pp.11-12. See also Shields, *Civil Tongues*, pp.xii-xiv; Borsay, *English Urban Renaissance*, pp.263-67; Lawrence E. Klein, 'Politeness and the Interpretation of the British Eighteenth Century', *The Historical Journal*, 45.4 (2002), pp.869-98; Raven, 'Libraries for Sociability', pp.241-63; Jon Mee, *Conversable Worlds: Literature, Contention and Community 1762 to 1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp.39-57; Christy Lindsay, 'Reading Associations in England and Scotland, c.1760-1830', unpublished PhD thesis, (University of Oxford, 2016), pp.103-04; Towsey and Roberts, 'Introduction', in *Before the Public Library*, pp.14-15.

[72] Allan, 'Politeness and the Politics of Culture', p.161; David Allan, 'Politeness, Sociability, and the "Little Platoon": Associational Theory in the Scottish Enlightenment', in *Association and Enlightenment*, pp.35-36.

Amicable Society or the Social Library or by making frequent references to classical history, housing their collections in the Athenaeum, the Lyceum, or the Portico.[73]

Whilst subscription libraries may have revelled in their enlightened status, their premises and spaces remained closed to ordinary members of the public. This hegemony, and the ordered space within the library, was maintained and controlled by a centralised power structure which was a consistent feature of both the subscription library and wider associational culture. In many instances, and principally for proprietorial libraries, a society's management committee was elected from its membership. Existing hierarchies, within both the library and wider society ensured that such committees were peopled by civic and religious elites who were already a part of a closely knitted network, the result of convivial, familial, and economic connections.[74] Similar networks existed in other clubs and societies and the 1780s onwards saw these associations undergo a greater institutionalisation, with increased stress placed on bureaucracy, a hierarchy of offices, and further emphasis upon social discipline to regulate behaviour between members and wider society.[75] This had always been so in the case of the subscription library. Codified rules and catalogues were vital for managing access amongst a shared collection of books.

Subscription libraries were subject to the same challenges as other associational clubs and societies. The chief danger for such associations was often financial, with many reliant upon

[73] David Allan, 'Eighteenth-Century Private Subscription Libraries and Provincial Urban Culture: The Amicable Society of Lancaster, 1769-c.1820', *Library History*, 19.1 (2001), pp.57-76; Jim Piecuch, '"Of Great Importance Both to Civil & Religious Welfare": The Portsmouth Social Library, 1750-1786', *Historical New Hampshire*, 57.3/4 (2002), pp.66-84. For the Athenaeum, Lyceum, and Portico, see respectively the Stirling Subscription Library, the Liverpool Library and the Portico Library in Manchester. Harris and McKean, *Scottish Town in the Age of Enlightenment*, p.187; M. Flavel, 'The Enlightened Reader and the New Industrial Towns: A Study of the Liverpool Library, 1758-1790', *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 8.1 (1985), pp.17-35; Allan, *Nation of Readers*, pp.70-71.

[74] This was the case at the Bristol Library Society. For examples, see Chapters Three, Five and Six. See also the examples of the Charleston Library Society and the New York Society Library. Raven, *London Booksellers and American Customers*, pp.37-41, 67-76; Sophie H. Jones, '"Very useful as well as ornamental": Social Libraries in Early American Communities', *Library & Information History*, 37.2 (2021), pp.115-24.

[75] Clark, *British Clubs and Societies*, p.95.

retaining and adding to their community of subscribers.[76] Without any measure of state support, all clubs and societies inhabited a financially perilous position, and many were brief and transient. As Clark says:

> The typical experience of associations in Georgian Britain was not one of balanced intersociety cooperation on a Lockean model, but of a Hobbesian jungle, where clubs and societies strove against each other to attract publicity, patrons, supporters, and, above all, cash.[77]

For subscription libraries, the urge to secure their own private premises and to inhabit larger and grander buildings pushed many into an accumulation of debts.[78] It took the New York Society Library forty years to pay off debts incurred in the construction of its own library building in 1795.[79] In this respect, both the Leighton and Bristol libraries were privileged in that they owned or rented their own space on highly favourable terms.[80] Added to these structural deficiencies of associational culture were the increased political and economic instability of the period 1800 to 1832 which saw wars with both Napoleonic France and the United States, a resultant higher burden of taxation, post-war demobilisation, political instability and economic stagnation.[81] Whilst British subscription libraries faced economic challenges as a result of war, they were sheltered from its physical dangers. In contrast, subscription libraries in the United States faced much greater physical threats. Occupying

[76] For examples, see Manley, *Books, Borrowers, and Shareholders*, pp.36-45.
[77] Clark, *British Clubs and Societies*, p.489.
[78] Allan, *Nation of Readers*, pp.88-93.
[79] Tom Glynn, *Reading Publics: New York City's Public Libraries, 1754-1911* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), pp.29-30.
[80] See above, Chapter One.
[81] A.D. Harvey, *Collision of Empires: Britain in Three World Wars 1793-1945* (London: Phoenix, 1994), pp.5-200; Rory Muir, *Britain and the Defeat of Napoleon 1807-1815* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996), pp.1-18, 232-40; Frank O'Gorman, *The Long Eighteenth Century: British Political and Social History, 1688-1832* (London: Arnold, 1997), pp.233-76; David Andress, *The Savage Storm: Britain on the Brink in the Age of Napoleon* (London: Little Brown, 2012), pp.169-85 and *passim*; Roger Knight, *Britain Against Napoleon: The Organization of Victory, 1793-1815* (London: Penguin, 2014), pp.xxi-xxii, 463-74.

British troops prevented library members from meeting at various times during the American War of Independence in Charleston, Philadelphia, and New York.[82] Indeed, British troops are said to have looted books from the New York Society Library during their occupation of Manhattan in 1776.[83]

Subscription libraries could also face a range of other bibliographical competitors in attracting subscribers, including book clubs, circulating libraries, reading rooms, and other subscription libraries. These challenges potentially became more acute as the nineteenth century progressed and the number of reading associations increased in number and the price of print eventually fell.[84] In some locations, subscription libraries were able to monopolise the urban space. No competing subscription library arose to challenge the Bristol Library Society, although there were a number of circulating libraries and specialist reading associations active through this period.[85] Other towns and villages were simply too small to play host to more than one subscription library. This was the case in Dunblane and the Leighton Library, but equally so in nearby Stirling, Crieff, and Falkirk.[86] Where a competing subscription library did emerge, they were designed to serve a particular deficiency in the first and older library. Often this criticism centred around access and could vary between complaints that the subscription library was too exclusive, or that it was not exclusive enough. The founders of the Liverpool Athenaeum, in 1797, explained they were motivated by the 'want of a **public library**' and listed their complaints with Liverpool's existing subscription library: the Liverpool Library was 'not

[82] Charleston Library Society, MS. 29, Series IV, No. 2, Committee minutes, 1759-80, 1783-91, January 1780; *Instance of Benjamin Franklin*, p.23; New York Society Library, New York Society Library Institutional Archives, Second Minute Book, 1773-1832, 21 December 1788.
[83] Glynn, *Reading Publics*, pp.28-29.
[84] Simon Eliot, *Some Patterns and Trends in British Publishing, 1800-1919* (London: Bibliographical Society, 1994), pp.18-24; James Raven, *The Business of Books: Booksellers and the English Book Trade, 1450-1850* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), pp.320-50; St Clair, *Reading Nation*, pp.111-21; Allan, *Nation of Readers*, pp.225-26; Michael F. Suarez, 'Towards a Bibliometric Analysis of the Surviving Record, 1701-1800', in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain. Volume 5: 1695-1830*, eds. Michael F. Suarez and Michael L. Turner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp.43-44.
[85] See above, Chapter One, pp.67-69.
[86] Manley, *Books, Borrowers, and Shareholders*, pp.209, 225-26.

sufficiently select' in its choice of books, these were nearly all in English, there were too many library members and the library was only open four hours a day.[87] In contrast, the Edinburgh Select Subscription Library, founded in 1800, and despite its name, was aimed towards those individuals who could not afford the membership fees of the Edinburgh Subscription Library, founded in 1794. In contrast to the eight and a half guineas entrance fee and ten shillings and sixpence subscription of the Edinburgh Subscription Library, the Edinburgh Select charged only five shillings to enter and a monthly subscription of sixpence.[88]

Sometimes political or religious splits led to the founding of new libraries. The Birmingham New Library (established 1794) was formed as a breakaway from the Birmingham Library by Dissenters unhappy at the Anglican presence upon the latter library's committee and their intention to 'admit one description of books and to exclude all other relating to certain disputed questions'.[89] In Bury St Edmunds the roles were reversed. Complaints that 'Whigs and heretics' controlled the committee of the Suffolk Public Library led to the founding of the New Public Library in 1793, with stricter entry requirements and a different method for choosing which books the library should buy.[90] Both of these libraries had noticeably different collections from those they split from, yet it is more accurate to view these libraries, and other forms of reading associations, less as direct competitors to the original subscription library and more as cohabitators of the urban reading environment.[91] Seceding library members very often found themselves eventually reunited with the libraries they had once left. From 1806, Bury's two

[87] Emphasis in original. *First Minute Book of the Liverpool Athenaeum,* eds. Brazendale and Towsey, p.29.
[88] The Edinburgh Select Subscription Library was 'Select' in its choice of books, rather than membership, aiming to 'procure… a collection of books, rather select than numerous'. *Sketch of the Origin and Progress of the Library* (1834), quoted in Manley, *Books, Borrowers, and Shareholders*, p.45, see also pp.164-65.
[89] Charles Parish, *History of the Birmingham Library* (London: Library Association, 1966), p.60.
[90] Potential new books had to be voted for by the membership as a whole and not just by the committee, as was the case at the Suffolk Public Library. Christopher Reid, 'Unitarian Activism and the Politics of the Subscription Library: Bury St Edmunds in the 1790s', in *Textual Transformations: Purposing and Repurposing Books from Richard Baxter to Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, eds. Tessa Whitehouse and N.H. Keeble (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), p.89, for quote see p.85.
[91] Allan, *Nation of Readers*, p.66; Reid, 'Unitarian Activism and the Politics of the Subscription Library', p.89.

subscription libraries were located in the same building.[92] Although formally kept as separate collections, any subscriber to one library was able to access the collection of the other. In Birmingham, a similar library union did not occur until 1860 but came when the committee of the Birmingham Library observed that 'one half' of the subscribers of the New Library were also members of the 'Old' library.[93] Indeed, analysing the network of libraries in eighteenth-century Leeds, Rebecca Bowd discovered that the same individuals each subscribed to the Leeds Medical Library, the Foreign Circulating Library and the 'Jacobin' Library.[94] Individuals were not restricted to the use of only one form of library association and regularly patronised a number of different types of libraries.[95]

Some libraries purposely chose to maintain a small exclusive membership, even if this cut them off from a growing urban population of potential new subscribers. As Maria Edgeworth writing about the Bristol Library made clear: 'an extremely fine one; and what makes it appear ten times finer is, that it is very difficult for strangers to get into.'[96] Although the overall library membership of the Bristol Library Society steadily grew in the early nineteenth century (peaking at 321 members in 1821), this increase was rapidly outpaced by the growth in Bristol's overall population, which had risen from just over 20,000 in 1696 to over 100,000 in 1831.[97] More importantly, the Library Society was failing to attract new proprietors, with only five new shareholders admitted between 1816 and 1832, compared to seventy-three in the preceding

[92] Reid, 'Unitarian Activism and the Politics of the Subscription Library', p.91.
[93] Parish, *Birmingham Library*, p.71.
[94] Rebecca Bowd, 'Useful Knowledge or Polite Learning? A Reappraisal of Approaches to Subscription Library History', *Library & Information History*, 29.3 (August 2013), pp.189-91.
[95] Stephen Colclough, *Consuming Texts: Readers and Reading Communities, 1695-1870* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp.97-105. See also the case of the Rev. William MacGregor Stirling, minister of Port of Menteith, and a subscriber at the Leighton Library and the Stirling Subscription Library in Chapter One.
[96] Maria Edgeworth to John Ruxton, 29 December 1791, in *Maria Edgeworth: Chosen Letters*, ed. F.V. Barry (London: Jonathan Cape, 1931), p.47, quoted in Richard De Ritter, *Imagining Women Readers, 1789-1820: Well-Regulated Minds* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), p.130.
[97] BA, 32079/LS/F/1, Bristol Library Society, Cash book, 2 December 1772–24 April 1871 [hereafter BA, LS/F/1, Cash book]; Steve Poole and Nicolas Rogers, *Bristol from Below: Law, Authority and Protest in a Georgian City* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2017), p.92. It was the same situation at the Charleston Library Society. Raven, *London Booksellers and American Customers*, p.68.

fifteen years.[98] Library members were painfully aware of this stagnation in the library's vitality and reach. A library report completed in 1827 laid bare the extent of the problem:

> Three hundred subscribers out of a population of 120,000, within a circumference of five miles from the Bristol Library, is a very small number; and an income of less than £500 a year, in proportion to the wealth, leisure, education, and general improvement of that population, is "poor indeed".[99]

The main barrier to new proprietors was undoubtedly the high cost of purchasing a share, which had steadily risen since the library's establishment.[100] This was an inflationary increase that would have taken place at all proprietorial subscription libraries, as later library members bought into a larger and more valuable collection of books.[101] Even non-proprietorial libraries cited the same justification for increasing the costs of membership. In 1785, the Leighton Library increased the entrance fee for existing members because of the 'great addition made to the Books of the Library for some years past'.[102] Rising rates of subscription limited the size and social diversity of the subscription library's membership. At Bristol, it also meant that the community of library members remained homogenised and small relative to the urban population that surrounded it. New subscribers came from those who had either been transferred or inherited shares and were therefore related, either by blood, marriage, or money, to other library members.[103] In the view of those who had compiled the 1827 library report, the

[98] BA, LS/F/1, Cash book.
[99] BA 32079/LS/M/1, Bristol Library Society, Minute book of General meetings, 2 December 1772–28 March 1870 [hereafter BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book], 21 January 1828. The circumstances, and politics, surrounding this report are further discussed in Chapter Six.
[100] See above, Chapter One, pp.59-60.
[101] Allan, *Nation of Readers*, p.93.
[102] USA, Leighton MS 16, Leighton Library, Minutes of the meetings of the trustees, 31 October 1734-March 1822 [hereafter Leighton MS 16, Minutes, 1734-1822], 11 October 1785.
[103] The transfer of library shares were recorded in the committee's minute books. BA, 32079/LS/M/3, Bristol Library Society, Minute book of Committee, 31 March 1789–10 March 1807 [hereafter BA, LS/M/3, Committee minute book, 1789-1807]; BA, 32079/LS/M/4, Bristol Library Society, Minute book of Committee, 24 March 1807–22 March 1823 [hereafter BA, LS/M/4, Committee minute book, 1807-23]; BA, 32079/LS/M/5, Bristol Library Society, Minute book of Committee, 1 April 1823–20 December 1836.

solution to the library's financial woes lay in 'greater facilities of accommodation on access'.[104] Yet whilst this may have been of financial benefit to the Society, socially, an expansion in the number and diversity of library members was not welcomed by the existing membership, and attempts to reform the library's regulations and expand access were repeatedly voted down at subsequent general meetings.[105]

IV

Exclusivity was a feature of the subscription library space, and a major draw to those who chose to participate in it. Other library regulations were designed explicitly to regulate the entry of members. As we have seen, the requirement for prospective library members to be vetted before admission was a common occurrence.[106] The Bristol Library Society had a similar requirement in place from 1801.[107] Christopher Reid assumes that the same rule at the New Public Library in Bury St Edmunds, where members were required to be approved by a majority of subscribers, was designed to prevent Dissenters from joining the library.[108] Yet without the library's institutional records, he is unable to say conclusively whether this rule was actually implemented.[109] By contrast, where institutional records do survive, there is no evidence to suggest that these rules were ever enforced, let alone whether anyone was ever refused membership on these grounds.[110] It may have been that in the political environment in

[104] BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 21 January 1828.
[105] As discussed below, in Chapter Six.
[106] For the Leighton Library's rule, see above p.52.
[107] This required prospective members to be proposed at one committee meeting and then approved by a majority of the committee at a following meeting. Max Skjönsberg and Mark Towsey, 'Introduction', in *The Minute Book of the Bristol Library Society, 1771-1801* (Bristol: Bristol Record Society, 2022), p.xxiv. The Orkney Subscription Library also required prospective members to be approved by the committee. Orkney Library & Archive, CO5/100/1, Minute book, Subscribers to the Library, 1815-57, 17 March 1815.
[108] Reid, 'Unitarian Activism and the Politics of the Subscription Library', p.89.
[109] Reid's research is based on an undated and unpaginated typescript by G.V.M. Heap, now held in Suffolk Record Office, which examined subscription libraries in Bury. Heap was able to access library catalogues which have now been lost. Reid, 'Unitarian Activism and the Politics of the Subscription Library', p.79, n.14.
[110] See also Dye, 'Books and their Borrowers', p.187. From 1812, the rules of the New York Society Library required a vote before the admittance of any new members, although this rarely took place. In April 1825, this regulation was used to contest a recent election of the committee on the grounds that those who voted in it

which these rules were fashioned, both libraries understood the importance of ensuring tight legislative control over elements of their administration. In this respect, these rules were a failsafe, there only if the need arose for them to be used. That this never occurred in Bristol or Dunblane demonstrates the success of both libraries in navigating through the politically turbulent decades of the 1790s and early nineteenth century.

Retaining the exclusivity of the library space, and fashioning the tools for doing so, therefore had both social and political implications. Historians of reading have been mixed in their judgements of this aspect of the subscription library. David Allan has argued that it is unfair to contrast such libraries with the publicly funded library. 'Voluntary associations funded by private subscription were in fact essentially inclusive in their view', he argues, broadly non-factional in their membership and involving men and women of different political and religious persuasions.[111] In comparison, William St Clair and Stephen Colclough, more readily stress the exclusionary elements of the subscription library.[112] Colclough, in particular, views the growth of the subscription library as a specific response to the 'popular' nature of the circulating library.[113] Certainly, some subscription libraries were openly contrasted with the commercial lending sector. According to its local church minister, the Greenock Society (established 1783) was founded in order 'to avert the fatal effects which are sometimes occasioned by circulating libraries', whilst a member of the Lewes Literary Society (established 1785) promised that it would provide an alternative to 'the usual trash of the circulating libraries'.[114] Yet circulating

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were never formally approved as members. Austin Baxter Keep, *History of the New York Society Library* (New York: De Vinne Press, 1908), p.289; Glynn, *Reading Publics*, p.32.

[111] Allan, 'Politeness and the Politics of Culture', p.167. See also Allan, *Nation of Readers*, pp.225-26.

[112] St Clair, *Reading Nation*, pp.258-60; Colclough, *Consuming Texts*, pp.90-92.

[113] Colclough, *Consuming Texts*, p.90. Colclough provides no specific reference for this claim. He does reference William St Clair's chapter on 'Reading Constituencies' in his *Reading Nation* (2004). Although St Clair notes that a number of subscription libraries openly contrasted themselves with circulating libraries, he does not suggest that they were a cause in the subscription libraries overall popularity.

[114] Archibald Reid, 'Town and Parish of Greenock. (County of Renfrew.)', in *The Statistical Account of Scotland. Drawn up from the Communications of the Ministers of the Different Parishes.*, ed. John Sinclair, 21 vols. (Edinburgh, 1791-99), V, p.583. Also quoted in St Clair, *Reading Nation*, p.249. John Button, *The Lewes Literary Society* (1804), quoted in St Clair, *Reading Nation*, p.249.

libraries had long pre-existed the subscription library, with the commercial borrowing of books already established by the end of the seventeenth century and a faster expansion in circulating libraries proper from the 1750s onwards.[115] They remained a noticeable presence in later eighteenth-century society, and were invariably slandered when discussed, but cannot solely explain the take-off in subscription library numbers which occurred in the final decades of the eighteenth century and the first decade of the nineteenth.[116]

Nevertheless, there is no denying that subscription libraries were exclusive spaces for their own communities and used a range of regulations to maintain the closed sanctity of the library space. High subscription rates were themselves a tool for managing access to the library, although it was regular to find additional requirements for entry, as those for the Leighton above demonstrate. There is, of course, a practical dimension to this, controlling and thereby protecting a valuable or collectively owned library of books from theft or damage. Yet, that even a library such as the Leighton, located in a rural community, felt compelled to establish additional safeguards as to whom could become members, speaks to a widespread willingness amongst the practitioners of the associational library to guard their spaces jealously. The exclusion of non-library members was not total, and sometimes a library consciously widened access. Both students in divinity and lay preachers were allowed to borrow for free from the Leighton Library, providing they received the written support of their local minister and for only as long as they continued to reside inside the boundaries of the 'diocese of Dunblane'.[117] Moreover, sharing a library's book amongst the family unit was generally accepted, and openly

[115] St Clair, *Reading Nation*, pp.239-40.
[116] A 'Traveller' writing into the *Monthly Magazine* in June 1821 with details of the spread of 'Book Societies, and Literary Institutions' across Britain described circulating libraries as appealing to 'sickly or perverted appetites' though also useful in having extended 'the influence of sentiment and sensibility'. 'Facts relative to the State of Reading Societies and Literary Institutions in the United Kingdom', *Monthly Magazine*, 5.354 (June 1821), p.398. The 'Traveller' estimated there were 'at least' 1,500 circulating libraries active, with about 70 subscribers on average, supplying at least 100,000 individuals on a regular basis, 'and another 100,000 occasionally.'
[117] Leighton MS 16, Minutes, 1734-1822, 3 May 1796.

encouraged amongst the members of the Bristol Library by its newly elected vice-president in the 1830s.[118] Non-members occasionally entered the library space. It was not uncommon for a courier or servant to collect books on behalf of a borrower. At the Leighton Library, members wrote requests for books on small scraps of paper which were then delivered to the librarian by a servant who would collect the books on their behalf.[119] At the Bristol Library, Peter Baillie sometimes used his servant, John Creed, to collect his books. In these instances, Creed's name, alongside Baillie's, was also entered into the borrowing register.[120] These circumstances clearly produced a degree of friction within the library. Bristol's librarian, Thomas Johnes (d. 1826), was said to have treated the admittance of any non-subscriber into the library as an 'impertinent intrusion' and in 1810, the general meeting empowered the committee 'to place sufficient Enclosure' over the bookcases in order to prevent those 'sent by Subscribers for their Books, from having indiscriminate access'.[121] Similar tensions were clearly present at the Liverpool Library where, in October 1806, it was ruled that servants or non-subscribers were only allowed entry into the library 'by the back passage only' and their names had to be written on a list by the subscriber before they would be delivered any books.[122] Such pressures once again reminds us that these were private societies.

St Clair notes that other regulations, such as library fines, acted as part of 'an array of instruments' designed to control the exclusivity of the library space.[123] In contrast, Allan views fines as a lucrative source of revenue for subscription libraries.[124] However, an examination of

[118] 'Bristol Library', *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal*, 24 March 1832.
[119] USA, Leighton MS 28, Leighton Library, Book requests, letters and scraps taken from Leighton MS 27.
[120] BCL, B7473, Bristol Library Society, Borrowing register, fol. 21, July 1803-March 1804, p.129.
[121] John Latimer, *The Annals of Bristol in the Eighteenth Century* (Bristol, 1893), p.403, quoted in Skjönsberg and Towsey, 'Introduction', in *Bristol Minute Book*, p.xlvi; BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 19 March 1810. The Leighton Library did similarly in 1841 when it became a newspaper reading room. USA, Leighton MS 17, Leighton Library, Minutes, 11 December 1840 onwards, 7 May 1841.
[122] Only 'Subscribers, their Wives, & their children' were allowed entry into the library through the 'Vestibule' door. LRO, 027 LYC/2/5, Records of the Liverpool Library, Lyceum, Suggestions or proposals book, 1804-08, p.102.
[123] St Clair, *Reading Nation*, p.259.
[124] Allan, *Nation of Readers*, p.94.

library catalogues alone, which list the potential fines for borrowers, as opposed to administrative records, which record their actual implementation, exaggerates the application and significance of these fines. In fact, fines were seldom ever enforced. In almost nine decades of records for the Leighton Library, there is only one recorded instance of a fine ever being levied. The unfortunate borrower, Michael Gilfillan (1747-1816), Burgher minister of Dunblane, paid a fine of two shillings for having kept three volumes longer than allowed.[125] This was far from a lucrative form of income for the library and represented only 0.3 percent of its annual credit for that financial year.[126] At both the Leighton and Bristol libraries, the librarian had a great deal of autonomy to decide whether and when to levy fines. In 1797, at the Leighton, William Murdoch of Gartincaber (1757-1805) borrowed both John Moore's *View of Society and Manners in France* (1780) and the *New Annual Register* for 1791 longer than the allotted time but was not fined having successfully pleaded to the librarian of 'long Distress in his Family'.[127] Moreover, this was not a situation unique to smaller subscription libraries. For example, at Bristol, over the span of eight decades between 1790 and 1870, fines were only levied in six years, five of which were 1816 to 1820.[128] This is unlikely to be because all books were returned to the library within their allotted time, but rather that the rules regarding the imposition of fines was rarely implemented. Indeed, the sudden spate of fines levied between

[125] *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Leighton Library: Register Ledger 1, page 137 (image and text view),", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/library/leighton/registers/15/102809/image-and-text>, [accessed 31/03/24]. As well as being noted in the borrowing register, Gilfillan's payment is recorded in the library's accounts. See Leighton MS 16, Minutes, 1734-1822, 11 September 1804. According to the 1793 catalogue, any member was liable to be fined one shilling for keeping a book longer than two months, rising to two shillings for three months and four shillings for four months. *A Catalogue of the Leightonian Library, Dunblane* (Edinburgh, 1793), p.iii. Although no date of return for Gilfillan's borrowings is provided, it is probable that he kept both books out for just longer than two months allowed, paying one shilling per book.

[126] The library's total credit for this financial period (September 1803 to September 1804) was thirty-two pounds, ten shillings and two pence. Leighton MS 16, Minutes, 1734-1822, 11 September 1804.

[127] *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Leighton Library: Register Ledger 1, page 103 (image and text view),", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/library/leighton/registers/15/102710/image-and-text>, [accessed 12/06/24].

[128] Fines are recorded as a source of income in the Library Society's cash book. BA, LS/F/1, Cash book.

1816 and 1820 owes itself partly to the appointment of a new librarian in John Peace (1785-1861) in 1815, but primarily to a resolution passed at the general meeting in 1816 calling for the rule concerning fines on overdue books to be put into effect.[129] Even then, the implementation of this rule was limited in that it applied principally 'with regard to New Publications, during two years after they shall be brought into the Library'.[130] This resolution was reiterated, but also possibly relaxed, at another general meeting two years later.[131] The librarian was to inform the member that their library book was overdue by post. A fine would then be levied the following day and could be paid along with the annual subscription. This public clarification of the rules may have been in response to the refusal of one library member, Isaac Dighton, to pay his fine in October 1817.[132] In any respect, the librarian had always pursued overdue books by post and, in an age in which postage was paid by the recipient, this may have acted as its own deterrent of sorts. Samuel Taylor Coleridge complained at having to pay five shillings to receive letters from the Bristol sub-librarian, George Symes Catcott (1729-1802), pursuing unreturned books.[133]

Unlike the Leighton Library, which outlined the length of time a book might be borrowed in its printed catalogue, at the Bristol Library borrowing length was determined entirely by the librarian who fixed a ticket on the inside cover of every book and wrote in how long it might be kept for and the fine due should this time be exceeded.[134] This may explain why fines were

[129] BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 20 March 1815, 18 March 1816.
[130] BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 18 March 1816.
[131] BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 25 March 1818.
[132] BA, LS/M/4, Committee minute book, 1807-23, 21 October 1817.
[133] Joseph Cottle, *Early Recollections; Chiefly Relating to the Late Samuel Taylor Coleridge, During his Long Residence in Bristol.* (1837; repr. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp.211-12.
[134] *Catalogue of the Leightonian Library* (1793), pp.iii-iv. Many of these tickets still survive in books in Bristol Central Library today. See, for example, John Adolphus, *The History of France, from the Year 1790 to the Peace Concluded at Amiens in 1802*, 2 vols. (London, 1803), I, BCL, 944.04 10304; Augustin Barruel, *Memoirs, Illustrating the History of Jacobinism*., 2nd ed., trans. Robert Clifford, 4 vols. (London, 1798), I, BCL, 944.04 8146; John Bowles, *Reflections on The Political and Moral State of Society, at the Close of the Eighteenth Century.* (London, 1800), BCL, 940.25 20534; A.F. Bertrand De Moleville, *Annals of the French Revolution; or, A Chronological Account of its Principal Events*, trans. R.C. Dallas, 4 vols. (London, 1800), I, BCL, 944.04 10307;

so rarely implemented at Bristol, yet the same was true for other comparable subscription libraries.[135] This was not for a want of pressure from the library's subscribers. In 1803, the Bristol Library's committee called for the rule concerning fines to be 'regularly executed', seemingly to no effect.[136] In 1806, the committee again called for 'the 12th Rule, subjecting to a fine those who keep Books beyond a limited time, be uniformly put into force'.[137] Nevertheless, as the published catalogue acknowledged some eight years later, the system of fines 'has seldom been enforced'.[138] Indeed, it is significant that it was after a resolution was passed at the general meeting in 1816, that fines were finally implemented.[139] Evidently, although the committee represented the library's chief decision-making body, a resolution passed at the general meeting, to which all members were invited, carried more weight than the same one passed by the committee.

When fines were levied, they were done so without fear or favour to the social hierarchies within the library. Those fined at Bristol in 1816 included the esteemed Church of England clergyman Francis Randolph (1752-1831) and the poet, theologian and Whig-supporting Sir

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Elizabeth Hamilton, *Memoirs of the Life of Agrippina, the Wife of Germanicus*., 3 vols. (Bath, 1804), I, BCL, 923.137 4044; James Johnson, *Change of Air, or The Pursuit of Health* (London, 1831), BCL, 914.1158; John Moore, *A Journal During a Residence in France*, 2 vols. (London, 1793), I, BCL, 944.041 10364; John Moore, *A View of the Causes and Progress of the French Revolution.*, 2 vols. (London, 1795), I, BCL, 944.04 10330; Charles Rollin, *The Ancient History of the Egyptians, Carthaginians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Medes and Persians, Macedonians, and Grecians.*, 11th ed., 8 vols. (London, 1808), IV, V, VII, VIII, BCL, 930 8532; Anna Seward, *Letters of Anna Seward*, 6 vols. (Edinburgh, 1811), I, BCL, 928.21 21338; David Sutherland, *A Tour up the Straits, from Gibraltar to Constantinople* (London, 1790), BCL, 914.1175. The rules concerning borrowing from the Bristol Library had changed little from when they were first drawn up in January 1773. Skjönsberg and Towsey, 'Introduction', in *Bristol Minute Book*, p.xxxi.

[135] The potential fines that could be levied at the Charleston Library Society were even more stringent, regulating not just the borrowing of books but also a member's attendance at the general meeting. Yet they were also hardly ever enforced. It was difficult enough for the librarian to keep track of those who did not pay the annual subscription. I am grateful to Deborah Fenn for sharing this with me. On the Charleston Library Society, see Raven, *London Booksellers and American Customers*, p.57.

[136] BA, LS/M/3, Committee minute book, 1789-1807, 13 September 1803.

[137] BA, LS/M/3, Committee minute book, 1789-1807, 17 June 1806.

[138] *A Catalogue of the Books belonging to the Bristol Library Society: To which are Prefixed an Account of the Institution of the Society, and its Rules & Regulations.* (Bristol, 1814), p.xvi.

[139] BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 18 March 1816.

Charles Abraham Elton (1778-1853).[140] Elton was also an elected committee member and those in administrative positions were not immune from such levies. At Bristol, this included the Library Society's own treasurer, Thomas Jarman, fined for an overdue book in 1816, raising the prospect of Jarman pursuing himself for unpaid fines.[141] Even those at the administrative head of the library could be liable, with the current and future vice-presidents, Samuel Seyer (1757-1831) and John Eden (1766-1840), also fined the same year.[142] This was not a phenomenon unique to British subscription libraries. At Thomas Jefferson's local subscription library in Charlottesville, Virginia, a list of those fined between 1825 and 1826 included the library's secretary, treasurer, and librarian.[143] It is significant that even those individuals who were socially prestigious or administratively important to the running of the subscription library could find themselves subject to censure. This sense of equality may have come from the fact that all library positions, even the very head of the library, were elected and all members were subject to the same laws as agreed to collectively at an annual general meeting, and as outlined in printed library catalogues.

The Bristol Library's recognition that fines were 'seldom… enforced' in the 1814 catalogue shows that it was not afraid to acknowledge this fact.[144] Indeed, the chief purpose of fines was not necessarily to enforce the swift return of books, but more specifically to ensure that the

[140] G. Le G. Norgate, revised by Emma Major, 'Randolph, Francis (1752-1831)', *ODNB* (September 2004); R.K. Webb, 'Elton, Sir Charles Abraham, sixth baronet (1778-1853)', *ODNB* (January 2008). Fines for overdue books were recorded in the library's borrowing registers. BCL, B7488, Bristol Library Society, Borrowing register, fol. 36, April 1816-December 1816, pp.39, 54.
[141] BCL, B7488, Borrowing register, 1816, p.14.
[142] Indeed, Seyer was fined on multiple occasions for the late return of books. BCL, B7488, Borrowing register, 1816, pp.7, 16, 69.
[143] Albemarle Charlottesville Historical Society, MS 348, Jefferson-Madison Regional Library, Historical Documents, list of library fines, 1825-26. Of these individuals, the library's treasurer, William Wertenbaker (1797-1882), would eventually go on to be appointed the University of Virginia's second librarian in January 1826. Harry Clemons, *The University of Virginia Library, 1825-1950: Story of a Jeffersonian Foundation* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Library, 1954), pp.93-95; O'Shaughnessy, *Illimitable Freedom of the Human Mind*, p.129. As university librarian, Wertenbaker was himself responsible for levying fines for overdue books, including against a young student, Edgar Allan Poe (1809-49). University of Virginia Library, Special Collections, MSS 11911, William Wertenbaker, 'List of Library Fines Imposed Since the 16th Day of June 1826'.
[144] *Catalogue of the… Bristol Library Society* (1814), p.xvi.

newest publications circulated amongst more readers.[145] This was a common complaint made by members, which the Library Society was consistently unable to deal with.[146] Invariably, if the fine, the tamest form of censure, was hardly ever enacted, its strictest form, the expulsion of a library member, was never even considered, despite it being a sanction at both Leighton and Bristol. At the Leighton, a member faced expulsion from the library were they to keep a book for four months, ignore the librarian's summons and refuse to return it.[147] Yet no one ever came close to receiving such a sanction. No similar rule was codified at the Bristol Library, although an individual could face the loss of their membership by neglecting to pay their annual membership, subletting a book or owning either a 'Lodging-house, Inn, Tavern, [or] Coffee-house'.[148] The latter regulation was not, as some have suggested, to exclude a certain social clientele from the library, but an attempt to guard against the sub-letting of library books.[149] This was made explicit in the 1814 library catalogue when the rule was extended to include 'no person keeping a Circulating Library or letting out books for hire shall be eligible as a member of this Society.'[150] Even this regulation was not always stringently enforced. In 1786, John Dupont was allowed to keep his library membership despite owning a 'Lodging and Boarding

[145] This had been the original impetus for the resolution at the general meeting in 1816 which had led to the implementation of fines. BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 18 March 1816. To this end, newly purchased publications had to remain within the library for one month before they were permitted to be borrowed. *Catalogue of the… Bristol Library Society* (1814), p.xvii.
[146] *Catalogue of the… Bristol Library Society* (1814), p.xvi; 'Bristol Library', *Bristol Mirror*, 24 March 1827.
[147] *Catalogue of the Leightonian Library* (1793), pp.iii-iv.
[148] *Catalogue of the… Bristol Library Society* (1814), pp.vii-x.
[149] Charles Tovey, *The Bristol City Library: Its Founders and Benefactors; Its Present Position in Connection with the Library Society; and Its Future Prospects; To which is Added, Plans and Estimates for Converting the Building into a Free Library; With a Catalogue of the Books Belonging to the Citizens*. (London, 1853), p.32; Edward Edwards, *Memoirs of Libraries: Including a Handbook of Library Economy*., 2 vols. (1859; repr. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), II, pp.744-45; Skjönsberg and Towsey, 'Introduction', in *Bristol Minute Book*, p.xxiv. The Orkney Library had a similar rule to guard against the subletting of books. *Institution, Rules & Catalogue of the Orkney Library* (Edinburgh, 1816).
[150] *Catalogue of the… Bristol Library Society* (1814), pp.vii-viii.

House' at No.1 Albemarle Row because he had paid his subscription money before the new regulation had come into effect.[151]

There was therefore a significant gap between the codification of these regulations in printed catalogues and their real implementation. It was lamented by the committee of the Liverpool Library that its members 'do not only use the books carelessly, but even wantonly deface them, by interpolations and impertinent remarks.'[152] Yet despite the library's 1814 catalogue clearly outlining the potential sanctions faced by the culprit, it was regretted 'that no effectual plan has hitherto been adopted, to punish those who thus mischievously injure this valuable repository.'[153] Whilst over-estimating the actual implementation of such fines, library historians have, arguably, also misunderstood their significance. The value of the communal collection of books required rules such as these to be codified in case they were ever needed. In actuality, the high thresholds of entry into the subscription library allowed for a laxer control of its internal dynamics. On a practical level, administering fines was an additional task for a librarian who already had a wide array of responsibilities.[154] There were also added legal and social complexities, firstly, in regulating too tightly access to books that were collectively owned and, secondly, a desire not to alienate paying subscribers. In maintaining the social hegemony of the membership, it was the terms of entry to the subscription library which were more important, ensuring that only those socially or financially connected to an urban elite could join. If one reached these requirements, it made little financial and, more importantly, social sense to place onerous burdens on members. Library fines were neither a money-making

[151] Skjönsberg and Towsey, 'Introduction', in *Bristol Minute Book*, p.xxiv. See also, *Bristol Minute Book*, eds. Skjönsberg and Towsey, pp.15-17, 126-28.
[152] *Catalogue of the Liverpool Library, at the Lyceum, Bold-Street*. (Liverpool, 1814), p.47.
[153] *Catalogue of the Liverpool Library* (1814), p.47. Those caught defacing a book risked having to pay the full value of it. *Catalogue of the Liverpool Library* (1814), p.18.
[154] For the duties of the Bristol librarian, see rule three of article nine in the 1814 catalogue. *Catalogue of the… Bristol Library Society* (1814), p.xvi.

exercise, nor were they necessarily meant to socially exclude individuals. Yet it was a tentative attempt to regulate the actions of library members.[155]

This 'laissez-faire' approach to the internal regulation of the library space allowed for a greater degree of sociable cohesiveness. Indeed, this aided one of the subscription library's central purposes: to provide a venue for sociability in which social politics could occur. For many it was this, rather than a desire to borrow books, which led them to subscribe as members. In Bristol, this not only included an aristocratic elite, but also a merchant elite, some with extraordinary levels of wealth accrued from slave plantations in the Caribbean and trade in slave-produced goods. Three generations of the Miles family were library members, including Philip John Miles (1774-1845) who, at the time of his death, had a wealth exceeding £1,000,000.[156] The social significance of the subscription library explains why those who had the private wealth to afford their own private libraries continued to fraternise within the library space. As Peter Clark and numerous scholars have observed, sociability was a fundamental element and driver of voluntary association.[157] Indeed, it was the Addisonian conception of sociability that provided an ideological justification for the subscription library and associational culture in general. This was a largely functionalist argument, advanced by Steele and Addison in the pages of *The Tatler* (1709-11) and *The Spectator* (1711-12), that clubs and

[155] Tentative because, as we have seen, they were rarely enforced.

[156] 'Philip John Miles', *Legacies of British Slavery*, <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/19118>, [accessed 04/06/24]; Stephen Farrell and David R. Fisher, 'Miles, Philip John (1774-1845), of Leigh Court, Abbots Leigh, Som.', *HoP*, <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1820-1832/member/miles-philip-1774-1845>, [accessed 04/06/24]. Other members of the Miles family who also subscribed to the Bristol Library included Philip John's father, William Miles (1728-1803), and son, also William Miles (1797-1878). 'William Miles', *Legacies of British Slavery*, <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/2146639021>, [accessed 14/06/24]; 'Sir William Miles', *Legacies of British Slavery*, <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/2146635208>, [accessed 14/06/24]; David R. Fisher, 'Miles, William (1797-1878), of Leigh Court, Abbots Leigh, Som.', *HoP*, <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1820-1832/member/miles-william-1797-1878>, [accessed 14/06/24].

[157] Shields, *Civil Tongues*, pp.11-54; Borsay, *English Urban Renaissance*, pp.267-83; Clark, *British Clubs and Societies*, pp.180-91; Mee, *Conversable Worlds*, pp.1-33; Allan, 'Politeness, Sociability, and the "Little Platoon"', pp.34-41.

societies could function as agents of improvement and civility and provide a healing salve to a society wracked by the violence and civil strife of the seventeenth century.[158] This was also a period in which the very idea of civil society was being conceptualised by philosophers such as Adam Ferguson.[159] Library members could read Ferguson's work, particularly his *Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767), as well as Addison's periodical essays and put both into practice.[160] David Allan believes that it is library sociability, and the ideological justification for it, that explains the emergence and success of the subscription library as a form of associational organisation.[161] However, this approach has been criticised, most stridently by Keith Manley who argues that 'the academic theory of library sociability is bogus, unsupported by facts, certainly in a British context'.[162] Manley believes that sociability was often an addendum to the core aim of these libraries, the supply of reading material to their members: 'the act of people coming together in an institutional context is irrelevant and unnecessary to the basic activity of reading.'[163] Yet, as this thesis argues, the institutional context was not 'irrelevant' for the process of reading and was central to the ideological conceptions of the subscription library and its political significance.[164] To Manley, library historians have over-

[158] Borsay, *English Urban Renaissance*, pp.263-67; Clark, *British Clubs and Societies*, p.178; Mee, *Conversable Worlds*, pp.39-57; Allan, 'Politeness and the Politics of Culture', p.164. On the context, authorship, printing, and readers of both *The Tatler* and *The Spectator*, see respectively Donald F. Bond, 'Introduction', in *The Tatler*, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), pp.ix-xxix; Donald F. Bond, 'Introduction', in *The Spectator*, 5 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), pp.xiii-cix.

[159] Robert J. Morris, 'Introduction', in *Civil Society, Associations, and Urban Places: Class, Nation, and Culture in Nineteenth-century Europe*, eds. Graeme Morton, Robert J. Morris and Boudien De Vries (London: Routledge, 2016), p.2; Craig Smith, *Adam Ferguson and the Idea of Civil Society: Moral Science in the Scottish Enlightenment* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019).

[160] Ferguson's *Essay* was borrowed on seventeen occasions from the Bristol Library between 1773 and 1798 and on twelve occasions from the Leighton Library between 1782 and 1830. 'Borrowing Record for *An Essay On History Of Civil Society* by Ferguson, Adam (b. 1723 – d. 1816), ECLO; *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Advanced search for 'Book Holding: An essay on the history of civil society.',", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/search/p-1/0/0/advanced/bhids|27669>, [accessed 17/09/24].

[161] Allan, 'Politeness and the Politics of Culture', p.159.

[162] Keith A. Manley, 'Libraries for Sociability, or Libraries of Reality? The Purpose of British Subscription and Circulating Libraries', *Library & Information History*, 36.1 (2020), p.2. Although not as critical as Manley, Christy Lindsay has also suggested that the prominence of 'polite sociability' in the stated purposes of reading associations has been overstressed. Lindsay, 'Reading Associations', pp.115-16.

[163] Manley, 'Libraries for Sociability', p.3.

[164] For an example of this, see the cases of Joseph Hunter (1783-1861) and Peter Baillie in Chapter Three.

interpreted or selectively focused on the few exceptional examples of library sociability, such as the famous venison feast of the Kendal Book Club: 'Ninety-nine per cent of libraries did not hold such meaty repasts, and only in Kendal were venison at risk.'[165] This is an obvious exaggeration and formal dinners organised by libraries were not as rare as Manley suggests. The Lewes Library Society, in Sussex, held an annual dinner, which in 1804, following the example of the London Literary Fund Society, included 'the recital of a very appropriate poem'.[166] The New York Society Library held a lavish dinner after the election of the library's committee, which in 1799 included fifty oysters, two pounds of beef, two bottles of wine, three bottles of porter and one pint of brandy.[167] Both the Charleston Library Society and the Wigtown Library held similar events following their annual meetings, whilst formal dinners were also held by the Dalkeith Subscription Library, the Luddenden Library and, as we have seen, members of the Bristol Library.[168]

[165] Manley, 'Libraries for Sociability', pp.1-5, for quote see p.5. Some confusion exists as to the nature of the Kendal Book Club. Both David Allan and Keith Manley refer to it as a library in disguise, but it was actually, as the name suggests, a book club and should not be confused with the Kendal Library, a subscription library founded in the town in 1794. David Allan, '"The Advantages of Literature": The Subscription Library in Georgian Britain', in *The Meaning of the Library: A Cultural History*, ed. Alice Crawford (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), p.116; Kendal Archive Centre, WD/K/192, Kendal Library, Minute book, 5 November 1794-28 December 1824. The Kendal Book Club auctioned of its collection of books every four years. Ina Ferris, *Book-Men, Book Clubs, and the Romantic Literary Sphere* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p.116. In contrast, in 1814, the Kendal Library could boast that it had sold no books off since its establishment two decades earlier. *Westmorland Advertiser and Kendal Chronicle*, 31 December 1814. For Kendal's reading institutions, see P.J. Mannex, *History, Topography, and Directory, of Westmorland; and Lonsdale North of the Sands, in Lancashire; Together with a Descriptive and Geological View of the Whole of the Lake District; Illustrated by a Map of each County* (Beverley, 1849), p.296; Cornelius Nicholson, *The Annals of Kendal: Being a Historical and Descriptive Account of Kendal and the Neighbourhood: with Biographical Sketches of Many Eminent Personages Connected with the Town*, 2nd ed. (London, 1861), p.278; Roger Bingham, *Kendal: A Social History* (Milnthorpe: Cicerone Press, 1996), p.414; Ferris, *Book-Men*, p.123.

[166] *Hampshire Telegraph*, 13 February 1804.

[167] New York Society Library, ac1.r6.s2.f2, New York Society Library Institutional Archives, Election and annual meeting 1793-2009, Election reports and expenses, Election meeting expenses 1799.

[168] Raven, *London Booksellers and American Customers*, pp.57-58; Mark Towsey, 'First Steps in Associational Reading: Book Use and Sociability at the Wigtown Subscription Library 1795–99', *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, 103.4 (2009), p.480; Paul Kaufman, 'The Community Library: A Chapter in English Social History', *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, 57.7 (1967), p.34; Lindsay, 'Reading Associations', p.234; *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal*, 23 April 1814.

The Kendal Book Club held two annual dinners a year, the first, the Venison Feast held every September at the White Lion Inn, later the Moot-Hall and the White Hall, the town's chief civic buildings. This was evidently a grand occasion which the county's political and aristocratic elite regularly appeared at. The meal's venison was supplied by the Earl of Lonsdale, who attended as the local lord lieutenant. He was joined by the county's parliamentary representatives, including Sir Michael le Fleming (1748-1806) in 1779 and George Howard, Viscount Morpeth (1773-1848) in 1811.[169] The evening's festivities were concluded with an evening ball, held in 1811 at the King's Arms 'where the company tript it on the light fantastic toe until an early hour.'[170] As well as the library, dinners, balls and formal dances could represent forms of extra-parliamentary politics, providing spaces for political dialogue and opportunities to build party cohesion.[171] The Kendal Book Club's second annual dinner was the 'Epiphany Dinner' and open only to club members.[172] Just as at the Bristol Library's dinner, here members met to dine, sing 'God Save the King', 'Rule Britannia', and 'Auld Lang Syne', as well as toast prominent national and local figures, including the King, the Lord Lieutenant and 'Mr. Holme, the Librarian'.[173] Whilst it was far more common for book clubs to host formal dinners, many of which held their meetings in social venues such as the tavern or inn, sociability was not confined to the book club.[174]

[169] Kendal Archive Centre, WDRY/1/10/5/7, Letters to Sir Michael le Fleming, 1779-82, Invitation to 'The Annual Venison Feast of the Gentlemen of the Book-Club', 1779; *Westmoreland Advertiser and Kendal Chronicle*, 21 September 1811; Mannex, *History, Topography, and Directory, of Westmorland*, p.296.
[170] *Westmoreland Advertiser and Kendal Chronicle*, 21 September 1811. As Christy Lindsay has observed, these occasions were regularly reported in the newspaper press. Lindsay, 'Reading Associations', p.122.
[171] Hillary Burlock, 'Party Politics: Dancing in London's West End, 1780-9', *The London Journal*, 47.2 (July 2022), pp.181-97.
[172] Nicholson, *Annals of Kendal*, p.278.
[173] *Westmorland Gazette*, 17 January 1824. I am grateful to Helen Corlett for this reference.
[174] Allan, *Nation of Readers*, pp.52-54; Christy Ford, '"An Honour to the Place": Reading Associations and Improvement', *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 38.4 (2015), pp.557-58; Lindsay, 'Reading Associations', pp.122-23; Manley, 'Libraries for Sociability', pp.6-7.

Manley is correct to note that such dinners often came after the formal business of the library was concluded and nearly always took place away from the library space.[175] Yet his extremely rigid definition of 'library sociability' excludes nearly all activities associated with being a library member and ignores the significance of such actions. Even if the members of the Bristol Library Society and the Kendal Book Club dined away from the reading space, their very purpose in meeting was to celebrate their shared membership of the reading association. Moreover, members valued the significance of this aspect of library sociability and understood that it was a political, although not a partisan, act. Mocked by the *Leeds Independent* as the 'Venison Book Club', the *Westmorland Gazette* defended such events as opportunities to bring together 'men of opposite parties and opinions… at the best of all places for Englishmen, the Dinner table.'[176] The newspaper recognised that such dinners represented the ideology of polite sociability in practice with its description that they helped 'to soften and smooth away that party asperity which the best of us are but too apt to cherish', a direct allusion to the Earl of Shaftesbury's characterisation of politeness and the freedom of association in his *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (1711).[177] Such a space was vital for a town like Kendal, located within the open and regularly contested constituency of Westmoreland:

> Social meetings like those which the Kendal Book Club produces, convinces us by experience, that our neighbours are not destitute of the kindly feelings of human nature, notwithstanding their being *guilty* of being *Yellows* or *Blues*. If we had more of that social intercourse in Kendal, which being men of various religious and political

[175] Manley, 'Libraries for Sociability', pp.2-3.
[176] *Westmoreland Gazette*, 17 January 1824.
[177] 'All Politeness is owing to Liberty. We polish one another, and rub off our Corners and rough Sides by a sort of amicable Collision.' Anthony Ashley-Cooper, Earl of Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, 3 vols. (London, 1711), I, pp.64-65, quoted in Allan, 'Politeness and the Politics of Culture', p.167.

> principles into closer contact, the shrine of Christian charity would be oftener visited than it is.[178]

These members met because of their shared association through the library or book club and the opportunities it imparted, in addition to the supply of reading material, for facilitating personal interactions between individuals of various social and political persuasions.[179]

Moreover, despite Manley's scepticism, we know that the library itself could be a space for meeting and exchange on an informal basis. Such occasions are invariably never recorded in the library's institutional records, but we should assume that those instances which are recorded, in diaries and private correspondence, are, to paraphrase William St Clair, a sample of the far larger total acts of library sociability which were fleetingly felt and only rarely recorded in writing.[180] Moreover, both institutional and printed library records are infuriatingly silent as to what the internal library space was actually like to read in. We know that library societies wished to represent themselves as the pinnacle of polite learning, but whether this translated itself into the library being a silent reading space is another matter.[181] Though rules regarding borrowing were tightly managed, there were often very few regulations in a library catalogue which governed the conduct of members inside the library. In some libraries, access to the presses was controlled principally because the library did not own its own premises.[182] The Liverpool Library lacked a permanent residence until 1786, but even after this date members had to apply to the librarian to have a book delivered to them.[183] In comparison, at the Leighton and Bristol libraries controls were far laxer. As a contemporary engraving of the

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[178] *Westmoreland Gazette*, 17 January 1824. Emphasis in original. For elections in Kendal and Westmorland in the early nineteenth century, see William Anthony Hay, *The Whig Revival, 1808-1830* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp.66-88.
[179] Allan, *Nation of Readers*, p.107.
[180] St Clair, *Reading Nation*, p.5.
[181] Lindsay, 'Reading Associations', pp.122-31.
[182] The Kelso Library lacked a room of its own until 1760, with members required to make written requests directly to the librarian. Manley, *Books, Borrowers, and Shareholders*, p.31.
[183] *Catalogue of the Liverpool Library* (1814), p.16. See also Manley, 'Libraries for Sociability', p.4.

Bristol Library's interior shows, members had free rein to browse and choose from the bookshelves, with desks and chairs in the library room allowing members to sit and read inside.[184]

BCL, Braikenridge Collection, XVIII, 609, Interior view of the Bristol Library Society, engraving by James Sargent Storer, c.1820, for John Peace, librarian.[185]

[184] Ten of the twelve 'turkie leather chairs' bought at the Leighton Library's founding are still present in the library today and would have been used by eighteenth-century readers. Gordon Willis, 'The Leighton Library, Dunblane: Its History and Contents', *The Bibliotheck*, 10.6 (1981), p.144. A nephew of Bristol's sub-librarian recorded his practice of ushering readers out of the library room and closing up: 'it was his custom to give warning to the readers at the Library, that it wanted but half of an Hour to "Nine of the Clock"… then "but ten minutes", "but five" and then, watch in hand he entered the inner room with "Come Gentlemen, the time is up and I want to go" and then he began… to put out the candles.' Henry Smith, MS. additions in John Whitson, *A Pious Meditation, Composed in the Seventeenth Century, by John Whitson, Alderman of the City of Bristol; to Which is Subjoined some Account of the Author, by the Late Mr. George Symes Catcott*, ed. John Eden (Bristol, 1829), BCL, B5258.

[185] Also printed in John Peace, *Axiomata Pacis.* (London, 1862), after p.xiv. This is the only known depiction of the interior of a subscription library in this period. The three Windsor Chairs pictured are still in Bristol Central Library today. Robert F. Parrott and John Boram, 'Three Eighteenth-Century Windsor Chairs Possibly Made in Bristol', *Regional Furniture Society*, 28 (2014), pp.97-105.

The library was a space to meet and converse, although we know that some maintained a far stricter control on their internal dynamics. For example, the Kilkenny Library Society (established 1811) instituted a rule of silence in the library rooms, one that was repeatedly broken and reimposed by the committee.[186] Reading within the library was of far greater importance here because it was not until 1820 that books were allowed to circulate beyond the premises. There was no comparable rule at either the Leighton or the Bristol Library. The geographic centrality of both libraries within their respective communities allowed members to come and go from the library space, and we know that the library's interior, whether the main reading room or its foyer, served as a space in which members met their neighbours, friends and acquaintances.[187] Moreover, the natural overlap of library involvement with other kinds of associational membership ensured that existing occupational or fraternal networks would have carried over into the library space.[188] The Leighton's trustees, consisting of church ministers, parish elders, heritors, and clerks, already met together at kirk, presbytery, and synod meetings. Indeed, on many occasions church and library business occurred on the same day.[189] The same was true elsewhere at subscription libraries less closely connected to the Church,

[186] Manley, *Irish Reading Societies*, pp.107-09.

[187] Joseph Cottle (1770-1853) recorded meeting the Rev. Joseph Porter in the Bristol Library in 1817. Porter had lent Samuel Taylor Coleridge fifty pounds who now refused to repay the money. He recounted this tale to Cottle, whom he met in the Bristol Library. BA, MS B20877, no.16, Joseph Cottle to Robert Southey, 22 March 1817, quoted in Lynda Pratt, 'The "Sad Habits" of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Unpublished Letters from Joseph Cottle to Robert Southey, 1813-1817', *The Review of English Studies*, 55.218 (February 2004), pp.87-88. A letter writer to *The Examiner* in April 1817 claimed to have seen Coleridge mercilessly ridicule Robert Southey in a 'public library' in Bristol, likely to have been the Library Society. Vindex, 'Mr. Coleridge and Mr. Southey', *The Examiner*, 484 (April 1817), p.211.

[188] As discussed further in Chapter Three.

[189] Meetings of the Presbytery of Dunblane and of the trustees of the Leighton Library were both held on 7 September 1802 and 7 September 1803 in Dunblane, with Robert Stirling, the minister of Dunblane, and Patrick Murray, the minister of Kilmadock, attending all four meetings. Christopher Tait (1744-1812), the minister of Kincardine-in-Menteith, also attended both the presbytery and the library meeting in 1803. Stirling Council Archives, CH2/723/13, Dunblane presbytery, Minutes (1793-1804), 7 September 1802, 7 September 1803; Leighton MS 16, Minutes, 1734-1822, 7 September 1802, 7 September 1803. On the same day as he attended both the presbytery and trustee meeting in 1803, Patrick Murray borrowed a number of books from the library, including all six volumes of Robert Dodsley's *A Collection of Poems* (London 1775), George Bell's *Treatise on the Cow-Pox* (Edinburgh, 1802) and George Hill's *Theological Institutes* (Edinburgh, 1803). *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Leighton Library: Register Ledger 1, page 123 (image and text view),", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/library/leighton/registers/15/102770/image-and-text>, [accessed 01/08/24].

such as the Kelso Library where stock selection meetings were held on the same day as meetings of the local presbytery.[190] Even if what we consider to be the traditional elements of sociability, such as dinners, drinks or games, likely never occurred within, the library was a semi-public meeting space which allowed people to meet and mix. It was the shared association through the subscription library that could bring members together to feast and drink. As they themselves recognised, this could serve a political purpose by either dampening partisan differences or maintaining them.

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With a membership consisting of both an aristocratic and middling urban elite, the subscription library, like other associational models, provided a space in which interactions between members of different social strata could be mediated and regulated. This was an implicit political element of the subscription library, and it is the one that has received the most attention from library scholars.[191] Subscription libraries reflected and reinforced the religious and political hierarchies of the contexts they were situated within. Part of the prestige of the subscription library came in their monopolisation of the cultural significance that came with being *the* lending institution of the town. The acquisition of a geographical moniker, with the addition of either 'public' or 'society', coupled with the stated cultural goal of enlightening the community, even though a wider community was very often barred from the subscription library, allowed such libraries, to at least appear from the exterior, as inclusive.[192] A public purpose of this kind very often brought a diverse early membership, as occurred at the Bristol Library where, in its earliest years, religiously Dissenting Whigs shared the library space with

[190] Manley, *Books, Borrowers, and Shareholders*, p.31.
[191] See, for example, Raven, 'Libraries for Sociability', pp.241-63; Allan, Politeness and the Politics of Culture', pp.159-69.
[192] Innes, 'Libraries in Context', p.297.

Church of England Tories.[193] At larger institutions, it was far more difficult for any one group or political opinion to monopolise the library space. Moreover, changes in the political complexion of a library's membership, typically from Dissenting Whig to Anglican Tory, occurred over decades and were arguably the result of changes in the politics of the local community rather than specifically within the subscription library.[194] Other reading associations were better suited to fulfil a purely political or partisan purpose, with the book club capable of serving as a far more malleable political lending society.[195] A smaller membership could allow for a more politically homogenised membership. The Birmingham Book Club was well known for its political leanings. Active since 1745, by 1775 the club consisted of twenty-four members and held its regular meetings in a tavern well-known as a 'rendezvous of liberals and radicals'.[196] By the 1790s, its notoriety had led it to be tarred as the 'Jacobin Club'. The boundaries between a book club and a political society could very often be blended together, and it was not uncommon for some political societies to keep a small stock of literature to be circulated amongst their members.[197]

The subscription library was a political arena in which local politics was writ small. Despite operating within a political climate that was deeply hostile towards political societies, the subscription library retained both the constitutionalist and democratic elements of its administration. Library associations operated within the same associational context as

[193] Skjönsberg and Towsey, 'Introduction', in *Bristol Minute Book*, pp.xix-xx. For more on the membership of the Bristol and Leighton libraries, see below, Chapter One.
[194] See the case of libraries in Birmingham, Leeds and Sheffield. Parish, *Birmingham Library*, pp.16-31; Bowd, 'Useful Knowledge or Polite Learning?', pp.190-92; Keith A. Manley, 'Jeremy Bentham has been Banned: Contention and Censorship in Private Subscription Libraries before 1825', *Library & Information History*, 29.3 (2013), p.176; Loveday Herridge and Sue Roe, 'Reading Sheffield: Sheffield Libraries and Book Clubs, 1771–1850', in *Before the Public Library*, pp.178-80. The same occurred at the Bristol Library Society, where changes in the committee's personnel mirrored similar changes in the membership of the city's Corporation. Harrison, *Crowds and History*, p.64; Skjönsberg and Towsey, 'Introduction', in *Bristol Minute Book*, pp.xix-xx.
[195] On book clubs, see above, pp.46-47.
[196] Paul Kaufman, 'English Book Clubs and Their Social Import', in *Libraries and Their Users: Collect Papers in Library History* (London: Library Association, 1969), pp.51-52.
[197] Manley, *Irish Reading Societies*, pp.31-38.

explicitly political societies and on the same spectrum which included, at its most extreme, the convention or the parliament.[198] Indeed, to eighteenth-century contemporaries, the term 'association' was typically connected with political clubs and extra-parliamentary pressure groups, whether the Protestant associations of the 1770s, the Society for Constitutional Information in the 1780s, or the London Corresponding Society, Friends of the People societies or loyalist associations of the 1790s.[199] In an age in which any degree of extra-parliamentary pressure could be viewed warily, participation in any kind of autonomous society was not value neutral, especially those whose membership included liberals, reformers, and religious dissenters.[200]

The formative period of subscription library growth (1780 to 1820) came during a period in which, in Britain, the right of association was subjected to heightened scrutiny and legislative control. A number of laws passed during the 1790s and the 1810s were enacted to contend with an upsurge in reformist activity and targeted both the circulation of cheap printed material and the ability to meet and associate together.[201] In 1799, the Suppression of Radical Societies Act outlawed a number of political societies by name, including the Societies of United

[198] T.M. Parssinen, 'Association, Convention and Anti-Parliament in British Radical Politics, 1771-1848', *English Historical Review*, 88.348 (1973), pp.504-33.
[199] See variously, Eugene Charlton Black, *The Association: British Extraparliamentary Political Organization, 1769-1793* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), *passim*; Clark, *British Clubs and Societies*, pp.96, 99-100; Keisuke Masaki, 'Within the Bounds of Acceptability: Tory Associational Culture in Early-19th-Century Britain', *Parliamentary History*, 37.3 (October 2018), pp.389-414. On the London Corresponding Society specifically, see John Barrell, 'London and the London Corresponding Society', in *Romantic Metropolis: The Urban Scene of British Culture, 1780-1840*, eds. James Chandler and Kevin Gilmartin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp.85-112; James Epstein and David Karr, 'Everyday Life and Everyday Sedition: Situating Radical Identities', in *British Jacobin Politics, Desires, and Aftermaths: Seditious Hearts* (New York: Routledge, 2021), pp.54-85. On John Reeves and the Crown and Anchor associations, see D.E. Ginter, 'Loyalist Association Movement of 1792-3 and British Public Opinion', *The Historical Journal*, 9.2 (1966), pp.179-90; Michael Duffy, 'William Pitt and the Origins of the Association Movement of 1792', *The Historical Journal*, 39.4 (1996), pp.943-62; Mark Philp, 'Vulgar Conservatism 1792/3', in *Reforming Ideas in Britain: Politics and Language in the Shadow of the French Revolution, 1789-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp.40-70.
[200] Philp, 'Vulgar Conservatism', pp.66-69.
[201] Clive Emsley, 'An Aspect of Pitt's "Terror": Prosecutions for Sedition During the 1790s', *Social History*, 6 (1981), pp.155-84; Clive Emsley, 'Repression, "Terror" and the Rule of Law in England during the Decade of the French Revolution', *English Historical Review*, 100.397 (October 1985), pp.801-25; Katrina Navickas, *Protest and the Politics of Space and Place, 1789-1848* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), pp.51-81.

Englishmen, Scotsmen, Britons and Irishmen, the London Corresponding Society and its regional branches, as well as any other society which required its members to take an 'Oath or Engagement'.[202] Whilst these Acts placed serious restrictions on civil liberties, some historians have questioned the degree of 'terror' they introduced. In most instances, they empowered local loyalists to imperil the activities of radicals, rather than leading to successful trials or prosecutions.[203] None of this legislation expressly targeted any of the elements of the subscription library. The 1795 Seditious Meetings Act banned 'Lectures and Discourses on… supposed public Grievances, and Matters relating to the Laws, Constitution and Government', in addition to meetings of fifty persons or more, but only those which were held for the purpose of 'preparing any Petition, Complaint, Remonstrance, or Declaration' to the King or Parliament.[204] Moreover, many of the civic officials explicitly named as being able to call public meetings, such as county sheriffs, local justices, corporation or borough officials, mayors and aldermen, would likely have been subscription library members themselves. The 1799 Act restricted the circulation of political material but did so by placing restrictions upon its producers, rather than its consumers, requiring printers and publishers to be registered and for their names to be recorded on every printed book or paper.[205]

Subscription libraries operated in this culture of suspicion, and popular fears about the threat of prosecution should not be underestimated.[206] Nevertheless, judging its impact is far from

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[202] 'The Suppression of Radical Societies Act (1799)', in H.T. Dickinson, ed., *Constitutional Documents of the United Kingdom 1782-1835* (Munich: K.G. Saur, 2005), pp.41-42. Free Mason societies were explicitly excluded from the requirements of the Act.

[203] Emsley, 'An Aspect of Pitt's "Terror"', pp.155-84; Emsley, 'Repression, "Terror" and the Rule of Law', pp.801-25; Robert Poole, *Peterloo: The English Uprising* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), p.94; Philip Harling, 'The Law of Libel and the Limits of Repression, 1790-1832', *Historical Journal*, 44 (2001), pp.107-34; Henry J. Miller, *A Nation of Petitioners: Petitions and Petitioning in the United Kingdom, 1780-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), pp.121-22.

[204] 'The Seditious Meetings Act (1795)', in Dickinson, *Constitutional Documents of the United Kingdom*, pp.31-36.

[205] Emsley, 'Repression, "Terror", and the Rule of Law', pp.817-18.

[206] Steve Poole, 'Pitt's Terror Reconsidered: Jacobinism and the Law in Two South-Western Counties, 1791-1803', *Southern History Society*, 17 (1995), pp.65-87; John Bugg, *Five Long Winters: The Trials of British*

straightforward. As circulators of political reading material, libraries had the potential to be politically subversive bodies, but they were rarely the target of conservative authors in the same respect as the circulating library or reading society.[207] Possibly the only exception to this is one minor reference in John Robison's *Proofs of a Conspiracy against all the Religions and Governments of Europe* (1797). Here Robison explained that the secret society of the Illuminati, through networks of literary societies and Masonic lodges, was engaged in a pan-European project to radicalise and overthrow political and ecclesiastical government.[208] Establishing and controlling reading associations was just one aspect of this plan: 'By establishing reading societies, and subscription libraries, and taking these under our direction, and supplying them through our labours, we may turn the public mind which way we will.'[209] There was no mass moral panic about the subscription library though. In the vast majority of cases, the terms of entry were too expensive for them to attract a 'popular' clientele. They were safe, regardless of their membership or books, because their social reach was restricted, just as William Godwin's *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793), despite its political radicalism, escaped prosecution because its high price prevented a wide circulation.[210]

Subscription libraries could be a danger when they were co-opted by a small minority. William Atkinson believed that it was a matter 'of material importance, constantly to secure a decided majority over Unitarians and Republicans, in the committees of all public Libraries, and

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Romanticism (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013); Kenneth R. Johnston, *Unusual Suspects: Pitt's Reign of Alarm and the Lost Generation of the 1790s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp.7-19.

[207] 'To the Editor of the Monthly Magazine', *Monthly Magazine*, 4.24 (November 1797), pp.347-49; Keith A. Manley, 'Infidel Books and "Factories of the Enlightenment": Censorship and Surveillance in Subscription and Circulating Libraries in an Age of Revolutions, 1790-1850', *Book History*, 19.1 (2017), p.172.

[208] Michael Taylor, 'British Conservatism, the Illuminati, and the Conspiracy Theory of the French Revolution, 1797-1802', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 47.3 (2014), pp.293-94.

[209] John Robison, *Proofs of a Conspiracy Against all the Religions and Governments of Europe, Carried on in the Secret Meetings of Free Masons, Illuminati, and Reading Societies.* (Edinburgh, 1797), p.195.

[210] St Clair, *Reading Nation*, p.309; Mark Philp, 'Godwin, Thelwall and the Means of Progress', in *Reforming Ideas in Britain*, pp.214-31. The first part of Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man* (1791) escaped censure for the same reason. Harling, 'Law of Libel', p.124.

Sunday schools'.[211] The reverse could also be claimed. Joseph Priestley, writing in 1790 complained that whereas Dissenters established 'liberal and open' libraries:

> the Anglican clergy have, in the first instance, discountenanced them; and when that could not be done, they have endeavoured to get the controul of them, for the sake of keeping out such books as they wish the common people not to read…[212]

Priestley was writing from personal experience, having been a member of the Birmingham Library when heated disagreements had arisen over the purchase of works on religious controversy, including his own.[213] Yet as was the case in Birmingham, as well as elsewhere, those who feared their subscription library had been co-opted by a partisan minority were more likely to split and found their own library than attempt to seize the means of control of their present one.[214] Only in rare instances was a subscription library established to represent a narrow partisan or religious purpose.[215] The majority of subscription libraries catered for diverse memberships and held a diverse collection of publications. They could be ecumenically broad, as at the Leighton Library, where its membership consisted of Presbyterians, Seceeders, and Episcopalians, or politically broad, as at Bristol, where the membership encompassed both

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[211] William Atkinson, *A Concise Sketch of the Intended Revolution, in England; with a Few Hints on the Obvious Methods to Avert it* (London, 1794), p.94, quoted in Reid, 'Unitarian Activism and the Politics of the Subscription Library', p.85.

[212] Joseph Priestley, *Familiar Letters, Addressed to the Inhabitants of Birmingham, in Refutation of Several Charges, Advanced Against the Dissenters and Unitarians.* (Birmingham, 1790), p.160.

[213] After the library purchased Priestley's *History of the Corruptions of Christianity* (1782) in 1787, a number of Anglican members brought forward a motion banning any similar such purchases. This proposal was strongly resisted by Priestley and eventually defeated. Thomas Kelly, *Early Public Libraries: A History of Public Libraries in Great Britain Before 1850* (London: Library Association, 1966), pp.130-31; Parish, *Birmingham Library*, pp.16-23.

[214] Parish, *Birmingham Library*, p.60; Reid, 'Unitarian Activism and the Politics of the Subscription Library', p.89.

[215] Exceptions included the Suffolk Public Library in Bury St Edmunds, the Moral and Religious Permanent Library in Ashbourne, Derbyshire, and the Church and King Library in Bolton. Many subscription libraries though, did cater for a specialist readership. Reid, 'Unitarian Activism and the Politics of the Subscription Library', p.80; Allan, *Nation of Readers*, p.74.

traditional Tory and Whig networks, as well as the liberal and potentially radical circles of Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Thomas Beddoes (1760-1808).[216]

There was no state-enforced censorship deciding which books could or could not be stocked by a subscription library. Nor is there any reference to the heightened political climate in the minutes of either the Leighton or Bristol libraries. Other libraries did ban the work of some authors, or openly removed and burned other books later deemed to be politically suspect.[217] As Keith Manley has noted, moral censorship of the works within subscription libraries was widespread, but nearly always undertaken at a local level.[218] In 1793, local magistrates seized the works of Joseph Priestley and Thomas Paine from the Manchester Reading Society, but it was far more likely for library books to be 'purged' by library members themselves.[219] Multiple sources note that it was the 'subscribers' of the Bolton Public Library who, in 1793, decided to burn 'the whole of Paine's works, and several other publications of a similar tendency' at a public burning of an effigy of Paine, organised by a local loyalist association, the 'Society of

[216] This religious diversity in Leighton members is discussed below, in Chapter Four, see pp.218-23. For a discussion of Bristol's Whig and Tory clubs, and their proximity to the Bristol Library, see Chapter Five. For the Coleridge and Beddoes network at Bristol, which also included Joseph Cottle, Humphry Davy (1778-1829), and Edward Long Fox (1761-1835). See variously Stuart Andrews, *The British Periodical Press and the French Revolution, 1789-99* (Gordonsville: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), pp.57-61; Dinah Moore, *Dr Edward Long Fox: Radical and Mental Health Pioneer* (Bristol: Avon Local History & Archaeology, 2022). As in the case of Coleridge and Robert Southey, Beddoes' association with the Bristol Library has been the frequent focus of scholars. Trevor Levere, citing Dorothy Stansfield, claims that the committee of the Bristol Library doubted 'whether he [Beddoes] was a fit person to be entrusted with books'. Trevor Harvey Levere, 'Book Collector, Library Omnivore, and Critic', in *The Enlightenment of Thomas Beddoes: Science, Medicine and Reform*, eds. Trevor Harvey Levere, Larry Stewart, H.S. Torrens & Joseph C.M. Wachelder (London: Routledge, 2017), p.171; Dorothy Stansfield, *Thomas Beddoes M.D. 1760-1848* (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1984), p.101. Stansfield provides no reference to support this, and there is no evidence anywhere in the library's minute books that the committee was uneasy with lending books out to Beddoes. In 1827, John Evans, a Bristol historian, claimed that Beddoes' name had been crossed out of the library's membership list because he was 'not Blue enough'. Latimer, *Annals of Bristol in the Nineteenth Century*, p.334, quoted in Skjönsberg and Towsey, 'Introduction', in *Bristol Minute Book*, p.xx. Yet again, there is little in the library's manuscript records to support such a claim, only that Beddoes acquired a share in 1794 and retransferred it in 1796. The library continued to purchase works by Beddoes into the nineteenth century and Beddoes also maintained a share in the library until his death in 1808. This was eventually transferred to Stephen Horsely in March 1811. Skjönsberg and Towsey, 'Introduction', in *Bristol Minute Book*, p.xx; BA, LS/M/4, Committee minute book, 1807-23, 16 March 1811.

[217] Manley, *Books, Borrowers, and Shareholders*, pp.100-02; Manley, 'Infidel Books', pp.171-73.

[218] Manley, 'Infidel Books', p.175.

[219] Manley, 'Infidel Books', p.173. For this, Manley cites an article in the *Manchester Guardian* published over fifty years later, 23 October 1844. I have been unable to locate any other reference to this event.

Correspondence and Information, and for other Salutary Ends'.[220] Moreover, even if a book was deemed to be scandalous or immoral, it could only be discarded provided the proper administrative routes were followed. In 1819, Edward Smedley's satirical poem, *Religio Clerici: a Churchman's Epistle* (1818), was removed from the Evesham Subscription Library and publicly burnt without due discussion, for which later the librarian was forced to resign.[221] A similar incident occurred at the Uxbridge Book Society. Here, one library member decided to personally suppress Lord Byron's satirical epic poem *Don Juan* (1819-24).[222] Although the library's committee ruled that the work should not be repurchased, the member was censured for his actions and for acting independently of the library's rules. Of course, when these books were collectively owned, there was a financial imperative in preventing members from defacing whichever books they wished. After a member ripped a page from a newspaper at the Dublin Library Society in 1824 and was not reprimanded, the Rev. E. Tighe Gregory moved a number of resolutions at the library's general meeting in protest, including:

> to promote harmony in the Society, and practical liberality, each Member be allowed, as a matter of right, to destroy or mutilate any newspaper not coinciding with his own private political sentiments; and that the same license extend to the various books in the Library.[223]

Gregory's resolutions, another of which moved that 'no Gentleman be allowed to *occupy two chairs* at the fire place at the same moment', were not taken up and 'declared indecorous and

[220] For first quotation, see *Leeds Intelligencer*, 21 January 1793, quoted in Reid, 'Unitarian Activism and the Politics of the Subscription Library', p.78. For the second quotation, and the reference to the loyalist association, see Christopher Scholes, *History of Bolton: With Memorials of the Old Parish Church.*, ed. William Pimblett (Bolton, 1892), p.440. The Bolton Public Library was founded in 1790. Perhaps it was the library members' penchant to burn their own books that led the library to close soon after in 1793. ECLO.
[221] Manley, 'Infidel Books', p.193.
[222] Allan, *Nation of Readers*, p.101.
[223] *Freeman's Journal*, 5 February 1824, quoted in Manley, 'Jeremy Bentham has been Banned', p.179.

improper, and almost unanimously dismissed with indignation.'[224] Jesting aside, these instances once again demonstrate that managing the internal dynamics of the subscription library was political in and of itself; a politics that often took its cues and influences from the wider political context.

The library could also allow for the circulation of contentious, even illegal reading material. Despite its notoriety, Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man* (1791) was stocked by the Dublin Library Society, the Dunfermline Subscription Library, Stirling's Library in Glasgow, the Wakefield Library and the London Library.[225] Even more exceptionally, the Bristol Library Society purchased and circulated both parts of Paine's *Age of Reason* (1794-95), his championing of 'ethical Deism' and critique of revealed religion, even when the work was being openly repressed.[226] Paine's pamphlet excited a furious response in Britain; its circulation was immediately suppressed and its contents were rebuffed with at least thirty published responses before 1800.[227] Franklyn Prochaska considers these collective efforts, which included the conviction and imprisonment of Paine's publishers, to have considerably limited the work's circulation: 'After 1796, the government removed from public notice all the copies of *The Age of Reason* that could readily be found.'[228] Yet these efforts did not extend to the Bristol Library's copy, which remained and was borrowed in both 1797 and 1798.[229] Library members were well aware of the content of Paine's pamphlet. One of the library's founding members

[224] Gregory's protest was widely reported in the newspaper press, including the Bristol papers. 'Literary Societies', *Bristol Mirror*, 14 February 1824. Emphasis in original.
[225] ECLO; Manley, 'Jeremy Bentham has been Banned', p.173. On efforts to suppress the circulation of Paine's works, see Emsley, 'An Aspect of Pitt's "Terror"', p.169; Emsley, 'Repression, "Terror", and the Rule of Law', pp.805-07.
[226] Franklyn K. Prochaska, 'Thomas Paine's *The Age of Reason* Revisited', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 33.4 (1972), pp.562-63; Edward Larkin, *Thomas Paine and the Literature of Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp.133-48; Philp, 'Paine's Experiments', in *Reforming Ideas*, pp.159-72; J.C.D. Clark, *Thomas Paine: Britain, America, and France in the Age of Enlightenment and Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp.331-56; Richard Whatmore, *The End of Enlightenment: Empire, Commerce, Crisis* (Padstow: Allen Lane, 2023), pp.225-26.
[227] Prochaska, '*Age of Reason* Revisited', pp.563-71.
[228] Prochaska, '*Age of Reason* Revisited', p.575.
[229] 'Borrowing Record for *Age of Reason* by Paine, Thomas (b. 1737 – d. 1809)', ECLO.

and a committee member between 1772 and 1817, the Unitarian minister John Prior Estlin (1747-1817), wrote his own rebuke to Paine in his *Evidences of Revealed Religion* (1796), donating it to the library at a meeting of the committee on 5 April 1796.[230] At the same meeting, the committee also ordered the most famous and widely published response to Paine in Richard Watson's *Apology for the Bible* (1796).[231] Neither of these texts stopped the library from purchasing Paine's work, doing so on 18 October 1796.[232] The library committee were not theological radicals, with Paine's *Age of Reason* ordered at a meeting that included the Anglican ministers Richard Collinson (1737-1811), William Milton (1743-1824), and the library's future vice-president Samuel Seyer.[233] These individuals were not ordering Paine's work because they concurred with its contents, indeed, they likely wished to read it in order to better refute its deistical theology.[234] Nevertheless, what Bristol readers, both within and outwith the library, took from the reading of Paine was down to them.[235] This was the freedom of reading and use of the subscription library that remained open to members, both during times of heated political and sectarian disagreement, as well as beyond them. Despite its active suppression by the government, Paine's *Age of Reason* remained on the Bristol Library's shelves and was still listed as present when the next library catalogue was printed in 1814.[236]

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[230] R.K. Webb, 'Estlin, John Prior (1747-1817)', *ODNB* (January 2008); Skjönsberg and Towsey, 'Introduction', in *Bristol Minute Book*, p.xlii; *Bristol Minute Book*, eds. Skjönsberg and Towsey, p.210.
[231] Prochaska, '*Age of Reason* Revisited', pp.567-70.
[232] *Bristol Minute Book*, eds. Skjönsberg and Towsey, p.213.
[233] For biographies of these committee members, see *Bristol Minute Book*, eds. Skjönsberg and Towsey, pp.256, 262, 263-64. John Prior Estlin was not present at this meeting.
[234] In a similar respect, anti-Jacobin authors of the 1790s and 1800s made reference to this 'new philosophy' in order to critique it. M.O. Grenby, *The Anti-Jacobin Novel: British Conservatism and the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp.65-103.
[235] Paine's pamphlet was borrowed by William Brame Elwyn, a future treasurer of the Library Society, on 13 July 1797, Thomas Cross on 2 February 1798, and John Rudhall on 13 March 1798. 'Borrowing Record for *Age of Reason* by Paine, Thomas (b. 1737 – d. 1809)', ECLO. Despite this borrowing record, Hannah More was clearly jesting in 1814 when, in a letter to William Wilberforce, she described Elwyn as 'a very accomplished man' although 'very wild and an infidel.' Hannah More to William Wilberforce, 13 April 1814, Manuscripts Department, Perkins Library, Duke University, NC, quoted in *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Marginalia. 3, Irving to Oxlee*, eds. H.J. Jackson and George Whalley (London: Routledge, 1992), p.507. It was Elwyn who first introduced the Romantic poet, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, to the works of Robert Leighton. See below, p.200.
[236] *Catalogue of the… Bristol Library Society* (1814), p.118.

Part of the attraction of the subscription library was in its capability to stock a range of reading material, but there was also a cultural superiority accrued by being seen to allow for the free circulation of texts and ideas. In 1792, the anti-Jacobin author John Bowles published *A Protest against T. Paine's "Rights of Man"*.[237] Although principally a critique of Paine's text, Bowles's pamphlet was written in the form of a letter addressed to the members of a 'Book Society', left unnamed, which had purchased *The Rights of Man*.[238] Bowles, a member of the society's committee, had strenuously argued against the purchase of Paine and although the majority of his pamphlet was concerned with refuting radical claims, he defended the right of the society to purchase the work. Most members, wrote Bowles, 'held the doctrines and the designs of Mr. PAINE in abhorrence' but were unaware of the work's content, and purchased it because they were 'zealously, and indeed laudably attached to a principle of free discussion, and fearful of even appearing hostile to the exercise of a right so essential to the existence of social Liberty'.[239]

VI

Subscription libraries existed as a thoroughly unregulated aspect of associational culture. These were self-regulating and self-governing societies: in this respect, they were wholly political associations. To reflect this, library members frequently employed political terminology to refer to its administration. The catalogue of the Liverpool Library made clear that all library

[237] [John Bowles], *A Protest Against T. Paine's "Rights of Man": Addressed to the Members of a Book Society, in Consequence of the Vote of Their Committee for Including the Above Work in a List of New Publications Resolved to be Purchased for the Use of the Society.*, 2nd ed. (London, 1792), pp.iii-iv.
[238] Christy Lindsay makes reference to this episode but does not seem to be aware that Bowles does not challenge the right of the book society's committee to purchase *Rights of Man*. Lindsay, 'Reading Associations', p.155. Emma Macleod believes that Bowles's complaint against the book society was merely a convenient excuse for the pamphlet. Emma Vincent, '"The Real Grounds of the Present War": John Bowles and the French Revolutionary Wars, 1792-1802', *History*, 78.254 (1993), pp.395-97.
[239] [Bowles], *Protest Against T. Paine's "Rights of Man"*, pp.iv-v.

proprietors enjoyed 'equal right and power' in the institution.[240] The novelist John Galt (1779-1839) referred to the battles between 'malcontents' and 'liberals' for the control of the committee of the Greenock Library during the 1790s, a time 'when party spirit ran high'.[241] At the Birmingham Library in 1795, a motion proposed by the Rev. Edward Burn to outlaw the use of printed lists was designed to protect the 'freedom of election in the annual appointment of the Committee'.[242] Whether free or not, the matter of appointing the library committee was an election, and as the records of the New York Society Library make clear, library members described it using the same terminology that they might describe any other poll.

> We the Subscribers being the Committee appointed by the Trustees of the New York Society Library to hold an Election on this day of twelve Trustees for the said Library for the ensuing year having canvassed and examined the Ballot taken this day at the Poll declare that… are duly elected.[243]

Even in these entirely local contests, members received direct experience in civic participation. This politically educational significance of the subscription library should not be underestimated. In 1793, a 'young lady' writing in to *The Country Spectator* disclosed the tale of administration of her local 'Book-Society'.[244] Although it had been active for some nineteen years, divisions had recently arisen over the inclusion of new books which could be proposed by any new member, the result of a town 'divided into almost as many parties as families'.[245] As a solution, the subscribers collectively decided to invest the power to order new books in

[240] *Catalogue of the Liverpool Library* (1814), p.6. The regulations of the Norwich Public Library used the exact same phrase. *A Catalogue of the Books Belonging to the Norwich Public Library* (1784), p.3, quoted in Reid, 'Unitarian Activism and the Politics of the Subscription Library', p.78. Reid lists the catalogues publication date as 1785, although the ECLO lists it as 1784.
[241] John Galt, *Autobiography*, 2 vols. (London, 1833), I, pp.38-39.
[242] Burn's motion is quoted in Parish, *History of the Birmingham Library*, p.35.
[243] New York Society Library, ac1.r6.s2.f3, New York Society Library Institutional Archives, Election and annual meeting 1793-2009, Election results 1800-09, 29 April 1800.
[244] *The Country Spectator* (Gainsborough, 1793), pp.194-95.
[245] *Country Spectator*, pp.194-95.

the authority of one person, 'Mr. Rust, the Curate, who had the reputation of great learning and judgement in books.'[246] Yet upon reading a political pamphlet, the 'young lady' realised that 'it is always dangerous to renounce rights, or to vest aggregated power in any single person.'[247] And so it was, the Curate 'exceedingly abused his authority' by ordering books which women 'cannot understand', a problem when they comprised half of the society.[248] This may be a fictional invention, if so, it is significant that the writer chose to situate their story within the confines of a reading association. Nevertheless, members recognised that the administration of these societies involved political choices. It should therefore come as no surprise that those in the administrative positions of these libraries were politically experienced, viewing the library as another forum in which politics took place. Those interested in advancing the cause of parliamentary reform in Bristol in the 1830s were also involved in debates about reforming the Library Society in the same decade.[249] Social leaders of their local communities, regularly politicians themselves, also took the lead on subscription library management. These figures included William Smith junior (1728-93) in New York, Thomas Jefferson in Virginia, Joseph Priestley in Birmingham, and Daniel O'Connell in Dublin.[250]

[246] *Country Spectator*, p.195.
[247] *Country Spectator*, p.195.
[248] The 'young lady' lists these books as '*Gilbert Wakefield's Silva Critica*, *Gregory's Philosophical Essays*, *Siglarium Romanum*, *Archaeologia* and fifty others with hard names'. *Country Spectator*, p.195.
[249] See below, Chapter Six.
[250] William Smith was one of the 'Whig Triumvirate' and closely associated with the Livingston faction within New York's politics. He was a founding member of the New York Society Library alongside the two other 'Triumvirate' members, William Livingston (1723-90) and John Morin Scott (1730-84). See variously New York Society Library, New York Society Library Institutional Archives, Second Minute Book, 1773-1832, 27 April 1773; Mike Rapport, *Rebel Cities: Paris, London and New York in the Age of Revolution* (London: Abacus, 2017), p.6; Christopher F. Minty, *Unfriendly to Liberty: Loyalist Networks and the Coming of the American Revolution in New York City* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2023). On Jefferson, see above, p.112, n.50. On Priestley, see Parish, *History of the Birmingham Library*, pp.12-31. On O'Connell, see Manley, *Irish Reading Societies*, pp.102-04.

Moreover, this was a political space to which women could gain admittance, in contrast to associational culture more widely, certainly before 1800.[251] Whilst administrative positions within the subscription library were almost wholly the preserve of male library members, women could and did become library members. There is no doubt that the subscription library, like wider society, was male dominated, but it was not exclusively so. William St Clair's depiction of such libraries as 'masculine', as opposed to the 'feminine' circulating library, arguably goes too far in drawing such gendered distinctions.[252] As Jacqueline Pearson and David Allan have both noted, the subscription library was one of the 'few quasi-public places where respectable women could go alone' and without male company.[253] Nor should we overlook the unrecorded opportunities that women had to access subscription library collections. Sharing the books and use of the library within the familial unit was a regular occurrence.[254] Indeed, by the 1830s, the practice was being openly encouraged by the Bristol library's new vice-president, a possible attempt to advertise the usefulness of an institution that was worried it was losing its privileged position in the city.[255] There remained significant social, cultural, and economic barriers to female access to these. Cost of admission, particularly the

[251] Robert J. Morris, 'Clubs, Societies and Associations', in *The Cambridge Social History of Britain 1750-1950: Volume 3, Social Agencies and Institutions.*, ed. F.M.L. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p.397; Clark, *British Clubs and Societies*, pp.198-204; Mee, *Conversable Worlds*, pp.132-33; Valérie Capdeville, 'Club Sociability and the Emergence of New "Sociable" Practices' in *British Sociability in the Long Eighteenth Century*, p.64; Wallace and Rendall, 'Introduction', in *Association and Enlightenment*, pp.17-18; There was a noticeable increase in women's associations in the early decades of the nineteenth century. Clark, *British Clubs and Societies*, p.204; Rendall, 'Women's Associations in Scotland', pp.206-27.

[252] St Clair, *Reading Nation*, p.250.

[253] Jacqueline Pearson, *Women's Reading in Britain, 1750-1835: A Dangerous Recreation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p.161; Allan, *Nation of Readers*, p.78.

[254] For examples at Bristol, see the cases of the female members of the Morgan and Bright families, as well as Maria Edgeworth, discussed above, in Chapter One.

[255] 'I beg to express my sincerest wishes for the progress and prosperity of an Institution, which has been productive of the most important benefits to this great commercial city, by elevating the tone of feeling in the superior class of its inhabitants, by inspiring the younger members of families with a taste for useful and solid reading, by refining the intercourse of social and domestic life, and by thus multiplying to us, in no scanty measure, the sources of innocent, rational, and intellectual enjoyment'. *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal*, 24 March 1832. This address was given by John Eden, the Society's vice president between 1829 and 1840. BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 23 March 1829, 22 March 1841.

purchase of a share, remained the most significant and growing barrier, as it increased, decade by decade, to represent the inflation in the value of the library.

Women were absent from the administrative organisation of the subscription library and never served on committee positions. Each year, the president of the Liverpool Library was allowed to nominate a 'Lady-Patroness' and although the position was purely ceremonial, each lady received 'a catalogue handsomely bound, and had… all the privileges of a proprietor.'[256] Female librarians were rare, but not unheard of and were likely to have been already involved in the print trade as booksellers. The librarian of the Coventry Library Society was Miss Parker, whose house and shop lay adjacent to the library.[257] What role, if any, women may have taken at the general meetings of the subscription library is also unclear. At Bristol, the presence of women at the library's general meeting was probably unlikely whilst it met in a local tavern.[258] Yet at other libraries, property ownership proved more important than the gender of the shareholder. In 1804, an advert for the Hampshire Library Society, which was proprietorial, made an explicit overture to women, that 'Ladies are admitted Subscribers, who may act and vote by proxy upon all occasions.'[259] We also know, from the signatures of women in borrowing registers, that they were physically present in these spaces. Indeed, for many of these women, for whom we only have a title and surname, their only surviving historical records may well be their record of borrowing from the library.

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[256] P. Macintyre, 'Historical Sketch of the Liverpool Library', *Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire*, 9 (1857), p.242. The 1814 catalogue lists the names of those nominated between 1774 and 1814. *Catalogue of the Liverpool Library* (1814), pp.42-43. This practice continued until 1828. Nevertheless, women were members of the library. Macintyre notes the example of a 'Miss Twentyman' who was a proprietor for seventy-eight years. The Canning Club, a Liverpool political association founded in 1812, may have followed the practice of the Liverpool Library in choosing also to have a Lady Patroness, appointed from amongst the daughters and female relatives of the club's members. Alexandra Mitchell, 'Middle-Class Masculinity in Clubs and Associations: Manchester and Liverpool, 1800-1914.', unpublished PhD thesis (University of Manchester, 2011), p.91.

[257] *Coventry Standard*, 29 August 1791.

[258] Skjönsberg and Towsey, 'Introduction', in *Bristol Minute Book*, p.xvi. Even when the general meeting was moved into the library building, there is no recorded evidence in the minute books of women ever being present.

[259] 'Portsmouth', *Hampshire Telegraph*, 17 September 1804.

Proprietorial ownership also provided opportunities for female access, as library shares were passed to wives, sisters, and daughters by deceased library members.[260] These circumstances probably increased the likelihood of female membership in the subscription library over time, as women benefitted from being the second or third generation of library member to inherit the same share. The number of female members at the Bristol Library steadily grew from three in 1774, to ten in 1798, and fifteen in 1831.[261] Most subscription libraries either admitted women from their outset, or within the first decade of their founding.[262] The members of the Amicable Society, a subscription library in Lancaster, chose to admit female members in 1775, apparently at the first time of asking and without disagreement.[263] Henry Crabb Robinson (1775-1867) recalled reading alongside women at the Suffolk Public Library, a subscription library, in 1797.[264] Of the fifty-one libraries in the ECLO for which records survive, thirty-five admitted female members, with only sixteen either partly or wholly banning them.[265] There was also little difference in status between male and female members within the library space. At its founding, the Hampshire Library Society called for both 'Gentlemen or Ladies inclined to promote an Undertaking so publicly and individually advantageous'.[266] Women enjoyed the same borrowing and membership rights as their male counterparts in that they could propose the purchase of new books, transfer shares, introduce visitors to the collection, or petition the committee to borrow a reference text.

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[260] See the case of Anne Morgan and Phoebe Bright at the Bristol Library, discussed above in Chapter One, pp.60-62.

[261] *Bristol Minute Book*, eds. Skjönsberg and Towsey, pp.266-74; University of Bristol Archives, DM58, Pinney Family Papers, Domestic boxes A-T 1692-1902, Box S/22, 1 Papers of the Bristol Riots, *A List of the Members of the Bristol Library Society. March 9th, 1832.* (Bristol, 1832).

[262] Some book clubs were exclusively female societies, for example, the Penzance Ladies' Book Club and a 'Reading Society' in Taunton. See, respectively, Allan, *Nation of Readers*, p.40; Kaufman, 'English Book Clubs and Their Social Import', p.41. See also, Pearson, *Women's Reading in Britain*, pp.160-62.

[263] David Allan, 'Eighteenth-Century Private Subscription Libraries and Provincial Urban Culture: The Amicable Society of Lancaster, 1769-c.1820', *Library History*, 19.1 (2001), pp.57-76.

[264] Dr Williams's Library, Crabb Robinson papers, Crabb Robinson to Thomas Robinson, 18 December 1797, Correspondence 1 (1725-99), 102c, quoted in Reid, 'Unitarian Activism', p.88.

[265] ECLO.

[266] 'Hampshire Library Society', *Hampshire Telegraph*, 3 September 1804.

Female involvement in established subscription libraries saw a gradual increase over time rather than any sudden upsurge after 1800. The social movements of the early nineteenth century brought new opportunities for female involvement in associational culture, especially in a wave of voluntary associations, partly propelled by the evangelical movement, formed to tackle the effects of urban growth or achieve the moral reform of society, even as notions of gender identification, social recognition and differences between the sexes led to a withdrawal from a mixed social space.[267] According to Peter Clark, the peak of the subscription library growth (1780-1820) came at the point in which 'the singular importance and principal features of British associational life had been established', most of which related to the subscription library.[268] Yet Clarke also notes that newer clubs and societies embraced the opportunities that came with the urban expansion and growth of the nineteenth century, with different types of clubs and societies spreading further and further down the social scale.[269] Subscription libraries, especially older established libraries, largely eschewed these changes, choosing to remain exclusive and elite institutions, even if this was to their financial detriment.[270] Examining the subscription library within this wider context reveals the associational significance of political reading. Our attention now turns back to the politics of reading in a more literal sense, as the remainder of this thesis examines the political significance of the subscription library through a series of different methodological studies, beginning first with its significance on an individual reader. Maintaining a library's exclusivity was a political

[267] Prochaska, 'Women in English Philanthropy', pp.426-45; F.K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), pp.1-17; David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), pp.128-29; Gorsky, *Patterns of Philanthropy*, pp.162-77; Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850*, 2nd ed. (Hoboken, NJ: Taylor and Francis, 2013), pp.397-415; Rendall, 'Gender and the Practices of Polite Sociability', pp.176-79.

[268] Clark, *British Clubs and Societies*, p.ix. For Clark's definition, see p.12.

[269] Clark, *British Clubs and Societies*, pp.470-76.

[270] This issue lay at the heart of debates between members at the Bristol Library in the 1820s, as discussed in Chapter Six. Changes to broaden the access or administration of a library could occur at a piecemeal pace: it was not until 1841 that the Leighton expanded its body of administrators to include paying subscribers. USA, Leighton MS 17, Leighton Library, Minutes, 11 December 1840 onwards, 7 May 1841.

choice, made by those individuals who chose to participate within the civic sphere of library administration. For those with ambitions, this participation brought significant social, intellectual, ideological and, crucially, political benefits.

Chapter Three: Social Library Politics and the Baillies of Bristol

> *By Industry, & perseverance, & a strict regard to Honour in your Dealings you cannot fail in the End to be rich & respectable, for it is only by means of these that a man acquires the confidence of mankind to make him so*.[1]
>
> Alexander Baillie to Peter Baillie, 20 November 1789.

Elected to Parliament as the MP for Inverness Burghs in 1807, Peter Baillie had reached the pinnacle of his political career by his mid-thirties. Although his constituency lay adjacent to his family's ancestral home of Dochfour House on Loch Ness, Baillie had been born on the Caribbean Island of St Vincent and raised in Bristol. His election to Parliament owed itself to the Baillies' West Indian wealth, their local political connections and his ability to connect with the freeholders of Inverness, Fortrose, Forres and Nairn.[2] Baillie's education and development had been carefully cultivated by his father, but the subscription library played an essential role in the development of these skills, honing the art of social politics.[3]

This chapter examines the significance of the subscription library upon the political and reading lives of an urban civic class at the end of the eighteenth century. For younger library members, the subscription library could play a pivotal role in their social and educational development, providing them with valuable and educational reading material, as well as opportunities to

[1] Alexander Baillie to Peter Baillie, 20 November 1789, University of Bristol Archives, DM58 Pinney Family Papers, Red Boxes, Box 32, folder 3. Emphasis in original.
[2] Douglas J. Hamilton, *Scotland, the Caribbean and the Atlantic World 1750-1820* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), pp.178-79.
[3] Hamilton, *Scotland, the Caribbean and the Atlantic World*, pp.90-92. For studies of this elements of politics in Georgian Britain, see Kathryn Gleadle and Sarah Richardson, eds., *Women in British Politics, 1760-1860: The Power of the Petticoat* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000); Judith Schneid Lewis, *Sacred to Female Patriotism: Gender, Class, and Politics in Late Georgian Britain* (New York: Routledge, 2003), pp.95-126; Elaine Chalus, *Elite Women in English Political Life, c.1754-1790* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2005), pp.75-105; Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850*, 2nd ed. (Hoboken, NJ: Taylor and Francis, 2013), pp.357-96, 416-49.

network amongst the political and social groups who frequented its space. The heir to a Bristol merchant dynasty, Peter Baillie borrowed books from the library for the purposes of both education and entertainment. His election to the library's committee and the civic education accrued from this were important steps before he was elected to Parliament in 1807. His association with the library brought him into regular contact with Bristol's civic and political elite, with his borrowing and visits to the library space a part of Baillie's social schedule. Interactions between Baillie and other library members within the library space and in private venues, such as the dinner table or the private club, provided him with the connections required to pursue a political career. These skills were necessary to sustain the economic and social relations which formed the bedrock of social politics in Georgian Britain.

Baillie's experience in this regard would hardly have been unique. Indeed, he is a typical example of how young men with hopes of a future career in politics used the subscription library as a resource for personal and civic education. An annual subscription provided younger members of the gentry and wealthy classes with access to a valuable resource of books and the opportunity to continue their education beyond university.[4] Henry Home Drummond subscribed to the Leighton Library in 1810, the year after graduating from the University of Oxford as a Bachelor of Civil Law.[5] Although he was an infrequent user of the library, his subscription, alongside his reading of French manuals of politeness, such as Antoine de Courtin's *Suite de la Civilite Francoise* (1680), would have helped him reconnect with Stirlingshire's political networks after a period away, a vital step in advance of a political career

[4] In Peter Baillie's case, it may even have acted as a replacement for a university education.

[5] Home Drummond subscribed for two years, at a cost of one pound and one shilling. USA, Leighton MS 16, Minutes of the meetings of the trustees, 31 October 1734-March 1822 [hereafter Leighton MS 16, Minutes, 1734-1822], 4 December 1810; C.D. Waterston and A. Macmillan Shearer, eds., *Biographical Index of Former Fellows of the Royal Society of Edinburgh 1783-2002: Part I A-J* (Edinburgh: The Royal Society of Edinburgh, 2006), p.269.

that begin in 1821 with his election as the MP for Stirlingshire.[6] Peter Baillie is also just one example of a generation of young men, born into wealthy West Indian merchant families with fortunes accumulated over decades of trading in enslaved individuals and slave-produced goods, who were able to pursue political and civic careers as a new landed aristocracy.[7] In this respect, his use and experience of the subscription library did not materially differ from other contemporaries of a similar age and socio-economic standing who all pursued political careers, such as Henry Bright, the MP for Bristol between 1820 and 1830, Charles Pinney (1793-1867), Bristol's mayor in 1831 and Philip John Miles, Bristol's MP between 1835 and 1837.[8]

While the subscription library has been generally associated with a growing 'public sphere', Peter Baillie's experience as a library member, as well as that of the community of members of the Bristol Library Society, enables a more focused analysis of its political significance.[9] Criticisms of the Habermasian model aside, few reading or political historians have, as yet, examined the significance of these, in the words of James Raven, 'socially instrumental institutions', or of the widespread cultural experience of membership of the subscription

[6] *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Leighton Library: Register Ledger 1, page 230 (image and text view),", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/library/leighton/registers/15/103088/image-and-text>, [accessed 22/06/24]; Terry Jenkins, 'Home Drummond, Henry (1783-1867)', *HoP*, <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1820-1832/member/home-drummond-henry-1783-1867#footnoteref32_gk5oijo>, [accessed 21/06/24].

[7] Hamilton, *Scotland, the Caribbean and the Atlantic World*, pp.195-216; Stephen Mullen, *The Glasgow Sugar Aristocracy: Scotland and Caribbean Slavery, 1775-1838* (London: University of London Press, 2022), pp.49-53.

[8] Terry Jenkins, 'Bright, Henry (1784-1869), of 2 Stone Buildings, Lincoln's Inn, Mdx.', *HoP*, <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1820-1832/member/bright-henry-1784-1869>, [accessed 22/06/24]; 'Henry Bright', *Legacies of British Slavery*, <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/-759123497>, [accessed 22/06/24]; Elizabeth Baigent, 'Pinney, Charles (1793-1867)', *ODNB* (March 2021); 'Charles Pinney', *Legacies of British Slavery*, <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/25863>, [accessed 22/06/24]; Stephen Farrell and David R. Fisher, 'Miles, Philip John (1774-1845), of Leigh Court, Abbots Leigh, Som.', *HoP*, <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1820-1832/member/miles-philip-1774-1845>, [accessed 22/06/24]; Kenneth Morgan, 'Miles, Philip John (1774-1845)', *ODNB* (October 2016); 'Philip John Miles', *Legacies of British Slavery*, <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/19118>, [accessed 22/06/24].

[9] Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, MA: Polity Press, 1989), pp.31-43; Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London: Verso, 2006), pp.37-46.

library.[10] Subscription libraries formed an essential element of the urban social network, with all its attendant outcomes: knowledge, status and commerce.[11]

The pioneer of historical library studies, Paul Kaufman, recognised the potential use of borrowing records to not only reveal which books eighteenth-century readers borrowed but also the use of library records for wider social research. Despite Kaufman's study of 'reading vogues' remaining widely cited today, he recognised the deficiencies inherent in his method, based solely upon an analysis of the eighteenth-century borrowing records of the Bristol Library Society.[12] As he noted, 'quantitative library borrowing records hold great interest and no little actual importance. But they are never substitutes for reliable personal witness'.[13] In other words, Kaufman had been unable to locate the recorded reader response of a Bristol borrower.

As Stephen Colclough correctly noted, Kaufman's analysis of library borrowing records left him unable to discuss either the materiality of the borrowed book or the different methods of reading which may have been employed by subscription library readers. Colclough analysed the diary of Joseph Hunter (1783-1861), a Sheffield-based apprentice manufacturer and

[10] James Raven, 'Social Libraries and Library Societies in Eighteenth-Century North America', in *Institutions of Reading: The Social Life of Libraries in the United States*, eds. Thomas Augst and Kenneth Carpenter (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007), p.49; David Allan, *A Nation of Readers: The Lending Library in Georgian England* (London: The British Library, 2008), pp.225-26. For a study of the electoral significance of a subscription library, see Joshua J. Smith, 'Reading against Reform: The Bristol Library Society and the Intellectual Culture of Bristol's Elections in 1812', *Parliamentary History*, 43.1 (February 2024), pp.112-28. For a critique of Jürgen Habermas's 'bourgeois public sphere', see David D. Hall, 'Introduction', in *A History of the Book in America, Vol. 1: The Colonial Book in the Atlantic World*, eds. Hugh Amory and David D. Hall (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp.10-11.

[11] William St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p.248-54; Allan, *Nation of Readers*, pp.225-26; John Haggerty and Sheryllynne Haggerty, 'The Life Cycle of a Metropolitan Business Network: Liverpool 1750-1810', *Explorations in Economic History*, 48 (2011), p.190.

[12] Paul Kaufman, *Borrowings from the Bristol Library, 1773-1784: A Unique Record of Reading Vogues* (Charlottesville, VA: Bibliographical Society of the University of Virginia, 1960). Max Skjönsberg and Mark Towsey, 'Introduction', in *The Minute Book of the Bristol Library Society, 1771–1801* (Bristol: Bristol Record Society, 2022), p.xii, n.14.

[13] Kaufman, *Borrowings from the Bristol Library*, p.128.

subscription library user, to 'test the hypothetical reader' constructed by Kaufman.[14] Colclough recognised the limitations in categorising a distinct 'subscription library reader' from a 'circulating library reader', thereby ignoring the plurality of locations in which one could access reading material in urban Georgian Britain such as other library associations, private collections, or through family and friends. Despite the availability of these additional resources, Colclough concluded that Hunter accessed the majority of his reading material from his local subscription library in Sheffield. As importantly, Hunter's evidence of reading recorded a 'hierarchy of texts' in which books borrowed from the subscription library were afforded more time and space for consideration in his diary than books accessed by other means.[15] In reading in such a way, Hunter's sub-conscious 'hierarchy of texts' was created from a socially constructed hierarchy of libraries, which placed the subscription library above other city libraries, such as the circulating library, as the most prestigious source to access printed material in the urban environment.[16]

The nature of the subscription library, its cultural and social presence as an institution, played a significant role in the manner in which Hunter engaged with his reading material, though Colclough only discusses this to a limited extent in his analysis.[17] There is little consideration of what being a member of the subscription library meant to Hunter, or his role within the internal dynamics of the subscription library. Colclough does not say whether Hunter recorded his participation in the administrative elements of the subscription library, the approval of new

[14] Stephen Colclough, *Consuming Texts: Readers and Reading Communities, 1695-1870* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p.97.
[15] Colclough, *Consuming Texts*, p.98.
[16] David Allan, 'Politeness and the Politics of Culture: An Intellectual History of the Eighteenth-Century Subscription Library', *Library & Information History*, 29.3 (September 2013), pp.161-65; St Clair, *Reading Nation*, pp.246-50; Sean D. Moore, *Slavery and the Making of Early American Libraries: British Literature, Political Thought, and the Transatlantic Book Trade, 1731-1814* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), p.201
[17] Colclough goes as far to describe the library's catalogue as constituting 'one of the most important texts in Hunter's reading life'. Colclough, *Consuming Texts*, p.102.

library members or the election of the library committee, both of which were confirmed with a general ballot among all the library's members.[18]

Colclough's use of qualitative methods was aimed at filling in the elements of the reading experience absent from Kaufman's quantitative tabulation of library borrowing data. The richness of the archival record for Bristol readers means that it is possible to do both for a Bristol Library Society reader. Neither Kaufman nor Colclough analysed the political implications of membership in the subscription library. This chapter uses the library records of the Bristol Library Society and reading records created by Peter Baillie, a library member, to examine the political significance and experience of a subscription library member in Bristol, rather than hypothesizing about it, as Kaufman did, or relying upon comparative examples from other cities, as in the case of Colclough. Paul Langford did make reference to the growth of the subscription library and, citing Kaufman, to the Bristol Library Society, recognising its significance for a rapidly emerging English middle class. However, he situated his discussion of this largely within the context of that of politeness and sensibility.[19] Arguably, one may go further in assessing the political significance of the subscription library, using it to provide an insight into an entire layer of social politics located a level below that of parliamentary politics.

I

As the eldest son and heir apparent to the Bristol branch of the Baillie dynasty, Peter Baillie serves as a useful case study to analyse the significance of the subscription library to the reading, social and political lives of its members in Georgian Britain. Baillie is typical of a

[18] Loveday Herridge and Sue Roe, 'Reading Sheffield: Sheffield Libraries and Book Clubs, 1771–1850', in *Before the Public Library: Reading, Community, and Identity in the Atlantic World, 1650–1850*, eds. Mark Towsey & Kyle B. Roberts (Leiden: Brill, 2017), pp.178-79. Colclough does note that the subscription library may have been a formative influence on Hunter's reading because his mentor, the Presbyterian minister Joseph Evans, was also the library's president. Colclough, *Consuming Texts*, p.102.

[19] Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People: England, 1727-1783*, rev. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp.94-95.

generation of merchant sons in Bristol coming to adulthood at the end of the eighteenth century. Although these individuals continued to own plantations and be major participants in the Caribbean slave economy, they were able to do so from a distance, remaining in Britain to participate in cultural and political circles whilst investing their wealth into industry and landed property.[20] In so doing, such individuals made the transition from new monied gentry to landed aristocracy. Still relative newcomers to Bristol, Peter's connections and networks remained central to securing the Baillies' place among the city's elite mercantile network. Kenneth Morgan has noted that Bristol merchants were unusual amongst their peers in the successful establishment of family dynasties that remained in the merchant trade for multiple generations.[21] Success in the construction of an enduring dynasty depended partly on the cultivation of economic and social ties between different families in private spaces, such as around the dinner table, or in the public or semi-public spaces of the association, club or library.[22] To this end, Peter Baillie's membership of the Bristol Library Society served multiple purposes. Visits to the library and participation in its administration formed a regular feature of Baillie's social life, as he utilised both the library's space and its resources to aid his social networking. Moreover, both aspects of Baillie's library membership - his book borrowing and participation on the library committee - increased his knowledge of the world and of bureaucratic and administrative civic politics before he embarked upon his own political career.

[20] Other examples include the families of Bright, Miles and Protheroe.
Terry Jenkins, 'Bright, Henry (1784-1869)', *HoP*, <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1820-1832/member/bright-henry-1784-1869>, [accessed 15/08/23]; Morgan, 'Miles, Philip John', *ODNB*; David R. Fisher, 'Protheroe, Edward (1774-1856)', *HoP*, <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1790-1820/member/protheroe-edward-1774-1856>, [accessed 15/08/23]. See also Steve Poole and Nicolas Rogers, *Bristol from Below: Law, Authority and Protest in a Georgian City* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2017), pp.27-28. The same trend also occurred amongst Glasgow's West India elite, see Mullen, *Glasgow Sugar Aristocracy*, pp.89-90.

[21] Kenneth Morgan, 'Introduction', in *The Bright-Meyler Papers: A Bristol-West India Connection, 1732-1837* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp.14-15. See also Peter Buckles, *Crisis and Resilience in the Bristol-West India Sugar Trade, 1783-1802* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2024).

[22] Sheryllynne Haggerty, 'A Link in the Chain: Trade and the Transshipment of Knowledge in the Late Eighteenth Century', *International Journal of Maritime History*, 14 (2002), pp.157-72.

A range of different source materials provide an insight into Peter Baillie's experience as a reader and library member at the Bristol Library Society. The library's administrative and borrowing records document Baillie's participation as a library member amongst a membership that numbered over 250.[23] In addition to this, family correspondence, and, more exceptionally, two surviving notebooks, record Baillie's reading and daily habits in the first decade of the nineteenth century.[24] In his journal, kept between May 1803 and February 1804, Baillie made a record of his everyday activities, including his attendance at sociable events, dinners with Bristol associates and his reading. He also recorded his visits to the library to attend its monthly committee meetings. These documents, together with family papers and private correspondence, enable us to reconstruct Baillie's reading and associational life, providing an insight into the daily activities of a member of Bristol's wealthy mercantile elite, but also the role a subscription library played in shaping an urban reader, its social significance amongst other clubs and societies in the urban environment, and the participation of its members in the social politics of the city.[25]

Baillie's record provides a rich insight into what motivated a member of the wealthy middling class to join a subscription library, offering some explanation as to why this form of library association grew to be so widespread across the English-speaking world. Baillie was a consistent and regular borrower of the library's books, but he also involved himself in the library's administration and was repeatedly elected as a committee member. This latter role

[23] BA, 32079/LS/F/1, Bristol Library Society, Cash book, 2 December 1772–24 April 1871 [hereafter BA, LS/F/1, Cash book].
[24] University of Bristol Archives, DM58 Pinney Family Papers, DM58/1/2, Pinney Family Domestic Papers: Baillie Papers, Box 1 and 2, 1789-1861; University of Bristol Archives, DM58 Pinney Family Papers, Red Boxes, Boxes 30-33, Baillie Papers. See particularly University of Bristol Archives, DM58 Pinney Family Papers, Red Boxes, Box 33, 2 notebooks of Peter Baillie, 1803-04, notebook 1 (commonplace book), n.d. and notebook 2 (journal), 1803-04.
[25] The Baillie family papers are stored in red boxes as part of the Pinney Family papers at the University of Bristol Archives. University of Bristol Archives, DM58, Pinney Family Papers, Red Boxes, Box 30-33.

provided him with his first experience of elected public office and with a civic education in low level political management.

In this respect, Baillie's association with the Bristol Library Society was a significant precursor to his own election to Parliament as the MP for Inverness Burghs in 1807. It provided him with an opportunity to cultivate the ideals to thrive in Georgian politics - 'civility', 'public spirit' and 'independence' - as well as the social skills to sustain the relations for political success.[26] His associational participation provided him with access and connections to different groups within Bristol's elite society. It confirms that the significance of the subscription library lay as much in the social connections it provided to its members, as in its valuable collection of books.[27] Although the political significance of the subscription library for Baillie was individual, and its effect upon his network of contemporaries local, his experience as a subscription library member is suggestive of what its larger political significance as a form of library association was in sustaining an essential element of Georgian politics.

II

The Baillies were relative newcomers to Bristol's political and economic circles. Peter's father, Evan Baillie, had been born in Inverness, but made his fortune, along with his two older brothers, Alexander (d. 1798) and James (1737-93), in the trade of sugar and the enslaved in the Caribbean, principally the Windward Islands.[28] The Baillie family was representative of the

[26] Langford, *Polite and Commercial People*, pp.61-90; Matthew McCormack, *The Independent Man: Citizenship and Gender Politics in Georgian England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), pp.2-5.
[27] See also Mark Towsey, 'First Steps in Associational Reading: Book Use and Sociability at the Wigtown Subscription Library 1795–99', *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, 103.4 (2009), pp.479-80; Sophie H. Jones, '"Very useful as well as ornamental": Social Libraries in Early American Communities', *Library & Information History*, 37.2 (2021), pp.123-24.
[28] Hamilton, *Scotland, the Caribbean and the Atlantic World*, pp.89-91; 'Alexander Baillie of Dochfour', *Legacies of British Slavery*, <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/2146665325>, [accessed 16/08/23]; 'James Baillie MP of Bedford Square and Ealing Grove', *Legacies of British Slavery*, <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/2146633538>, [accessed 16/08/23]. See also David R. Fisher, 'Baillie, James (?1737-93)', *HoP*, <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1790-1820/member/baillie-james-1737-93>, [accessed 16/08/23]; David R. Fisher, 'Baillie, Evan (?1741-1835)', *HoP*,

marked increase of Scottish participation in West India trade in the eighteenth century, although branches of the family were geographically dispersed across Scotland, England and the Caribbean, rather than centred upon any one urban centre, in contrast to the Smiths of Glasgow.[29] In either instance, financial success was dependent on a 'mercantile plantation nexus' built upon close social and economic relations between a planter class in the Caribbean and a merchant class in Britain.[30] Compared to his older brothers, Evan Baillie spent a shorter period of residence in the Caribbean, arriving in 1770, possibly following a period of military service, and after his brothers had progressed from mercantile partnerships to the purchase of property in the form of plantations and estates.[31] Baillie participated actively in the growth of the family's property in the Caribbean, moving to St Vincent in 1771 and acquiring a plantation estate on the island with his marriage to Mary Gurley that same year. In a prelude to his future role in Bristol, he established himself amongst the island's civic and political circles with the acquisition of a seat on the Island Assembly.[32] Baillie began trading with merchants in Bristol before relocating there permanently in 1774 and establishing himself as one of the city's largest sugar importers. Nevertheless, he retained ownership of plantations on Grenada and Demerara and continued to participate in the trafficking of enslaved people. He was responsible for the transportation of at least 2,186 captives from the west coast of Africa to the Caribbean across six voyages made between 1784 and 1787.[33]

<https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1790-1820/member/baillie-evan-1741-1835>, [accessed 16/08/23].

[29] In the words of Stephen Mullen, the Smiths were the '*arriviste*' of Glasgow West India merchants, in contrast to landed families. 'The spectacular transformation [of the Smiths] into elite landowners with multiple estates coincided with the involvement of family members in the West India trade across two generations'. Mullen, *Glasgow Sugar Aristocracy*, pp.89-90.

[30] Hamilton, *Scotland, the Caribbean and the Atlantic* World, pp.2-3.

[31] Hamilton, *Scotland, the Caribbean and the Atlantic World*, p.90. For Baillie's military service, see George Baillie, *Interesting Letters Addressed to Evan Baillie, Esq. of Bristol, Merchant, Member of Parliament for that Great City, and Colonel of the Bristol Volunteers* (London, 1809), p.6.

[32] Hamilton, *Scotland, the Caribbean and the Atlantic World*, p.91.

[33] Fisher, 'Baillie, Evan', *HoP*; 'Enslavers – Database', *Slave Voyages: People of the Atlantic Slave Trade*, <https://www.slavevoyages.org/past/enslavers>, [accessed 16/08/23].

From 1774 onwards, now settled in Bristol, Evan Baillie established himself within the city's civic and political circles. He joined the Corporation in May 1785 with the purchase of his freedom and election as a common councillor, serving in his first administrative role as a sheriff in 1786.[34] In 1798, he inherited the family property of Dochfour House after the death of his elder brother Alexander, and thereafter split his time between Inverness and Bristol. He remained firmly fixed on furthering his political career and reached its pinnacle in 1802 with his election as a city alderman and member of parliament. In the same year he joined the Bristol Library Society, doing so in a highly symbolic manner alongside his fellow parliamentary representative for Bristol, Charles Bragge. Both MPs paid twenty-one pounds to become members for life, far and above the required fifteen guineas, but consciously imitating the actions of previous Bristol parliamentarians, such as Matthew Brickdale in 1773 and Edmund Burke in 1774.[35] For Baillie, membership of the library was about far more than just providing a generous benefaction to a local society and he regularly borrowed its books, making eighty-three borrowings between 1803 and 1815.[36] It is unclear whether Baillie had a private library of his own in Bristol. The library at Dochfour House remained unavailable to him whilst he

[34] Baillie paid twelve pounds, sixteen shillings, and sixpence to purchase his freedom of the city on 14 May 1785. *Index to the Bristol Burgess Books: Volumes 1 To 21, 1557-1995* (Bristol: Bristol & Avon Family History Society, 2005); Alfred Beaven, *Bristol Lists. Municipal and Miscellaneous* (Bristol, 1899), p.227. The second sheriff, appointed to serve alongside Baillie in 1786, was Thomas Daniel who would later become a significant figure in Bristol's society. Madge Dresser, 'Daniel, Thomas (1762-1854)', *ODNB* (October 2016). Daniel had been a member of the Bristol Library Society since 1789 and served on its committee between 1807 and 1842. 'Borrowing Records for Daniel, Thomas Junior, Esq.', *ECLO*; BA, 32079/LS/M/1, Bristol Library Society, Minute book of General meetings, 2 December 1772-28 March 1870 [hereafter BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book], 23 March 1807, 21 March 1842.

[35] Both Baillie's and Bragge's donations were 'accompanied by a very obliging Letter'. The library committee ordered their names to 'be inserted at the Head of the List of Subscribers' and the vice-president, Samuel Seyer was requested to write his thanks to both of them. BA, 32079/ LS/M/3, Bristol Library Society, Minute book of Committee, 31 March 1789–10 March 1807 [hereafter BA, LS/M/3, Committee minute book, 1789-1807], 3 August 1802. For the library rules in place at the time of their admission to the library, see *A Catalogue of the Books belonging to the Bristol Library Society; To which are Prefixed the Rules of the Institution, and a List of the Subscribers.* (Bristol, 1798) pp.v-viii. For Brickdale and Burke, see *The Minute Book of the Bristol Library Society, 1771–1801*, eds. Max Skjönsberg and Mark Towsey (Bristol: Bristol Record Society, 2022), pp.35, 56.

[36] BCL, B7472-7486, Bristol Library Society, Borrowing registers, fol. 20-34, October 1802-June 1815.

was away.[37] It was clearly incorrect to jest, as Robert Southey had done privately, that Baillie had never read a book in his life.[38] He played no elected role in the library's administration, although he may have participated as an ordinary attendee at its general meetings. Instead, it was his eldest son, Peter Baillie, who would take up a position as an elected library committee member. Father and son may have used their library membership with different motives in mind. For Evan, the Bristol Library remained a useful resource for books while away from the library at Dochfour House. For Peter Baillie, the library was not only valuable for the same purpose, but also provided him with a local arena of politics in which he could accrue administrative and civic experience.

Evan Baillie's civic status and, above all, his wealth, enabled his sons to enter adulthood as accepted members of Bristol's mercantile elite. Yet Peter Baillie still played a central role in solidifying the family's place in the city. It was Peter's marriage to Elizabeth Pinney (1774-1852), the daughter of John Pretor Pinney (1740-1818), a West India merchant and absentee planter, in 1797, which formalised ties between the family and one of Bristol's oldest and most established mercantile dynasties.[39] Both Peter's father and his uncle viewed him as the natural successor as the head of the family and both urged him to cultivate not only his mind but his character. Evan Baillie urged his son to look to his future prospects with 'industry, attention

[37] The Baillie library at Dochfour House was clearly substantial. In 1789, Baillie listed the value of its books and prints at £810. University of Bristol Special Collections, DM58 Pinney Family Papers, Red Boxes, Box 31, notebook recording sundries, work done to and furniture at Dochfour. The family also seem to have been in the habit of lending out its books to other local families. Writing to Peter Baillie in 1806, Evan hoped that 'on Rainey days I wish the Ladies would amuse themselves by comparing the Inventories with the Books actually in the House, for I much suspect a deficiency in the number, as the Family was in the Habit of lending out many Books to their neighbours'. Evan Baillie to Peter Baillie, 16 July 1806, University of Bristol Special Collections, DM58 Pinney Family Papers, Red Boxes, Box 30.

[38] 'Morton Eden lost his Election by the folly of his friends – who chose to command their party instead of asking their consent. I wished him well because he had written a book – & God knows whether the man [Evan Baillie] whom they have elected has ever read one. however he is a respectable man – rich by his own industry – & can say yes & no'. Robert Southey to John Rickman, 24 August [1802], *The Collected Letters of Robert Southey: Part Two: 1798-1803*, eds. Ian Packer and Lynda Pratt (Romantic Circles, 2011), <https://romantic-circles.org/editions/southey_letters/Part_Two/HTML/letterEEd.26.709.html#back9>, [accessed 16/08/23].

[39] Hamilton, *Scotland, the Caribbean and the Atlantic World*, p.92; Kenneth Morgan, 'Pinney, John Pretor (1740-1818)', *ODNB* (January 2011).

and perseverance', whilst Peter's uncle used similar language when he urged him to use 'Industry & perseverance, & a strict regard to Honour' in order to succeed in life and business.[40] Peter completed his education with a year's residence in France from July 1788, which cost his father £200.[41] Although he left the choice of a future profession to him, Evan Baillie clearly hoped his son would follow his footsteps and carry on in the merchant trade, writing 'If the mercantile line should be your object, I should hope that after three years close application you would be able to take much trouble and responsibility off my shoulders'.[42] Ultimately, Peter acquiesced with his father's wishes, entering the family business and running parts of it by the mid-1790s.[43] No doubt, his workload increased markedly after 1796 and his father's inheritance of the Dochfour estate and again in 1802 with his father's election as one of Bristol's MPs.

The Bristol Library Society was clearly a significant feature in Peter Baillie's life in these early years, offering a natural resource through which he continued his education after his return from France. His date of return to England is unclear. In May 1789, Evan Baillie vetoed a requested 'excursion' to Switzerland by Peter, although he was still resident in Vendôme in early July 1789 and may possibly have planned to remain there for the rest of the year.[44] He had certainly returned to Bristol by the autumn, by which time he had joined the library. Baillie's first recorded borrowing was the first volume of John Moore's *A View of Society and*

[40] Evan Baillie to Peter Baillie, 24 May 1789, University of Bristol Archives, Pinney Papers, quoted in David R. Fisher, 'Baillie, Peter (1771-1811), *HoP*, <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1790-1820/member/baillie-peter-1771-1811#footnoteref2_z4ksoks>, [accessed 10/08/23]; Alexander Baillie to Peter Baillie, 20 November 1789, University of Bristol Archives, DM58 Pinney Family Papers, Red Boxes, Box 32, folder 3.
[41] Evan Baillie to Peter Baillie, 2 July 1789, University of Bristol Archives, DM58 Pinney Family Papers, Red Boxes, Box 32, folder 3.
[42] Evan Baillie to Peter Baillie, 24 May 1789, University of Bristol Archives, Pinney Papers, quoted in Fisher, 'Baillie, Peter', *HoP*.
[43] Fisher, 'Baillie, Peter', *HoP*; Hamilton, *Scotland, the Caribbean and the Atlantic World*, p.92.
[44] Fisher, 'Baillie, Peter', *HoP*.

Manners in France, Switzerland and Germany (1779) made on 28 October.[45] A week later he took out its second volume, continuing to renew it over the next three weeks before finally returning it on 27 November. Moore's *View of Society* was a telling first borrowing, made at a significant time. Having just returned from a year-long residency in France, Moore's epistolary work may have served as a reminder of his time away. Prevented from continuing his educational travel into Switzerland, Baillie turned to the next best thing, the reproduction of Switzerland's valleys and mountains in Moore's prose.[46] It is also significant that Baillie read about central Europe during the formative days of the French Revolution; when events, such as the storming of the Bastille on 14 July, may have hurried Baillie's return to England. Reading Moore provided Baillie with interesting depictions of a country he had recently left, but also with an analysis of a people, customs and system that were rapidly soon to change. Borrowing Moore's *View of Society* was just the beginning of Baillie's journey through the books of the Bristol Library Society. He was a frequent and recurring borrower from the library, making a total of 199 borrowings between October 1789 and February 1800.[47] While resident in Bristol, he took a book out of the library on a regular monthly basis between 1789 and 1791 and again between 1795 and 1805.[48]

Baillie shared the membership of the library with the leading figures of Bristol's society in this period, including many that were within his immediate familial and social circle. Baillie's father-in-law, John Pretor Pinney, had been a library member since 1791, as was his business partner James Tobin (1736-1817) who also served as a committee member between 1791 and

[45] 'Borrowing Record for Baillie, Mr. Peter Esq.', ECLO. Moore's *View of Society* had been ordered by the library's trustees at a meeting on 20 April 1779. *Bristol Minute Book*, eds. Skjönsberg and Towsey, p.88.
[46] John Moore, *A View of Society and Manners in France, Switzerland, and Germany*, 2 vols. (London, 1779), I.
[47] 'Borrowing Record for Baillie, Mr. Peter Esq.', ECLO.
[48] For Baillie's borrowings in the nineteenth century, see BCL, B7469-78, Bristol Library Society, Borrowing registers, fol. 17-26, July 1800-December 1807.

1807.[49] Other Baillies were also library members, including Peter's father but also his brother, James Evan.[50] Baillie borrowed books at the same time as his father and brother, sometimes even different volumes of the same works.[51] They rarely borrowed on the same day, and in most instances their entries and signatures in the borrowing registers were signed by the librarian rather than themselves.[52] Peter Baillie's borrowing of the second and third volume of Jane West's *Letters Addressed to a Young Man* (1801) was collected from the library on 13 January 1804 by his servant John Creed, and this may have been the most common way for the Baillies to receive their library books.[53]

Although Baillie did not record when he borrowed books from the library in his journal, he did record his attendance at meetings of the library committee, recognising it as an event of some significance in his social calendar. Within the library's organisation, the library committee managed its day-to-day administration and was its main decision-making body. It was formed of twenty-one individuals, including the president, vice-president and treasurer, chosen annually by library members at the general meeting of the society.[54] Whilst any member could propose a book for the library to purchase, it was the committee's role 'to consider of the books proposed and to order such as the majority shall approve'.[55] Unusually, Baillie served as a

[49] 'Borrowing Record for Pinney, John Esq.', ECLO. James Tobin had been a member of the library since 1788. 'Borrowing Record for Tobin, James Esq.', ECLO; *Bristol Minute Book*, eds. Skjönsberg and Towsey, p.264; BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 23 March 1807. On Tobin, see Buckles, *Crisis and Resilience*, pp.25-26.
[50] James Evan Baillie first subscribed to the library in 1803, paying six guineas. BA, LS/F/1, Cash book, p.16.
[51] For example, on 21 March 1805 Peter Baillie borrowed the first volume of William Godwin's *Life of Chaucer* (1803). Six days later, on 27 March, his brother, James Evan Baillie, borrowed the second volume of Godwin. Significantly, on 2 April 1805, the day James Evan returned his borrowing to the library, it was immediately borrowed again by Peter. BCL, B7475, Bristol Library Society, Borrowing register, fol. 23, December 1804-August 1805.
[52] Peter Baillie's borrowing of Joseph Strutt's *Sports and Pastimes of the People of England* (1801) on 12 March 1805 was an exception to this, entered into the borrowing register and signed by Baillie himself. BCL, B7475, Borrowing register, 1804-05, p.178.
[53] BCL, B7473, Bristol Library Society, Borrowing register, fol. 21, July 1803-March 1804. Baillie recorded hiring Creed in his journal on 26 September 1803. Baillie notebook 2 (journal), 1803-04, 26 September 1803. Library borrowers at the Leighton Library also used servants to collect their books. USA, Leighton MS 28, Leighton Library, Book requests, letters and scraps taken from Leighton MS 27.
[54] *Catalogue of the… Bristol Library Society* (1798), p.v.
[55] *A Catalogue of the Books belonging to the Bristol Library Society: To which are Prefixed an Account of the Institution of the Society, and its Rules & Regulations.* (Bristol, 1814), p.xii.

library committee member on two separate instances, first for only a year from 1799 and later between 1803 until his death in September 1811. His first election to the library committee in 1799 occurred in truly exceptional and controversial circumstances, in what Max Skjönsberg and Mark Towsey have described as 'the Library Society's most significant crisis in this period'.[56] Prior to the library's general meeting, a false printed list 'purporting to be a List of the Committee, and exactly resembling that circulated under the Sanction of the Society, but differing as to a part of the Names in that List' had been circulated amongst the membership and led to the election of six new committee members, one of whom was Baillie.[57] A subsequent extraordinary general meeting ruled that this action 'was highly improper and should be guarded against in future'. The results of the 1799 election were not overturned, although the meeting expressly ruled that the use of 'improper means' at future elections would render those contests void. The use of fraudulent lists for library elections was not a completely unheard-of occurrence. Similar printed lists were circulated during the election of trustees at the New York Society Library in 1755 in an attempt to exclude Presbyterians from participating in the library's administration, whilst at the Birmingham Library in 1795, a motion to outlaw the use of similar lists 'to supersede or destroy freedom of election in the annual appointment of the Committee' was narrowly defeated.[58] Rather less seriously, in 1823, a number of malcontents at the Dublin Library Society urged members to elect 'Captain Rock', the notorious and mythical rebel leader, as the library's new president.[59]

There is no evidence to suggest that Baillie was a party to or even aware of the machinations surrounding the 1799 election and there was nothing clearly to link together those elected for

[56] Skjönsberg and Towsey, 'Introduction', in *Bristol Minute Book*, p.xxv.
[57] *Bristol Minute Book*, eds. Skjönsberg and Towsey, p.30.
[58] Austin Baxter Keep, *History of the New York Society Library* (New York: De Vinne Press, 1908), p.139; Charles Parish, *History of the Birmingham Library* (London: Library Association, 1966), p.35.
[59] Keith A. Manley, *Irish Reading Societies and Circulating Libraries Founded Before 1825: Useful Knowledge and Agreeable Entertainment* (Dublin: Four Courts, 2018), p.104.

the first time. Indeed, the entire situation may only have been a useful ploy by those looking to advance wider reforms in the library's administration.[60] Most of those newly elected were hardly conscientious committee members, with five of the six attending fewer than ten committee meetings over the entire year. Baillie was the exception to this, attending twenty of the fortnightly committee meetings.[61] Nevertheless, he and the other five were ejected at the next general meeting the following year.[62] It is surely no coincidence that Baillie's re-election to the library committee in March 1803 came at the first opportunity since Evan Baillie's election as Bristol's MP in July 1802 and after Evan joined the library as a member for life on 3 August. Once again, Peter Baillie was a regular attendee at committee meetings and would attend over two hundred between 1803 and 1811.[63]

III

Baillie's journal only covers a short period of his time as a committee member, the ten months between May 1803 and February 1804. Regardless, it provides an exceptional record of his social and political day to day activities. Baillie outlined his intentions for his journal in its opening entry in May 1803:

[60] In addition to Baillie, the other committee members elected for the first time in 1799 included Lowbridge Bright, Thomas Evans Bull (d. 1799/1800), John Cave junior (1765-1842), Rev. Edward Coulson Grevile (1777-1830) and Dr William Stephen. Library members frequently complained in the pages of Bristol's newspapers at the manner in which committee members were elected and various attempts to reform this were proposed throughout the library's history. 'To the Members of the Bristol Library Society', *Bristol Mirror*, 16 March 1811; 'Bristol Library Society', *Bristol Mirror*, 25 March 1815; 'To the MEMBERS of the BRISTOL LIBRARY SOCIETY', *Bristol Mirror*, 22 March 1823; 'Bristol Library', *Bristol Mercury*, 24 January 1825; Skjönsberg and Towsey, 'Introduction', in *Bristol Minute Book*, p.xxv; BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 20 March 1826, 21 January 1828; Charles Tovey, *The Bristol City Library: Its Founders and Benefactors; Its Present Position in Connection with the Library Society; and Its Future Prospects; To which is Added, Plans and Estimates for Converting the Building into a Free Library; With a Catalogue of the Books Belonging to the Citizens*. (London, 1853), p.38. See also, below, Chapter Six.

[61] *Bristol Minute Book*, eds. Skjönsberg and Towsey, pp.232-42.

[62] Skjönsberg and Towsey, 'Introduction', in *Bristol Minute Book*, p.xxvi.

[63] BA, LS/M/3, Committee minute book, 1789-1807; BA, 32079/LS/M/4, Bristol Library Society, Minute book of Committee, 24 March 1807–22 March 1823.

> Considering that it may be eventually of importance to a person to keep a daily Journal of the Common Occurrences of Life & that the same is accompanied with little or no trouble, I have resolved on Commencing from this day – In my Journal I propose inserting occasionally any remarks or observations I may make on the few Books which my leisure will permit me to read; & likewise anything interesting that I may hear in Conversation.[64]

Despite these aims, Baillie rarely recorded the detail of his conversations, but he did keep record of his attendance at dinners and other sociable engagements.

Amongst these activities, Baillie noted his attendance at committee meetings of the Bristol Library Society. Between 17 May 1803 and 31 January 1804, Baillie attended eight meetings of the library committee, recording seven of these instances in his journal.[65] As a committee member, he was in the privileged position of deciding which books suggested by members should be purchased by the library. Baillie served on the committee with some of Bristol's well-known citizens including the Library Society's vice president Samuel Seyer, John Prior Estlin, Charles Joseph Harford (1764-1830) and George Pelham (1766-1827), the bishop of Bristol.[66] Baillie's participation in the administration of the Bristol Library formed only one aspect of his social calendar and his journal records his attendance at numerous other associational events and engagements. His journal provides a carefully recorded account of the political significance of involvement in urban society, and the opportunities associational involvement provided to connect with others.

[64] Baillie notebook 2 (journal), 1803-04, 17 May 1803.
[65] Baillie notebook 2 (journal), 1803-04.
[66] J.H. Bettey, 'Seyer, Samuel (1757-1831)', *ODNB* (January 2008); R.K. Webb, 'Estlin, John Prior (1747-1817)', *ODNB* (January 2008); Peter Wakelin, 'Harford family (*per. c.* 1700-1866)', *ODNB* (May 2009); W.P. Courtney, revised by H.C.G. Matthew, 'Pelham, George (1766-1827)', *ODNB* (September 2004).

Food and drink formed a key aspect of the sociability Baillie recorded in his journal and he was the most meticulous in recording with whom he dined and where. Sometimes these engagements resulted from Baillie's participation in a club or society, and he regularly feasted with fellow members of the West India Club and the Bear's Cub Club.[67] Regardless of its setting, these occasions nearly always involved meetings and dinners with fellow members of the Bristol Library. Baillie's most frequent dinner guests were the 'usual Family Party', as he referred to them, consisting of his close family, his wife Elizabeth and her parents John and Jane Pinney (d. 1821), his father Evan Baillie, his two brothers James Evan and Hugh Duncan (1777-1866) and his sister Maria (1786-1808).[68] These dinners took place at various locations including Peter's own home in Bristol, his father's residence on Park Row, John Pretor Pinney's residence at 7 Great George Street and at the Pinneys' country residence at Somerton.[69] All of the male members of this 'Family Party' were library members but it is highly likely that female members of the family had access to the library's books through them.[70]

[67] Founded in 1777, Bristol's West India Club, although principally a social club, campaigned in the interest of its members who were all engaged in the West Indian trade. It operated separately from the Society of Merchant Venturers, of which Baillie does not seem to have been a member. Amongst its membership included Baillie's father-in-law, John Pretor Pinney. Patrick McGrath, *The Merchant Venturers of Bristol: A History of the Society of Merchant Venturers of the City of Bristol from its Origin to the Present Day* (Bristol: Society of Merchant Venturers, 1975), pp.237-38. Baillie dined with the club on 8 June, 13 July, 14 September, 14 December 1803, 11 January and 8 February 1804. Baillie notebook 2 (journal), 1803-04. The Bear's Cub Club was a social and debating club closely associated with Bristol's medical community and the Bristol Royal Infirmary. Baillie's association with the club is likely to stem from his role on the committee at St Peter's Hospital in May and June 1803. Baillie notebook 2 (journal), 1803-04, 20 May, 7 June, 9 June, 10 June 1803. Again, Baillie would have found himself socialising with a number of library members including Thomas Johnes who served as the Bear's treasurer as well as the Library Society's librarian between 1773 and 1809, but also Dr Andrew Carrick, Dr Robert Lovell (1753-1823), Dr Richard Smith, Dr John Edmonds Stock, Francis Randolph, Francis Cheyne Bowles (1771-1807) and Sir Abraham Elton (1755-1842). George Munro Smith, *A History of the Bristol Royal Infirmary* (Bristol: J.W. Arrowsmith, 1917), pp.223, 231-33. Other Bear's Cub Club members listed by Richard Smith, that were also library members, include Thomas Eagles, Arthur Broughton (d. 1796), William Milton, John Garnett (d. 1824), Samuel Seyer, Richard Bright, Joseph Smith, John Paine Berjew, and Lowbridge Bright. BA, 25893/36/c_i, Records of Bristol Royal Infirmary, Richard Smith papers, Biographical Memoirs Volume 3, 1766-1780, c.1800-1840, p.110.

[68] Baillie notebook 2 (journal), 1803-04.

[69] See variously, Baillie notebook 2 (journal), 1803-04, 30 May, 5 June, 19 June, 23 August 1803.

[70] For example, see the case of Maria Edgeworth and others, discussed above on p.21, n.48.

Beyond this family circle, Baillie regularly dined with politically significant figures in Bristol, both Whig and Tory, but all of whom were members of the library. Some of these individuals would be decisive campaigners in future general elections held in Bristol. Baillie recorded dining with Sir Henry Protheroe on at least two occasions.[71] Protheroe would fund and aid the successful election of his brother, Edward, in 1812, as well as play a prominent role in the local Whig association, the Independent and Constitutional Club.[72] It is highly likely that Henry Protheroe was also present when Baillie dined with the 'new' club on 5 August 1803.[73] Bristol's electoral contest in 1812 would be marked by deep divisions between reformist and conservative Whigs, but in 1803 Baillie dined with both sides of the future divide.[74] On 3 June Baillie recorded dining with Richard Bright at his home of Ham Green, outside Bristol, alongside Sir Abraham Elton (1755-1842), who would second the nomination of Sir Samuel Romilly's (1757-1818) unsuccessful candidature for Bristol in 1812.[75] Bright and Elton were prominent members of Bristol's Unitarian congregation at Lewin's Mead Chapel and both had experience serving on the committee of the Bristol Library.[76] Baillie also dined with Bristol's

[71] Baillie notebook 2 (journal), 1803-04, 17 July 1803, 26 January 1804.
[72] Samuel Romilly, *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Samuel Romilly, Written by Himself*, 3rd ed., 2 vols. (1840; London, 1841), II p.230; John Latimer, *The Annals of Bristol in the Nineteenth Century* (Bristol, 1887), p.52; Peter Brett, 'The Liberal Middle Classes and Politics in Three Provincial Towns – Newcastle, Bristol, and York – c.1812-1841', unpublished PhD thesis (University of Durham, 1991), p.85. Baillie associated together with Edward Protheroe on the 'Committee of Shipowners' formed to oppose the Bristol Harbour Bill, then passing through Parliament. Protheroe was the leading spokesman of the committee, tasked with negotiating with those in favour of the Bill. BA, 11168/9w[i-iii], Records of the Bright family, 1760s-1920s, Expenses incurred in respect of opposition to the Bristol Port Bill, 1803.
[73] Baillie notebook 2 (journal), 1803-04, 5 August 1803.
[74] *The Bristol Poll-Book* (Bristol, 1818), pp.i–lxiv; Brett, 'Liberal Middle Classes and Politics in Three Provincial Towns', pp.86-99; David R. Fisher, 'Bristol, 1790-1820', *HoP*, <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1790-1820/constituencies/bristol#footnoteref1_iuxaccf>, [accessed 14/11/22]; Mark Harrison, *Crowds and History: Mass Phenomena in English Towns, 1790-1835* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp.209-20; John A. Phillips, *The Great Reform Bill in the Boroughs: English Electoral Behaviour, 1818-41* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), pp.83-86; Steve Poole and Nicolas Rogers, *Bristol from Below: Law, Authority and Protest in a Georgian City* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2017), pp.307-11; Smith, 'Reading Against Reform', pp.116-28.
[75] Romilly, *Memoirs*, II, pp.271–2; *Bristol Poll-Book*, pp.xxxvii–xxxix.
[76] Kenneth Morgan, 'Introduction', in *The Bright-Meyler Papers: A Bristol-West India Connection, 1732-1837* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp.122-23; *Bristol Minute Book*, eds. Skjönsberg and Towsey, pp.254, 258. Baillie would dine again with Bright on 30 December 1803, and separately with Bright's cousin, Lowbridge Bright, on 16 June 1803. Baillie notebook 2 (journal), 1803-04, 16 June 1803, 30 December 1803.

most prominent Tory figure in this period, Thomas Daniel and his wife Susanna Daniel (1767-1846) on 13 June 1803.[77] Daniel was elected to the library's committee during Peter Baillie's tenure, and would continue to serve until 1842, combining his library position with the membership of some fifty-six organisations in Bristol between 1790 and 1835.[78] Although Baillie did not record his dinner conversation topics, these individuals' shared membership of the Library Society cut through partisan divides. The connections Baillie and others forged over dinner, partly by virtue of his library membership, may also have played a decisive role in the organisation of Bristol's branch of the period's mass participatory movement, the Volunteer Corps.

From August 1803, Baillie busied himself with involvement in the recently reformulated company of the Bristol Volunteers. Baillie had served as an ensign when the Volunteers were first formed in 1797, and his father served as one of the company's leading officers, a lieutenant colonel in 1797, and a colonel from 1798.[79] Both Baillie and his father served on the committee to regulate and organise the Volunteer Corps, doing so with a number of library members.[80] Peter Baillie played a larger role in the revived company of 1803, recording his appointment as captain on 18 August.[81] By this time, John Cookson argues, the nature and role of the

[77] Baillie notebook 2 (journal), 1803-04, 16 June, 13 June 1803. On Daniel, see below, Chapter Five, p.247. Baillie and the Daniels were also joined by Susanna Daniel's brother John Cave junior (1765-1842) and his wife Penelope Cave (d. 1815). John Cave was also a member of the Bristol Library and had been elected, alongside Baillie, at the controversial election of 1799. *Bristol Minute Book*, eds. Skjönsberg and Towsey, p.256. Baillie would dine again at Cave's residence in Clifton on 31 December 1803. Baillie notebook 2 (journal), 1803-04, 31 December 1803.

[78] BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 23 March 1807, 21 March 1842; Harrison, *Crowds and History*, p.81.

[79] Fisher, 'Baillie, Evan' and 'Baillie, Peter', *HoP*. Evan Baillie's importance to the Volunteers was commemorated in a company song. 'By Baillie brave, and vet'ran Gore; Bristolia's Sons commanded; Shall Frenchmen make on Albion's shore; To rue the day they landed'. James Brown, *The Rise, Progress & Military Improvement of the Bristol Volunteers; with an Alphabetical List of the Officers and Privates.* (Bristol, 1798), p.83.

[80] Brown, *Bristol Volunteers*, p.15. These members included Thomas Batchelor, Richard Bright, Robert Bush junior, John Foy Edgar, George Gibbs Sr., John Lambert, Philip John Miles, Edward and Henry Protheroe, James Tobin and Thomas Tyndall. See *Bristol Minute Book*, eds. Skjönsberg and Towsey; BCL, B7483, Bristol Library Society, Borrowing register, fol. 31, October 1811-August 1812. Another library member, Gabriel Goldney (1766-1837), served as a captain in 1797 and a second major in 1804. University of Bristol Archives, DM1398/1, Goldney Family Papers, Box A, Bundle 1, 203 and 203b. In all, fourteen of the twenty-five members of the Volunteer committee were also library members.

[81] Baillie notebook 2 (journal), 1803-04, 18 August 1803.

Volunteers as a force had shifted away from a close association with loyalism to one of national self-defence.[82] In the following year, the volunteer establishment was thought to number 380,000 individuals, or at least more than half of all armed forces in Britain.[83] In 1803, their chief purpose was to serve as a local defence force in the case of a French invasion, but Baillie also recorded that the Bristol volunteers were tasked with guarding French prisoners of war at nearby Stapleton.[84]

Participation in the Volunteer Corps brought Baillie into contact with some of the country's political and military elite. On 18 August 1803, Baillie's company was inspected by Ernest Augustus (1771-1851), the Duke of Cumberland and Teviotdale and the fifth son of George III.[85] The Duke was also present at a dinner Baillie attended two days later held at Merchants' Hall.[86] On 18 November 1803 Baillie dined with Sir Banastre Tarleton (1754-1833), 'General Tarleton', and other military figures at the home of John Pretor Pinney.[87] All, including Baillie, were aware that cohesion as a Volunteer Corps depended upon managing the different politics that existed amongst the officers and infantry, as recognised in the company's song:

> In POLITICS, though wide may be
>
> Their diff'rence of Opinion,
>
> To *ne'er submit* – they all agree

[82] J.E. Cookson, *The British Armed Nation, 1793-1815* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997), pp.67-81; J.E. Cookson, 'Service without Politics? Army, Militia and Volunteers in Britain during the American and French Revolutionary Wars', *War in History*, 10.4 (November 2003), pp.395-96.
[83] Cookson, *British Armed Nation*, p.67; Roger Knight, *Britain Against Napoleon: The Organization of Victory, 1793-1815* (London: Penguin, 2014), pp.262-65.
[84] For example, Baillie notebook 2 (journal), 1803-04, 12 October 1803, 10 November 1803, 11 December 1803, 8 January 1804, 20 January 1804.
[85] Baillie notebook 2 (journal), 1803-04, 18 August 1803; Alan Palmer, 'Ernest Augustus (1771-1851)', *ODNB* (September 2004).
[86] Baillie notebook 2 (journal), 1803-04, 20 August 1803.
[87] Baillie notebook 2 (journal), 1803-04, 18 November 1803.

To GALLIA'S harsh Dominion[.][88]

The success of the Volunteer corps rested on managing these differences between members. To this end, its participants, like Baillie, used the social skills accrued from associational involvement, such as the subscription library. Clubs and societies succeeded in taming the problematic elements of urban politics, partisanship and conflict. Codified regulations were partly designed to remove uncertainties in their administration, thus helping to eliminate ambiguous spaces in which disagreement could flourish. Equally important were the social skills and cohesion that were brought about by regular contact between different individuals of Bristol's civic class. This was the sociability that Joseph Addison and Richard Steele preached in their periodicals, writing of the importance of polite, reasoned engagement.[89] Baillie used his membership of the subscription library to read the manuals of eighteenth-century polite society. Between September and October 1790, he consecutively borrowed the six volumes of a later edition (1786) of Steele's *The Tatler* (originally published in 1709), the forerunner to the coffee-table periodical.[90] Working through partisan differences was essential to maintaining the cohesiveness of Bristol's Volunteer Militia, but it was also a vital personal skill which Baillie consciously cultivated for both his political and business career.

IV

As his reading of *The Tatler* demonstrates, Baillie's borrowing from the Bristol Library was often directed at aiding his participation within the city's social politics. From the outset, Baillie intended his record of reading to form a significant component of his journal entries, although he qualified this by explaining that this would consist of 'the few Books which my leisure will permit me to read'.[91] Baillie made eighteen borrowings from the Bristol Library during the

[88] Brown, *Bristol Volunteers*, p.15.
[89] Allan, 'Politeness and the Politics of Culture', pp.161-65.
[90] 'Borrowing Record for Baillie, Mr. Peter Esq.', ECLO.
[91] Baillie notebook 2 (journal), 1803-04, 17 May 1803.

period in which he recorded matters in his journal (May 1803-February 1804).[92] Despite his initial intentions he recorded very few of his reading responses in his journal and seems to have used a separate commonplace book.[93] For the most part, he kept the record of his social life separate from the records of his reading. His commonplace book, which he left undated, includes biographical entries on various figures including Sir Francis Bacon, Jacques-Pierre Brissot, Nicolas de Condorcet and James Cook, notes on Indian history and religion, as well as notes on agriculture, English grammar and pronunciation. Because Baillie did not leave a record of book titles above the notes he made in his commonplace book it is difficult to link his note taking with his borrowing record from the Bristol Library. He seems to have paraphrased material he read, rather than copy it out verbatim and did not generally record his own commentary. Baillie did note different instances of reading in his social journal. On 20 May 1803, for example, he recorded reading the 'King's Proclamation' on the resumption of war with France, while, on 8 July 1803, he recorded the discovery of a child genius in northern Germany, possibly read from a newspaper.[94] He also used his journal, as originally intended, to engage directly with material he had borrowed from the Bristol Library. He borrowed Ralph Fell's *Tour through the Batavian Republic* (1801) from the library on 17 May 1803, the day he began keeping his journal.[95] Two days later he described it as 'a Book of no great interest, but not altogether devoid of Entertainment' and returned it on 24 May when he visited the library for the meeting of the committee.[96] Reading David Collins's *Account of the English Colony in New South Wales* (1789-1802) Baillie, calling it the 'History of Botany Bay', described it as a 'not a very Entertaining tho'[…] rather a curious book – It contains a dreadful Catalogue of

[92] BCL, B7472, Bristol Library Society, Borrowing register, fol. 20, October 1802-July 1803 and B7473, Borrowing register, 1803-04.
[93] Baillie notebook 1 (commonplace book), n.d.
[94] Baillie notebook 2 (journal), 1803-04, 20 May, 8 July 1803.
[95] BCL, B7472, Borrowing register, 1802-03, p.156; Baillie notebook 2 (journal), 1803-04, 17 May 1803.
[96] Baillie notebook 2 (journal), 1803-04, 19 May 1803. In actuality, an insufficient number of committee members attended the meeting on 24 May 1803 to form a quorum. BA, LS/M/3, Committee minute book, 1789-1807, 24 May 1803.

Crimes & punishments & shews how incorrigible human nature is, when Vice has once obtained Complete possession of the mind'.[97] A week later he recorded that he had finished the first volume of Collins's work and again complained at its 'disgusting repetition of Crimes & punishm[ts]'. He positively contrasted the morals of the Aboriginal Australians with those of the colony's settlers: 'The Acco[t] of the Natives, their manners Customs &c., is sufficiently curious – They appear to be a race of people sunk very low in the scale of civilisation & yet in all respects they were superior to many of our Convicts'.[98]

Baillie provided no further record of his reading in his journal, although he borrowed less frequently over the summer months as he spent more time away from Bristol, taking various trips to Cheltenham, Glastonbury and Bath. His use of the Bristol Library notably changed from the 1790s to the 1800s, both in the books he borrowed and how he recorded these. Baillie's method of commonplacing aligns closely with the gendered dimensions of notetaking that Mark Towsey observed more generally in the reading of history. Whereas female readers tended to maintain reading diaries throughout their lives, male-authored commonplace books were often narrower in scope.[99] Baillie began his diary to maintain a record of his reading and associational activities, yet his recording of these became sparser as his political career developed. Fittingly for his choice of trade, one of Baillie's earliest borrowings was Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* (1776), whose two volumes he read between February and April 1790. Later Baillie returned to the library to borrow Smith's *Additions and Corrections to his Inquiry into the Wealth of Nations* (1784). Yet Baillie's borrowing during his early membership in the library was also far more methodical and systematic than in the following decade. During the 1790s he frequently made his sequential way through long volumes of works, including the

[97] Baillie notebook 2 (journal), 1803-04, 29 May 1803. Baillie borrowed both volumes of Collins's *Account* on 26 May, returning both on 21 June 1803. BCL, B7472, Borrowing register, 1802-03.
[98] Baillie notebook 2 (journal), 1803-04, 6 June 1803.
[99] Mark Towsey, *Reading History in Britain and America, c.1750-c.1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp.34-54.

six volumes of *The Tatler*, the eight volumes of David Hume's *History of England* (1773) and the five volumes of James Bruce's *Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile* (1790).[100] In the early 1800s, Baillie was no longer taking out such extended works, frequently only borrowing material one volume in length. Baillie's borrowing practices may have changed as his role in the family business increased and the extent of his participation in Bristol's associational society widened. During the period in which he kept his journal (May 1803-February 1804) the range of material he borrowed was eclectic, including travel writing, theology, history, anthropology and works on pronunciation.[101] Nevertheless, his reading of Friedrich Hornemann's *Travels in the Interior of Africa* (1802), Ralph Fell's *Tour through the Batavian Republic*, Thomas Maurice's *Modern History of Hindostan* (1802), along with the manner in which he read Collins's *Account of the English Colony in New South Wales*, his concern of the morals and values of Aboriginal Australians, speaks to a broader interest in, and potentially sympathetic stance toward, the places and peoples of the world. Nevertheless, despite this reflective reading, there was a large disconnect between Baillie's concern for Aboriginal Australians and his own family's ownership of enslaved individuals in the Caribbean and his acquaintance with the pro-slavery proponent, James Tobin.[102]

Baillie also used his borrowings from the Bristol Library to directly aid his social urban networking, and the opportunity to read a range of texts likely provided him with the social and

[100] 'Borrowing Record for Baillie, Mr. Peter Esq.', ECLO.

[101] These included John Stoddart's *Remarks on Local Scenery and Manners in Scotland* (1801), Samuel Burder's *Oriental Customs in Illustration of the Scriptures* (1802), Thomas Maurice's *Modern History of Hindostan* (1802), George Shaw's *General Zoology* (1800-12) and John Walker's *Key to the Pronunciation of Proper Names* (1798). BCL, B7472, Borrowing register, 1802-03 and B7473, Borrowing register, 1803-04. Baillie's reading on elocution may have been to improve his skill at reading aloud, whether in a private or public context. As Abigail Williams has noted, 'reading out loud *well* was at the very centre of polite accomplishment', and Baillie may have viewed it as another way to present himself as at home amongst the urban political elite. Abigail Williams, *The Social Life of Books: Reading Together in the Eighteenth-Century Home* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018), pp.15-35.

[102] 'Evan Baillie', *Legacies of British Slavery*, <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/128429844>, [accessed 23/06/24]; 'Peter Baillie', *Legacies of British Slavery*, <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/2146650153>, [accessed 23/06/24].

cultural education required for polite conversation amongst his social circles. In some instances, Baillie read library texts with a specific social meeting in mind. On 20 December 1803, he borrowed 'Tobin's Tracts', a collection of pro-slavery pamphlets published by the sugar planter James Tobin.[103] In these pamphlets Tobin, a library committee member and absentee planter, refuted the arguments of the abolitionist James Ramsay and erroneously argued that slaves in the Caribbean enjoyed better living conditions than free individuals living in Scotland and Ireland.[104] Baillie returned 'Tobin's Tracts' three days after they were taken out of the library and six days later hosted the Tobins for dinner at his Bristol residence.[105] In other instances, library business was followed immediately by a social occasion. Both men attended the committee meeting held on 6 December 1803, with Baillie recording that he dined at Tobin's immediately afterwards.[106] Tobin's name is recorded in ten other instances in Baillie's journal that year, although it is likely that he was already known to Baillie due to his close business ties with Baillie's father-in-law, John Pretor Pinney.[107] Yet Baillie and Tobin's joint membership of the library enabled Baillie to forge these connections independently.

This is one specific example of what may have been a regular occurrence for Baillie. He owed his political success at the election of 1807 to this ability to socialise and foster connections with politically important individuals. Although his ancestral links with Inverness-shire afforded him a clear advantage, Baillie's election as an MP also owed itself to his ability to forge close connections with the existing social and political networks there.[108] He continued

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[103] Baillie borrowed Elizabeth Sotheby's *Patient Griselda* (1798) at the same time as Tobin's *Tracts*, returning both three days later on 23 December 1803. BCL, B7473, Borrowing register, 1803-04. Sotheby had donated her work, along with 'Sonnets, Odes, and other Poems', to the library on 26 August 1794. *Bristol Minute Book*, eds. Skjönsberg and Towsey, p.197.

[104] 'James Tobin', *Legacies of British Slavery*, <http://wwwdepts-live.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/2146644497>, [accessed 02/09/23]; Skjönsberg and Towsey, 'Introduction', in *Bristol Minute Book*, pp.xliv-xlv; Buckles, *Crisis and Resilience*, pp.54-55.

[105] BCL, B7473, Borrowing register, 1803-04, p.110; Baillie notebook 2 (journal), 1803-04, 29 December 1803.

[106] BA, LS/M/3, Committee minute book, 1789-1807, 6 December 1803; Baillie notebook 2 (journal), 1803-04, 6 December 1803.

[107] Baillie notebook 2 (journal), 1803-04; Morgan, 'Pinney, John Pretor', *ODNB*.

[108] Hamilton, *Scotland, the Caribbean and the Atlantic World*, pp.178-79; Fisher, 'Baillie, Peter', *HoP*.

to consolidate his position after his election. In September 1807, Baillie was elected as a burgess of Fortrose, whilst in April the following year he was unanimously admitted as a member of the Highland Society.[109] In this, Baillie used the strategies that he had rehearsed in Bristol, engaging in local civic circles and playing host in social engagements.[110] Baillie used his participation in the Bristol Library Society and the opportunities it afforded him to cultivate connections upon which future political success could be built. Baillie was hardly alone in doing this, his father had used similar methods to ingratiate himself into the society of St Vincent and Bristol.[111] Peter Baillie used his membership of the subscription library for much the same purposes. Although his death in 1811 prevented it, Baillie may have had future aspirations to succeed his father as Bristol's MP, as his two brothers attempted to do at the elections of 1818 and 1820.[112] Had he done so, his membership and participation in the Bristol Library Society would have been essential elements of any success.

V

Baillie's use of the subscription library demonstrates the manner in which networks centred around it effortlessly intertwined with those of other clubs and societies in the urban associational space. His journal records not only his social circle, and the significance of the subscription library to him individually, but also the wider social life of a community of library members in Bristol, one that mirrored its civic class. It explains an additional purpose to the subscription library. As their records of borrowings suggest, these institutions were valuable as

[109] University of Bristol Archives, DM58, Pinney Family Papers, Red Boxes, Box 32, Certificate of admittance of Peter Baillie as a Burgess of Fortrose, 25 September 1807; Levi Gordon to Peter Baillie, 2 July 1808, University of Bristol Archives, DM58, Pinney Family Papers, Red Boxes, Box 30.
[110] Hamilton, *Scotland, the Caribbean and the Atlantic World*, pp.179-80.
[111] Hamilton, *Scotland, the Caribbean and the Atlantic World*, p.91.
[112] Phillips, *Great Reform Bill*, pp.86-89. James Evan Baillie was successfully elected as one of Bristol's MPs in 1830. Terry Jenkins, 'Baillie, James Evan (?1781-1863), of Rodney House, Clifton, Glos. and 1 Seamore Place, Mayfair, Mdx.', *HoP*, <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1820-1832/member/baillie-james-1781-1863>, [accessed 24/06/24]; Kenneth Morgan, 'Baillie, James Evan (1781?-1863)', *ODNB* (October 2016); Michael Taylor, *The Interest: How the British Establishment Resisted the Abolition of Slavery* (London: Vintage, 2021), pp.177-78.

libraries. Of equal significance, however, was participation in the administrative elements of the subscription library, which provided some with their first experience of civic politics, participation on committees and elections, albeit at a local level. For the collective of the library membership, the subscription library provided the space and opportunity for a civic class to network and associate together, with these networks ultimately forming the basis for wider civic and political association, whether at the level of the club and society, civic administration or parliamentary politics. Arguably, this function of the subscription library explains their popularity and extensiveness as much as their bibliographical significance. The cultural experience of this should not be underestimated. They were politically useful and politically valued for the opportunities they provided to educate, connect and sustain the political class of Georgian society.

Peter Baillie's overall reading habits were typical for a subscription library reader, especially his penchant for reading travel literature.[113] His reading of history and particularly the sequential reading of David Hume, presaged his future career as a parliamentarian, turning, as so many others did, to Hume's *History of England* for its account of the development of Britain's constitution.[114] Yet Baillie's record of reading was also remarkably broad, encompassing liberal authors such as Mary Wollstonecraft and Maria Edgeworth, as well as conservative writers such as Robert Bisset and Jane West.[115] In a manner, Baillie's nuanced reading mirrored his own politics. Although recurring bouts of poor health limited his attendance at Westminster, when he did attend Baillie generally kept an independent line from

[113] Kaufman, *Borrowings from the Bristol Library*, p.121. Travel literature was the most popular subject for Bristol borrowers in 1812. See below, Chapter Four, p.272.
[114] Towsey, *Reading History*, pp.103-38.
[115] This included Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), Maria Edgeworth's *Practical Education* (1798), *Letters for Literary Ladies* (1799) and *Essay on Irish Bulls* (1802), Robert Bisset's *Life of Edmund Burke* (1800), and Jane West's *Letters to a Young Man* (1801). 'Borrowing Record for Baillie, Mr. Peter Esq.', ECLO; BCL, B7469, Bristol Library Society, Borrowing register, fol. 17, July 1800-April 1801, pp.87, 100; BCL, B7473, Borrowing register, 1803-04, pp.123, 129; BCL, B7474, Bristol Library Society, Borrowing register, fol. 22, March-December 1804, pp.135, 142.

both the administration of William Cavendish-Bentinck, 3rd Duke of Portland, and its Whig opposition. It is probable that he, like his father, would have opposed the passage of the slave trade abolition bill had he been in Parliament when this was passed in March 1807. Yet he was also a supporter of parliamentary reform and voted for Thomas Brand's reform motion on 21 May 1810 despite being aware of its unpopularity amongst his electors in Inverness.[116]

The events and legacy of the French Revolution had a profound effect upon Baillie's life. In 1789, revolutionary upheaval cut short his education in France, whilst a decade later, the threat of foreign invasion led him to join Bristol's Volunteer Militia, to defend his city and guard French prisoners of war. Despite these threats, and despite reading through a conservative backlash, Baillie's borrowing record retained a Gallic interest. He persistently read, and in some cases recorded, his continued interest in French figures and ideas. He was fully aware of the violent turn which events in France had taken, whether from travel narratives through the country, such as the anonymously written *Sketch of Modern France* (1798) with its depictions of ruined chateaus in Chantilly, or by following its revolutionary actors, recording the fate suffered by Brissot, 'consigned to the Guillotine by his quondam Friend Robespierre'.[117] Nevertheless, he continued to read works in English and French by French authors such as Jean-Jacques Barthélemy, Nicolas de Condorcet, Louis-Pierre Anquetil, François de La Rochefoucauld and Jean-Jacques Rousseau.[118] For Baillie, war with France did not mean an end to this transnational transfer of stories and ideas. Indeed, like many of his Bristol merchant

[116] Fisher, 'Baillie, Peter', *HoP*.
[117] C.L. Moody, ed., *A Sketch of Modern France. In a Series of Letters to a Lady of Fashion. Written in the Years 1796 and 1797, During a Tour Through France.* (London, 1798), pp.118-22; Baillie notebook 1 (commonplace book), n.d. Baillie borrowed *A Sketch of Modern France* on 13 December 1798. 'Borrowing Record for Baillie, Mr. Peter Esq.', ECLO. On Brissot, see Richard Whatmore, *The End of Enlightenment: Empire, Commerce, Crisis* (Padstow: Allen Lane, 2023), pp.191-221.
[118] This consisted of Jean-Jacques Barthélemy's *Voyage du Jeune Anacharsis en Gréce* (1789), Condorcet's *The Life of Voltaire* (1790), Louis-Pierre Anquetil's *Memoirs of the Court of France* (1791), François de La Rochefoucauld's *Moral Maxims* (1749), Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Oeuvres Completes* (1782) and *Confessions* (1783). 'Borrowing Record for Baillie, Mr. Peter Esq.', ECLO; BCL, B7470, Bristol Library Society, Borrowing register, fol. 18, April 1801-January 1802, pp.26, 42.

compatriots, he may not have viewed warfare as the 'ultimate crisis' but rather as a period, like 'peacetime', with its own challenges and opportunities for trade.[119] Others clearly thought differently to Baillie, viewing French arms and ideas as existential threats to the safety and security of the British state. This included the overt threat of armed invasion, as well as the 'fifth column' element posed by liberal or reforming politicians at home.[120] These fears infected the political and reading lives of British subjects on an individual and collective level. The next chapter will therefore examine the political impact of reading at the subscription library amongst a community of readers. Political readers during this period collaborated together in defence of the British state, with the subscription library contributing to the form and content of this response. At the Leighton Library, a community of readers preached, organised, and read together for devotional salvation, and political loyalism.

[119] Buckles, *Crisis and Resilience*, pp.21-22.

[120] Edward Royle, *Revolutionary Britannia?: Reflections on the Threat of Revolution in Britain, 1789-1848* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp.13-66; M.O. Grenby, *The Anti-Jacobin Novel: British Conservatism and the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp.6-8; David Andress, *The Savage Storm: Britain on the Brink in the Age of Napoleon* (London: Little Brown, 2012), pp.104-28 and *passim*; Knight, *Britain Against Napoleon*, pp.251-84.

Chapter Four: 'Use all the helps of nature and grace': Politico-religious Reading and the Church of Scotland at the Leighton Library

> *I must plead guilty to the charge of occasionally preaching political Sermons. I have preached, however, no other politics than such as St Paul has enjoined* ***all*** *Clergymen to preach, and such as he and St Peter preached before us.*[1]
>
> George Gleig, *Sermons Preached Occasionally in the Episcopal Chapel, Stirling* (1803).

The malleability of the subscription library as an associational format partly explains its popularity and general spread throughout the English-speaking world. Together, collectively, members crafted a reading culture that best suited their context and the whims of the community of subscribers. This culture depended upon the kind of individuals who became library members, managed the subscription library and borrowed its books. In Scotland, religion and politics were inexorably intertwined. Ministers of the Church of Scotland were the primary users of the Leighton Library in Dunblane, with politics and religion intersecting in their reading and library habits. These readers occupied privileged roles as leaders of their communities. During periods of political and social tumult, ministers used the prominence of the pulpit to intervene directly within political debates.[2] Although some, as George Gleig (1753-1840) did, responded apologetically to this incursion, there had always existed a 'duty', as Jeremy Taylor had urged, for ministers to 'endeavour to destroy all popular errors and evil

[1] George Gleig, *Sermons Preached Occasionally in the Episcopal Chapel, Stirling, during the Eventful Period from 1793 to 1803.* (Edinburgh, 1803), p.vi. Emphasis in original.

[2] Emma Vincent, 'The Responses of Scottish Churchmen to the French Revolution, 1789-1802', *The Scottish Historical Review*, 73.2 (October 1994), pp.191-215; John R. McIntosh, *Church and Theology in Enlightenment Scotland: the Popular Party, 1740-1800* (East Lothian: Tuckwell, 1998), pp.156-66; Richard B. Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment: the Moderate Literati of Edinburgh*, rev. ed., (1985; Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), pp.262-97; Ronald Lyndsay Crawford, *The Chair of Verity: Political Preaching and Pulpit Censure in Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (Glasgow: Humming Earth, 2017), pp.4-22.

principles taken up by his People, or others with whom they converse.'[3] The analysis of the manner in which the subscription library was managed and used can not only reveal how a community responded to the political upheavals of the 1790s and beyond, but also why they did so, the influences upon their thoughts, ideas, and interventions. Understanding how this 'religious' group of readers borrowed and used their subscription library provides an insight into the broader socio-political significance of these reading associations and their use by members of the elite classes.

Using book and church records, and with this analysis of political reading, this chapter also assesses the intellectual state and vitality of a presbytery of the Church of Scotland in the first few decades of the nineteenth century. In their administration of the Leighton Library as a subscription library, ministers of the Church of Scotland in Dunblane and surrounding Perthshire were actively cultivating an intellectual resource intimately tied to the Kirk yet of use to the wider elite community. This, and other aspects of this group (their engagement with works of Christian Stoicism, their political conservatism, and their connections with other Christian denominations) places them closer to a Moderate ecclesiastical positioning than to those associated with the 'Popular' party. The structures and environment of the Leighton Library created this culture as well as supporting the intellectual efforts of those who made up it. Moreover, the diversity of interests and publications produced by Leighton members in the early nineteenth century suggests a reorientation, rather than decline, in the intellectual focus of Church of Scotland ministers, away from a study of theology and scripture and towards more secular and 'polite' interests. The Leighton Library formed an essential element in this reorientation and in the intellectual and reading lives of its members.

[3] Jeremy Taylor, *Rules and Advices to the Clergy of the Diocese of Down and Conner* (Glasgow, 1774), p.42.

This chapter bases its analysis on the borrowing records of a group of Leighton Library members who I term, for the sake of brevity, 'religious readers'. These are individuals who were in an ecclesiastical occupation, predominantly church ministers, but also lay preachers, church elders, students in theology and a bishop.[4] It was also an ecumenical group, containing ministers of the Church of Scotland, as well as for the Scottish Secession churches, both Burgher and Anti-Burgher, and the Scottish Episcopal Church. Although this group constituted 46 percent of the Leighton Library's borrowers with a registered occupation, they were responsible for almost 51 percent of borrowings made from the library.[5] Moreover, 40 percent of the library's total borrowings were made by church ministers, despite only accounting for almost 21 percent of borrowers with a registered occupation.[6] In short, library members in or preparing for ecclesiastical occupations were more likely to borrow books than those in other occupations, with church ministers being far more likely to do so. It is not intended, by focusing on the borrowing record of this group of library members, to suggest that members in other occupations were any less 'religious' in their choice of borrowing, or that any kind of distinction can be drawn between 'religious' or 'secular' readers. Instead, by using a targeted analysis, rather than providing a general analysis of the borrowing trends of all Leighton Library members, this chapter will examine the intellectual culture of a coherent group of individuals who occupied, or would later occupy, significant positions within society and

[4] *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Leighton Library: Borrowers ordered by surname (A),", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/library/leighton/borrowers/surname/A>, [accessed 27/09/24].

[5] 'Religious readers' were responsible for 3,223 borrowings out of a total recorded 6,737. 134 out of 306 borrowers at the Leighton Library have at least one identified occupation. Many of these individuals lived locally and used the library over a number of years. Approximately 110 of the Leighton's borrowers were 'Water Drinkers', the title given to seasonal visitors to Dunblane visiting the local spa waters and responsible for 549 borrowings. *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Leighton Library: Facts & figures,", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/library/leighton/facts>, [accessed 29/03/24]. As temporary visitors these individuals frequently left only the record of their surname and location in the borrowing register, making it difficult to track further biographical or occupational details. Further explanation of the nature of the Leighton Library's membership is provided in Chapter One, see above, pp.83-86.

[6] Visual breakdowns of these figures are provided on the 'Facts & Figures' page of the Leighton Library on the Books and Borrowing website. *Books and Borrowing*, s.v., "Leighton Library: Facts & figures".

Scotland's churches, and who were not afraid to intervene, whether from the pulpit or in print, in political matters.

I

Modern analysis of the eighteenth-century Church of Scotland has focused on a division within the Kirk between a Moderate and a Popular grouping. For Ian Clark, at the centre of this split lay the question of patronage, the presentation of ministers to vacant parishes.[7] The Moderates were a party of Presbyterian churchmen that emerged after 1750 under the leadership of the minister, historian and university principal William Robertson (1721-93) who favoured the strict enforcement of the Patronage Act of 1712 which entrenched the right of land owners and heritors over that of congregations.[8] Expanding on this scholarship, later historians have shifted the focus onto the Moderates' ecclesiastical opponents, those ministers in the 'Popular party'.[9] Although scholars disagree on the extent of their organisation as a formal ecclesiastical 'party', Popular ministers differed from their Moderate counterparts on the question of patronage, their evangelical approach to preaching the Gospel, their adherence to the Westminster Confession of Faith and their approach to natural religion.[10] As Colin Kidd has noted, in addition to their

[7] Ian D.L. Clark, 'From Protest to Reaction: The Moderate Regime in the Church of Scotland , 1752-1805', in *Scotland in the Age of Improvement*, ed. Nicholas Phillipson and Rosalind Mitchison, rev. ed. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022), pp.203. See also Ian D.L. Clark, 'Moderatism and the Moderate Party in the Church of Scotland, 1752-1805', unpublished PhD thesis (University of Cambridge, 1963); David Allan, *Scotland in the Eighteenth Century: Union and Enlightenment* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp.63-68; Colin Kidd, 'Subscription, the Scottish Enlightenment and the Moderate Interpretation of History', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 55.3 (2005), pp.502-19; Thomas Ahnert, *The Moral Culture of the Scottish Enlightenment* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), pp.78-93.

[8] On Robertson, see Jeffrey R. Smitten, *The Life of William Robertson: Minister, Historian, and Principal* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018).

[9] Ned C. Landsman, 'Presbyterians and Provincial Society: The Evangelical Enlightenment in the West of Scotland, 1740-1755', in *Sociability and Society in Eighteenth-Century Scotland*, eds. John Dwyer and Richard B. Sher (Edinburgh: Mercat Press, 1993), pp.194-209; Ned C. Landsman, 'Witherspoon and the Problem of Provincial Identity in Scottish Evangelical Culture', in *Scotland and America in the Age of Enlightenment*, eds. Richard B. Sher and Jeffrey R. Smitten (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), pp.29-45; McIntosh, *Church and Theology*; Jonathan M. Yeager, *Enlightened Evangelicalism: The Life of Thought of John Erskine* (London: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[10] McIntosh, *Church and Theology*, pp.233-34; Yeager, *Enlightened Evangelicalism*, pp.5, 15-19; Ahnert, *Moral Culture*, pp.95-121. On the question of the existence of an organised 'Popular party', see McIntosh, *Church and*

stance on ecclesiastical polity, the Moderates have also been generally associated with possessing a 'polite, ecumenical outlook'.[11] It was this culture that Richard Sher defined as marking a Moderate 'literati' which consisted of eminent men of letters, of similar ages and education who dominated the institutions and intellectual and cultural life of Scotland in the second half of the eighteenth century.[12] Sher's 'literati' inhabited the institutional and associational networks of Edinburgh, but this chapter will assess whether a similar culture, what might be termed a 'provincial literati', existed amongst the readers of the Leighton Library. Historical contemporaries and historians alike pointed to a perceived decline in the intellectual vitality and prominence of the Kirk in the early nineteenth century.[13] Yet a study of the authors and readers at the Leighton Library reveals that this was less a decline and more a reorientation to other more diverse forms of intellectual enquiry, what Adam Smith defined as the 'subdivision of employment in philosophy'.[14]

The study of books and the circulation of print has formed an important aspect of this historiography of the Church of Scotland. Part of the social prestige of the Moderate literati lay in their dominance within the Scottish universities, but also their success as published authors.[15]

Theology, p.20; Yeager, *Enlightened Evangelicalism*, p.5. The influence of evangelicalism was particularly pronounced on this group of ministers. For example, see David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), p.33; Stewart J. Brown, 'The Ten Years' Conflict and the Disruption of 1843', in *Scotland in the Age of the Disruption*, Stewart J. Brown and Michael Fry, eds. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993), p.5. There is no evidence that any of the Leighton Library's trustees were evangelical ministers in this regard, although a number of Leighton members would, in later life, join the Free Church in 1843. This included Patrick MacFarlan (1781-1849), the minister of Kippen during his period as a Leighton member (1807-10) and described by Michael Fry and Stewart J. Brown as one of the 'Evangelical leaders' of the Church of Scotland. Michael Fry and Stewart J. Brown, 'Preface' in *Scotland in the Age of the Disruption* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993), p.vii.

[11] Kidd, 'Moderate Interpretation of History', p.503, n.6.

[12] Sher, *Church and University*, p.13.

[13] For example, see Yeager, *Enlightened Evangelicalism*, p.185; Ahnert, *Moral Culture*, p.136; Sher, *Church and University*, pp.318-21; Crawford, *Chair of Verity*, pp.299-300.

[14] Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*., 2 vols. (London, 1776), I, p.12.

[15] Sher, *Church and University*, pp.62-63. See also, Richard B. Sher, *The Enlightenment and the Book: Scottish Authors & Their Publisher in Eighteenth-Century Britain, Ireland, & America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), p.131; Ann Matheson, 'Religion', in *The Edinburgh History of the Book in Scotland: Volume II, Enlightenment and Expansion, 1707-1800*, eds. Stephen W. Brown and Warren McDougall (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), pp.459-70.

On the other end of the ecclesiastical spectrum, Jonathan Yeager has argued that the primary contribution of John Erskine (1721-1803) as the leader of the 'Popular' group of ministers in the Church of Scotland came in his dissemination of information and religious ideas through printed material.[16] Erskine owned a large personal library and his deep reading and consideration of texts shaped significant elements of his character. He also acted as the editor and promoter for numerous other theologians, and regularly sent books to his correspondents in Britain and North America.

In many of these studies, the focus has largely been on the supply side of religious print culture, the authors, printers, and publishers involved in creating and disseminating this material, especially at an elite level.[17] Some historians have been interested in the significance of circulated religious material amongst congregations in eighteenth-century Scotland. Luke Brekke has argued that the popular market for 'small godly books' in the western lowlands of Scotland contributed to the spread of a 'simplified Calvinism' amongst parishioners there.[18] As this chapter will demonstrate, a similar approach equally alive to the significance of reading and print in the formation and spread of religious ideas can be used to analyse the intellectual and theological vitality of ministers within the Church of Scotland at the end of the eighteenth century.

[16] Yeager, *Enlightened Evangelicalism*, pp.11-12.
[17] Although he examines far more than just religious publications, Sher's *The Enlightenment and the Book* (2006) is an excellent example of this publisher-led approach to book history.
[18] Luke Brekke, 'Heretics in the Pulpit, Inquisitors in the Pews: The Long Reformation and the Scottish Enlightenment', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 44.1 (2010), pp.81-82. For other studies of the spread of religious reading material in this period, see McIntosh, *Church and Theology*, p.13; Alastair J. Mann, *The Scottish Book Trade 1500–1720: Print Commerce and Print Control in Early Modern Scotland* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press 2000), pp.35-65; Valerie Honeyman, '"That ye may judge for yourselves": The Contribution of Scottish Presbyterianism Towards the Emergence of Political Awareness Amongst Ordinary People in Scotland Between 1746 and 1792', unpublished PhD thesis (University of Stirling, 2012), pp.145-225; Yeager, *Enlightened Evangelicalism*, pp.167-91; Alexander Dick, '"A good deal of trash": Reading Societies, Religious Controversy and Networks of Improvement in Eighteenth-Century Scotland', *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 38 (2015), pp.587-94.

Although few private records, let alone reading records, survive in the case of ordinary parish ministers, church ministers were regularly involved in associational library culture. Library records therefore represent an excellent source for detailing some of the texts Kirk ministers engaged with in this period. For the Church of Scotland ministers who became library members, the Leighton Library provided access to a valuable repository of books. For these ministers, books borrowed from the Leighton Library formed a significant element of their regular reading material alongside its sourcing through other means.[19] An analysis of what these ministers did, or did not, borrow offers one insight into their interests and the state of the Kirk in this period.

Studying the Leighton Library as a subscription library can also inform us as to the significance of this form of library association in smaller urban and rural areas. Subscription libraries spanned the entirety of the British Isles, present in major urban centres but also regularly in smaller communities, from the Orkney Library in the north of Scotland, to the Tavistock Public Subscription Library in the south of England.[20] In such locations, the subscription library was able to adapt to its local circumstances. Not always able to enjoy the seclusion of their own private residence, the rural subscription library sometimes existed in a 'virtual' space, located physically in a chest or shelf in a church or civic building.[21] The finances of such libraries were also tighter and generally unable to afford the constant stream of new publications that was a feature of the urban subscription library.[22] There was a greater responsibility placed upon the

[19] For example, the Rev. William MacGregor Stirling, minister of Port of Menteith between 1801 and 1824, not only accessed books from the Leighton Library and the Stirling Subscription Library, but also subscribed to periodicals and purchased his own books from booksellers in Stirling and Edinburgh. See above, Chapter One, pp.70-71.

[20] *Rules and Catalogue of the Orkney Library.* (Kirkwall, 1844); *A Catalogue of the Books in the Tavistock Public Subscription Library; a Copy of the Rules, and List of the Subscribers.* (Plymouth, 1818).

[21] Mark Towsey and Kyle B. Roberts, 'Introduction', in *Before the Public Library: Reading, Community, and Identity in the Atlantic World, 1650–1850* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), p.16.

[22] For example, see the almost monthly lists of purchases in the minutes of the Bristol Library Society and the Liverpool Athenaeum. *Bristol Minute Book*, eds. Skjönsberg and Towsey; BA, 32079/LS/M/3, Bristol Library Society, Minute book of Committee, 31 March 1789–10 March 1807 [hereafter BA, LS/M/3, Committee minute

trustees and committee members of these smaller libraries to ensure the correct books were purchased at the correct time and for the correct price. Analysing the subscription library in a Scottish context provides an additional resource for understanding the local dynamics at play in rural Scotland and reveals that the Scottish subscription library acted in similar ways to those located in England. Library members at the Leighton Library invariably consisted of Dunblane's civil and social elite, whilst the library's administrative positions were monopolised by the community's leaders. In Dunblane, as it was for much of Scotland, this was the Kirk and its minister.

II

The Leighton Library was hardly a typical subscription library, however, and would have held a deep spiritual and religious resonance for its users. Its founding collection of books, the private library of Robert Leighton, bishop of Dunblane, and later archbishop of Glasgow, provided it with a valuable selection of sixteenth and seventeenth century texts, more than half of which were printed in Europe, with many including Leighton's own notes and marginalia.[23] To religious commentators and some present-day scholars, Leighton's bequest of his books was proof of the charity and magnanimity which characterised his life and record.[24] He remained a popular figure during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and his works, all of which were

book, 1789-1807]; BA, 32079/LS/M/4, Bristol Library Society, Minute book of Committee, 24 March 1807–22 March 1823 [hereafter BA, LS/M/4, Committee minute book, 1807-23]; *The First Minute Book of the Liverpool Athenaeum, 1797-1809*, eds. David Brazendale and Mark Towsey (Lancaster: The Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, 2020). Kathleen Hapgood estimates that between 1800 and 1809 the Bristol Library Society purchased well over one hundred works a year. Kathleen Hapgood, 'Library Practice in the Bristol Library Society, 1772-1830', *Library History*, 5.5 (1981), p.148.

[23] Gordon Willis, 'The Leighton Library, Dunblane: Its History and Contents', *The Bibliotheck*, 10.6 (1981), pp.147-52.

[24] Gilbert Burnet, *Bishop Burnet's History of His Own Time. Vol. 1* (London, 1724), p.588; *Memoir and Correspondence of Mrs. Grant of Laggan.*, ed. J.P. Grant, 3 vols. (London, 1844), II, pp.144, 249-50; Willis, 'Leighton Library', pp.139-40; David Allan, 'Reconciliation and Retirement in the Restoration Scottish Church: The Neo-Stoicism of Robert Leighton', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 50.2 (April 1999), pp.252-57, 278; Bill Inglis, *A Scottish Town: Dunblane 1560-1919* (Stirling: Jamieson and Munro, 2016), pp.27-36.

published posthumously, were regularly reprinted.[25] Leighton's writing had a deep spiritual impact upon the Romantic poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and Leighton is credited with influencing Coleridge's religious move away from Unitarianism to traditional Christian doctrines, and for offering him vital spiritual sustenance during a period of crisis between 1813 and 1814.[26] Coleridge's first introduction to Leighton came when he was lent a copy of his *Expository Works* (1748) by the Bristol Library member, William Brame Elwyn, in 1814, the circumstances of which were later recounted by Hannah More in a letter to William Wilberforce.[27] Utterly engrossed, at first Coleridge apparently continued to read Leighton into the early hours of the morning. Despite the fact that he was not reading his own copy, Coleridge added a number of annotations to the text, including one to the book's flyleaf in which he extolled the virtues of Leighton's prose:

> Surely if ever Work not in the sacred Canon might suggest a belief of Inspiration, or something more than human, this it is. When Mr. E[lwyn]. made this assertion, I took

[25] Hugh Ouston, 'Leighton, Robert (*bap.* 1612, *d.* 1684)', *ODNB* (January 2008). Publications of Leighton's works in the eighteenth and nineteenth century include *An Exposition of the Creed, Lord's Prayer, and Ten Commandments.* (London, 1701); *Select Works of Archbishop Leighton* (Edinburgh, 1746); *The Expository Works and Other Remains of Archbishop Leighton*, ed. Philip Doddridge, 2 vols. (Edinburgh, 1748); *Select Works of Archbishop Leighton* (London, 1758); *Theological Lectures, Read in the Publick Hall of the University of Edinburgh* (London, 1763); *The Works of Robert Leighton.*, ed. George Jerment, 6 vols. (London, 1805-08); *The Whole Works of Robert Leighton*., ed. George Jerment, 4 vols. (London, 1820); *The Whole Works of the Most Reverend Father in God, Robert Leighton*, ed. John Norman Pearson, 4 vols. (London, 1825). In total, the Leighton Library has twenty-six editions of Leighton's works, published between 1692 and 1911, and 'conscientiously procured by the trustees as they appeared'. Willis, 'Leighton Library', p.153.

[26] John Beer, *Coleridge's Play of Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp.187-92.

[27] Hannah More to William Wilberforce, 13 April 1814, Manuscripts Department, Perkins Library, Duke University, NC, quoted in *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Marginalia. 3, Irving to Oxlee*, eds. H.J. Jackson and George Whalley (London: Routledge, 1992), p.507. More had recently met Coleridge for the first time, describing him in the letter as 'very eloquent, entertaining and brimfull of knowledge.' Coleridge seems not to have been a Bristol Library member at this time, his membership in it having ceased on 15 March 1799 when he transferred his library share to Josiah Wade. *The Minute Book of the Bristol Library Society, 1771–1801*, eds. Max Skjönsberg and Mark Towsey (Bristol: Bristol Record Society, 2022), p.233. Nevertheless, on 18 January 1814, the committee granted a 'Mr Coleridge', possibly Samuel Taylor, access to the library for one month. BA, LS/M/4, Committee minute book, 1807-23, 18 January 1814. In 1814, the Bristol Library held only one copy of Leighton's works, a six-volume set edited by George Jerment and published between 1805 and 1808, which the library had ordered on 29 September 1812. It is noteworthy that William Brame Elwyn, as a library committee member, was present at this meeting. BA, LS/M/4, Committee minute book, 1807-23, 29 September 1812; *A Catalogue of the Books belonging to the Bristol Library Society: To which are Prefixed an Account of the Institution of the Society, and its Rules & Regulations.* (Bristol, 1814), p.10.

> it as an hyperbole of affection, but now I subscribe to it seriously, & bless the Hour that introduced me to the knowledge of the evangelical apostolical Archbishop Leighton.[28]

Indeed, Leighton's legacy continued to draw visitors to Dunblane and the Leighton Library from across the British Isles.[29]

Library historians have generally classified the Leighton as a religious library and Mark Towsey is correct in describing it as a library 'run to a large extent for the succour of its religious community'.[30] The record of those who borrowed from the library bears this out.[31] Whilst the scale of this religious borrowing from the Leighton was significant, the involvement of members of the clergy in the subscription library is not a phenomenon unique to the Leighton Library. Members of the clergy, across the British Isles, were active participants in the market of print as purchasers and borrowers.[32] A regular and consistent income, as well as the time to

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[28] *Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Marginalia. 3*, p.508. Leighton was the central subject of Coleridge's expression of spiritual philosophy in his *Aids to Reflection* (1825), which he had originally envisaged as being a celebration of Leighton's works and an account of his life. *Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Marginalia. 3*, pp.537-39; Douglas Hedley, *Coleridge, Philosophy and Religion: Aids to Reflection and the Mirror of the Spirit* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp.8-12.

[29] The Bristol resident and member of the Bristol Library Society, John Scandrett Harford, visited the Leighton in 1825. BA, 28048/J/6_1, Deeds and documents relating to the Harford family, including the Blaise Castle estate, 1576-1918, Journal of John Scandrett Harford of tour of Scotland, 1825, 1830. Also discussed below, pp.365-70. For further examples of references to Leighton, Dunblane, and the Leighton Library in travel literature, see Robert Heron, *Scotland Delineated, or a Geographical Description of Every Shire in Scotland*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh, 1799), p.156; Patrick Graham, *Sketches of Perthshire*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh, 1812), pp.25-28; Elizabeth Isabella Spence, *Letters from the North Highlands, During the Summer 1816.* (London, 1817), pp.276-78; Richard Pococke, *Tours in Scotland: 1747, 1750, 1760* (Edinburgh, 1887), p.202. Bill Inglis reports that Leighton was still being idealised as late as 1886, in a speech given by the Rev. Alexander Ritchie, the recently appointed minister of Dunblane. Inglis, *A Scottish Town*, p.27.

[30] Mark Towsey, *Reading the Scottish Enlightenment: Books and Their Readers in Provincial Scotland, 1750-1820* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), p.150. See also, Keith A. Manley, *Books, Borrowers, and Shareholders. Scottish Circulating and Subscription Libraries before 1825: A Survey and Listing* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Bibliographical Society, 2012), p.8.

[31] *Books and Borrowing*, s.v., "Leighton Library: Facts & figures".

[32] David Allan, *A Nation of Readers: The Lending Library in Georgian England* (London: The British Library, 2008), pp.67-68. Ministers were regularly members at a number of libraries in the Books and Borrowing database and were responsible for borrowing a larger percentage of books than their numbers would suggest, for example, at the Dumfries Presbytery Library, Haddington Library, Innerpeffray Library and Selkirk Library. See, respectively, *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Dumfries Presbytery Library: Facts & figures,", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/library/dumfries-presbytery/facts>, [accessed 29/03/24]; *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Haddington Library: Facts & figures,", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/library/haddington/facts>, [accessed

read, allowed church ministers the time and resource to be subscription library members. They were also commonly involved in elements of their administration. At the Bristol Library Society, both Anglican and Unitarian church ministers were regularly elected to the library's committee, with members of the clergy serving consistently in the library's senior leadership positions for its entire existence.[33] The involvement of church ministers in libraries of all kinds across the British Isles reflected their position as leaders within the local community.[34]

The nature of the Leighton Library in the nineteenth century still owed a great deal to its longer history as an institution, from its founding in the late seventeenth century to incremental changes made to its administrative structure in the early eighteenth century. From its very foundation after Robert Leighton's death in 1684, the library was intimately tied to the local ecclesiastical polity. As noted in Chapter One, Leighton's written instructions for the library amounted to only a single line in his will: 'my Books I leave and bequeath to the Cathedrall of Dunblane in Scotland, to remaine there for the use of the clergie of that Diocess'.[35] Although it is likely that Leighton discussed matters with his executors, Saphira and Edward Lightmaker, the latter of whom was instrumental in the library's earliest years, the lack of any further formal documentation founding the library left those who would serve as the library's trustees with a great deal of flexibility in the manner in which it could be administered.[36] Until the middle of the nineteenth century, control of the library remained largely monopolised by a group of

29/03/24]; *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Innerpeffray Library: Facts & figures,", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/library/innerpeffray/facts>, [accessed 29/03/24]; *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Selkirk Library: Facts & figures,", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/library/selkirk/facts>, [accessed 29/03/24].

[33] *Bristol Minute Book*, eds. Skjönsberg and Towsey; BA, 32079/LS/M/1, Bristol Library Society, Minute book of General meetings, 2 December 1772-28 March 1870.

[34] Callum G. Brown, *Religion and Society in Scotland since 1707* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), p.68; Stewart J. Brown, *The National Churches of England, Ireland, and Scotland, 1801-1846* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p.23.

[35] USA, Leighton MS 1, Leighton Library, 'Register of the Bibliotheck', historical outline and catalogue, 1691, transcribed in 'An Account of the Foundation of the Leightonian Library. By Robert Douglas, Bishop of Dunblane', *The Bannatyne Miscellany; Containing Original Papers and Tracts, Chiefly Relating to the History and Literature of Scotland*. (Edinburgh: Bannatyne Club, 1855), III, p.237.

[36] *Bannatyne Miscellany*, III, pp.238-55; Willis, 'Leighton Library', pp.140-41.

Church of Scotland ministers and elders who were able to shape the administrative structures and contents of the library in whichever way they saw fit. More significantly, rather than maintaining it as a religious library, successive generations of trustees consciously chose to broaden its accessibility, but also the range of books within it to make it more like the typical subscription library. As such, ministers of the Presbytery of Dunblane demonstrated a willingness to involve themselves in and contribute towards fostering a culture of learning, education, and letters in Dunblane in many ways similar to that which the Moderate literati in Edinburgh sought to do in the middle of the eighteenth century.[37]

At around the period of the library building's construction in 1687, the executors of Leighton's will transferred some authority over the library and its books to Robert Douglas (c.1630-1716), the bishop of Dunblane.[38] A meeting, held in the finished library on 9 August 1688, and presided over by Douglas, ruled that at the close of every regional synod, the library was to be examined by the dean of Dunblane and two other members of a neighbouring presbytery.[39] The abolition of the episcopal polity in the Church of Scotland in 1690 delayed further changes to the library's structure. These were not made until 1701 and signed by Leighton's executors, the Lightmakers.[40] This effectively settled the question of trusteeship and reiterated the link

[37] Sher, *Church and University*, pp.120-47. See also, John Robertson, 'Hume, David (1711-1776)', *ODNB* (January 2009).
[38] *Bannatyne Miscellany*, III, p.252.
[39] Attendant at this meeting were Gaspar Kellie, the dean of Dunblane, James Fall, the principal of the University of Glasgow, John Graham, the commissary clerk of Dunblane, and George Robertson, a lawyer. *Bannatyne Miscellany*, III, p.259. This meeting also outlined the 'Rules and Orders to be observed by the Keeper' of the library. It is unclear whether the annual examination of the Leighton's books continued in the period after the abolition of the episcopal polity. At the Bristol Library Society, a similar examination of the books was made annually by the committee. For an example, see BA, LS/M/4, Committee minute book, 1807-23, 31 March 1812.
[40] Although this document, signed on 11 December 1701, is now lost, its contents are summarised in the minutes of the Synod of Perth and Stirling, 12 October 1703. Willis, 'Leighton Library', p.155, n.16; USA, Leighton MS 3, Act of the Synod of Perth and Stirling, nominating Alexander Douglas, minister of Logie, and Matthew Wallace, minister of Kincardine, to join the "Overseers of the Library of Dunblane", transcribed in *Bannatyne Miscellany*, III, pp.166-67. For the original minutes, see Stirling Council Archives, CH2/449/3, Perth and Stirling synod, Minutes (1691-1707), 12 October 1703. It is significant that these minutes refer to the library as the 'Liberarie of Dumblain' rather than the Leighton Library, foreshadowing the library's role as one within the community.

between the library's administration and the local presbytery. Three of the library's trustees would be ministers of the Church of Scotland. The minister of Dunblane, as the bishop of Dunblane had previously been, would be a library trustee *ex officio*, and would always play a decisive role in the library's administration. In addition to this, two ministers from the Presbytery of Dunblane would be appointed by the Synod of Perth and Stirling.[41] Even with the change from an episcopalian to presbyterian polity, the library remained closely tied to the Kirk. Some legacies of the episcopacy remained, principally in the vocabulary adopted in the library's administration. Even in the final decade of the eighteenth century, those entitled to preferential library membership, often by virtue of their ecclesiastical position or having donated books to the library, were entitled to these benefits but only so long as they continued to reside within the 'Diocese of Dunblane'.[42]

Yet while some aspects of the Leighton Library's administration were now settled, the absence of any formal founding document, establishing the aims, customs, and regulations of the library, provided its eighteenth-century trustees with a relatively blank canvas to shape the structures and contents of the library in whichever way they saw fit. Although a majority of the trustees were lay persons, those who were ministers of the Church of Scotland were invariably amongst the most regular attendees at meetings and in the completion of administrative tasks.[43] We should therefore judge the Leighton Library of the late eighteenth century less as Robert Leighton's library and more as the subscription library of ministers of the Church of Scotland.

[41] During this period, this consisted of the parishes of Aberfoyle, Balquhidder, Callander, Dunblane, Gartmore, Kilmadock, Kincardine-in-Menteith, Kippen, Lecropt, Logie, Norrieston, Port of Menteith, Tillicoultry and Tulliallan. *Fasti*, IV, pp.334-66.

[42] For example, see USA, Leighton MS 16, Leighton Library, Minutes of the meetings of the trustees, 31 October 1734-March 1822 [hereafter Leighton MS 16, Minutes, 1734-1822], 11 February 1794.

[43] For example, it was the minister of Kincardine-in-Menteith, Christopher Tait, who organised the printing of the library's first published catalogue in 1793. Leighton MS 16, Minutes, 1734-1822, 26 October 1790, 21 December 1790, 27 December 1791, 27 November 1792. Ministers of the Church of Scotland were frequently the majority presence at trustee meetings. For examples, see Leighton MS 16, Minutes, 1734-1822, 31 October 1780, 12 October 1784, 26 December 1786, 3 May 1796, 7 September 1803, 11 September 1804, 18 June 1805, 5 August 1806, 5 September 1809, 4 December 1810, 2 January 1812, 20 May 1817.

Leighton's legacy, charity and bequest continued to be a guiding light in this endeavour, although it acted, less as a restraint, and more as a useful precedent which trustees could invoke when needed. As such, when choosing to open the library up freely to lay preachers and students in divinity, the trustees explained their actions by paraphrasing Leighton, that 'the Library was *originally* intended for the Clergy of the Diocese'.[44]

Admittedly, the Episcopalian influence upon the Leighton Library in the eighteenth century remained significant even after 1689. This was owed less to Robert Leighton's legacy and more to Dunblane's specific context, the continued participation and engagement of Episcopalians with the library, but also an older Early Enlightenment tradition.[45] The library benefitted from two bequests of books by Episcopalians in the middle of the century, from the Rev. Robert Douglas (d. 1746), the son of the last bishop of Dunblane, in 1746, and from the Rev. James Inglis, the Episcopalian minister of Muthill, in 1750.[46] Moreover, Episcopalians continued to enjoy a preponderant influence as library trustees. Chief amongst these was Robert Hay-Drummond, the archbishop of York, but also Drummond's proxy at meetings, James Robertson Barclay of Cavill, Clerk to the Signet, and the Jacobite Sir Hugh Paterson of Bannockburn.[47]

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[44] Leighton MS 16, Minutes, 1734-1822, 3 May 1796. My emphasis. The two attendant trustees at the meeting were Robert Stirling (d. 1801), the minister of Port of Menteith, and Christopher Tait, the minister of Kincardine-in-Menteith.

[45] I am indebted to Gordon Willis for these suggestions. For the Episcopalian influences on the Scottish Early Enlightenment, see Kelsey Jackson Williams, *The First Scottish Enlightenment: Rebels, Priests, and History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020). Episcopalians were amongst some of the library's most regular borrowers in its earliest years. Andrew T.N. Muirhead, *Scottish Presbyterianism Re-established: The Case of Stirling and Dunblane, 1687-1710* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021), pp.154-55.

[46] Leighton MS 16, Minutes, 1734-1822, 2 September 1746, 8 May 1750. Douglas had also been the Leighton's second librarian. Muirhead, *Scottish Presbyterianism Re-established*, pp.27, 147-48, 154; Gordon Willis, 'The Second Leighton Librarian: Robert Douglas', *Leighton Letter*, 8 (October 2023), pp.5-8. The books of James Inglis were to sit in the library within a press of their own with his name inscribed overhead. In return for the donation, Episcopal ministers of Muthill were granted free use of the library's books. Both donations were referenced in Dunblane's entry in the *Old Statistical Account* some four decades later. John Robertson and Robert Stirling, 'Parish of Dunblane', in *The Statistical Account of Scotland. Drawn up from the Communications of the Ministers of the Different Parishes.*, ed. John Sinclair, 21 vols. (Edinburgh, 1791-99) [hereafter *OSA*], VII, p.324.

[47] For examples, see Leighton MS 16, Minutes, 1734-1822, 31 October 1734, 20 August 1740, 15 April 1746, 13 July 1747, 22 May 1752, 27 October 1757. Hay-Drummond was also a trustee, and active patron, of nearby Innerpeffray Library from 1734. Jill Dye, 'Books and their Borrowers at the Library of Innerpeffray c. 1680-1855',

Robert Hay-Drummond was particularly involved in the library's expansion during this period, drawing up lists of books the library should order or by offering to purchase books on the library's behalf when he was in London.[48] Hay-Drummond had also been instrumental in first recommending and then supporting the presentation of John Robertson (d. 1795) as the minister of Dunblane in 1757, support which is likely to have been reciprocated by Robertson at library meetings.[49] Hay-Drummond's death in 1776 thus greatly reduced this Episcopalian presence on the library's trustees and left its administration firmly in the hand of Church of Scotland ministers.

In other instances, the trustees moved away from, rather than abandoned, Robert Leighton's (admittedly limited) written description of the library as one for the 'clergie of that Diocese'. The office of librarian was slowly, and somewhat quietly, amended from its original inception as an educational apprenticeship for students in divinity, to a more straightforward custodian of the books and administrator for borrowings.[50] Moreover, the trustees purposely chose to open the library up to a wider community beyond the clergy of Dunblane and the local presbytery. In 1734 they formally instituted a system of subscription for lay readers.[51] From 1815 access to the library was further widened when visitors were allowed to subscribe to the

unpublished PhD thesis (University of Stirling, 2018), pp.48-58; Richard Sharp, 'Drummond, Robert Hay (1711-1776)', *ODNB* (September 2004). Drummond signed the Leighton's matriculation book on 20 August 1740, paying three pounds. USA, Leighton MS 25, Leighton Library, Leighton Library matriculation book, 31 October 1734-1814. On Paterson, see Hayton, 'Paterson, Sir Hugh, 3rd Bt. (c.1685-1777)', *HoP*.

[48] Leighton MS 16, Minutes, 1734-1822, 22 May 1752, 7 October 1766. Hay-Drummond also recommended and offered to purchase books for Innerpeffray Library. Dye, 'Books and their Borrowers', pp.183-84.

[49] Inglis, *A Scottish Town*, pp.188-95.

[50] The original duties of the keeper are recorded in Leighton MS 3, transcribed in *Bannatyne Miscellany*, III, pp.258-59. It was envisioned that the library's keeper would always be a student of divinity, who would hold the post for a three-year period, using the library's books to better educate himself in preparation for an ecclesiastical career. According to his duties, the keeper was also required to deliver an annual 'Anniversary discourse' at the close of the Synod 'upon such a suteable subject as the Bishop shall think fitt to prescryve to him'. *Bannatyne Miscellany*, III, p.258, also p.253; Gordon Willis, 'The First Leighton Librarian', *Leighton Letter*, 7 (May 2023), p.3. As Gordon Willis observes, the Leighton's second librarian, Robert Douglas, was, having been an ordained minister, far too over-qualified for the role according to its original parameters, 'while the three-year term was quietly forgotten'. Willis, 'The Second Leighton Librarian: Robert Douglas', p.6. For later appointments of librarians, see Leighton MS 16, Minutes, 1734-1822, 15 April 1746, 6 February 1787.

[51] Leighton MS 16, Minutes, 1734-1822, 31 October 1734.

library on a weekly basis, rather than for a year, allowing seasonal visitors, visiting Dunblane's spa waters, to become library members.[52]

The library was therefore consciously changed into one that was more locally oriented. Alongside changes to its structuring and administration, changes to the way in which the library was described in the trustees' minutes reflect this. By the late eighteenth century, the library was referred to as the 'Leightonian Library of Dunblane', thereby centring its place within the local community.[53] This conception, that the library was one for the wider community, was further strengthened in 1787 when the newly appointed keeper was ordered by the library's trustees to only write the words 'Library of Dunblane' on the title pages of the library's books.[54]

In overseeing these changes, the Leighton's trustees were not changing the library into a secular institution. Indeed, the library remained as closely aligned and intertwined with the Church of Scotland as it had ever been. Since its inception in 1688, and up until the late nineteenth century, the role of keeper, or librarian, was always filled by an individual who also held an ecclesiastical role in the community.[55] For much of the eighteenth century, the Leighton's keeper also served as the clerk to the local presbytery and the village schoolmaster.[56] Indeed,

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[52] The borrowings of these seasonal visitors, or 'water drinkers' as they were known, were originally recorded in the main borrowing ledger, with the first borrowings made by 'Mr Shulls' on 1 July 1815. *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Leighton Library: Register Ledger 1, page 272 (image and text view)," <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/dev-site-solr/library/leighton/registers/15/103214/image-and-text>, [accessed 11/10/23]. From 5 August 1815, these borrowings were recorded in their own separate ledger. *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Leighton Library: Register Ledger 2, page 1-2 (image and text view)," <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/dev-site-solr/library/leighton/registers/143/3782/image-and-text>, [accessed 11/10/23]. There is no record in the library's minutes of this change of procedure being formally approved. However, it is likely to be linked to the repairs the library underwent between 1815 and 1817. Leighton MS 16, Minutes, 1734-1822, 2 May 1815, 20 May 1817, 19 August 1817. My thanks to Jacqueline Imrie for this suggestion. On spa tourism, see Alastair J. Durie, *Scotland for the Holidays: A History of Tourism in Scotland 1780-1939* (East Linton: Tuckwell, 2003), pp.86-108.

[53] For example, see Leighton MS 16, Minutes, 1734-1822, 13 October 1772, 13 October 1774, 1 October 1776.

[54] Leighton MS 16, Minutes, 1734-1822, 6 February 1787.

[55] Willis, 'First Leighton Librarian', pp.3-4; Willis, 'Second Leighton Librarian', pp.5-8; Leighton MS 16, Minutes, 1734-1822. See also, Willis, 'Leighton Library', pp.143-44.

[56] These roles were held, successively, by William Coldstream, Malcolm Coldstream, and Daniel Stewart. Leighton MS 16, Minutes, 1734-1822, 26 December 1786, 6 February 1787; USA, Leighton MS 17, Leighton

between 1828 and 1840 the role of keeper was held by the minister of Dunblane himself.[57] Moreover, the library was still primarily administered for the benefit of Church of Scotland ministers and the religious community. Kirk ministers received preferential membership in the library. A one-off payment of ten shillings and sixpence provided them with library membership for the duration of their incumbency, rather than an annual payment of the same amount that was required for all other members. Church of Scotland ministers were entitled to borrow books from the library for a period of up to six months, as opposed to two months for all other members.[58] Lay preachers and students in divinity were also provided with free access to the library, provided they received the written support of their church minister.[59] However, as the Leighton's borrowing record attests, the trustees cultivated an intellectual resource that was also used by a wider elite society in Dunblane, from the surrounding region and even further afield.

III

Why the trustees did so says something about the religious culture of this presbytery of the Church of Scotland in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Arguably, the administration of the Leighton Library by the ministers of the Presbytery of Dunblane in this manner is evidence of a Moderate practice at work.[60] Indeed, Richard Sher's conception of Moderatism offers a useful structure through which to analyse the ecclesiastical culture of the

Library, Minutes, 11 December 1840 onwards, 7 May 1841; Alexander B. Barty, *The History of Dunblane*, rev. ed. (1944; Stirling: Stirling District Libraries, 1994), pp.210, 273. Callum Brown writes that the role of session clerk and schoolmaster were 'almost invariably' held by the same individual. Brown, *Religion and Society*, p.69.

[57] This was John Grierson. In 1841, Grierson's family protested to the library's trustees that he had not received the full salary and dues entitled to him as librarian. USA, Leighton MS 17, Leighton Library, Minutes, 11 December 1840 onwards, 19 May 1841. Grierson was not the only keeper to combine his role as librarian with a ministership. The Leighton's second keeper, Robert Douglas, remained a minister of the Episcopal Church even into the 1740s. Muirhead, *Scottish Presbyterianism Re-established*, pp.27, 147-48, 154; Willis, 'Second Leighton Librarian', p.7.

[58] Leighton MS 16, Minutes, 1734-1822, 7 September 1803.

[59] Leighton MS 16, Minutes, 1734-1822, 3 May 1796.

[60] Sher, *Church and University*, pp.57-59.

Leighton Library's ministers. Of course, historians continue to differ as to the degree, as well as the manner, of difference between two perceived ecclesiastical camps in the Church of Scotland.[61] During the middle of the eighteenth century, patronage represented the clearest point of division separating the two groups, between the Moderates, and those in favour of the consistent implementation of the law of patronage as reestablished in 1712, and their opponents in the Popular party who, although generally opposed to patronage were divided regarding its potential alternatives.[62] Patronage disputes in the nineteenth century were very different from those occurring in the previous century and it is difficult to classify ministers of the Presbytery of Dunblane on this question alone.[63]

Nevertheless, patronage had had a significant impact upon religious life in Dunblane and the surrounding area. Nearby Stirling saw the first significant secession from the Church of Scotland by Ebenezer Erskine and his followers in 1733.[64] In 1757, Dunblane was itself the site of a sizeable secession from the established church when a group of parishioners opposed the ordination of the new minister, John Robertson.[65] At first, the 'secessionists' main complaint was against Robertson's oratory, the rise and sudden fall of his voice coupled with a slowness of speech that left his sermons largely inaudible to the congregation.[66] His appointment of an assistant against the wishes of church elders further inflamed the situation

[61] Friedrich Voges, 'Moderate and Evangelical Thinking in the Later Eighteenth Century: Differences and Shared Attitudes', *Records of the Scottish Church History Society*, 22.144 (1985), pp.141-57; Kidd, 'Moderate Interpretation of History', pp.502-19; Ahnert, *Moral Culture*, pp.66-93.
[62] Sher, *Church and University*, pp.47-52; Ahnert, *Moral Culture*, pp.70-78; Clark, 'Moderate Regime', p.206.
[63] Richard Sher and Alexander Murdoch, 'Patronage and Party in the Church of Scotland, 1750-1800', in *Church, Politics and Society: Scotland 1408-1929*, ed. Norman MacDougall (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1983), p.198.
[64] McIntosh, *Church and Theology*, p.93; David C. Lachman, 'Erskine, Ebenezer (1680-1754)', *ODNB* (September 2004).
[65] Robert Small, *History of the Congregations of the United Presbyterian Church from 1733 to 1900*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: David M. Small, 1904), II, pp.690-91; Barty, *History of Dunblane*, p.151; Inglis, *A Scottish Town*, pp.188-95.
[66] This may have been a skill that Robertson sought to continually improve. In 1792, he borrowed Hugh Blair's *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1783), described by Sher as 'the bible of Moderate pulpit oratory'. Sher, *Church and University*, p.169, see also pp.169-72; *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Leighton Library: Register Ledger 1, page 55 (image and text view),", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/library/leighton/registers/15/102566/image-and-text>, [accessed 30/03/24].

and led to the split.[67] The secession of 1757 left the ecclesiastical administration of the parish of Dunblane greatly diminished; one local historian refers to the Kirk session records after Robertson's ordination as being 'barren of interest'.[68] Thirteen of the fifteen elders left the Church in 1757, and Robertson only appointed one replacement during his thirty-nine years as minister, William Coldstream (d. 1786) in November 1756, who, as Bill Inglis, notes could hardly have refused being both the clerk to the presbytery and the Leighton's librarian.[69] Between 1757 and 1781 there were too few elders even to form a sederunt, and Robertson was reliant upon the support of neighbouring ministers, who were also Leighton members, to form a church session.[70] The ordination of Robertson's successor, Robert Stirling (1765-1817), in 1791, seemingly took place without any trouble.[71]

By the first decade of the nineteenth century, Dunblane was home to two Secession congregations, the Burghers, of Michael Gilfillan, and the Anti-Burghers, of John Wallace (1777-1828), so called because of a split in the Secession church more broadly in 1747 over whether it was appropriate for magistrates to take an oath to uphold the established church.[72] The success of these secession churches, and their rapid growth across Scotland, probably played a role in the decline of patronage as a source of ecclesiastical controversy in the late eighteenth century, removing the most vocal opponents of patronage from congregations in the

[67] The nature of this division focused on the personal character or qualifications of the minister, and to a lesser extent on the nature of patronage, rather than on a theological matter. These kinds of disputes became more common after 1775. Sher and Murdoch, 'Patronage and Party', p.199.
[68] Barty, *History of Dunblane*, p.151.
[69] Inglis, *A Scottish Town*, p.195.
[70] This included Robert Stirling, the minister of Port of Menteith, and William Osburn (1745-1812), the minister of Tillicoultry. Barty, *History of Dunblane*, p.151; Inglis, *A Scottish Town*, p.201.
[71] *Fasti*, IV, p.344.
[72] Small, *United Presbyterian Church*, pp.690-95; Brown, *National Churches*, p.42. Both ministers were members of the Leighton Library. For their respective borrowing records, see *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Advanced search for 'Borrower: Reverend Mr Michael Gilfillan ',", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/search/p-1/0/0/advanced/brids|3719>, [accessed 30/03/24]; *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Advanced search for 'Borrower: Reverend Mr John Wallace ',", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/search/p-1/0/0/advanced/brids|26957>, [accessed 30/03/24].

Church of Scotland.[73] This may well have been the case in Dunblane. After 1775, whilst presentation disputes continued to occur across Scotland, these were generally on a more isolated and symbolic basis than had been the case earlier in the eighteenth century.[74] Disputes related to patronage continued to divide ministers in the General Assembly along 'party' lines even during the 1790s.[75] It is unclear what stance ministers in the Presbytery of Dunblane took in these disputes, although in their few printed sermons, the topic of patronage is not considered outright.[76] A number of former Leighton members would join the group of ministers who left the Church of Scotland in the Disruption of 1843 to form the Free Church of Scotland, a schism which had a seismic impact upon Scottish society.[77] However, this event lay far off in the future, and these were young men during the period in which they used the library, having been recently licensed to preach but not yet ordained or inducted to their first charge.[78]

It is not possible to deduce whether Leighton ministers were Moderates on the question of patronage alone. In addition to this question, Richard Sher defines Moderates as taking a generally 'conservative view of civil and ecclesiastical organization' that made them, in his words, 'Whig-Presbyterian conservatives'.[79] Yet whether such a stance is enough to differentiate them from ministers in the Popular party, especially in their responses to the

[73] Sher and Murdoch, 'Patronage and Party', pp.201-02.
[74] Sher and Murdoch, 'Patronage and Party', p.199. There were at least twenty-one instances of violent intrusion in Scotland between 1780 and 1815. K.J. Logue, *Popular Disturbances in Scotland, 1780-1815* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1979), pp.168, 176, cited in Vincent, 'Responses of Scottish Churchmen', p.203.
[75] Colin Kidd, 'The Kirk, the French Revolution, and the Burden of Scottish Whiggery', in *Religious Change in Europe, 1650-1914*, ed. N. Aston (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), p.223; Ahnert, *Moral Culture*, p.125.
[76] Robert Stirling, *A Sermon preached at the Opening of the Synod, October 16. 1781.* (Edinburgh, 1782); Alexander Stirling, *Sermons by the Late Reverend Alexander Stirling, LL.D. Minister of Tillicoultry* (Glasgow, 1808).
[77] For example, see the edited collection of essays by Stewart J. Brown and Michael Fry in *Scotland in the Age of the Disruption* (1993).
[78] This included Henry Anderson (1779-1845), Patrick MacFarlan, John MacFarlane (1798-1875) and Peter Robertson (1787-1849). See, respectively, *Fasti*, IV, p.362; Lionel Alexander Ritchie, 'Macfarlan, Patrick (1781-1849)', *ODNB* (January 2011); *Fasti*, VI, p.135; *Fasti*, IV, p.341.
[79] Sher, *Church and University*, p.53 and p.54. Nevertheless, Moderate and Popular ministers did differ on their approach to the American War of Independence. McIntosh, *Church and Theology*, p.157; Allan, *Scotland in the Eighteenth Century*, pp.69-70; Clark, 'Moderate Regime', p.207.

French Revolution at the end of the eighteenth century, is another question. Sher himself admits, along with Alexander Murdoch, that Moderates and members of the Popular party were equally conservative during the 1790s, describing the latter group as representing 'an elitist Whig view'.[80] McIntosh concurs, writing that whilst Popular authors may have supported more liberal ideas concerning religious liberty and liberty of conscience, after 1789 they, like their Moderate counterparts, rallied to the loyalist cause.[81] Emma Macleod concludes that Church of Scotland ministers, both Moderate and Evangelical, were 'fundamentally conservative' in their response to the French Revolution.[82] Ministers in the Presbytery of Dunblane were eager to demonstrate their own loyalty to King and constitution. In 1795 and 1800 the presbytery met specifically to express their joy at the King's recovery from illness, with the meeting in 1795 resulting in a formal address of congratulation to the monarch on his 'Deliverance from a late imminent Danger'.[83] In 1803, responding to the resumption of war with Napoleonic France, the presbytery produced a pastoral admonition that was to be read aloud by all ministers from the pulpit, listing the evils and abuses committed by French troops, as well as praising the strength and zeal of the local volunteers.[84] Yet the members of the presbytery frequently chose to go further in their admonitions than the original motivation for doing so. Indeed, the address delivered in 1795, sent to Henry Dundas (1742-1811) in turn to be delivered before the throne, did more than simply wish good health to the monarch in that it expressly referenced and sided against political attacks made upon him. The members of the presbytery collectively expressed their surprise that there would be 'any Persons so wicked, as by a daring attack upon the Person

[80] Sher and Murdoch, 'Patronage and Party', p.211.
[81] McIntosh, *Church and Theology*, pp.219-28.
[82] Vincent, 'Responses of Scottish Churchmen', pp.203-06. See also Kidd, 'Burden of Scottish Whiggery', p.224; Ahnert, *Moral Culture*, p.124; Clark, 'Moderate Regime', p.211; John S. Warren, 'The French Revolution and the Transformation of Moderatism: The Silence of the Scribes', in *Beyond the Enlightenment: Scottish Intellectual Life, 1790-1914*, eds. Aileen Fyfe and Colin Kidd (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2023), pp.59-60.
[83] Stirling Council Archives, CH2/723/13, Dunblane presbytery, Minutes (1793-1804) [hereafter Dunblane presbytery, Minutes (1793-1804)], 17 November 1795 and 4 June 1800.
[84] Dunblane presbytery, Minutes (1793-1804), 7 September 1803.

of their gracious Sovereign, to commit an act of Treason, against the British Constitution'. Moreover, they promised to continue their 'exertions' upon all for 'a love of order and good Government, [and] a hatred of every thing which may disturb the peace of Society'.[85]

Where Moderate and Popular ministers did diverge, even during the 1790s, was in the emphasis they placed upon quelling not just political radical societies but all elements of radicalism and perceived radicalism even within the Kirk.[86] Arguably, the strength of language employed by Leighton members in these debates places them closer to a Moderate and a politically conservative position in these matters. The books and social space of the Leighton Library may have played a role in fostering an environment in which these ideas could better spread amongst the membership. Indeed, library members responded to the revolutionary controversy on a collective basis as well as an individual basis, making declarations as a presbytery, publishing their own loyalist pamphlets or aiding the publication of others. One of those present at the meeting of the presbytery in 1795, Alexander Stirling (1761-1807), had, two years earlier, published his own rejection of radical views in a sermon titled *A Discourse on the Love of Our Country* (1793), playing on the title of the famous celebration of the French Revolution by Richard Price.[87] Likewise in 1795, James Robertson (d. 1812), the minister of Callander and a Leighton member, published *The Love of Our Country and the Duties Arising From That Principle* (1795), a straightforward loyalist barrage against support for Jacobin France.[88] Robertson wrote that it was the 'seditious and discontented' which had appropriated patriotic language and tricked 'the low, the ignorant, the fickle, the prodigal, the licentious, the profane, the needy', who had forgotten the natural love of their country, and 'reclined their heads on the

[85] Dunblane presbytery, Minutes (1793-1804), 17 November 1795.
[86] Vincent, 'Responses of Scottish Churchmen', pp.203-04; Ahnert, *Moral Culture*, pp.124-28; Clark, 'Moderate Regime', pp.215-17.
[87] Alexander Stirling, *A Discourse on the Love of Our Country* (Edinburgh, 1793).
[88] James Robertson, *The Love of our Country and the Duties arising from that Principle: A Sermon, Preached at Callander, on Occasion of the National Fast, 26 February 1795* (Edinburgh, 1795). See also Kidd, 'Burden of Scottish Whiggery', p.226.

pillow of sedition to dream of innovations'.[89] If not writing their own loyalist literature, Leighton members aided the publication of others. Patrick Murray (1759-1837), the minister of Kilmadock and a Leighton trustee, subscribed to the publication *The Cause of Truth* (1797), a critique of Thomas Paine written by Robert Thomas (d. 1811), the minister of Abdie.[90] All three published works may be an example of what Ronald Crawford has termed 'writing to order', anti-radical or conservative sermons written and published, possibly at the instigation of government, in response to the perceived threat of radical literature in the 1790s.[91] Similar discourses were endorsed by the presbytery as a collective. On 22 January 1793, a sederunt consisting of Robertson and five other Leighton members, four of whom were trustees, declared 'to the World', or more accurately the three newspapers to which their extracted minute was to be sent, 'their Detestation of all seditious and levelling Principles; [and] their entire satisfaction with the British Constitution as settled at the glorious Revolution in Sixteen hundred and Eighty eight'.[92] Moreover the presbytery, like the Moderate-majority General Assembly, aimed its ire at those inside the Kirk, as well as outside. In 1799 the presbytery concurred with a declaratory act passed by the General Assembly which condemned

[89] Robertson, *Love of our Country*, pp.8.
[90] Robert Thomas, *The Cause of Truth: Containing, Besides a Great Variety of Other Matter, a Refutation of Errors in the Political Works of Thomas Paine, and Other Publications of a Similar Kind.* (Dundee, 1797), p.11. The subscription list also includes a 'Rev. Robert Stirling', possibly the minister of Dunblane between 1795 and 1817, although his address is not listed.
[91] Crawford, *Chair of Verity*, p.173.
[92] Dunblane presbytery, Minutes (1793-1804), 22 January 1793. The Leighton members and trustees present at the presbytery meeting in addition to Robertson were William Osburn, minister of Tillicoultry, Robert Stirling, minister of Port of Menteith, Christopher Tait, minister of Kincardine-in-Menteith, Robert Stirling, minister of Dunblane and Patrick Murray, minister of Kilmadock. The three newspapers the address was to appear in were the *Caledonian Mercury*, the *Edinburgh Evening Courant* and another referred to as 'the Advertizer'. Interestingly, the presbytery's address did not rest on the assumption that the constitution was perfect and required no change, only that the remedy for any deficiencies already lay in the system as it currently stood: 'the Government of the Country is vested in King, Lords and Commons and… the Legislature will exert those Powers which they possess, for redressing all real Grievances and correcting such abuses as shall be found, in due time, to exist in the British Constitution'.

unqualified ministers and preachers acting within its parishes, wary of a perceived union between the forces of political and religious radicalism.[93]

With both these collective and individual declarations, Leighton ministers were principally responding to external events but their connection of membership and participation in the Leighton Library provided a venue in which they could have shared ideas and curated loyalist responses together. The Leighton's books may also have provided the intellectual foundation for such a response. Some thinkers in the 1790s conceptualised the threat faced by the British state as resulting from an international conspiracy of British radicals, French revolutionaries, Masonic lodges and secret societies, such as the Illuminati, intent on subverting morality and overturning the state.[94] Two of the most prominent British works popularising this theory, John Robison's *Proofs of a Conspiracy against all the Religions and Governments of Europe* and James Thomson's *Rise, Progress and Consequences of the New Opinions and Principles Lately Introduced into France* (1799), were both present and borrowed from the Leighton Library.[95] Indeed, James Thomson (1768-1855) was himself a Leighton Library member during the period in which it is likely that he wrote his *Rise, Progress and Consequences*, borrowing from the library between 1797 and 1802 whilst working as a tutor for the sons of John Stirling of

[93] Dunblane presbytery, Minutes (1793-1804), 23 July 1799. See also Vincent, 'Responses of Scottish Churchmen', pp.202-03.

[94] Michael Taylor has stressed the significance of this conception of international conspiracy to conservative thought as whole in its responses to the French Revolution. See Michael Taylor, 'British Conservatism, the Illuminati, and the Conspiracy Theory of the French Revolution, 1797-1802', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 47.3 (2014), pp.293-312.

[95] *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Advanced search for 'Book Holding: Proofs of a conspiracy against all the religions and governments of Europe, carried on in the secret meetings of Free Masons, Illuminati, and Reading Societies. Collected from good authorities.',", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/search/p-1/0/0/advanced/bhids|36638>, [accessed 31/03/24]; *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Advanced search for 'Book Holding: The rise, progress, and consequences of the new opinions and principles lately introduced into France; with observations.',", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/search/p-1/0/0/advanced/bhids|36821>, [accessed 31/03/24]. Not present in the Leighton was Abbé Augustin de Barruel's *Mémoires pour server à l'histoire du Jacobinisme* (1797-99), which alleged a near identical international conspiracy as that reported by Robison and Thomson. Taylor, 'Conspiracy Theory of the French Revolution', pp.293-94.

Kippendavie (1742-1816).[96] Although none of these loyalist declarations made any explicit reference to 'Illuminism', they were aware of the international dimensions of radical thought. James Robertson noted that similar seditious principles had caused havoc across Europe, laying the blame firmly at an associational culture ('cabals, clubs, conventions, societies… [and] other seditious assemblies') which had imported 'foreign jargon, [and] coined new names and appellations for their members… to find flaws or to pick holes in the fair fabric of the British constitution'.[97] Thomson's use of the Leighton's books, as well as his association through the library with other church ministers who shared his views, such as Robertson, Alexander Stirling and Patrick Murray, likely played a role in shaping his publication. Regardless, with their writing, reading, and collective statements, Leighton ministers, although at a local level, were contributing to both a national and international reaction to the French Revolution.

Although subsiding slightly in the early 1790s, by the end of the decade, partisan differences between the Moderates and those in the Popular Party resurfaced in the Kirk.[98] The insecurity of the Moderate position in the General Assembly, which not only consisted of ministers but also lawyers as lay elders, forced the group to compromise on the principle of a Kirk independent from pressure-groups and external political actors. In turn, just as Moderate ministers found themselves more closely aligned with the Pitt administration, and its Scottish 'manager' Henry Dundas, its opposition in the Popular Party aligned itself with the parliamentary opposition of the Whigs and Henry Erskine (1746-1817).[99] Members of the

[96] E.I. Carlyle, revised by H.C.G. Matthew, 'Thomson James (1768-1855)', *ODNB* (September 2004). As a licensed preacher, Thomson was permitted free use of the library's books. He donated his *Rise, Progress, and Consequences* to the library in 1800. Leighton MS 16, Minutes, 1734-1822, 4 September 1801. For Thomson's borrowings, see *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Advanced search for 'Borrower: Mr James Thomson ',", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/search/p-1/0/0/advanced/brids|28375>, [accessed 31/03/24].

[97] Robertson, *Love of our Country*, p.8.

[98] Vincent, 'Responses of Scottish Churchmen', pp.203-04; Ahnert, *Moral Culture*, pp.124-28; Clark, 'Moderate Regime', pp.215-17.

[99] Clark, 'Moderate Regime', pp.215-17. See also Sher, *Church and University*, pp.319-21; McIntosh, *Church and Theology*, pp.229-31; Emma Macleod, 'The Scottish Opposition Whigs and the French Revolution', in *Scotland*

Presbytery of Dunblane continued to hold favourable views of Dundas, even following his ignominious fall from grace in 1805.[100] Writing in his *Sketches of Perthshire* (1812), Patrick Graham (1750-1835), the minister of Aberfoyle, was effusive in his praise for Dundas, calling him the 'late lamented statesman and patriot, so justly his country's pride'.[101] Dundas had 'stemmed the torrent of revolution in our country' that had been the ruin of so many nations in Europe: 'Whilst the feeling of this security and independence, which the contemplation of our yet unimpaired constitution inspires, remains among Britons, the memory of Henry Lord Melville will live'.[102]

In any respect, the Moderates' approach towards patronage and their response to the French Revolution did not emerge from purely secular political considerations, but also their ecclesiastical grounding.[103] Although Sher recognises that it was a dispute over patronage in 1751 that ultimately led to the formal organisation of the Moderates, around the 'policy paper' of William Robertson's "Reasons of Dissent", he defines the collective ideology of Moderatism as revolving around six overlapping intellectual tenets ('Presbyterianism, Scottish nationalism, Stoicism, civic humanism, conservatism, enlightenment').[104] As Sher acknowledged in the case of the Moderate literati, the Leighton's trustees too were first and foremost Presbyterian ministers and it was their responsibilities to the Kirk and their communities which shaped their daily activities and outlook.[105] They exhibited similar patriotic components as the Moderate literati, although whether this was a Scottish identity rather than a British or 'North British'

in the Age of the French Revolution, ed. Bob Harris (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2005), pp.79-98; Gordon Pentland, *Radicalism, Reform and National Identity in Scotland, 1820-1833* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2008), p.48; Warren, 'Transformation of Moderatism', pp.59-60.

[100] Michael Fry, *The Dundas Despotism*. (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2004), p.267.

[101] Graham, *Sketches*, p.17.

[102] Graham, *Sketches*, p.18.

[103] Kidd, 'Moderate Interpretation of History', p.517; Ahnert, *Moral Culture*, p.78.

[104] Sher, *Church and University*, p.324.

[105] Sher, *Church and University*, p.324.

identity is debatable.[106] Leighton members did read and write about the poems of Ossian, the work of the famed Gaelic bard translated, but also largely invented by James Macpherson (1736-96) and popularised and supported by the Moderates.[107] Likewise, Leighton members and trustees wrote and read about their local regions and native Scotland, producing local histories of Perthshire and Stirlingshire, as well as writing about its geography, agriculture and natural scenery.[108] As parish ministers, a number of the Leighton's members contributed to *The Statistical Account of Scotland* (1791-99), Sir John Sinclair's ambitious project to survey all of Scotland's parishes at the end of the eighteenth century.[109] These accounts, published in twenty-one volumes, were also voraciously read by the Leighton's members, constituting the most

[106] Colin Kidd argues that ministers of the Church of Scotland consciously downplayed problematic elements within Scottish presbyterian tradition, including its legacy of resistance and subversion, in order to conform it with the demands of the British state in the eighteenth century. This involved critiquing, or ignoring, elements of the Kirk's seventeenth century history. Kidd, 'Burden of Scottish Whiggery', pp.233-34. Arguably, William MacGregor Stirling, minister of Port of Menteith and a Leighton trustee, engaged in a similar exercise with his description of the Union in 1707 as putting an end 'to the evils of civil war and ecclesiastical tyranny'. He later explained that 'the union of the two kingdoms, however revolting to national vanity, put an end to this state of perpetual dependence… and accelerated the improvement of the empire, beyond all past experience, and the brightest visions of sanguine anticipation'. William MacGregor Stirling, *Memoir, to Accompany Chart of British History* (Edinburgh, 1816), pp.29-30.

[107] The Leighton owned two editions of Ossian's poems during this period: *The Poems of Ossian*, trans. James Macpherson, 2 vols. (London, 1790) and *The Poems of Ossian, in the Original Gaelic*, trans. Robert Macfarlan, 3 vols. (London, 1807). For the borrowings of each, see *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Advanced search for 'Book Holding: The poems of Ossian.',", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/search/p-1/0/0/advanced/bhids|18146>, [accessed 31/03/24] and *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Advanced search for 'Book Holding: The poems of Ossian, in the original Gaelic.',", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/search/p-1/0/0/advanced/bhids|57596>, [accessed 31/03/24]. Macfarlan's translation of Ossian was donated to the Leighton by Sir John MacGregor Murray (1745-1822) in 1810, with a dedicated inscription by Murray opposite its title page. Leighton Library copy, *Poems of Ossian*, trans. Macfarlan (1807), I, Leighton 8-F-8; Leighton MS 16, Minutes, 1734-1822, 4 December 1810. Patrick Graham, the minister of Aberfoyle 1787-1835 and a Leighton member, wrote an *Essay on the Authenticity of the Poems of Ossian* (Edinburgh, 1807), discussing the authenticity of Ossian's poems. Graham dedicated his essay to John Murray (1778-1846) the 5th Duke of Atholl and President of the Highland Society of Scotland. In 1808, the Society awarded him twenty guineas for a copy of his work. *British Press*, 20 January 1808. See also Sher, *Church and University*, pp.242-49.

[108] These included Patrick Graham, *Sketches Descriptive of the Picturesque Scenery of Perthshire* (Edinburgh, 1810); Patrick Graham, *General View of the Agriculture of Stirlingshire* (Edinburgh, 1812); William MacGregor Stirling, *Notes, Historical and Descriptive on the Priory of Inchmahome* (Edinburgh, 1815); William Nimmo, *History of Stirlingshire*, rev. ed., ed. William MacGregor Stirling, 2 vols. (Stirling, 1817).

[109] For more on *The Statistical Account*, and particularly its publisher, William Creech (1745-1815), see Sher, *Enlightenment and the Book*, pp.425-48.

popular borrowing from the library in this period, with volumes purchased by the library as they were published between 1791 and 1799.[110]

With the Leighton Library's books, local church ministers had access to the key texts that provided the foundation of Moderate intellectual culture, notably ancient Stoic and neo-Stoic texts and eighteenth-century works of Christian Stoicism.[111] Sher describes Stoicism as having constituted the 'dominant philosophical strain' in the Moderates' ideology, melding with their presbyterian ethics, morality and civic humanism.[112] Robert Leighton was himself a keen student of Stoic literature and his valuable library of Stoic texts, many of which were enriched by his own marginalia and notes, constituted a valuable resource for Leighton members.[113] While these books would always have been available for members to read in the library building, the borrowing record from the later eighteenth century reveals that the original Stoic texts that Leighton owned were rarely borrowed by members. If they were to borrow works on Stoicism, borrowers were more likely to turn to more modern, eighteenth-century editions, although not in great numbers. Even here lay readers were far more likely to borrow Stoic texts than Church of Scotland ministers. The *Meditations of the Emperor Marcus Aurelius* (1742)

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[110] Leighton members who contributed to the *Old Statistical Account* included Patrick Graham for Aberfoyle, William Osburn for Tillicoultry, James Robertson for Callander, John Robertson and Robert Stirling for Dunblane, William MacGregor Stirling for Port of Menteith and Christopher Tait for Kincardine-in-Menteith. *OSA*. Volumes of *The Statistical Account* were borrowed on 194 separate borrowing occasions by Leighton members between 1791 and 1830. *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Advanced search for 'Book Holding: The statistical account of Scotland. Drawn up from the communications of the ministers of the different parishes.'","<https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/search/p-1/0/0/advanced/bhids|17891>, [accessed 31/03/24].

[111] At its simplest, Stoicism is a school of thought principally concerned with how one should live, particularly stressing the benefits of physical, mental and emotional discipline. For this definition of Stoicism, see John Sellars, *Stoicism* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), pp.2-3. Neo-Stoicism refers to the intellectual movement of the sixteenth century concerning the re-discovery, publication and commentary of ancient Stoic authors and texts in partial search of a solution to contemporary civil and political life. See variously, G. Oestreich, *Neostoicism and the Early Modern State*, eds. Brigitta Oestreich and H.G. Koenigsberger, trans. David McLintock (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Richard Tuck, *Philosophy and Government, 1572-1651* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Allan, 'Neo-Stoicism of Robert Leighton', p.259. Christian Stoicism involved the synthesis of Stoic and Christian approaches to moral virtue, see Sher, *Church and University*, p.325; Isabel Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment. A Study of the Language of Religion and Ethics in England, 1660-1780. Volume II: Shaftesbury to Hume* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp.92-96, 118-41.

[112] Sher, *Church and University*, p.325.

[113] Allan, 'Neo-Stoicism of Robert Leighton', pp.260-66.

were borrowed only three times, although all by church ministers, with the *Works* (1768) of Epictetus borrowed six times, although by no Church of Scotland ministers.[114] Seneca, whom David Allan describes as 'the greatest Stoic moralist and dramatist in antiquity', was not borrowed at all, despite the library owning six different editions of his work.[115] Works by Cicero were more popular, with three editions of his work being borrowed by Leighton members on twenty-seven occasions.[116] The most popular of these, by far, was William Melmoth's English translation, published in 1753, although principally borrowed by lay readers.[117] Indeed, the only work of Cicero's to be borrowed by a church minister was his *Opera Quae Supersunt Omnia* (1748-49), by Robert Stirling (d. 1801), minister of Port of Menteith, in 1792.[118]

Rather than directly borrowing these foundational Stoic texts, Leighton members, and specifically Church of Scotland ministers were more likely to engage with works of Christian

[114] *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Advanced search for 'Book Holding: The meditations of the Emperor Marcus Aurelius Antoninus. Newly translated from the Greek : with notes, and an account of his life.',", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/search/p-1/0/0/advanced/bhids|55669>, [accessed 31/03/24]; *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Advanced search for 'Book Holding: All the works of Epictetus, which are now extant; consisting of his Discourses, preserved by Arrian, in four books, the Enchiridion, and fragments.',", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/search/p-1/0/0/advanced/bhids|47072>, [accessed 31/03/24].

[115] Allan, 'Neo-Stoicism of Robert Leighton', p.262; *Catalogue of the Leightonian Library, Dunblane* (Edinburgh, 1843), pp.55-56.

[116] *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Advanced search for 'Author: Marcus Tullius Cicero ',", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/search/p-1/lname|Leighton Library/0/advanced/aids|35>, [accessed 31/03/24]. These consisted of *M. Tullii Ciceronis Orationes*., 6 vols. (Amsterdam, 1695-99), *M. Tullii Opera Quae Supersunt Omnia*., 20 vols. (Glasgow, 1748-49), and *The Letters of Marcus Tullius Cicero to Several of his Friends.*, ed. William Melmoth, 3 vols. (London, 1753).

[117] *The Letters of Marcus Tullius Cicero to Several of his Friends*, trans. William Melmoth (London, 1753). *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Advanced search for 'Book Holding: The letters of Marcus Tullius Cicero to several of his friends.',", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/search/p-1/0/0/advanced/bhids|17717>, [accessed 31/03/24].

[118] *M. Tullii Opera Quae Supersunt Omnia.* (Glasgow, 1748-49). *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Leighton Library: Register Ledger 1, page 47 (image and text view),", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/library/leighton/registers/15/102542/image-and-text>, [accessed 31/03/24]. The Leighton's earliest edition of Cicero, *M. Tullii Ciceronis Orationes.* (Amsterdam, 1695-99), was borrowed on three occasions. *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Advanced search for 'Book Holding: M. Tullii Ciceronis Orationes.',", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/search/p-1/0/0/advanced/bhids|35048>, [accessed 31/03/24].

Stoicism, particularly those of Francis Hutcheson (1694-1746) or Hugh Blair (1718-1800).[119] Indeed, Hutcheson's *System of Moral Philosophy* (1755) was borrowed twenty-two times, entirely by 'religious readers', either church ministers or students in divinity.[120] Blair's *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1783), whilst obviously useful for a church minister who publicly preached, also included analysis and quotation of Stoic authors such as Cicero and were borrowed sixty times in total making it the sixteenth most popular borrowing overall from the Leighton Library.[121] Borrowings made by church ministers and preachers account for twenty-eight of these borrowing records.[122] As these suggest, whilst Stoic thought may have been as influential on the minds of this group of Church of Scotland ministers at the end of the eighteenth century, this was now being received through the medium of Christian Stoicism, rather than engaging directly with original Stoic texts. Arguably, where the influence of this is most pronounced is in the way ministers in the presbytery engaged with and supported local civic culture in Dunblane. In this respect, the wider culture of Stoic and Christian Stoic thought was employed to serve a particular local circumstance.

IV

The actions of ministers in the Presbytery of Dunblane, their involvement and participation in the Leighton Library, and the conscious expansion of its purpose all mark out a civic ethos

[119] For the influence of Stoic thought upon Hutcheson, see Sher, *Church and University*, pp.175-86; Christian Maurer, 'Hutcheson's Relation to Stoicism in the Light of his Moral Psychology', *Journal of Scottish Philosophy*, 8.1 (March 2010), pp.33-49. For Blair, see Sher, *Church and University*, pp.169-71.

[120] *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Advanced search for 'Book Holding: A system of moral philosophy.'," <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/search/p-1/0/0/advanced/bhids|46286>, [accessed 31/03/24].

[121] Hugh Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, 2 vols. (London, 1783), II, pp.26-34, 86-100; *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Leighton Library: Books ordered by borrowings,", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/library/leighton/books/borrowings>, [accessed 31/03/24]. Blair's *Lectures*, like his *Sermons* (1777-1801), proved to be widely popular. He received £1,500 for its copyright and both works were published in their thousands in multiple edition runs. Sher, *Enlightenment and the Book*, pp.33, 246-47, 705-07.

[122] *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Advanced search for 'Book Holding: Lectures on rhetoric and belles lettres.'," <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/search/p-1/0/0/advanced/bhids|27774>, [accessed 31/03/24].

amongst Leighton ministers similar to what prevailed amongst the Moderate literati in Edinburgh, one that involved itself actively in a literary and scientific society of letters, with an emphasis upon sociability, gentility and toleration.[123] As Sher observed, Moderates mixed freely in polite society, participating in the array of clubs and societies existing in Georgian Edinburgh and dominating its intellectual and educational institutions.[124] The Leighton's trustees were seeking to foster a similar learned and educated community in Dunblane, albeit on a smaller scale. Nor was this an isolated community. Many made frequent trips to Scotland's larger urban centres, especially to Edinburgh to participate in the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, and may have viewed themselves as participants in a larger Scottish 'polite society'.[125] On a practical level, involvement in a local associational network provided vital experience for those who were later translated to larger urban ministries.[126]

The implementation of a system of matriculation for lay library members in 1734 formally opened the library out beyond the local religious community, but under curatorship of the Leighton's trustees the library's membership was also ecumenically diverse.[127] True, the most favourable terms of membership remained open only to local Church of Scotland ministers.[128] Yet the library was also regularly used by members of other Christian denominations beyond the Kirk and was the site of collaborations and associations between these groups. Ministers from secession churches in the area, both Burgher and Anti-Burgher, were active borrowers

[123] Sher, *Church and University*, p.57.
[124] Sher, *Church and University*, pp.59-62.
[125] William MacGregor Stirling, the minister of Port of Menteith, was a frequent traveller. NRA S2362/193, Stirling Family, of Garden, Stirlingshire, Miscellaneous accounts and receipts, 1800-23, Receipt for Crown Inn, Falkirk, records held privately. On 18 August 1822, no public worship was held in Menteith because Stirling had travelled to Edinburgh to witness the visit of George IV. Stirling Council Archives, CH2/1300/5, Port of Menteith kirk session, Accounts (1801-1832), p.189.
[126] For example, Patrick MacFarlan, the minister of Kippen in 1806, was later translated to the parish of St John's in Glasgow. Ritchie, 'Macfarlan, Patrick (1781-1849), *ODNB*.
[127] The exception to this was Catholics, none of whom seem to have been Leighton members.
[128] See above, p.208.

from the Leighton Library.[129] Of these individuals, the most prolific borrower, indeed the second most regular borrower from the Leighton Library overall, was Michael Gilfillan, the Burgher minister of Dunblane between 1768 and 1816, responsible for a recorded 385 borrowings across a span of thirty-five years (1780-1815).[130] Gilfillan's appetite for reading was well known to contemporaries: 'such was the studious life which Mr. G. led, that almost every book of value in it [the Leighton Library] he had read with care, and some of them more than once'.[131] Gilfillan put this intimate knowledge of the Leighton's books to use in 1792 when he helped the librarian, Malcolm Coldstream, with the creation of the first printed library catalogue.[132] Despite providing this aid, offered seemingly for free, and being an extremely regular user of the library, as a minister for the Secession Church, Gilfillan was not entitled to the preferential library membership given to Church of Scotland ministers. He would have been liable to pay the cost of subscription annually (ten shillings and sixpence), rather than in a one-

[129] This included John Wallace, Anti-Burgher minister of Dunblane, James Anderson, Burgher minister of Dunblane, Samuel Armour (1783-1853), Burgher minister of Doune, and Robert Campbell (c.1738-1803), Burgher minister of Stirling. For their library borrowings, see, respectively, *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Advanced search for 'Borrower: Reverend Mr John Wallace ',", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/search/p-1/0/0/advanced/brids|26957>, [accessed 31/03/24]; *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Advanced search for 'Borrower: Reverend Mr James Anderson ',", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/search/p-1/0/0/advanced/brids|29445>, [accessed 31/03/24]; *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Advanced search for 'Borrower: Reverend Mr Samuel Armour ',", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/search/p-1/0/0/advanced/brids|27643>, [accessed 31/03/24]; *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Advanced search for 'Borrower: Reverend Mr Robert Campbell ',", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/search/p-1/0/0/advanced/brids|29234>, [accessed 31/03/24].

[130] *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Advanced search for 'Borrower: Reverend Mr Michael Gilfillan ',", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/search/p-1/0/0/advanced/brids|3719>, [accessed 31/03/24]. Gilfillan had been a library member since 1776, so he almost certainly made more use of the Leighton's books than is recorded in the surviving borrowing records from 1780. His recorded use of the Leighton Library was only surpassed by Robert Stirling, the minister of Dunblane, who lived directly adjacent to the library building. *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Advanced search for 'Borrower: Reverend Mr Robert Stirling ',", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/search/p-1/0/0/advanced/brids|14223>, [accessed 31/03/24]. Both Stirling's and Gilfillan's borrowings from the Leighton dwarf in comparison to the most prolific borrower in the *Books and Borrowing* database, also a 'religious reader', George Lawson (1749-1820), the minister of Selkirk, who was responsible for 1628 borrowings from the Selkirk Subscription Library. *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Advanced search for 'Borrower: Reverend Mr George Lawson ',", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/search/p-1/0/0/advanced/brids|2955>, [accessed 31/03/24].

[131] Henry Belfrage, *Sketches of Life and Character, from Scripture and from Observation* (Edinburgh, 1822), p.9.

[132] Leighton MS 16, Minutes, 1734-1822, 27 November 1792.

off payment as in the case of Kirk ministers, had he not been granted *civis* membership for his donation of Gerard Brandt's four-volume *History of the Reformation* (1720-23) in 1776.[133] Moreover, Gilfillan is the only recorded borrower, seemingly in the whole of the Leighton's history, to have been fined for an overdue book, paying two shillings for the late return of both volumes of William Robertson's *History of Scotland* (1759) and the first volume of George Campbell's *The Four Gospels* (1789) in 1803.[134] Nevertheless, Gilfillan's repeated and regular use of the Leighton Library brought him into daily contact with John Robertson, the minister of Dunblane from whose church Gilfillan's congregation had originally seceded in 1757.[135] Despite this situation, it was both men's use of the Leighton Library which formed the basis of a close friendship, with the two said to take frequent walks together 'and, by their communication of what they had read, contributed to the improvement of each other'.[136]

A number of local Episcopalians were library members, including the ministers of Alloa and Stirling, John Rhind (d. 1807) and Hugh James Cheyne (d. 1785) respectively.[137] Cheyne's successor as minister of Stirling, George Gleig, also later the bishop of Brechin and primus of the Episcopal Church, was also a Leighton borrower, offered library membership in return for

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[133] Leighton MS 16, Minutes, 1734-1822, 1 October 1776.

[134] *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Leighton Library: Register Ledger 1, page 137 (image and text view),", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/library/leighton/registers/15/102809/image-and-text>, [accessed 31/03/24]. As well as being noted in the borrowing register, Gilfillan's payment is recorded in the library's accounts. See Leighton MS 16, Minutes, 1734-1822, 11 September 1804. According to the library's rules, as published in the 1793 catalogue, borrowers were only allowed to take out a book for up to two months before they were fined. *A Catalogue of the Leightonian Library, Dunblane* (Edinburgh, 1793), p.iii. From September 1803, Church of Scotland ministers were entitled to borrow books from the library for up to a period of six months. Leighton MS 16, Minutes, 1734-1822, 7 September 1803.

[135] Small, *United Presbyterian Church*, II, pp.691-92.

[136] Belfrage, *Sketches*, p.15.

[137] David M. Bertie, *Scottish Episcopal Clergy, 1689-2000* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2000), pp.629, 646. *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Advanced search for 'Borrower: Mr John Rhind ',", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/search/p-1/0/0/advanced/brids|18119>, [accessed 31/03/24]; *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Advanced search for 'Borrower: Reverend Hugh James Cheyne ',", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/search/p-1/0/0/advanced/brids|18044>, [accessed 31/03/24].

two books donated to the library across his eleven years of use.[138] As well as being a frequent contributor to a number of periodicals, from 1793, Gleig served as the editor to the third edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1788-97), a publication that the Leighton purchased as it was published from 1791 onwards.[139] The *Encyclopaedia* was extremely popular with the Leighton's borrowers, being the second most borrowed item between 1780 and 1840, with Gleig responsible for a number of the articles within it, including those on 'Instinct', 'Metaphysics' and 'Theology'.[140] The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* did more than simply propagate the spread of knowledge: its philosophical and editorial unity also offered a full-throated defence of religious orthodoxy.[141] Writing in the supplement to the third edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, which the Leighton also owned, Gleig explained that he intended it to counteract the 'seeds of Anarchy and Atheism' disseminated by the French *Encylopédie*.[142] Moreover, he accepted wholesale the 'Illuminati theory' as popularised by Augustin Barruel (1741-1820), James Thomson, and John Robison (1739-1805). Michael Taylor notes that it was Gleig who did the most amongst a number of ecclesiastical figures 'to propagate the Illuminati theory'.[143] Gleig was strident in his declarations against 'Illuminism' from the pulpit:

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[138] Gleig donated Ralph Cudworth's *Systema Intellectualle* (1733) in 1802 and S.F. Waddington's *The Metaphysics of Man* (London, 1806) probably in 1811. Leighton MS 16, Minutes, 1734-1822, 7 September 1802, 2 January 1812. For Gleig's borrowing record, see *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Advanced search for 'Borrower: Reverend Dr George Gleig ',", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/search/p-1/0/0/advanced/brids|27640>, [accessed 01/04/24].

[139] Nigel Aston, 'Gleig, George (1753-1840)', *ODNB* (September 2004); Leighton MS 16, Minutes, 1734-1822, 27 December 1791.

[140] Volumes of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* were borrowed by Leighton readers on 156 occasions between 1792 and 1840. *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Advanced search for 'Book Holding: Encyclopaedia britannica; or, A dictionary of arts, sciences, and miscellaneous literature.',", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/search/p-1/0/0/advanced/bhids|25145>, [accessed 21/08/24].

[141] Silvia Sebastiani, 'Conjectural History vs. the Bible: Eighteenth-Century Scottish Historians and the Idea of History in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*', *Lumen*, 21 (2002), pp.221-23.

[142] George Gleig, *Supplement to the Third Edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica, or, A Dictionary of Arts, Sciences, and Miscellaneous Literature.*, rev. ed., 2 vols. (Edinburgh, 1803), I, p.iv. See also Silvia Sebastiani, 'Enlightenment America and the Hierarchy of Races: Disputes Over the Writing of History in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1768-1788)', trans. Denis Griesmar, *Annales: Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, 67.2 (2012), pp.224, 227.

[143] Taylor, 'Conspiracy Theory of the French Revolution', pp.297-98.

> That these debasing principles and gross practices have spread over the northern nations of Europe, I need not go about to prove. The facts has been sufficiently proved by others who have providentially been enabled to bring to light the novel and secret arts by which the apostles of atheism, anarchy, and vice, have drawn so many aside from the paths of truth and virtue.[144]

According to Gleig, the works of Barruel and Robison had made clear that society as a whole has 'drunk deep of the corrupted stream of modern illuminism'.[145] Indeed, any man who doubts such a situation must assuredly be an 'illuminatus' himself.[146] Gleig's association with Robison has been widely noted; the two were close friends and Robison also co-edited the *Encyclopaedia* alongside Gleig, as well as writing a number of its articles.[147] Yet Gleig also had as close an association with Thomson, a connection that has gone largely unnoticed, as has Thomson's own role in popularising the 'Illuminati theory'.[148] Thomson served as an assistant editor to Gleig on the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* and produced the articles 'Septuagint', 'Superstition', and, critically for the *Encyclopaedia's* purpose, 'Scripture'.[149] Although Thomson resigned his assistant post after a year when he became the tutor to the Stirling family, his membership of the Leighton Library allowed him to maintain contact with Gleig.[150] The two men were quite possibly present in the library together on 25 December 1800 when they

[144] Gleig, *Sermons*, p.326.
[145] Gleig, *Sermons*, p.327.
[146] Gleig, *Sermons*, p.328.
[147] Sebastiani, 'Conjectural History vs. the Bible', p.215, n.7; Taylor, 'Conspiracy Theory of the French Revolution', p.298.
[148] It is Barruel and Robison who frequently receive most of the attention of scholars. For examples, see M.O. Grenby, *The Anti-Jacobin Novel: British Conservatism and the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p.10; Taylor, 'Conspiracy Theory of the French Revolution'; Richard Whatmore, *The End of Enlightenment: Empire, Commerce, Crisis* (Padstow: Allen Lane, 2023), pp.152-53. This may be because Thomson is typically viewed as having largely copied the works of his predecessors; Taylor describes it as having been 'cribbed from Barruel'. Taylor, 'Conspiracy Theory of the French Revolution', p.300.
[149] Carlyle and Matthew, 'Thomson, James (1768-1855)', *ODNB*.
[150] Carlyle and Matthew, 'Thomson, James (1768-1855)', *ODNB*. Thomson was succeeded in the role of assistant editor by his brother, Thomas Thomson (1773-1852), in 1796. Jack Morrell, 'Thomson, Thomas (1773-1852)', *ODNB* (September 2006).

both made a borrowing.[151] Critically, Gleig's most direct reference to the dangers posed by 'modern illuminism' came during this period, in a sermon he delivered on 24 January 1802, at the same time as he was writing the preface to the supplement to the third edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, and as Gleig, Thomson, his works, and those of Robison were all present at the Leighton Library.[152] In this respect, it seems likely that the library acted as an essential catalyst in an ecumenical, intellectual, and political partnership.

V

It might be said that the ecumenicalism and openness which marked the Leighton Library in this period is evidence of Robert Leighton's own legacy.[153] Arguably it says more about the virtues and values of the Church of Scotland ministers who consciously chose to shape the Leighton Library in such a manner. Of all the aspects of Moderatism, this active involvement in the social sphere of letters is perhaps the most pronounced in Church of Scotland members of the Leighton Library. During the middle of the eighteenth century, critics in the Evangelical and Popular wing of the Kirk savaged this Moderate polite civil culture. The most famous of these attacks was that of John Witherspoon (1723-94) in his *Ecclesiastical Characteristics* (1753).[154] Witherspoon made reference to nearly all the elements that have come to be associated with Moderate behaviour but paid special attention to the perceived focus upon good manners and polite learning. His fifth maxim of the Moderate minister concerned his place within the wider community:

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[151] Thomson borrowed Alexander Gerard's *Essay on Genius* (1774), whilst Gleig borrowed both volumes of George Campbell's *The Four Gospels* (1789). It was his first borrowing from the Leighton Library. *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Leighton Library: Register Ledger 1, page 112 (image and text view),", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/library/leighton/registers/15/102737/image-and-text>, [accessed 12/08/24]; *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Leighton Library: Register Ledger 1, page 142 (image and text view),", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/library/leighton/registers/15/102824/image-and-text>, [accessed 12/08/24].

[152] This sermon was titled 'Delusion believing a Lie'. Gleig, *Sermons*, pp.321-41.

[153] Burnet, *History of His Own Time*, p.588; Grant, *Memoirs and Correspondence*, II, pp.144, 249-50; Willis, 'Leighton Library', pp.139-40; Allan, 'Neo-Stoicism of Robert Leighton', pp.252-57, 278.

[154] John Witherspoon, *Ecclesiastical Characteristics or, The Arcana of Church Policy.* (Glasgow, 1753), pp.15-24.

> In former times, ministers were so monkish and recluse, so ordinary, and so formal… whereas now, let a moderate, modern, well-bred minister go into promiscuous company, they stand in no manner of awe; and will even swear with all imaginable liberty.[155]

Witherspoon exaggerated for satirical effect but his perception that the Moderates were comfortable mixing in elite social circles is accurate.[156] Dunblane played host to a more limited associational network than Edinburgh, but even in the first two decades of the nineteenth century Leighton ministers were active participants in networks of historians, antiquarians, and geographers who were all library members.[157] As well as criticising a perceived obsession with politeness, Witherspoon was also critical about the general education of Moderates and their reading habits. This was not an anti-intellectual argument but more accurately a criticism of the type of learning Moderates now focused upon. Moderates were able to pretend to be more learned than their adversaries because of their choice use of phrases, accumulated from books 'not above the size of an octavo', and an 'abundance of citations from the antient heathen authors in Cudworth's Intellectual System'.[158] Branches of knowledge were now shortened into 'little phials; so that we may come to all learning by one act of intuition'.[159] The intended consequence of this, according to Witherspoon, was the diminution of religious reading:

[155] Witherspoon, *Ecclesiastical Characteristics*, p.23.
[156] Sher, *Church and University*, pp.231-33; Smitten, *William Robertson*, pp.103-09.
[157] See below pp.235-36.
[158] Witherspoon, *Ecclesiastical Characteristics*, p.26. *The True Intellectual System of the Universe* (1743), by Ralph Cudworth (1617-88), referred to by Witherspoon, was held by the Leighton and borrowed on eight occasions by a number of 'religious readers', including Michael Gilfillan, John Robertson, James Robertson, John Wallace and James Anderson. *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Advanced search for 'Book Holding: The true intellectual system of the universe : the first part. With A discourse concerning the true notion of the Lord's Supper ; and two sermons.',", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/search/p-1/0/0/advanced/bhids|55684>, [accessed 01/04/24].
[159] Witherspoon, *Ecclesiastical Characteristics*, p.26.

> There will be no need at all for the critical study of the scriptures, for reading large bodies of divinity, for an acquaintance with church history, of the writings of these poor creatures, the Christian fathers, but all is absorbed into the good of the *whole*.[160]

Writing in the late eighteenth century, John Erskine espoused similar concerns that theology was, in the words of Jonathan Yeager, 'becoming less in vogue'.[161] The borrowing records of the Leighton Library largely support these fears, at least as to their applicability to readers in Clackmannanshire, Perthshire, and Stirlingshire in the late eighteenth century.

Table 1: Top Ten Most Borrowed Books By 'Religious Readers' at the Leighton Library, 1780-1840.[162]

Title	**Borrowing Events**
Encyclopaedia Britannica (1788-97) and *Supplement to the Third Edition* (1801).	101
The Statistical Account of Scotland (1791-99).	84
The Poets of Great Britain, ed. John Bell (1777-83).	46
The New Annual Register (1780-99).	39
David Hume, *History of England* (1763).	34
Hugh Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres.* (1783).	33
Jean-Jacques Barthélemy, *Travels of Anacharsis* (1790-91).	32
William Robertson, *History of Scotland* (1759).	31
Thomas Reid, *Intellectual Powers of Man.* (1785).	29
Richard Graves, *The Spiritual Quixote* (1774).	29

The most popularly borrowed work for 'religious readers' was the third edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1788-97), and its supplement, a work of reference concerned with codifying and collating knowledge, whether 'Natural and Scientifical' or 'Artificial and

[160] Witherspoon, *Ecclesiastical Characteristics*, p.26.
[161] Yeager, *Enlightened Evangelicalism*, p.184.
[162] Figures taken from Books and Borrowing.

Technical', in a manner similar to the 'phials of knowledge', as described by Witherspoon.[163] Indeed, other works of reference were popular, with *The Statistical Account* (1791-99) and the *New Annual Register* (1780-99) the second and fourth most popularly borrowed works by 'religious readers' at the Leighton Library in this period. This list of most popular works largely tallies up with the most borrowed books overall by all library members, with *The Statistical Account*, the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, and the *New Annual Register* constituting the top three most borrowed books.[164]

As to whether this new type of reading crowded out the reading of religious texts, the evidence is slightly mixed. Borrowings of religious works are certainly not absent from the record of 'religious readers' at the Leighton, but they were far from dominating it. Of course, members would have owned their own reading material, more likely pamphlets and sermons than the most expensive reference works. The Rev. James Wodrow (1730-1810) of Stevenston, Ayrshire, bought his own pamphlets and shared others with his correspondent Samuel Kenrick (1728-1811).[165] At the Leighton, the Rev. William MacGregor Stirling, minister of Port of Menteith, supplemented his borrowing from the library with subscriptions to a number of periodicals, including the *Monthly Magazine* and *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*.[166] Jonathan Yeager, using publication data gathered from the English Short Title Catalogue (ESTC), argues that the eighteenth century saw an overall increase in the number of theological works produced in Scotland although most of these were by seventeenth-century authors, very

[163] *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, I, p.viii.
[164] *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Leighton Library: Books ordered by borrowings,", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/library/leighton/books/borrowings>, [accessed 01/04/24]. The fifth most borrowed book by both all Leighton members and 'religious readers' was David Hume's *History of England* (1763).
[165] Letter 98: James Wodrow to Samuel Kenrick, 21 July 1785 and Letter 130: James Wodrow to Samuel Kenrick, 15 June 1787, *The Wodrow-Kenrick Correspondence 1750-1810, Volume II: 1784-1790*, eds. Martin Fitzpatrick, Emma Macleod, and Anthony Page (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024), pp.108, 272-75.
[166] Andrew Bean to William MacGregor Stirling, 13 May 1818, NRA S2362/186, Stirling Family, of Garden, Stirlingshire, Correspondence of William MacGregor Stirling, concerning personal matters, parish affairs, Stirlingshire antiquities and his book *Priory of Inchmahome*, 1815-20, records held privately.

few of whom were Scottish.[167] The borrowing record from the Leighton Library slightly confuses this conclusion, with the vast majority of its borrowed books being published by London, rather than Scottish, publishers. Of notable popularity were also works by latitudinarian Anglicans such as the *Sermons* (1771) of Thomas Secker, the *Works* (1735) of John Tillotson and *Commentary upon the Historical Books of the Old Testament* (1765-66) by Simon Patrick, all being borrowed on over twenty-one occasions.[168] As was typical for subscription libraries, 'polite' histories were borrowed, including those by David Hume, Edward Gibbon and William Robertson.[169] The combined borrowings of Robertson's three histories in the Leighton Library, which also included his *History of America* (1777), places him as the second most popular author overall for borrowings made by the Leighton's 'religious readers', behind Sir John Sinclair and just ahead of Thomas Reid.[170] Robertson was a Church of Scotland minister himself and leader of the Moderate party in the Kirk between the 1760s and the 1780s.[171] The next most popular religious author at the Leighton Library was another Moderate minister, professor, and principal of Marischal College, Aberdeen: George Campbell (1719-96).[172] 'Religious readers' valued both Campbell's *The Four Gospels* (1789), and his

[167] Yeager, *Enlightened Evangelicalism*, pp.184-85. For discussions exploring some of the methodological limitations of using ESTC data in this respect, see variously David McKitterick, '"Not in STC": Opportunities and Challenges in the ESTC', *The Library*, 6.2 (June, 2005), pp.178-94; Stephen Tabor, 'ESTC and the Bibliographical Community', *The Library*, 8.4 (December, 2007), pp.367-86; Michael F. Suarez, 'Towards a Bibliometric Analysis of the Surviving Record, 1701-1800', in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain. Volume 5: 1695-1830*, eds. Michael F. Suarez and Michael L. Turner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp.39-41

[168] These and subsequent borrowing figures are taken from searches of the Books and Borrowing database and can be obtained by searching for the specific book within the Leighton's borrowings and refining by borrower occupation.

[169] These included Hume's *History of England* (1763), borrowed on thirty-four occasions, Gibbon's *Decline and Fall* (1776-88) on twenty-five occasions and Robertson's *History of Scotland* (1759) and *Charles V* (1769) borrowed on thirty-one and twenty-five occasions respectively by 'religious readers'. For the use of the term 'polite' history, see Sher, *Church and University*, pp.100-05.

[170] Three of Reid's works were borrowed by Leighton members. This included his *Inquiry into the Human Mind* (1769) borrowed on twenty-one occasions, his *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* (1785) borrowed on twenty-nine occasions and his *Essays on the Active Powers of Man* (1788) borrowed on fifteen occasions.

[171] Just as Robert Leighton had once been, Robertson was also the principal of the University of Edinburgh from 1762. Jeffrey R. Smitten, 'Robertson, William (1721-1793)', *ODNB* (January 2008); Sher, *Church and University*, pp.126-35.

[172] Jeffrey M. Suderman, 'Campbell, George (1719-1796)', *ODNB* (September 2006).

intervention on oratory, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (1776), which were borrowed on eighteen and sixteen occasions respectively. This latter work, like the vastly more popular *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1783) by Hugh Blair, borrowed a total of thirty-three times, whilst obviously useful for a church minister, was not theological.[173] The borrowing of works by Moderate authors contrasts with the relative scarcity of Leighton Library books written by ministers of the Popular Party. John Erskine's two-volume *Discourses Preached on Several Occasions* (1801-04) was present but borrowed only on three occasions by 'religious readers', whilst there were no works at all by John Witherspoon.

Nevertheless, religious works were far more popular for 'religious readers' than the newest works of fiction. Take, for example, the novel *Zeluco* (1789), the work of the Stirling-born author John Moore (1729-1802), borrowed 119 times in seventy-two records, placing it sixth on the list of most borrowed Leighton books.[174] Yet only sixteen of these records were by 'religious readers'. Likewise, the other work of modern fiction present in the library in the early nineteenth century, the *Cottagers of Glenburnie* (1808) by Elizabeth Hamilton, was borrowed only on five occasions by 'religious readers'.[175] The same cannot be said for older works of fiction. Significantly for the context of the Leighton Library, Richard Grave's partial satire of Methodism in his picaresque three-volume novel, *The Spiritual Quixote* (1774), was borrowed on twenty-nine occasions, placing it ahead, by times borrowed, than other, narrowly religious works.[176] More popular than this amongst 'religious readers' were John Bell's *The Poets of Great Britain* (1777-83), held in 109-volumes octodecimo, and borrowed 217 times in fifty-

[173] Sher, *Church and University*, pp.169-71.
[174] *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Leighton Library: Books ordered by borrowings,", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/library/leighton/books/borrowings>, [accessed 05/04/24].
[175] Despite this, *Cottagers* introduction to the Leighton's collection owes itself to the minister of Dunblane, Robert Stirling, who sold it to the library in 1808 for seven shillings and sixpence. Leighton MS 16, Minutes, 1734-1822, 5 September 1809.
[176] David Oakleaf, 'Graves, Richard (1715-1804)', *ODNB* (April 2022); Dragoş Ivana, *Embattled Reason, Principled Sentiment and Political Radicalism: Quixotism in English Novels, 1742-1801* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2014), pp.219-29.

three records, of which the vast majority, forty-six, were made by 'religious readers'.[177] Thus whilst religious texts continued to be borrowed from the Leighton Library, 'religious readers', including Church of Scotland ministers, were borrowing them alongside the other standard fare of the subscription library such as history, philosophy, travel and works of reference. Of course, what 'religious readers' could borrow from the Leighton Library was dependent on what books were in its collection. Yet at the Leighton Library, these were decisions that lay within the hands of the Church of Scotland ministers who served as the library's trustees.

The context within which these works were being read by Leighton members is considered by some historians to be a period of decline in the intellectual vitality of Moderatism, and to a lesser extent in the Church of Scotland.[178] Sher points to a moment in Scottish society occurring alongside the passing of the Moderate literati, although he does acknowledge that this was less of a decline and more of a '*reorientation* of Scottish intellectual life' towards 'new genres' and 'new values'. [179] Nevertheless, members of the Scottish clergy were thought to be no longer at the forefront of these changes, nor were they as concerned with thinking or publishing on theological matters as they once may have been.[180] As discussed above, the borrowing record of 'religious readers' from the Leighton Library attests to this change in interests. However, as their publication records demonstrate, provincial Church of Scotland ministers remained committed scholars who wrote on a growing list of fields, including literary studies, geography, agriculture, and art. Theology was not generally amongst these topics, yet whether this reflected a break in tradition or merely the continuation of a Moderate culture of learning is debateable.

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[177] *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Leighton Library: Books ordered by borrowings,", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/library/leighton/books/borrowings>, [accessed 05/04/24]. On Bell's *Poets*, see Thomas F. Bonnell, *The Most Disreputable Trade: Publishing the Classics of English Poetry, 1765-1810* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp.97-133.

[178] For example, see Ahnert, *Moral Culture*, p.136; Crawford, *Chair of Verity*, pp.299-300. Although not about intellectual decline per se, Richard Whatmore has shown that a range of thinkers at the end of the eighteenth century worried about the 'end of enlightenment' and the resumption of religious and social fanaticism. Whatmore, *End of Enlightenment*, pp.xxix-xxxi.

[179] Sher, *Church and University*, p.308.

[180] Sher, *Church and University*, pp.318-21; Yeager, *Enlightened Evangelicalism*, p.185.

Certainly, this switch in focus became most pronounced in the work of Leighton Library members in the 1790s and early nineteenth century.

In 1781, Robert Stirling, the minister of Port of Menteith and a Leighton Library trustee, preached at the opening of the Synod of Perth and Stirling and emphasised that the study of scripture should remain the central concern of the Kirk minister, in a sermon which combined elements of Moderate and Popular theology.[181] For Stirling, it was the duty of a minister to instruct his congregation in 'those divine truths that are indispensable for their conversion, reformation, and improvement in holiness'.[182] Elements of Stoicism and Moderate theology perhaps influenced the importance Stirling placed on personal morality, the cultivation of 'caution', 'diffidence', 'modesty' and 'humility'.[183] Key to this, and as important for the general search for 'truth', was an 'intimate acquaintance' with holy scripture.[184] To achieve this, Stirling recommended a manner of learning that John Witherspoon had believed to be lacking in Moderate clergy, recommending the congregation to make an 'attentive and patient examination', proceeding cautiously and slowly with a 'humble docile disposition'.[185] Although he made no explicit reference to the Leighton Library or reading in general, he urged that personal education and learning should remain a continual concern of a Kirk minister. He concluded, perhaps with one eye towards the Leighton Library by:

> recommending to you, my brethren, and to myself, to make the important matters of salvation our chief and habitual study, and to use all the helps of nature and grace for advancing more and more in this holy science.[186]

[181] Stirling's sermon was published the following year. Stirling, *Sermon Preached at the Opening of the Synod, October 16. 1781*.
[182] Stirling, *Sermon*, p.2.
[183] Stirling, *Sermon*, p.5.
[184] Stirling, *Sermon*, p.7.
[185] Stirling, *Sermon*, pp.12-18.
[186] Stirling, *Sermon*, p.32.

For Stirling, a better educated clergy in this manner would be better placed to provide instruction to others. Yet in the generation of Leighton ministers following Stirling, scripture was no longer their primary concern.

Stirling was succeeded, as both the minister of Port of Menteith and a Leighton trustee, by his son Robert MacGregor Stirling, a regular borrower from the Leighton Library from the time in which he was a lay preacher in the presbytery in 1797.[187] Stirling combined his ecclesiastical responsibilities with an interest in local and regional history. He prepared or produced a number of publications during his occupancy as a church minister including accounts of his parish in both *The Statistical Account* (1793) and *The New Statistical Account* (1845), whilst also writing a history of a ruined Augustinian priory located on an island in the Lake of Menteith, a short *Memoir* (1816) to accompany a chart of British history, as well as editing the second edition of William Nimmo's *History of Stirlingshire* (1817) which Stirling greatly expanded with additional chapters and footnotes.[188] In 1818, he prepared a history of Dunblane that came close to publication, while from 1822, he began to compile material for an uncompleted history of Clan Gregor for Sir Evan Murray MacGregor (1785-1841).[189] In addition to these interests, Stirling was also a member of the Stirling Subscription Library, an amateur poet and a pupil

[187] *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Advanced search for 'Borrower: Reverend Mr William MacGregor Stirling ',", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/search/p-1/0/0/advanced/brids|14208>, [accessed 02/04/24]. Stirling passed his presbytery trials on 12 February 1793. Stirling Council Archives, CH2/723/13, Dunblane presbytery, Minutes (1793-1804), 12 February 1793.

[188] William [MacGregor] Stirling, 'Parish of Port of Monteith', in *OSA* (1793), VII, pp.139-41. Stirling's account of the parish also largely formed the basis for its description in the *New Statistical Account*. [William MacGregor Stirling], 'Parish of Port of Menteith', in *The New Statistical Account of Scotland.*, ed. John Gordon 52 vols. (Edinburgh, 1834-45), X, pp.1095-1109. William MacGregor Stirling, *Notes, Historical and Descriptive on the Priory of Inchmahome* (Edinburgh, 1815); William MacGregor Stirling, *Memoir, to Accompany Chart of British History* (Edinburgh, 1816); William Nimmo, *History of Stirlingshire*, rev. ed., ed. William MacGregor Stirling, 2 vols. (Stirling, 1817).

[189] Stirling's history of Dunblane never appeared in print despite his publisher, Andrew Bean, relaying to him that he had already 'got the promise of a great many Subscribers' and hoped to sell between 100 or 150 copies providing the price of the work did not exceed four or five shillings. Andrew Bean to William MacGregor Stirling, 27 November 1818**,** NRA S2362/366, Stirling Family, of Garden, Stirlingshire, Letters to Rev. William MacGregor Stirling from Andrew Bean, [printer] in Stirling, with accounts for books and periodicals supplied and for the publication of a new edition of Nimmo's Stirlingshire, records held privately; William Brown, *History of The Clan Gregor* (Edinburgh, 1898), p.2.

and correspondent of the English artist Hugh William Williams (1773-1829).[190] Stirling's sketches were published in the *Scots Magazine* in 1817 as well as his own publications, but he also produced illustrations and maps for the publications of Patrick Graham, the minister of Aberfoyle and a fellow Leighton member.[191] Graham's interests and publication record were as varied and diverse as Stirling's, ranging from descriptions of the local landscape, analysis of Ossianic poetry and agricultural accounts of Stirlingshire, Kinross and Clackmannan.[192] In a similar respect, Christopher Tait (1744-1812), the minister of Kincardine-in-Menteith, was a contributor to *The Statistical Account*, and the *Transactions of the Royal Society of Edinburgh*, as well as a trustee of the 'Gargunnock Farmer Club', whilst James Robertson, the minister of Callander, published accounts of the agriculture of Perth, Inverness and Kincardine.[193] These Leighton members were historians, illustrators, poets, critics, agriculturalists and geographers but they were not, judging by their publication record, committed theologians. The same criticisms were frequently levelled at the Moderates of the time of Robertson and Blair.[194] Yet the extent of the interests and publications of Leighton Library members tests the view that the Church of Scotland was intellectually weaker by the final decade of the eighteenth century.

[190] Nimmo, *Stirlingshire*, pp.381-82; Stirling, *Priory of Inchmahome*, pp.8-19; Joseph Rock, 'The Life and Work of Hugh William Williams [1773-1829] Set Within a Scottish Context.', unpublished PhD thesis, 2 vols. (University of Edinburgh, 1996), I, pp.65-66.

[191] Rock, 'Hugh William Williams', I, p.66; Graham, *Sketches of Perthshire*, p.v.

[192] Graham, *Authenticity of the Poems of Ossian*; Graham, *Sketches Descriptive*; Graham, *Sketches of Perthshire*; Graham, *Agriculture of Stirlingshire*; Patrick Graham, *General View of the Agriculture of Kinross and Clackmannan* (Edinburgh, 1815).

[193] Christopher Tait, 'Parish of Kincardine', *OSA* (1793), VI, pp.477-505; Christopher Tait, 'XIV. An Account of the Peat-Mosses of Kincardine and Flanders in Perthshire', *Transactions of The Royal Society of Edinburgh*, 3.2 (1794), pp.266-79; Graham, *Agriculture of Stirlingshire*, p.382; James Robertson, *General View of the Agriculture in the County of Perth: With Observations on the Means of its Improvement* (Perth, 1799); James Robertson, *General View of the Agriculture in the County of Inverness* (London, 1808); James Robertson, *General View of the Agriculture in the County of Kincardine* (1811). Robertson also produced accounts of the parishes of Callander and Lecropt for *The Statistical Account*. James Robertson, 'Parish of Callander', *OSA* (1794), XI, pp.574-627; James Robertson and John Kinross, 'Parish of Lecropt', *OSA* (1796), XVII, pp.45-60.

[194] Witherspoon, *Ecclesiastical Characteristics*, pp.15-19. See also, Martin Fitzpatrick, Emma Macleod, and Anthony Page, 'General Introduction', in *The Wodrow-Kenrick Correspondence 1750-1810, Volume I: 1750-1783* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), pp.50-51. Even Wodrow, a Moderate himself, described Robertson and Blair as 'men of the World as well as Scholars'. Letter 99: James Wodrow to Samuel Kenrick, 5 August 1785, *Wodrow-Kenrick Correspondence, II*, p.122.

This may have been a period which witnessed the passing of a Moderate world of letters in Edinburgh, but in the provinces, a culture of reading, writing, and inquiry continued as stronger as it ever had.[195]

Ministers from Scottish churches were vigorous participants in this overlaying of different cultures, pointing less to a decline in intellectual vitality than a reorientation from a narrow theological or doctrinal focus to more 'secular' or 'polite' lines of enquiry in history and belles lettres that were popularised by Moderate authors earlier in the eighteenth century. Robert Stirling's 1781 sermon suggests that this was a gradual change, but one that is marked by the manner in which the Leighton's trustees managed the library as well as in their borrowing record from it. Stirling's sermon is also an example of the political significance of this change on parts of the reading patterns of ministers of the Church of Scotland; a change that, in turn, influenced the manner and substance of what they preached to their congregations. It may have also marked a change in what it meant to be a community leader, the reading of reference works and local and regional surveys representing a requirement to understand and manage a variety of types of knowledge. The *Encyclopaedia Britanica*, the third edition of which included substantial contributions from Leighton members, epitomised this change, which Aileen Fyfe and Colin Kidd have referred to as the 'dissolution of the unity of knowledge'.[196] Books read from the library, personal connections forged within it and a sense of collectiveness that came with voluntary association together also influenced the political response of the Presbytery of Dunblane, both individually and collectively, to political flashpoints in the 1790s and beyond. In this, the use and administration of the subscription library were significant factors in shaping the intellectual culture of this community. Although fears of a radical politics extended into the

[195] Nor was this 'Republic of Letters' necessarily limited to rural Perthshire. See, for example, James Wodrow in Ayrshire. Fitzpatrick, Macleod, and Page, 'General Introduction', *Wodrow-Kenrick Correspondence, I*, pp.10-14, 91-93.

[196] Aileen Fyfe and Colin Kidd, 'Introduction: Scotland after Enlightenment', in *Beyond the Enlightenment*, p.3.

1810s, coming to be exhibited in new forms, the books of the subscription library remained central to an individual's reading of contextual events, influencing their emotions and a wider electoral culture. The next chapter will examine these aspects of the reading habits of a collective but with a change of context and method; the analysis and cross-comparison of voting and borrowing records.

Chapter Five: Voting and Political Reading in Times of Anxiety

> *I subscribe to your library, Mr. Catcott, not to read novels, or books of quick reading and easy digestion, but to get books which I cannot get elsewhere, - books of massy knowledge…*[1]
>
> Samuel Taylor Coleridge to George Symes Catcott, May 1797.[2]

Despite his occupation as the tax collector for the south district of Perthshire, John Allan (d. 1824), was not as unpopular as one might assume.[3] A resident in Dunblane, Allan, like other fellows of his social rank, was a subscriber to the Leighton Library.[4] His rounds throughout the county, taxing houses, windows, male servants, carriages, horses, and dogs, brought him into contact with his fellow library members, with some of whom he struck up close friendships.[5] Allan was a valuable dealer in information. He shared with his friends, who included the Rev. William MacGregor Stirling, minister of the Port of Menteith, a recipe for making 'fine Shoe blacking' which he had learnt during his time in the Royal Navy.[6] For other reasons, he was also a useful man to know. In 1820, Stirling asked Allan whether he could get his son 'insured

[1] Joseph Cottle, *Early Recollections; Chiefly Relating to the Late Samuel Taylor Coleridge, During his Long Residence in Bristol.* (1837; repr. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p.212.
[2] Catcott was the sub-librarian of the Bristol Library Society between 1790 and 1802. *The Minute Book of the Bristol Library Society, 1771–1801*, eds. Max Skjönsberg and Mark Towsey (Bristol: Bristol Record Society, 2022), p.256.
[3] The date of Allan's death, and his occupation, was recorded in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 15 (1824), p.493.
[4] For Allan's borrowings, see *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Advanced search for 'Borrower: Mr John Allan ',", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/search/p-1/0/0/advanced/brids|14205>, [accessed 09/08/24].
[5] NRA S2362/193, Stirling Family, of Garden, Stirlingshire, Miscellaneous accounts and receipts of Rev. William MacGregor Stirling, 1800-23, tax sheets, 15 September 1816, 31 October 1819, 23 July 1823, records held privately.
[6] NRA S2362/367, Stirling Family, of Garden, Stirlingshire, Miscellaneous papers and historical notes of William MacGregor Stirling, Recipe for making 'shoe blacking' by John Allan, undated, records held privately.

against the Militia Ballot', and thereby avoid being called up to the local service.[7] Allan was also somewhat of a gossip and delighted in sharing tales of Dunblane life with his correspondents. In one letter, he recounted the recent cases held before the local appeal court including one of a woman who owned 'a house, of a certain description, at Perth' and was 'banished' from Scotland for seven years for stealing twenty pounds from a man 'who happened to be in liquor'.[8] He was also less than complimentary about the poetical skills of the sheriff who presided over the proceedings:

> When I come your way, I shall endeavour to bring along with me, for your amusement, a late poetical production of our Sheriffs – It far surpasses any thing I have before seen, from his pen, in point of absurdity…[9]

[7] Allan was unable to do this and noted that all the local associations had since disbanded. He instead recommended that Stirling seek out an 'Insurance Office' in Edinburgh or Glasgow. John Allan to William MacGregor Stirling, 9 September 1820, NRA S2362/186, Stirling Family, of Garden, Stirlingshire, Correspondence of Rev. William MacGregor Stirling, minister of Port of Menteith, concerning personal matters, parish affairs, Stirlingshire antiquities and his book *Priory of Inchmahome*, 1815-20, records held privately. On the use of substitutes to avoid the militia ballot, see J.E. Cookson, *The British Armed Nation, 1793-1815* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997), pp.101-09; Roger Knight, *Britain Against Napoleon: The Organization of Victory, 1793-1815* (London: Penguin, 2014), p.261. On the militia more generally in this period, see Cookson, *British Armed Nation*, pp.66-94, 101-09; J.E. Cookson, 'Service without Politics? Army, Militia and Volunteers in Britain during the American and French Revolutionary Wars', *War in History*, 10.4 (November 2003), pp.381-97; Knight, *Britain Against Napoleon*, pp.78-80, 260-62. The son here referred to was Robert MacGregor Stirling (1802-32). In 1820, Robert had recently studied for an MA at Glasgow but would leave Scotland by the end of the decade to work as an overseer on a number of slave plantations in the Caribbean. He was financially supported by his father whilst he was abroad but died of putrid fever on 5 October 1832. See Stephen Mullen, *The Glasgow Sugar Aristocracy: Scotland and Caribbean Slavery, 1775-1838* (London: University of London Press, 2022), pp.229-33.

[8] Allan names the woman as 'Moll Duncason'. A 'female associate' involved in the theft was sentenced to eighteen months imprisonment. The stolen money was 'mostly' recovered. John Allan to William MacGregor Stirling, 16 April 1821, NRA S2362/187, Stirling Family, of Garden, Stirlingshire, Correspondence of Rev. William MacGregor Stirling, minister of Port of Menteith, concerning personal matters, parish affairs, Stirlingshire antiquities and his book *Priory of Inchmahome*, 1821-25, records held privately. Emphasis in original.

[9] Allan to Stirling, 16 April 1821, NRA S2362/187. Emphasis in original. The sheriff referenced is John Coldstream, who was also the son and brother of successive Leighton librarians. Alexander B. Barty, *The History of Dunblane*, rev. ed. (1944; Stirling: Stirling District Libraries, 1994), pp.244-45. For Coldstream's borrowings, see *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Advanced search for 'Borrower: Mr John Coldstream '," <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/search/p-1/0/sortDate/advanced/brids|26153>, [accessed 22/05/24].

Amidst such frivolities, Allan remained attuned to the political fluctuations that shook Britain at the end of the 1820s, discussing these in his correspondence. He described the 'trial' of Queen Caroline, the eventually aborted attempt by George IV to divorce his wife in the summer of 1820, as 'an awful business' and worried that 'the disclosure of such scenes of lewdness and debauchery, to the Public, will lend in no small degree, to vitiate the minds of young females in the higher classes of Society'.[10] Although he exhibited no sympathy for Caroline, he placed the majority of the blame at the feet of her advisers, particularly that of 'Alderman Wood' (Sir Matthew Wood):

> I could really stand by with pleasure, and see Wood get a good flogging with a Cat of nine tails, such as I have often seen many better men than I conceive him to be, chastised with, in the Navy, and certainly for much less generally hurtful conduct.[11]

Other political tumults occurred closer to home. In the same letter, Allan referenced the execution of John Baird and Andrew Hardie, which had taken place the day earlier in Stirling, after the abortive 'Radical War'.[12] Another Leighton member, Henry Home Drummond, had served as a prosecutor during the two men's trial, a role for which he accrued 'an unenviable notoriety'.[13] Although not present himself, Allan heard from a witness to the day's events that the local authorities had delayed the deed until the arrival of the mail coach from Edinburgh,

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[10] Allan to Stirling, 9 September 1820, NRA S2362/186. On the 'trial' of Queen Caroline, see J.E. Cookson, *Lord Liverpool's Administration: The Crucial Years, 1815-22* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1975), pp.200-14, 228-300; E.A. Smith, *George IV* (London: Yale University Press, 1999), pp.173-82; Ian Haywood, *Queen Caroline and the Power of Caricature in Georgian England* (Cham: Springer, 2023), pp.29-60.

[11] Allan to Stirling, 9 September 1820, NRA S2362/186. Emphasis in original. Wood was often caricatured, unfavourably, alongside that of the Queen. See Smith, *George IV*, pp.180, 189; Anita McConnell, 'Wood, Sir Matthew, first baronet (1768-1843)', *ODNB* (September 2004); Haywood, *Queen Caroline*, pp.87-88, 92-95.

[12] Gordon Pentland, *The Spirit of the Union: Popular Politics in Scotland* (London: Pickering & Chatto Publishers, 2011), pp.89-115; Gerard Carruthers, Kevin Thomas Gallagher, Craig Lamont and George Smith, eds., *1820: Scottish Rebellion: Essays on a Nineteenth-Century Insurrection* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2022).

[13] For quote, see Terry Jenkins, 'Home Drummond, Henry (1783-1867)', *HoP*, <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1820-1832/member/home-drummond-henry-1783-1867#footnoteref32_gk5oijo>, [accessed 09/08/24]. See also Kevin Thomas Gallagher and George Smith, '"A great, and dangerous, and treasonable conspiracy, by some persons unknown": Duntocher, Dunbartonshire and the Scottish Insurrection of 1820', in *1820: Scottish Rebellion*, p.165.

in case of a last-minute pardon. This never materialised and the sentence was eventually carried out, although not before a further delay was necessitated when the local minister fainted midway through prayer. The 'vast multitude' which had assembled to witness the deed did so quietly and without interruption.[14] Allan, despite having claimed in the very same letter that he would happily witness the flogging of Alderman Wood, considered the witnessing of an execution to be a step too far:

> What a strange sort of curiosity it must be, which prompts people to be present at a scene of that kind! Unless compelled by Official duty, I am sure I would far rather travel fifty miles to get out of the way of it.[15]

I

The events in Stirling in September 1820 brought home to Leighton members, like Allan, the precariousness of the body politic, radical uprisings being just one of a number of challenges faced by the British state during the course of the decade. For subscription library members, threats such as these were a consistent source of anxiety which reflected onto their reading habits and political activity. This chapter assesses the borrowing habits of political communities to consider what effects these anxieties had upon what and how readers interacted with the subscription library, as well as how subscription library members interacted and participated within the electoral process. The geographical centrality of the subscription library in an urban setting placed them within the midst of political events. A study of quantitative reading habits also makes it possible to examine practices of political reading across different communities, to question whether political texts were read, when, and by whom. Subscription library members constituted communities in and of themselves by virtue of their shared association

[14] Allan to Stirling, 9 September 1820, NRA S2362/186.
[15] Allan to Stirling, 9 September 1820, NRA S2362/186.

with the library. Within this larger community existed smaller groups, united by shared occupations and political or religious beliefs.

Examining the political and ideological cultures of these communities and their interaction with the subscription library requires the analysis of a range of different types of source material including library borrowing data, electoral polling data, political literature, private correspondence and administrative library records. Cross-referencing different data sets in this manner, particularly borrowing records with voting records, allows us to examine, quantitatively, the reading habits of a civic class, so as to consider the potential influence reading played upon the formation of the intellectual climate in which electoral contests were fought.[16] Readers at both Bristol and Leighton read under a shared state of anxiety over the safety and solidity of the British state, seemingly threatened by internal saboteurs and the belligerence of first Revolutionary and then Napoleonic France. A large proportion of their reading focused on this French threat, both representing, and in some cases, heightening the danger faced. Yet this context also shaped their reading of an eclectic range of texts that were seemingly removed from present political concerns. As we shall see, for Bristol readers and voters, the reading of anti-French texts, many of which looked back to the early 1790s and the heady days of revolutionary terror, was representative of a strand of anti-Gallicanism which pervaded the electoral contest in October 1812 and contributed to the defeat of candidates for reform. At the Leighton Library, although removed from the humdrum world of electoral politics, readers were not secluded from the French phantom which intruded into their reading lives, nor from anti-Jacobin conspiracies which attempted to explain the threat. Whether the reading of texts shaped political sentiments, or the political sentiments of these readers shaped

[16] In combining an analysis of electoral polling data with additional sources, this chapter follows a similar methodological approach to John Phillips's and James Bradley's studies of electoral behaviour. John A. Phillips, *The Great Reform Bill in the Boroughs: English Electoral Behaviour, 1818-41* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), pp.37-44; James E. Bradley, *Religion, Revolution, and English Radicalism: Nonconformity in Eighteenth-Century Politics and Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp.39–46.

the books they were reading, the discourses prevalent within both these communities is significant for our understanding of politics in this period.

The effects upon readers' experiences of the political turbulence of the 1810s is no great surprise. For much of the decade, Britain remained locked in conflict with Napoleonic France, eventually achieving victory and peace in April 1814, at the Treaty of Fontainebleau, and conclusively after the battle of Waterloo on 18 June 1815.[17] Peace in Europe was followed by a major retrenchment in military and industrial spending, which in turn contributed to a period of severe economic disruption.[18] In 1816, a disastrous harvest, depression in trade and a poor labour market all combined to provide the foundations for a revival of a popular reform movement which had lain mostly dormant since the 1790s.[19] The response to a growing reformist press and a campaign of mass open air meetings was swift and brutal. In August 1819, 60,000 people attended a meeting at St Peter's Fields, Manchester, to call for parliamentary reform and were violently dispersed by the local magistracy. These actions, which were roundly praised by the Prince Regent and members of the government, headed by Lord Liverpool, were followed by a series of legislation, collectively termed the Six Acts, which were aimed at cracking down on a reformist press and placed further controls on public meetings.[20] Though this reformist movement remained overwhelmingly peaceful and constitutionalist, the threat of violent disorder could not be discountenanced, and emerged variously across the decade, from machine breaking in the north of England in 1811 and 1812, the Spa Fields riots in 1816, the failed Pentrich rising in 1817 and in 1820 the Cato Street conspiracy and the threat of radical

[17] Boyd Hilton, *A Mad, Bad, and Dangerous People?: England, 1783-1846* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p.235.
[18] Knight, *Britain Against Napoleon*, pp.467-70.
[19] John Cannon, *Parliamentary Reform, 1640-1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), pp.165-74; Cookson, *Lord Liverpool's Administration*, pp.90-105; Pentland, *Spirit of the Union*, pp.7-32.
[20] Cookson, *Lord Liverpool's Administration*, pp.178-99; E. Evans, *The Forging of the Modern State: Early Industrial Britain, 1783-1870*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 2014), pp.227-34.

risings in Ireland, northern England and Scotland.[21] The death of George III at the close of the decade ushered in the reign of a new monarch but one whose extravagant lifestyle had brought sustained ridicule.[22] George IV's attempts to divorce his wife, Queen Caroline, in 1820 created further royal scandal, one which elicited much controversy, petitioning and gatherings across Britain.[23] In truth, it was from opposition 'out of doors' that the Liverpool administration had the most to fear. From inauspicious beginnings, the only coalition of Pittites willing to join together in an administration following the assassination of Spencer Perceval in 1812, Liverpool's government would achieve an astonishing longevity; reliant on the continued monarchical prejudice against a Whig administration and a general disorganisation and lack of strength in the numbers of their parliamentary opponents.[24]

The 1810s was also the decade which saw a return to contested elections in both of the constituencies in which the Leighton Library and the Bristol Library Society were located. Both libraries were closely connected to the political currents at play in both regions and were patronised and used by both current and future politicians.[25] Moreover, the use of each library, by both voters and non-voters alike, ensured they played a role in fashioning the intellectual context in which electoral contests were fought. This was particularly the case at Bristol, where a larger proportion of the membership were electorally franchised and able to vote within contests fought that decade.

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[21] See variously Malcom I. Thomis and Peter Holt, *Threats of Revolution in Britain 1789-1848* (London: Macmillan, 1977), pp.32-36. 45-61, 75-81; Edward Royle, *Revolutionary Britannia? : Reflections on the Threat of Revolution in Britain, 1789-1848* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp.37-42, 45-51; 56-58; Pentland, *Spirit of the Union*, pp.89-108; Malcolm Chase, *1820: Disorder and Stability in the United Kingdom* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), pp.76-84, 105-24. See also Carruthers, Gallagher, Lamont and Smith, eds., *1820: Scottish Rebellion*.

[22] Smith, *George IV*, pp.167-72; Steve Poole, *The Politics of Regicide in England, 1760-1850: Troublesome Subjects* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p.150.

[23] Hilton, *A Mad, Bad, and Dangerous People?*, pp.269-70; Steve Poole and Nicolas Rogers, *Bristol from Below: Law, Authority and Protest in a Georgian City* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2017), pp.106, 320-21; Haywood, *Queen Caroline*, pp.1-28. For an overview of Britain and Ireland in 1820 see Chase, *1820*, pp.9-26.

[24] Austin Mitchell, *The Whigs in Opposition, 1815-1830* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), pp.58-60; Cookson, *Lord Liverpool's Administration*, pp.1-17.

[25] See above Chapter One.

II

Early nineteenth-century Bristol was an urban community with its own distinct and vibrant political culture.[26] It was a prestigious electoral prize but an expensive and difficult parliamentary constituency to control, home to around 5,000 eligible voters and, in population terms, the largest urban electorate outside of London.[27] As a freeman borough, eligibility to vote in Bristol elections was provided to those who held the freedom of the city, a privilege that could be obtained through birth, marriage, apprenticeship, or purchase at varying and arbitrary amounts.[28] Freeholders of forty shillings or more were also eligible to vote, with a significant proportion of this electorate living beyond Bristol.[29] Bristol's electoral politics in the eighteenth century, whilst not aristocratic, was 'intensely oligarchical'.[30] Bristol's political class, those who stood for and managed elections in the city, were formed of a collection of families and individuals who not only managed the civic administration of the city, but were also actively involved in the city's two political clubs and were socially prominent amongst Bristol's clubs and societies, particularly the Bristol Library Society.

Bristol's oligarchical, dynastic politics was built upon a series of interwoven networks between members of different associational organisations: the city's two political clubs, the Tory Steadfast Society and the Whig Independent Club; charitable associations, such as the Colston Society; the Society of Merchant Venturers; the Bristol Library Society; and the centre of local

[26] See variously Peter Brett, 'The Liberal Middle Classes and Politics in Three Provincial Towns – Newcastle, Bristol, and York – c.1812-1841', unpublished PhD thesis (University of Durham, 1991); Mark Harrison, *Crowds and History: Mass Phenomena in English Towns, 1790-1835* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp.205–20; Phillips, *Great Reform Bill*, pp.65–105; Poole and Rogers, *Bristol from Below*.
[27] Poole and Rogers, *Bristol from Below*, p.86. David R. Fisher, 'Bristol, 1790-1820', *HoP*, <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1790-1820/constituencies/bristol#footnoteref1_iuxaccf>, [accessed 14/11/22]; 'Bristol', ECPPEC, <https://ecppec.ncl.ac.uk/case-study-constituencies/bristol/>, [accessed 26/03/23].
[28] For lists of those granted the freedom of the city, see *Index to the Bristol Burgess Books: Volumes 1 To 21, 1557-1995* (Bristol: Bristol & Avon Family History Society, 2005).
[29] Fisher, 'Bristol, 1790-1820', *HoP*; Poole and Rogers, *Bristol from Below*, p.92.
[30] Poole and Rogers, *Bristol from Below*, p.85.

civic governance in the Corporation.[31] No individual exemplifies this interconnectedness better than Thomas Daniel, merchant, alderman and library committee member. Colloquially called the 'King of Bristol', Daniel was an immensely wealthy merchant, specialising in the importation of sugar and with significant plantation holdings in Demerara and other Caribbean islands.[32] He was politically active from an early age, becoming a freeman of Bristol in 1783, a Common Councillor from 1785, and an alderman from 1798, as well as serving in various civic roles such as sheriff (1787), mayor (1798), master of the Merchant Venturers (1805), president of the Colston Society (1807) and of the Dolphin Society (1816).[33] Mark Harrison has described him as the 'most prominent, powerful, influential and public figure' in Bristol of this period, who was heavily involved in the social life of the city, being a member of some fifty-six organisations in the city between 1790 and 1835.[34] One of these was the Bristol Library Society, for which Daniel served as a committee member between 1807 and 1842.[35] Daniel's presence amongst the members of the library was viewed by the committee as being as significant as that of its vice-president, and the *de facto* head of the Society in this period, Samuel Seyer. Indeed, Daniel's intention to resign as a committee member was rejected by the remainder of the committee when he announced his intention to do so in March 1828, with a group of three committee members requested to convey the wishes of the Society that he continue in his post, as he ultimately would do for a further thirteen years.[36]

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[31] For an overview of Bristol's civic governance in this period, see Chapter One, pp.86-87.
[32] Kenneth Morgan, 'Bristol West India Merchants in the Eighteenth Century', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 3 (1993), pp.185-86; Madge Dresser, 'Daniel, Thomas (1762-1854)', *ODNB* (October 2016); 'Thomas Daniel', *Legacies of British Slavery*, <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/92>, [accessed 28/09/24]. For quotation, see John Latimer, *The Annals of Bristol in the Eighteenth Century* (Bristol, 1893), p.455.
[33] Beaven, *Bristol Lists*; Graham Bush, *Bristol and its Municipal Government, 1820-1851* (Bristol: Bristol Record Society, 1976), p.235.
[34] Harrison, *Crowds and History*, p.81.
[35] BA, 32079/LS/M/1, Bristol Library Society, Minute book of General meetings, 2 Dec 1772-28 Mar 1870 [hereafter BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book], 23 March 1807, 21 March 1842.
[36] BA, 32079/LS/M/5, Bristol Library Society, Minute book of Committee, 1 April 1823–20 December 1836, 25 March 1828 [hereafter BA, LS/M/5, Committee minute book, 1823-36].

Daniel was a significant political force in Bristol's electoral politics. He was a regular attendee and a frequent chair at meetings of the Tory Steadfast Society and was a central player in its electoral organisation at both elections in 1812.[37] Bristol's Whigs were also representative of this overlap between the city's associational members and its political class. A number of Bristol library members were active campaigners for multiple Whig candidates during elections in the 1810s. John Noble (d. 1828) was a civic office holder and leader of the Whigs in the Common Council and had served as mayor in 1791 and a city alderman from 1792.[38] In his capacity as a member of the Union & Independent Club he had supported Burke's successful candidature for Bristol in 1774.[39] Noble was also a longtime member of the Library Society and whilst he was consistently elected to its committee, from 1773 until 1809, he attended only four meetings, all of which came in his first year as a committee member.[40] To Bristolians, Noble was best known, perhaps infamously, for his role as a city magistrate during a disturbance on Bristol Bridge in 1793 in which ten people were shot and over fifty wounded by the militia.[41] Indeed, Noble's name remained synonymous with those events almost two decades later. In 1812, he publicly supported Sir Samuel Romilly's attempted candidature at the general election and appeared alongside him at a speech to be given from the Bush Tavern,

[37] BA, SMV/8/2/2/2, Records of the Society of Merchant Venturers, Steadfast Society, White Lion Committee Book, 1805-1826. On the actions of election committees more generally, see Frank O'Gorman, *Voters, Patrons, and Parties: The Unreformed Electoral System of Hanoverian England, 1743-1832* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), pp.68-78.

[38] Noble also served as president of the Anchor Society in 1775 and had been one of the proposers for John Baker Holroyd, 1st Earl of Sheffield, at the election of 1796. Alfred Beaven, *Bristol Lists. Municipal and Miscellaneous* (Bristol, 1899); Harrison, *Crowds and History*, p.72. He was also a Presbyterian. Bradley, *Religion, Revolution, and English Radicalism*, p.197.

[39] *Bristol Minute Book*, eds. Skjönsberg and Towsey, p.263.

[40] *Bristol Minute Book*, eds. Skjönsberg and Towsey, pp.36, 38-39.

[41] Harrison, *Crowds and History*, pp.72, 78. Noble's public image had clearly fallen since the 1770s. Then a fellow merchant had described him as 'much respected by every body reckon'd rich & in good business'. Library of Congress, Samuel Smith Papers, Box 7, Samuel Smith Letterbook (1772-4), quoted in Kenneth Morgan, *Bristol and the Atlantic Trade in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p.78.

only to be met with hisses and shouts from the waiting crowd.[42] Romilly's appearance alongside Noble was seized upon in pamphlets by his political opponents.[43]

The subscription library served a key social purpose in providing a managed sociable space and a degree of social cohesion amongst those who could vote and those who could not in the early nineteenth century. Yet as libraries they also provided for the circulation of texts within a politically engaged, and socially and economically secure population. Despite an increasing willingness by political historians to broaden their conceptual analysis of Georgian politics, the importance that reading played in the electoral process or the creation of a political culture has received little to no consideration.[44] Library records, particularly borrowing records, represent an underutilised source in the study of the political motivations of Britons in the unreformed electorate. Indeed, both borrowing records and voting records can assist the quantitative analysis of an intensely personal and private action. Much like the act of reading, the processes which go into the formulation of an individual's political awareness or political identity often remain imperceptible, especially for those who were not exceptional or elite political actors. An appreciation of the intellectual and reading context in which votes were cast enables us to deepen our analysis of political motivations and stimuli and can be possible even for those voters or readers for which no other records survive. This also provides the opportunity to go further and assess the role reading played in the incubation or circulation of ideas among a politically engaged public. Analysing the reading patterns of both the Bristol and Leighton libraries across the 1810s provides some indication of the political significance of the subscription library. The structural elements of politics in both constituencies, networks of sociability, patronage and club, were clearly important in determining electoral contests. The subscription library could be an important element in the creation and maintenance of such

[42] Henry Hunt, *Memoirs of Henry Hunt, Esq.,* 3 vols. (London, 1820), II, pp.499-502.
[43] Harrison, *Crowds and History*, pp.210-11.
[44] For an overview of the 'new political history, see above, pp.29-30, 34-35.

networks. Yet to fully understand why an elector would cast their vote in whatever manner requires an appreciation of the local intellectual or ideological context in which they lived. Their choice of reading material during an election year can be of great value in understanding the conceptualisation of their individual self and of their place in local, regional, and national politics and society. Data analysis of library borrowing records and electoral polling data provides an opportunity to link these two facets of eighteenth-century life to better contextualise the intellectual climate in which votes were cast.

III

Bristol's size as a political constituency, the size of its subscription library (and its surviving records), and the feverish nature of Bristol's politics in 1812, including two electoral contests, make it a prime candidate to test such a methodological analysis. Bristol Library members were directly involved in nearly all facets of Bristol's electoral activity in 1812, as candidates, canvassers, civic officials, voters, and street participants. Voting data for the 1812 general election in Bristol provides the opportunity to quantitatively analyse the votes and political affiliations of the city's subscription library and to link up an individual's voting record with their record of reading that year.[45] Whilst local circumstances were a significant factor in deciding Bristol's electoral contests, the reading habits of library electors were thoroughly international. The phantom of France and the legacy of revolutionary terror loomed large in the material borrowed from the Bristol Library and this reflected, or possibly accentuated, discourses in the election such as a customary mistrust of external political figures and an anti-Gallicism that contributed to the defeat of the insurgent Whig candidate.

[45] *The Bristol Poll-Book* (Bristol, 1818). This electoral data has been digitally transcribed by the ECPPEC project. 'Oct 1812 Bristol', ECPPEC, <https://ecppec.ncl.ac.uk/case-study-constituencies/bristol/election/Oct-1812/>, [accessed 24/03/23].

Before we can proceed to an analysis of this intellectual culture it is necessary to provide some background to both of Bristol's electoral contests of 1812 to better understand the context within which each election was fought and read. Bristol's large electorate and competing political clubs made it an expensive constituency to contest. It was for this reason that its two respective factions frequently agreed to split the representation of the city between them, as occurred between 1754 and 1774, and again between 1784 until 1812.[46] This infrequency of contests was a source of much discontent. It was only a challenge to the city's established political clubs which forced a contest in March 1812 when the incumbent Tory MP, Charles Bragge, later Bragge-Bathurst, was appointed to the Duchy of Lancaster and opted not to stand again in Bristol.[47] As his replacement, the Steadfast Society selected Richard Hart Davis, a local West India merchant and the MP for Colchester since 1807. Although the Whig club decided not to challenge for the seat of the 'Blues', Henry 'Orator' Hunt (1773–1835), active in Bristol's radical politics since 1807, was determined to force a contest which took place in July. The resulting fifteen days of polling saw an election that was 'extraordinarily violent', as Hunt's and Davis's armed supporters skirmished in the streets.[48] Windows were smashed at the Steadfast Society's headquarters at the White Lion Inn, with similar attacks upon the homes of Davis and Thomas Daniel. Hunt was ultimately well beaten, by 1,907 votes to 235, but his chief success lay in keeping the polls open for so many days, thus gaining for himself a national

[46] Phillips, *Great Reform Bill*, p.75.

[47] The following account of Bristol's politics in 1812 is drawn from BA, SMV/8/2/2/2, Records of the Society of Merchant Venturers, Steadfast Society, White Lion Committee Book, 1805-1826; BA, SMV/8/2/2/3, Records of the Society of Merchant Venturers, Steadfast Society, Register of names, no date; *Bristol Poll-Book*, pp.i–lxiv; Brett, 'Liberal Middle Classes and Politics in Three Provincial Towns', pp.86-99; Fisher, 'Bristol, 1790-1820', *HoP*; Harrison, *Crowds and History*, pp.209-20; Phillips, *Great Reform Bill*, pp.83-86; Poole and Rogers, *Bristol from Below*, pp.307-11.

[48] John Belchem, *'Orator' Hunt: Henry Hunt and English Working-Class Radicalism* (London: Breviary, 2012), pp.26–30. For quote, see Poole and Rogers, *Bristol from Below*, p.307.

platform and forcing Davis's Tories to spend over £14,000 in campaign expenses, with Davis himself paying £10,000.[49]

A further electoral contest was now assured to take place at the next general election, which occurred in October that year, with Hunt again choosing to challenge Davis. Divisions within Bristol's Whigs now produced a contest for Bristol's second parliamentary seat. Indeed, political manoeuvrings had been in progress since the previous July when the incumbent MP, Evan Baillie, had announced his intention to retire at the next dissolution of Parliament.[50] In December 1811, the Whig Independent Club made formal their interest and invited Sir Samuel Romilly, the prominent lawyer and legal reformer to stand as his replacement. Romilly's candidature, and his support for the abolition of slavery, were strongly opposed by certain Whig families of West India interest such as the Protheroes, Ameses and the Baillies, who proposed one of their own, Edward Protheroe, in his stead. At first, Protheroe attempted to win the backing of his local association, although his candidacy was rejected at a meeting of the club held on 7 January 1812.[51] He opted to stand for election anyway, promising to be the 'enemy of tyranny and corruption whether exercised by a Court, an Aristocracy, or a Club', presenting himself as an 'Old Whig' without the need for the 'paltry patronage of a Political Club'.[52]

John Phillips writes that the 1812 general election illustrated the 'complex cross-currents of Whiggery in Bristol' and saw the establishment of a general pattern of Whig division that

[49] Despite it being some sixteen years since Bristol had last faced a contested election, and despite the length of the poll itself, the total of recorded votes represented less than half of the total electorate. This may be due to no official Whig candidate standing for election, although without a surviving poll book, it is impossible to say for sure. Violence during the period of polling may also have played a role. Fisher, 'Bristol, 1790-1820', *HoP*; Harrison, *Crowds and History*, p.215; Poole and Rogers, *Bristol from Below*, pp.308-09. Turnout was also low at the general election in October.

[50] David R. Fisher, 'Baillie, Evan (1741-1835)', *HoP*, <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1790-1820/member/baillie-evan-1741-1835>, [accessed 14/11/22].

[51] Samuel Romilly, *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Samuel Romilly, Written by Himself*, 3rd ed., 2 vols. (1840; London, 1841), II pp.229-30.

[52] *Bristol Poll-Book*, p.xxvi.

repeated itself in further electoral contests up to 1830.[53] Much of this division was owing to differences over the abolition of slavery which, as a political issue, cut across partisan lines.[54] There was also a great degree of political difference between the two 'Whig' candidates which reflected schisms within the Whig party at a local and national level. Romilly was a proud and vocal abolitionist, who was also supportive of parliamentary reform and Catholic emancipation. In contrast, Protheroe, as a banker and West India merchant, had accrued much of his wealth through his family's plantations in Jamaica, St Vincent and Trinidad and was publicly evasive on both parliamentary reform and the repeal of penal laws against Dissenters and Catholics.[55] He professed himself a supporter of 'genuine Whig principles', but he was never a consistent opposition voter in the Commons, nor did he ever join Brooks's, the London social club which acted as a headquarters for parliamentary Whigs. A supporter of Romilly's, and a library member, described his politics as that of a 'neutral and negative whiggism': he was certainly politically closer to the Grenvillite wing of the parliamentary Whigs than its Foxite counterpart.[56] Though he depicted himself as a lover of liberty and a critic of 'secret influence', he was either cautious or opposed to nearly all aspects of reform, whether political or social, and he was not unwilling to support restrictions upon civil liberties, as he did in 1817 when he voted in favour of the suspension of *habeas corpus* and in 1819 when he believed in the existence of a 'widely spread conspiracy for changing the constitution of the country'.[57]

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[53] Phillips, *Great Reform Bill*, p.83.

[54] In April 1789 a committee formed to organise against the abolition of the slave trade involved prominent civic figures from both political camps. John Latimer, *The Annals of Bristol in the Eighteenth Century* (Bristol, 1893), pp.476-77.

[55] 'Edward Protheroe senior', *Legacies of Bristol Slavery*, <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/27337>, [accessed 06/06/23]; Phillips, *Great Reform Bill*, p.84. Hunt, in his opening address, said of Protheroe, 'that after listening to him with great attention, he could not discover what his politics were'. *Bristol Poll-Book*, p.i.

[56] Charles Abraham Elton, *An Account of the Entry of Sir Samuel Romilly into Bristol, on Thursday, April 2, 1812; with a Report of the Speeches Delivered on That Occasion, at a Dinner Given to Him at the Assembly-Room, Prince's Street* (Bristol, 1812), pp.28-29, quoted in Brett, 'Liberal Middle Classes and Politics in Three Provincial Towns', p.93. See also Mitchell, *Whigs in Opposition*, pp.19-20, 109; Peter Jupp, *Lord Grenville 1759–1834* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), pp.420–39.

[57] *Parliamentary Debates*, 1st ser., 41 (14 March 1819): 1127; David R. Fisher, 'Protheroe, Edward (1774-1856)', *HoP*, <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1790-1820/member/protheroe-edward-1774-

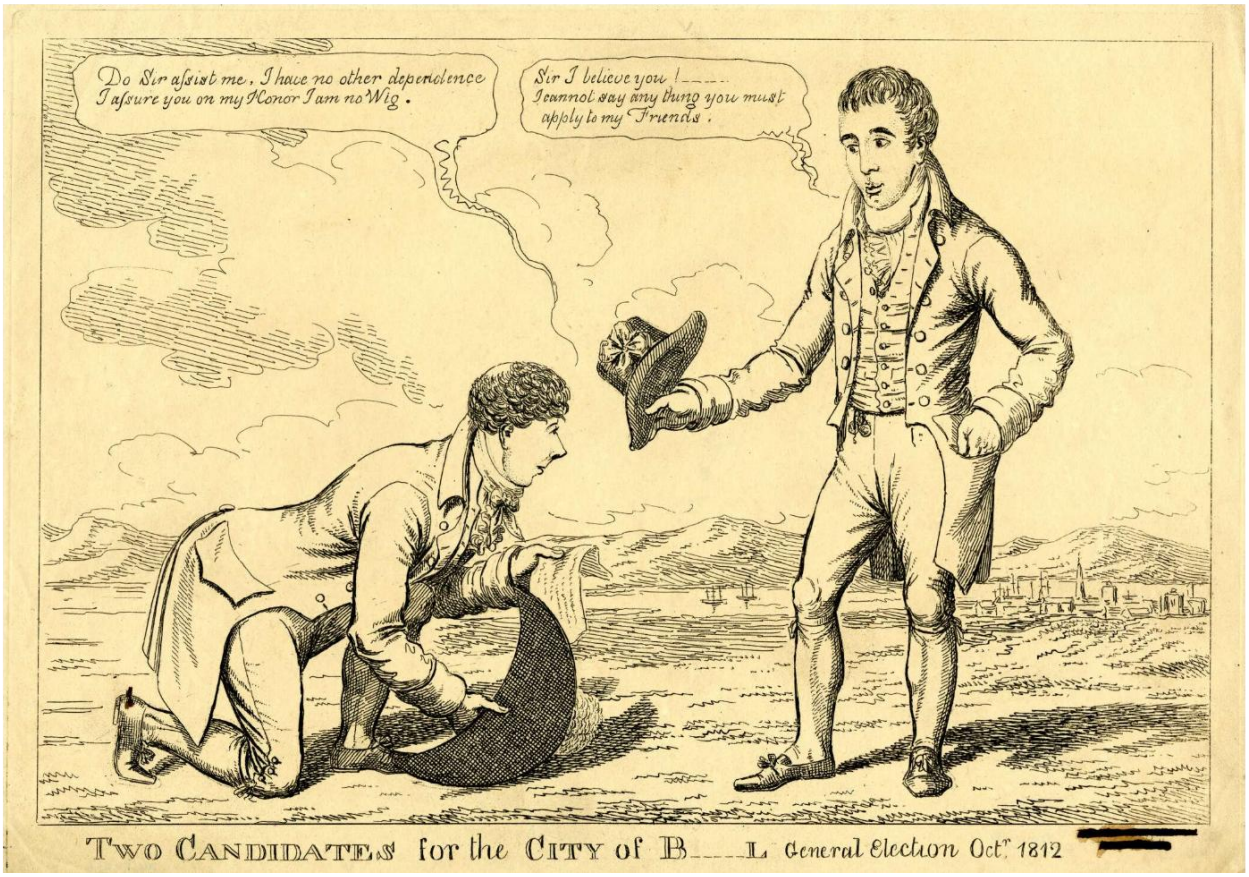
Arguably, the divisions within Bristol Whigs which first arose at the election of 1812 were the same political differences that had led the Portland Whigs to join with William Pitt in 1794, and led William Grenville and his followers to split from Grey's Whigs in 1817, making themselves felt in Bristol's constituency politics.[58]

It was the political width between Romilly and Protheroe which prevented the two Whig candidates jointly challenging for both of Bristol's seats, though the city's history of shared representation between its Tory and Whig clubs, each side viewing themselves as responsible for only one seat, was also significant. In any case, the disarray within the Whig camp ultimately ensured Davis's safe re-election and ceded a great deal of political control to Bristol's Tories, enabling them to decide which Whig candidate they wished to lend their second votes.[59] It was no great surprise then, that on the third day of the poll, Davis and Protheroe openly united in what was akin to a joint electoral ticket. For his part, without the institutional support of Bristol's Whig club, Protheroe was reliant upon Davis's aid to be elected, a situation for which he was mocked in satirical prints at the time which showed him kneeling before the triumphant Davis.

1856#family-relations>, [accessed 14/11/22]. It should be noted that Protheroe voted against the renewed suspension of *habeas corpus* on 23 and 27 June 1817, saying that he believed that the danger of insurrection had been exaggerated. However, his voting record on such issues was mixed. For example, the following year, on 5 March 1818, he voted with the government in defence of their use of spies.

[58] Mitchell, *Whigs in Opposition*, p.109; Frank O'Gorman, *Emergence of the British Two-Party System, 1760-1832* (London: Edward Arnold, 1982), pp.21-26; Jupp, *Lord Grenville*, pp.443–49; William Anthony Hay, *The Whig Revival, 1808-1830* (Basingstoke. Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp.17-18.

[59] Phillips, *Great Reform Bill*, p.83.



British Museum, 1868,0808.8026, Charles Williams, 'Two candidates for the city of B-----l general election Octr, 1812', (1812), satirical print.[60]

Protheroe's subservience in 1812 would cause him trouble in subsequent contests.[61] His politics were certainly closer to Davis's, who proudly pronounced himself a Tory who saw 'the encroaching and overbearing licence of the people' as the most prominent danger to the constitution, than Davis's politics were to Romilly's.[62] Davis's and Protheroe's similar backgrounds, as West India merchants and Bristol Library members, may also have played a role.[63] Beginning on the 6 October, the polling lasted for ten days, and though noisy and boisterous, there was no repeat of the violence that had affected the July by-election. Romilly

[60] This may possibly be the only surviving visual depiction of Protheroe.
[61] Phillips, *Great Reform Bill*, p.87.
[62] *Parliamentary Debates*, 1st ser., 39 (22 February 1819), 594, quoted in Lawrence Taylor and R.G. Thorne, 'Davis, Richard Hart (1766-1842)', *HoP*, <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1790-1820/member/davis-richard-hart-1766-1842>, [accessed 14/11/22]; Phillips, *Great Reform Bill*, p.85. Davis was also a vocal opponent of religious toleration, including Catholic emancipation, and the abolition of slavery. Romilly, *Memoirs*, II, pp.283–84.
[63] Protheroe had been a library subscriber since 1802, whilst Davis subscribed in 1805. BA, 32079/LS/F/1, Bristol Library Society, Cash book, 2 December 1772–24 April 1871, March 1802 to March 1803 and March 1805 to March 1806 [hereafter BA, LS/F/1, Cash book].

retired on the eighth day receiving 1,678 votes, Hunt received forty-four, with the two victorious candidates, Davis and Protheroe, receiving 2,901 and 2,432 votes respectively.[64]

IV

Bristol Library members were active participants in Bristol's electoral politics in 1812 and were well placed to affect the political climate of the city. They were directly involved in the politicking, as candidates (Davis and Protheroe) or as campaigners. Committee member Thomas Daniel was central to Tory electioneering efforts throughout the year.[65] Protheroe's candidature was aided financially and logistically by his two younger brothers, Henry and Philip, who were both library members.[66] Romilly received support from the Alderman John Noble and Sir Charles Abraham Elton, a member of the mercantile gentry whom Hunt later accused as being amongst 'the foremost to abuse and belie me' during the October 1812 election.[67] Bristol Library members were also involved in the management and organisation of the electoral process as magistrates, sheriffs and barristers. As the city's sheriffs, Benjamin Bickley (1763?-1846) and Abraham (1787-1867) and George Hilhouse (1778-1848) served as the returning officers during the year's elections, first taking a show of hands for the candidates

[64] 'Oct 1812 Bristol', ECPPEC.

[65] BA, SMV/8/2/2/2, Records of the Society of Merchant Venturers, Steadfast Society, White Lion Committee Book, 1805-1826.

[66] Romilly, *Memoirs*, II p.230; John Latimer, *The Annals of Bristol in the Nineteenth Century* (Bristol, 1887), p.52. Henry Protheroe continued to be active in Bristol's politics after 1812 and chaired an annual Whig dinner in 1815 and 1816. However, both occasions were marred by the same Whig divisions that arose in 1812 and were sparsely attended. Brett, 'Liberal Middle Classes and Politics in Three Provincial Towns', p.85.

[67] Harrison, *Crowds and History*, pp.72-8, 210–12. Nevertheless, Hunt would also describe Elton as being one 'of the very best men amongst the gentry of Bristol'. Hunt, *Memoirs*, III. See also *Bristol Poll-Book*, p.xiii; R.K. Webb, ''Elton, Sir Charles Abraham, sixth baronet (1778-1853)', *ODNB* (January 2008). Elton continued to support reformist Whig candidates at future elections and published a number of political broadsides against Protheroe's re-election in 1818. Charles Abraham Elton, *An Apology for Colonel Hugh Baillie* (Bristol, 1818); *A Summary View of the Public Conduct of Edward Protheroe, Esq. MP* (Bristol, 1818); *A Full Detail of the Facts relative to the Late Election of Edward Protheroe* (Bristol, 1819). See also Brett, 'Liberal Middle Classes and Politics in Three Provincial Towns', p.93; Phillips, *Great Reform Bill*, pp.86-87. Romilly's nomination in October 1812 was seconded by Elton's father, Revd Sir Abraham Elton (1755–1842), who had served on the Library Society's committee in the 1770s. Romilly, *Memoirs*, II, pp.271–72; *Bristol Poll-Book*, pp.xxxvii–xxxix; *Bristol Minute Book*, eds. Skjönsberg and Towsey, p.258.

amongst the waiting public and then overseeing the casting of votes by electors.[68] Legal challenges at the polling station, over whether an elector had the right to vote, were overseen by the barrister Edmund Griffith (d. 1835) who served as the steward of Sheriff's Court.[69] Finally, library members were also amongst the some 5,000 electors of Bristol who cast their votes in both June and October 1812.

In the absence of other sources, the Bristol Library's borrowing registers provide an accurate record of who could access the library in 1812. These reveal that between January and December 1812, 229 borrowers made a total of 3,097 borrowings.[70] This tally does not include all those who may have used the library during this year. Indeed, the library's cash book reveals that it received 292 subscriptions in 1812, meaning that only 78 percent of those who subscribed to the library were active borrowers.[71] Nevertheless, the total of active borrowers offers a useful sample of names to compare against those who voted in October 1812. Using other records and biographical information it has been possible to identify seventy-nine individuals who borrowed from the library in 1812 and who voted in the general election in October.[72] A total of 4,389 individuals voted in the election, meaning that these seventy-nine

[68] Beaven, *Bristol Lists*. Edward Brice (d.1833), another sheriff in 1812, seems not have been a library member, but he was probably related to Samuel Brice and William Diaper Brice who were. For an overview of the electoral process in Bristol, see Harrison, *Crowds and History*, p.209. For election campaigns more generally in this period, see O'Gorman, *Voters, Patrons, and Parties*, pp.126-41.

[69] Beaven, *Bristol Lists*, p.353; *Bristol Minute Book*, eds. Skjönsberg and Towsey, p.260. Hunt was generally dismissive of the 'gentlemen' of Bristol, describing them as either ignorant or partisan, but he respected both Bickley and Griffith as civil, liberal and fair. Hunt, *Memoirs*, II.

[70] Borrowings for the year 1812 are recorded in two consecutive borrowing registers. BCL, Bristol Library Society, Borrowing registers, B7483, fol. 31, October 1811-August 1812 and B7484, fol. 32, August 1812-July 1813. Borrowings are recorded and tallied by title, although members were able to borrow multiple volumes at a time.

[71] BA, LS/F/1, Cash book, March 1812 to March 1813. The 1814 library catalogue notes that in August there were 295 members, but this total seems not to include members for life or the two members whose subscriptions were in arrears, as the cash book records. *Catalogue of the… Bristol Library Society* (1814), p.vi; BA, LS/F/1, Cash book, March 1814 to March 1815.

[72] These are chiefly *Bristol Minute Book*, eds. Skjönsberg and Towsey; BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book; BA, 32079/LS/M/3, Bristol Library Society, Minute book of Committee, 31 March 1789–10 March 1807 [hereafter BA, LS/M/3, Committee minute book, 1789-1807]; BA, 32079/LS/M/4, Bristol Library Society, Minute book of Committee, 24 March 1807–22 March 1823 [hereafter BA, LS/M/4, Committee minute book, 1807-23]; BA, LS/F/1, Cash book; *Index to the Bristol Burgess Books: Volumes 1 to 21, 1557-1995* (Bristol: Bristol & Avon

library electors make up just less than 2 percent of the total of Bristol voters for 1812.[73] Without a full list of the library's members (the practice of publishing membership lists was discontinued in 1798) and a full electoral roll for Bristol, it is impossible to conclusively determine how many library members were able to vote in 1812.[74] Burgess books detail who may have been eligible to vote as freemen, but freeholders (of forty shillings or more) could also vote in Bristol's elections.[75] A significant proportion of this electorate also lived beyond Bristol and would not have been eligible for library membership which was generally available only to those who lived in or close to the city.[76] Nor did any of the library's twelve female members have the vote.[77] Although Bristol's electorate was large, by the nineteenth century it represented just less than a quarter of the city's wider population, or around one in five males. Moreover, increases in the size of the electorate had failed to keep pace with urban population growth meaning that, as a proportion of the wider population, the size of Bristol's electorate had declined over time.[78] There was a symmetry here with the Bristol Library whose own membership, although gradually increasing until 1821, also failed to keep pace with wider changes in population trends.[79]

Nevertheless, this tally of seventy-nine library electors underplays the number of those who could vote. Electoral turnout in 1812 (66 percent) was markedly lower than it had been at

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Family History Society, 2005). For four borrowers it has been impossible to determine their identities from multiple individuals of the same name listed in the poll book and they have been excluded from the following analysis.

[73] 'Oct 1812 Bristol', ECPPEC.

[74] Printed membership lists prefixed the 1774, 1782, 1790 and 1798 catalogues and are transcribed in *Bristol Minute Book*, eds. Skjönsberg and Towsey, Appendix 2.

[75] Fisher, 'Bristol, 1790-1820', *HoP*; Poole and Rogers, *Bristol from Below*, p.92.

[76] See, for example, the committee's refusal in 1828 to transfer a library share to a gentleman living in Weston-super-Mare because of its distance from Bristol. BA, LS/M/5, Committee minute book, 1823-36, 15 July 1828.

[77] These included Ann Span (1777-1844) and the inventor Sarah Guppy (d.1852). 'Ann Bartlet (née Span)', *Legacies of British Slavery*, <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/2146630841>, [accessed 06/06/23]; Madge Dresser, 'Guppy [*née* Beach; *other married name* Coote], Sarah (*bap*. 1770, *d.* 1852)', *ODNB* (October 2016).

[78] Poole and Rogers, *Bristol from Below*, p.92.

[79] A situation with which library members were all too aware, see below, Chapter Six.

elections earlier in the eighteenth century and there are a number of library members who borrowed books and were eligible to vote in 1812 but are not recorded as doing so.[80] Likewise, there are a number of members who are not recorded as borrowing a book and either could have or did vote in October 1812.[81] Despite being a small proportion of the overall electorate, this list of seventy-nine library electors includes individuals who would have been well known among Bristol's civic society, including Joseph Cottle (1770–1853), Thomas Daniel, John Eagles (1783-1855), Philip John Miles, John Noble and James Cowles Prichard (1786–1848).[82] As political campaigners, organisers and pamphlet writers their influence went far beyond the act of voting. These individuals were instrumental in shaping electioneering discourses in Bristol in 1812.[83] As borrowers, they were a representative group in terms of the number of borrowings they made and were about no more or less likely to borrow books than non-voting library members.[84] In a similar proportion to Bristol's electorate and its total population, the library's electors accounted for just over a third of its active borrowers in 1812. This group is also generally representative of voting habits of the Bristol electorate in 1812 more widely. Votes by library members were cast in five different ways. Forty-three voters voted for Davis and Protheroe.[85] Nineteen 'plumped' for Davis, using only one of their votes and voting for

[80] For example, turnout in 1754 was 84 percent. Poole and Rogers, *Bristol from Below*, p.92. It is curious why Bristol's turnout in October 1812 was so low considering that preparation for a general election had been underway for over a year and there was no repeat of the electoral violence of July. Fisher, 'Bristol 1790-1820'. Library members who borrowed books and were not recorded as voters in 1812, despite being eligible, include the independent Whig candidate Edward Protheroe, along with his younger brother Philip, Evan Baillie, John Paine Berjew, Lowbridge Bright, William Gibbons (1782–1848) and Nathan Windey.

[81] Even if they did not borrow books, such individuals may have used their library membership to read in the library building. These included the Tory candidate Richard Hart Davis, as well as Schaw Grosett (1741-1820), Charles Joseph Harford, John Peace and Henry Protheroe.

[82] Ralph A. Manogue, 'Cottle, Joseph (1770-1853)', *ODNB* (October 2007); Gordon Goodwin, revised by Anne Pimlott Baker, 'Eagles, John (1783-1855)', *ODNB* (September 2004); Stephen Farrell and David R. Fisher, 'Miles, Philip John (1774-1845)', *HoP*, <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1820-1832/member/miles-philip-1774-1845>, [accessed 17/01/23]; H.F. Augstein, 'Prichard, James Cowles (1786-1848)', *ODNB* (September 2004). For Daniel and Noble, see above pp.247-49.

[83] For examples, see *Bristol Poll-Book*, pp.i–lxiv; Brett, 'Liberal Middle Classes and Politics in Three Provincial Towns', pp.86-96.

[84] Seventy-nine (34 percent) elector borrowers out of a total of 229 borrowers, responsible for 1,102 (36 percent) borrowings out of a total of 3,097.

[85] Electing two candidates as members of Parliament, voters were able to cast two votes.

one candidate, with nine doing the same for Romilly. Seven voters split for Romilly and Davis and only a single voter ignored the Whig divide and voted for Romilly and Protheroe. There were no plumpers for Protheroe and no votes at all for Henry Hunt.

That no Bristol Library members voted for Hunt is not a complete surprise. He succeeded in securing only a tenth of the votes he had achieved earlier in July and his voters were principally those involved in small crafts and trades which were not well represented amongst the Bristol Library's membership.[86] Although Hunt had been an active participant in Bristol politics for many years, he was supported by neither of Bristol's political clubs despite his hopes that he might unite with Romilly on a joint ticket.[87] His standing at the general election in 1812 was partly performative, especially while the split within the Whig camp made the prospect of an electoral contest inevitable and his polling at the July by-election demonstrated that he had little chance of success. Yet Hunt, in the words of Steve Poole and Nicolas Rogers, was an 'expert in the politics of exposure'.[88] Standing at both elections in 1812 had allowed him to raise his public profile and, by extending the length of the poll, Hunt was able to expose the tactics employed by Bristol's political factions to control the election, most notably the deployment of special constables and military forces during the electoral proceedings and the use of violence and armed gangs.[89] These instances provided further fuel for radical literature and were subsequently referenced by both William Cobbett, in his *Political Register*, and Hunt himself in later petitions, but Hunt was also able to make a broader point about Bristol's politics, linking electoral malaise to allegations of corruption at the Corporation.[90] Despite close links between the Bristol Library and the Corporation, there were critics of it amongst

[86] Poole and Rogers, *Bristol from Below*, pp.309-10.
[87] Hunt had supported the concept of a third candidate challenging the Tory-Whig duopoly in Bristol politics since 1807. Poole and Rogers, *Bristol from Below*, pp.305-09. See also Phillips, *Great Reform Bill*, p.85.
[88] Poole and Rogers, *Bristol from Below*, p.310.
[89] Romilly, *Memoirs*, II, p.264; Harrison, *Crowds and History*, pp.213-17.
[90] Harrison, *Crowds and History*, p.219; Belchem, *'Orator' Hunt*, pp.26-30; Poole and Rogers, *Bristol from Below*, pp.308-10.

the Bristol Library's membership, most notably the author and newspaper proprietor John Mathew Gutch (1776-1861), but no other member wished to align themselves openly with Hunt in this cause, mindful perhaps of the social opprobrium that might come with such an association.[91]

The voting habits of Bristol Library members roughly corresponds to that of the wider electorate, except in a few key respects. Library voters were slightly more likely to vote for the two successful candidates, Davis and Protheroe, than the wider electorate (54 percent to 48 percent). They were also slightly less likely to plump for Romilly (12 percent to 17 percent) and were willing to make a political sacrifice and vote in accordance with their principles, and in favour of issues like parliamentary reform and the abolition of slavery, rather than on party lines. [92] These individuals included Unitarians of Lewin's Mead Chapel, Bristol's leading nonconformist centre, including its minister, the Rev. John Prior Estlin, and two influential members of its congregation in Richard Bright and Charles Abraham Elton.[93] There were though, by percentage, fewer Romilly 'plumpers' amongst the Bristol Library membership than amongst the total electorate. A far greater divergence in voting habits comes in the percentage of library members who plumped for Davis versus that of the wider electorate (24 percent to 8 percent), with far more choosing to pin their political colours firmly to the flag of the 'blue'

[91] Max Skjönsberg and Mark Towsey, 'Introduction', in *The Minute Book of the Bristol Library Society, 1771–1801* (Bristol: Bristol Record Society, 2022), p.xv; Kathleen Hapgood, *The Friends to Literature: Bristol Library Society 1772-1894* (Bristol: Avon Local History & Archaeology, 2014), p.4. Following the July by-election, the Steadfast Society published the names, occupation and parishes of the 235 men who had voted for Hunt. *A List of the Persons who Voted for Mr Hunt at the Late Election* (Bristol, 1812), referenced in Harrison, *Crowds and History*, p.215, n.59. Hunt explicitly referenced Gutch in his *Memoirs* as 'the Ministerial or Tory hack editor' who, along with John Mills, the editor of the Whig *Bristol Gazette*, was as 'equally unprincipled in politics… [contributing] mainly to assist in perpetuating the ignorance of the people… Gutch and Mills vie with each other which could be most scurrilous, and which could tell the greatest number of the most unprincipled and barefaced falsehoods'. Hunt, *Memoirs*, III. On Gutch, see Elizabeth Baigent, 'Gutch, John Mathew (1776-1861)', *ODNB* (January 2016).

[92] Figures taken from Phillips, *Great Reform Bill*, pp.85-86.

[93] Kenneth Morgan, 'Introduction', in *The Bright-Meyler Papers: A Bristol-West India Connection, 1732-1837* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp.122-23; R.K. Webb, 'Estlin, John Prior (1747-1817)', *ODNB* (January 2008).

interest.[94] In terms of electoral strategy, plumping for Davis accomplished very little. The contest between the Bristol Whigs ensured that his position was never truly threatened, and Bristol's Tories enjoyed the luxury of being able to choose whichever Whig candidate they wished to share the representation of Bristol with.[95] Although Davis was politically closer to Protheroe, there were still many differences between the candidates. While Protheroe prevaricated on the issue of Catholic Emancipation and supported peace negotiations with France, Davis was staunchly anti-Catholic and supported the full prosecution of the war effort.[96] It might have been that even Protheroe's 'mild' Whig principles proved too much for those library members who identified themselves solely with the Tory interest. Certainly, members of the Tory political club, the Steadfast Society, were well represented within the library's membership. At the meeting held on 24 June 1812, convened to establish Davis's election committee for the July by-election, five of the thirteen attendant members were also library members, and this did not include other prominent Tories who were not in attendance including Edward and Thomas Daniel, George Daubeny (1775-1851) and James Tobin.[97] This was a group of individuals united by their political beliefs, associational activity and service in the Corporation.[98] This contingent within the library was representative of a wider Tory dominance in Bristol's civic politics, which became more pronounced in 1812 when the party secured a majority membership within the Corporation.[99] Indeed, it was two library members

[94] My calculations.
[95] Nearly 90 percent of Protheroe's votes were doubled with a vote to Davis. Phillips, *Great Reform Bill*, p.86.
[96] Phillips, *Great Reform Bill*, p.85. See also David R. Fisher, 'Protheroe, Edward (1774-1856)', *HoP*, <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1790-1820/member/protheroe-edward-1774-1856#family-relations>, [accessed 14/11/22]; Lawrence Taylor and R. G. Thorne, 'Davis, Richard Hart (1766-1842)', *HoP*, <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1790-1820/member/davis-richard-hart-1766-1842>, [accessed 14/11/22].
[97] Those library members present at the Steadfast meeting on 24 June 1821 included Thomas Cole, Thomas Eagles, Gabriel Goldney, Charles Ridout and Richard Vaughan. BA, SMV/8/2/2/2, Records of the Society of Merchant Venturers, Steadfast Society, White Lion Committee Book, 1805-1826, p.50. There were at least thirty-two library members in the Steadfast Society during the eighteenth century. Skjönsberg and Towsey, 'Introduction', in *Bristol Minute Book*, p.xxxvi.
[98] A theme also picked up by Mark Harrison. Harrison, *Crowds and History*, pp.78-82.
[99] Harrison dates 1812 as the beginning of this shift and this is concurred by Brett. Harrison, *Crowds and History*, p.64; Brett, 'Liberal Middle Classes and Politics in Three Provincial Towns', p.94.

who were instrumental in this shift when the shipbuilding brothers George and Abraham Hilhouse were appointed to the Common Council in 1812.[100]

V

Recognising this political complexion within the library is significant not only for our understanding of where the library was situated within Bristol's political spectrum, but also for how the collection was used by its members. Though non-partisan, the Bristol Library was not an ideologically or a politically neutral borrowing space and this reading context shaped how individuals used the subscription library, the intellectual and ideological significance of borrowing from the Bristol Library and the political texts within it. As discussed in Chapter One, the Bristol Library was not the only source of reading material available to electors in 1812, even if studies of comparative urban readers suggest they were more likely to get most of their reading material from a subscription library.[101] Many of the Bristol Library's members enjoyed the financial security that would have enabled them to cultivate their own private libraries.[102] Although the Bristol Library was the pre-eminent and largest lending institution in the city, there were also various other types of libraries open to readers.[103] Bristol also had a lively newspaper culture with publications of various political shades including the Tory *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal*, the moderate Whig *Bristol Mirror* and *Bristol Observer*, the independent Whig *Bristol Mercury* and the 'radical' *Bristol Gazette*.[104] Moreover, we should

[100] Latimer, *Annals of Bristol in the Nineteenth Century*, p.37; Bush, *Bristol and its Municipal Government*, p.34.
[101] See Stephen Colclough's analysis of the reading of Joseph Hunter, a manufacturing apprentice from Sheffield, during the 1790s. Stephen Colclough, *Consuming Texts: Readers and Reading Communities, 1695-1870* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p.98. See also the example of Peter Baillie, discussed in Chapter Three.
[102] For example, by the time of their deaths both Thomas Daniel and Philip John Miles had estates worth hundreds of thousands of pounds. Dresser, 'Daniel, Thomas (1762-1854)', *ODNB*; Stephen Farrell and David R. Fisher, 'Miles, Philip John (1774-1845)', *HoP*, <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1820-1832/member/miles-philip-1774-1845>, [accessed 17/01/23].
[103] As discussed below, in Chapter One, pp.67-69.
[104] Phillips, *Great Reform Bill*, p.87; Brett, 'Liberal Middle Classes and Politics in Three Provincial Towns', pp.142-47; Keisuke Masaki, 'The Development of Provincial Toryism in the British Urban Context, c.1815-1832', unpublished PhD thesis (University of Edinburgh, 2016), pp.24-78.

not discount the possibility, open to all Bristolians, of reading texts in situ, either in the open street, a shop window, or a public space as a pasted flyer or a shared pamphlet.[105] Elections were, of course, a prime theatre for the creation and dissemination of political reading material, often to those who did not have the right to vote.[106] The Bristol Library's borrowing record remains the best surviving source to reveal how a cohort of Bristol readers were reading during a politically tumultuous year, but it should not be misconstrued as the only source of books available to readers.

The social, cultural and structural dynamics of the Bristol Library also shaped the ways in which its collection was used by Bristolians and may have influenced their voting behaviour and the wider intellectual climate. Just as a back-catalogue of an individual's reading and their ideological frameworks (their social, political and religious beliefs) shaped the way they interacted with a new book, so too did the associational context from which a book was borrowed speak to the reading experience that may be gathered from it.[107] In a practical sense, the library's rules dictated how and for how long a book might be borrowed.[108] In 1812 a library member was permitted to take two books out of the library at any given time.[109] The process for deciding the length of the borrowing period was fairly unregulated, with a slip pasted into

[105] Simon Eliot argues that by the end of the nineteenth century this was the most common form of reading practice. See Simon Eliot, 'The Reading Experience Database; or, what are we to do about the history of reading?', *The Reading Experience Database (RED), 1450-1945*, <http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/RED/redback.htm>, [accessed 01/02/23]. It is notable that though Joseph Hunter recorded the reading of such texts in his diary, he gave the most space and time to books borrowed from libraries, hence exhibiting a hierarchy of texts in his reading habits. Colclough, *Consuming Texts*, pp.97-98.
[106] Harrison, *Crowds and History*, p.211.
[107] Christy Lindsay, 'Reading Associations in England and Scotland, c.1760-1830', unpublished PhD thesis, (University of Oxford, 2016), pp.20-22. This method, alive to the significance of the associational context to the reading of a text builds upon the methods of reader-reception theorists, particularly Wolfgang Iser's 'horizon of expectations'. Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (London: John Hopkins University Press, 1980). See also James Raven, 'From Promotion to Proscription: Arrangements for Reading and Eighteenth-Century Libraries', in *The Practice and Representation of Reading in England*, eds. James Raven, Helen Small and Naomie Tadmor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p.196.
[108] These rules are detailed in the 1814 library catalogue. *Catalogue of the… Bristol Library Society* (1814), pp.xv-xvii. It is noteworthy that section nine, 'Of the Perusal and Care of the Books', which details what one imagines would be the primary purpose of a library, comes after ten pages of regulation concerned with the structure and administration of the society.
[109] Borrowers were allowed to take out multiple volumes of each work.

each borrowed book detailing the length of borrowing time and the cost of the fine for exceeding this.[110] Certain books, by virtue of their size and value, were not permitted to circulate except by the express consent of the library committee.[111] Other aspects of the library's structuring would have subtly impacted the way readers read from the library. The arrangement of books in the library, into class and subject headings, acted as both an aid to reading and a shaper of reading practices in shepherding readers towards similar material.[112] For example, whilst there was no class for 'Politics', 'Class IV. British Affairs' included 'British Biography', 'History and Antiquities of Britain', 'British Topography and Geography', and 'Political Treatises', with further subject headings for those concerning Scotland, Ireland and 'Places dependent on Britain'.[113] This, coupled with the acquisition practices of the Bristol Library, under the careful management of the elected committee, was designed to foster a space and collection of books for polite, cultured learning worthy of the city's urban elite.[114] This was not intended to be a narrow, prejudiced or partisan type of learning, and on political topics the library sought to purchase a range of literature. Unsurprisingly, it had former library member Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), amongst many of his other pamphlets, and his works, in twelve volumes (1801-12), as well as other loyalist and reactionary titles by authors including John Bowles, John Gifford and Arthur Young.[115] Yet the

[110] It was presumably the role of the librarian to fill in this pasted slip, although there is no record in any of the library's minute books as to whether he was given guidance on the length of time a book may be borrowed for or the cost of the fine to administer for late returns. In practice, fines were hardly ever implemented for late returned books despite frequent criticisms that new books did not circulate amongst subscribers quickly enough, for example BA, LS/M/3, Committee minute book, 1789-1807, 17 June 1806; *Catalogue of the… Bristol Library Society* (1814), p.xvi; BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 25 March 1818.
[111] Skjönsberg and Towsey, 'Introduction', in *Bristol Minute Book*, p.xxxii. This consent was frequently sought and granted and was recorded in the committee minute books, see BA, LS/M/3, Committee minute book, 1789-1807; BA, LS/M/4, Committee minute book, 1807-23; BA, LS/M/5, Committee minute book, 1823-36.
[112] The annotated 1798 catalogue of the Bristol librarian John Peace includes a diagram of one of the inner rooms of the library, with the books arranged into twenty-six presses and six subjects. BCL, B8453, Bristol Library Society, John Peace's 1798 Catalogue.
[113] *Catalogue of the… Bristol Library Society* (1814), pp.xix-xx.
[114] Skjönsberg and Towsey, 'Introduction', in *Bristol Minute Book*, pp.xxvi–xxx.
[115] John Bowles, *Reflections on the Political and Moral State of Society* (1800); John Gifford, *Letter to Erskine* (1797); Arthur Young, *Example of France, a Warning to Britain* (1793).

Bristol Library also stocked the responses to Burke, including both Joseph Priestley's *Letters to Mr Burke* (1791) and *Appeal to the Public on the Riots in Birmingham* (1792), as well as Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) and Daniel Stuart's *Peace and Reform Against War and Corruption* (1794). Moreover, the library was a rapid purchaser of nearly all these pamphlets, with only Bowles's *Reflections* (1800), not purchased within a year of its publication.[116] It was thus able to provide its readers with easy access to the latest publications shaping a national political debate.[117] This afforded Bristol readers with a great degree of freedom of choice, yet the structures within the library would have been significant in moulding reading patterns. Filed under 'Metaphysic, Ethic, and Logic', Wollstonecraft's *Vindication* was kept both intellectually and physically separate from these other works by being stored in a different press within the library away from the political pamphlets of Bowles, Burke, Gifford, Priestley, Stuart and Young.[118] It is important to recognise the potential of these influences upon borrowing and reading habits, and in turn from reading habits to voting habits.[119]

In addition to its broad range of pamphlets from the 1790s, the Bristol Library seems never to have undergone a political 'purge' of books as occurred elsewhere. The works of Thomas Paine were frequent targets especially following the publication of the second part of his *Rights of Man* (1792), with his works either removed, destroyed or prevented from circulating from

[116] Burke's *Reflections* were ordered by the library committee on 26 October 1790 (p.168.), Gifford's *Letter* on 2 May 1797 (p.218.), Young's *Example* on 23 April 1793 (p.188.), Priestley's *Letters* on 18 January 1791 (p.169.) and *Appeal* on 27 March 1792 (p.180.), Wollstonecraft's *Vindication* on 1 January 1793 (p.185.) and Stuart's *Peace and Reform* on 3 June 1794 (p.196.). See *Bristol Minute Book*, eds. Skjönsberg and Towsey.

[117] For more on this debate and the pamphlets referenced above, see Emma Macleod, *A War of Ideas: British Attitudes to the Wars Against Revolutionary France, 1792-1802* (Oxford: Routledge, 1998).

[118] *Catalogue of the… Bristol Library Society* (1814). A work could be filed under multiple headings, although only in the case of large multi-volume works. For example, Joseph Addison's *Works* (Baskerville, 1761) was listed under five headings including Divinity, Geography and Poetry. This was a particularly fine edition, printed in 'Royal Quarto' and donated to the library in August 1773 by the London bookseller Thomas Cadell the elder. Skjönsberg and Towsey, 'Introduction', in *Bristol Minute Book*, p.xxvii.

[119] Even if a borrowed book was not necessarily read in full, at the very least, borrowing records represent an intention to engage with a text.

libraries in Ayr, Birmingham, Bolton, Glasgow, Jedburgh, Luddenden, Selkirk, Sheffield and from all the book clubs and circulating libraries in Somerset.[120] Other works by suspected 'Jacobin' authors could suffer similar fates.[121] Indeed, these instances have led some reading scholars to conclude that certain years saw a major reordering in subscription library collections as an anti-Jacobin invective succeeded in engendering the removal of certain texts from library shelves. William St Clair suggests that by 1794, Burke's *Reflections* reigned supreme over Paine's *Rights of Man* in terms of readership, as the latter was swiftly removed and banished from library shelves.[122] In contrast, Stephen Colclough, and others have suggested that 'Jacobinical' reading material remained in the associational library only until 1798.[123] It was in this year that the Sheffield Subscription Library replaced the *Analytical Review* with the *Anti-Jacobin Review* and refused to purchase the second volume of the anonymously written *Anecdotes of the Founders of the French Revolution* (1797).[124] The subscribers at the Shrewsbury Library went a step further, choosing to expel not only the *Analytical Review* and the *New Monthly Magazine* but also works by authors including William Godwin, James

[120] Keith A. Manley, *Books, Borrowers, and Shareholders. Scottish Circulating and Subscription Libraries before 1825: A Survey and Listing* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Bibliographical Society, 2012), pp.100-02; Keith A. Manley, 'Infidel Books and "Factories of the Enlightenment": Censorship and Surveillance in Subscription and Circulating Libraries in an Age of Revolutions, 1790-1850', *Book History*, 19.1 (2017), p.171; Charles Parish, *History of the Birmingham Library* (London: Library Association, 1966), p.33; *Leeds Intelligencer*, 21 January 1793, quoted in Christopher Reid, 'Unitarian Activism and the Politics of the Subscription Library: Bury St Edmunds in the 1790s', in *Textual Transformations: Purposing and Repurposing Books from Richard Baxter to Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, eds. Tessa Whitehouse and N.H. Keeble (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), p.78; Paul Kaufman, 'The Community Library: A Chapter in English Social History', *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, 57.7 (1967), p.34; Loveday Herridge and Sue Roe, 'Reading Sheffield: Sheffield Libraries and Book Clubs, 1771–1850', in *Before the Public Library: Reading, Community, and Identity in the Atlantic World, 1650–1850*, eds. Mark Towsey & Kyle B. Roberts (Leiden: Brill, 2017), p.187; *A Country Carpenter's Confession of Faith, with a few Plain Remarks on the Age of Reason in a letter from Will Chip the Carpenter in Somersetshire to Thomas Pain Stay-Maker in Paris* (1794), cited in William St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p.257.

[121] See, for example, John Galt's description of the removal of the works of 'tainted authors' from the library at Greenock. John Galt, *Autobiography*, 2 vols. (London, 1833), I, pp.38-43. See also Manley, *Books, Borrowers, and Shareholders*, p.101.

[122] St Clair, *Reading Nation*, p.257.

[123] Richard Cronin, *The Politics of Romantic Poetry: In Search of the Pure Commonwealth* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 2000), pp.61-82, cited in Colclough, *Consuming Texts*, pp.110-11; H.J. Jackson, *Marginalia: Readers Writing in Books* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), p.78. See also Stuart Andrews, *The British Periodical Press and the French Revolution, 1789-99* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), pp.72-82.

[124] Colclough, *Consuming Texts*, p.109.

Mackintosh, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Mary Wollstonecraft.[125] Yet we should be wary of reading too much into these individual cases. These were the results of local self-regulated censorship, rather than government 'diktat', and may bear the hallmarks of such eccentricities.[126] Even at Shrewsbury, an annotation within one of the excluded books reveals that they were given away by lot, presumably to the library's members, rather than destroyed wholesale.[127] Stephen Colclough suggests there is a degree of performativity amidst the actions of both the Sheffield and Shrewsbury libraries, with both choosing to distance themselves from an anti-war position advocated within the pages of the *Analytical*.[128] Critically, it was the local circumstances of each library which determined its acquisition policy. These were decisions taken, collectively, by library committee members themselves, rather than imposed in a repressive manner by a state apparatus. Despite a large contingent of Bristol's Tories amongst its membership, despite being headed by a cautious and conservative vice-president in Samuel Seyer and despite a librarian described as an 'old Church and King man' and even a 'fossil Tory', no authors were blacklisted from the Bristol Library Society, nor were any works removed from circulation for political motives.[129] As we have seen, the library held extensive runs of both the *Anti-Jacobin Review* and the *Analytical Review*, Rousseau's complete works in fifteen volumes (1782) as well as his *Confessions* (1783), Godwin's *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793) and *Life of Chaucer* (1803), and Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the*

[125] Annotation in J.J. Rousseau, *A Treatises on the Social Compact; or The Principles of Politic Law*, new ed., (London, 1791), British Library. Shelf-mark 1608/4490, cited in Jackson, *Marginalia*, p.78.
[126] Manley, 'Infidel Books and "Factories of the Enlightenment"', pp.175. In comparison, the content of comparable European libraries was actively regulated by their local authorities, see Manley, 'Infidel Books and "Factories of the Enlightenment"', pp.175-90.
[127] Annotation in J.J. Rousseau, *A Treatises on the Social Compact; or The Principles of Politic Law*, new ed., (London, 1791), British Library. Shelf-mark 1608/4490, cited in Jackson, *Marginalia*, p.78.
[128] Colclough, *Consuming Texts*, p.109.
[129] For an exemplar of Seyer's politics, see his description of the political situation of Bristol in November 1820, BA, 44954/1/1, Manuscript volumes compiled by Seyer and others, Calendar of events in Bristol, 1820-27, pp.28-29. These descriptions of John Peace, the Bristol librarian, are provided in a memoir to him included in the preface of a posthumous publication, see John Peace, *Axiomata Pacis* (London, 1862), p.xiv. Peace was appointed as the Society's librarian in 1815 and remained in the role for forty years, reputedly attending the library every day. Kathleen Hapgood, 'Library Practice in the Bristol Library Society, 1772-1830', *Library History*, 5.5 (1981), p.152.

Rights of Woman (1792) and *Letters from Sweden* (1796).[130] The library even stocked the work of the arch-Jacobin himself, Thomas Paine, having both parts of his attack upon institutional religion in *The Age of Reason* (1796), these having been purchased at a committee meeting on 18 October 1796.[131]

For a library user in 1812, somewhat chronologically distanced from the 'pamphlet wars' of the 1790s, this literature and these authors may have lost some of their political charge. Certainly, few of these works were being regularly taken out of the library in 1812, with the exception of the *Anti-Jacobin Review* which was borrowed on twenty-six occasions by a small number of regular periodical readers.[132] Volume nine of Rousseau's *Oeuvres* was borrowed on one occasion, as were both volumes of his *Confessions* and the first volume of Godwin's *Life of Chaucer*.[133] More intriguingly, Wollstonecraft's *Rights of Woman* was borrowed by a voter in 1812, John Brent Cross on 27 November.[134] Cross was an apothecary on Dove Street and had close connections to members of Bristol's medical community and others interested in it, including James Cowles Prichard, Richard Smith (1772-1843) George Fisher junior (d. 1821) and James Storr Fry (1767-1835), all of whom were library members.[135] The borrowing register shows that Cross borrowed *Rights of Woman* for almost a full month and read it alongside

[130] *Catalogue of the… Bristol Library Society* (1814).
[131] *A Catalogue of the Books belonging to the Bristol Library Society; To which are Prefixed the Rules of the Institution, and a List of the Subscribers.* (Bristol, 1798); *Bristol Minute Book*, eds. Skjönsberg and Towsey, p.213. On Paine's *Age of Reason*, see Franklyn K. Prochaska, 'Thomas Paine's *The Age of Reason* Revisited', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 33.4 (1972), pp.561-76; Richard Whatmore, *The End of Enlightenment: Empire, Commerce, Crisis* (Padstow: Allen Lane, 2023), pp.225-26. On the suppression of Paine's work, as well as its borrowing from the Bristol Library, see below, Chapter Two, pp.151-52.
[132] Five of these borrowings were made by two library electors, John Weeks, on four occasions, and John Eden, on one. BCL, B7483, Borrowing register, 1811-12 and B7484, Borrowing register, 1812-13. Both Weeks and Eden voted for Davis and Protheroe.
[133] *Oeuvres* was borrowed by Benjamin Wilson on 16 September, *Confessions* by Charles Hereford on 17 November and Godwin by Richard Smith on 8 October. BCL, B7484, Borrowing register, 1812-13. None of these members are recorded as having voted in 1812.
[134] BCL, B7484, Borrowing register, 1812-13, p.60.
[135] Michael Whitfield, *The Dispensaries: Healthcare for the Poor Before the NHS* (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2016). Cross was elected as a library committee member in 1829 and continued to be so until 1845. BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 23 March 1829, 24 March 1845.

Walter Scott's *Marmion* (1808) and *Lady of the Lake* (1810), Elizabeth Hamilton's *Letters of a Hindoo Rajah* (1796) and the 4th Earl of Chesterfield's *Works* (1777-78) and *Letters to his Son* (1774).[136]

Cross's reading was varied and, as it came after the general election, could not have swayed his choice of vote which, like the majority of library electors, was for Davis and Protheroe.[137] His borrowing of a politically contentious text comes seemingly at odds with his own political views. At future elections, in 1818 and 1830, Cross continued to vote for candidates proposed by Bristol's Tory and Whig clubs, whilst in 1835 he was listed as a Conservative candidate to be a city alderman at the election of the reformed Corporation.[138] It may be that he read *Rights of Woman* for a practical purpose, and for its insights on female education. In this regard, his borrowing of Chesterfield's *Letters to his Son* two days before he chose to return Wollstonecraft may be significant. In another respect, Cross's reading of Elizabeth Hamilton's two novels, *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers* (1800) and *Letters of a Hindoo Rajah*, which bookended his borrowing record for 1812, may have encouraged him to seek out a work of 'modern philosophy' himself.[139] Perhaps his reading of Hamilton's anti-Jacobin critique furthered his own disparagement of Wollstonecraft's text.[140] As it did for others, this kind of reading could have reaffirmed Cross's sense of identity, enabling him to better situate his political views or providing him with the means to better develop them.[141] The associational context in which

[136] BCL, B7484, Borrowing register, 1812-13.
[137] 'Oct 1812 Bristol', ECPPEC.
[138] 'June 1818 Bristol', ECPPEC, <https://ecppec.ncl.ac.uk/case-study-constituencies/bristol/election/June-1818/>, [accessed 26/03/23]; 'Aug 1830 Bristol', ECPPEC, <https://ecppec.ncl.ac.uk/case-study-constituencies/bristol/election/Aug-1830/>, [accessed 26/03/23]; Beaven, *Bristol Lists*, p.42.
[139] Cross borrowed Hamilton's *Memoirs* on 14 January 1812. BCL, B7484, Borrowing register, 1812-13, p.62.
[140] M.O. Grenby, *The Anti-Jacobin Novel: British Conservatism and the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp.65-103. It may be significant that Cross chose to return both *Rights of Woman* and the first volume of *Hindoo Rajah* on the same day, 26 December 1812. BCL, B7484, Borrowing register, 1812-13, pp.60, 71.
[141] David Bebbington, *The Mind of Gladstone: Religion, Homer, and Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp.15-40; Ruth Clayton Windscheffel, *Reading Gladstone* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp.234-39; Mark Towsey, *Reading History in Britain and America, c.1750-c.1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge

Cross borrowed these texts would also have been significant, among fellows of similar politics, within an association which stressed order and process.[142] Without library or reading records, and barring the survival of other sources, the individual idiosyncrasies which determined both reading or voting habit remain intangibly distant. Even with these borrowing records, it is difficult to say whether either the act of reading or voting pre-empted the other. Yet it does point to a potential motivator to electoral behaviour, in this case an anti-Jacobin strand in Bristol's politics in 1812, that would otherwise be left unknown. Moreover, this is an analysis which can be undertaken at both a qualitative and quantitative level, with the latter further contextualising the social and intellectual setting within which this electoral contest was decided.

VI

1812 again saw an external political figure vying to be chosen as Bristol's parliamentary representative. In 1774, when Edmund Burke stood for election in the city, he and his supporters went to great efforts to interact with its social and cultural networks, and Burke himself joined the Library Society as a life member and donated several books to it.[143] Romilly made no similar attempts.[144] No doubt, the width in political views between Romilly and some of Bristol's conservative Whigs was significant, but as significant may have been a bibliographical climate of anti-Gallicism which made Bristol an unfavourable constituency for a man of his political views and heritage.

University Press, 2019), pp.63-65; Julieanne Lamond, 'Representative Readers: Political Agency, Reading History, and the Case of Matthew Charlton', *Library & Information History*, 37.3 (December 2021), pp.225-27.

[142] David Allan, *A Nation of Readers: The Lending Library in Georgian England* (London: The British Library, 2008), pp.75, 106–7; David Allan, 'Politeness and the Politics of Culture: An Intellectual History of the Eighteenth-Century Subscription Library', *Library & Information History*, 29.3 (2013), pp.159–69.

[143] Max Skjönsberg, '"This Revolution in the Town": Richard Champion and the Early Years of the Bristol Library Society', *Library & Information History*, 37.2 (2021), pp.149-51, 157-58; Skjönsberg and Towsey, 'Introduction', in *Bristol Minute Book*, pp.xxxv-xxxvi.

[144] Poole and Rogers, *Bristol from Below*, p.309.

In 1812, library electors made a total of 1,102 borrowings from the Bristol Library which were representative of the general borrowing trends of the wider library membership.[145] 'Travel' was far and away the most popular borrowed subject, accounting for 21 percent and 22 percent of total borrowings by all library members and library electors respectively. Indeed, for all library members and library electors, the four most popular borrowed subjects (Travel, History, Periodicals, Lives) accounted for 54 percent of all borrowings made.[146] The popularity of the remaining subject categories is also roughly equal for both library members and library electors. The popularity of travel writing was not a trend restricted to Bristol and records from comparative libraries elsewhere in the British Isles suggest that it was generally popular.[147] Yet the most popular borrowed political works also had an international, outward-looking dimension and a fixation with French domestic politics. The works of political and social theorists were borrowed, including Voltaire, Adam Smith, Edmund Burke, Richard Price, Thomas Malthus and Mary Wollstonecraft, but not in large numbers.[148] Instead, library electors were more likely to take out a work such as Joseph Weber's *Memoirs of Marie Antoinette* (1805-12), edited by the arch-anti Jacobin, Robert Charles Dallas, and which included an analysis of *Several Important Periods of the French Revolution*. Of almost equal popularity was Theodor von Faber's translated *Sketches of the Internal State of France* (1811), which was

[145] BCL, B7483, Borrowing register, 1811-12 and B7484, Borrowing register, 1812-13. To enable an analysis of library borrowing by subject, each text borrowed was given one of eighteen different subject categories (Belles Lettres; Drama; Education; Fiction; Fine Arts; History; Law; Lives; Medicine; Natural Philosophy; Periodicals; Philosophy & Morality; Poetry; Politics, Society & Political Economy; Practical Arts/Useful Knowledge; Theology and Travel). These subject categories were jointly formulated by the Books and Borrowing 1750–1830: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers and the Libraries, Reading Communities and Cultural Formation in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic (ECLO) projects.

[146] For all library members: Travel, 650 (21 percent of total); History, 372 (12 percent); Lives, 342 (11 percent); Periodicals, 314 (10 percent). For library electors: Travel, 247 (22 percent); History, 121 (11 percent); Periodicals, 119 (11 percent); Lives, 109 (10 percent).

[147] Paul Kaufman, 'Some Reading Trends in Bristol 1773–84', in *Libraries and Their Users: Collected Papers in Library History* (London: Library Association, 1969), p.31.

[148] Works borrowed included Voltaire's *Œuvres Completes*, (69 vols., 1784), Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) and *Wealth of Nations* (1776), Edmund Burke's *Works* (12 vols., 1801-12), Richard Price's *Observations on Reversionary Payments* (1772), Thomas Malthus's *On Population* (1798). For Wollstonecraft, see above p.266.

widely reported as having been suppressed by Napoleon in Europe.[149] Not all works offered a negative depiction of Napoleonic France. Anne Plumptre's *Narrative of a Three Years' Residence in France* (1810) was both a work of travel writing and political 'polemic', providing a first-hand account of Napoleon's reign, recognising his legitimacy to rule and advocating peace with him.[150] Yet Plumptre's narrative was swimming against the political and bibliographic tide among the Bristol Library borrowers. Indeed, anti-Jacobin and anti-Gallic sentiment crossed over into other seemingly apolitical subject categories. The most popular novelist for library electors in 1812 was Elizabeth Hamilton, with her *Letters of a Hindoo Rajah* (1796) and *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers* (1800) borrowed eleven times in total. In both, Hamilton set her sights against the levelling tendency of French principles, as well as the 'new philosophy' of British writers such as Wollstonecraft, Godwin and Mary Hays.[151]

French domestic politics, even events occurring some two decades previous, continued to appear prominently in the reading material of Bristol readers in 1812. The resultant anxiety from such a reading syllabus would have been heightened by a number of features of the October general election. Firstly, as had been the case in 1774, a competitive contest in the city had been forced by an outsider standing for election. The violence and disorder that had accompanied the July by-election, typified the dangers of electioneering in a city which had forgotten the conventions and structures which managed electoral proceedings.[152] Secondly, whilst its results showed that Hunt had little chance of electoral success, Romilly, backed by the Union and Independent club, was a serious electoral prospect.[153] His political views, support for parliamentary reform, religious toleration and, above all, the abolition of slavery,

[149] Theodor von Faber, *Sketches of the Internal State of France* (London, 1811), pp.v-vi; *British Critic*, 38 (July 1811), pp.59-60; *Critical Review*, 3rd series, 23.4 (August 1811), pp.403-04.
[150] Adriana Craciun, *British Women Writers and the French Revolution: Citizens of the World* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp.179-83.
[151] Grenby, *Anti-Jacobin Novel*, pp.69-99.
[152] Harrison, *Crowds and History*, pp.218-19.
[153] Fisher, 'Bristol, 1790-1820', *HoP*; Poole and Rogers, *Bristol from Below*, pp.309-10.

placed him at odds with many of Bristol's mercantile dynasties and raised the resultant electoral stakes yet further.[154] Thirdly, Romilly's candidature had already proved deeply divisive, forcing a conclusive split within the city's Whig faction which would not be fully healed until 1833 with the abolition of slavery and its removal as a political issue.[155] Romilly blamed his defeat on the union of Davis and Protheroe against him, but Henry Hunt considered him to have been failed by his public supporters. 'The fact was, that these hypocritical Whigs would rather have sacrificed Romilly a hundred times, and have elected the devil himself, than they would have voted for Hunt'.[156] Hunt was overstating his chances of success, but to many political commentators Romilly and his views were dangerous and foreign.

Writing after the conclusion of the contest, Robert Southey, a former resident of Bristol and library member himself, warmly welcomed Romilly's defeat.[157] Despite not even knowing the names of the successful candidates, Southey considered Romilly's character, as a 'philosophical lawyer', to be cheap and his politics to be dangerous, based upon 'pseudo-philosophy' rather than any rational judgement of man and society. Taken together, these 'would assuredly tend to make this country a province of France'.[158] Romilly's descendance from French Huguenots gave such a criticism a slight xenophobic barb and his family heritage was continually referenced, particularly by his Whig opponents, to stress his status as an

[154] Phillips argues that slavery 'dominated' the 1826 election in Bristol and that as an issue it played a pivotal role in the realignment of Whig identity in the city away from party labels. Phillips, *Great Reform Bill*, pp.90-94. However, it was also largely a solidification of trends that were first openly raised in 1812.
[155] Phillips, *Great Reform Bill*, p.93.
[156] Hunt, *Memoirs*, III.
[157] Southey was writing to the wine merchant Charles Danvers (c.1764-1814), who was himself a library member and borrower in 1812. For biographical notes on Danvers, see 'Danvers, Charles (c.1764-1814)', *Romantic Circles*, <http://romantic-circles.org/node/103896>, [accessed 22/03/23]. For more on Southey's membership of the Bristol Library, see Skjönsberg and Towsey, 'Introduction', in *Bristol Minute Book*, p.xlvi.
[158] Robert Southey to Charles Danvers, 29 October 1812, *The Collected Letters of Robert Southey: Part Four: 1810-1815*, eds. Ian Packer and Lynda Pratt (Romantic Circles, 2013), <http://romantic-circles.org/editions/southey_letters/Part_Four/HTML/letterEEd.26.2165.html#back6>, [accessed 23/03/23]. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Southey's close acquaintance and fellow library member, came to a similarly negative view with regards to post-Revolution France in his Bristol Lectures of 1795. Whatmore, *End of Enlightenment*, pp.296-97.

outsider, not only to Bristol's politics but England more generally.[159] Romilly sought to tackle from the outset the claim that Bristol was set elect a 'foreigner' to represent it in Parliament, stressing his own Englishness in a speech he made during his first arrival into the city in April 1812.[160] Nevertheless, references continued to be made to his French roots in comparison to the local connections of his opponent. At a political dinner attended by Protheroe, toasts were made to 'A natural *Bristol* whig, and may it never be scratched by *London* or *French* fashions'.[161] The same allusion was drawn by Henry Protheroe, albeit in a less than subtle manner, when, during the course of the election, he frequented public houses, scattering money and vocally damning 'French principles'.[162] A general anti-Gallicism played a role in accentuating political differences between Whig candidates in Bristol in 1812, with Protheroe able to stress his occupation as a merchant and his participation within the political and social networks of the city, including the Corporation and the Library Society, to his advantage. The borrowing records of the Library Society also demonstrate that library electors were reading a selection of works that were anti-Gallic in either their tone or analysis. Whether these reading trends were directly influential in determining voting trends is another matter. Yet the popularity of anti-Gallican texts throughout 1812 at least implies that this general milieu preceded the elections of that year rather than resulting from them. It also demonstrates the persistence of anti-Jacobin lines of argument in the reading literature and political contests of the 1810s and beyond.[163] Critically, as only a quantitative analysis of reading records can show,

[159] R.A. Melikan, 'Romilly, Sir Samuel (1757-1818), *ODNB* (January 2008); Brett, 'Liberal Middle Classes and Politics in Three Provincial Towns', p.94.
[160] Romilly described his grandfather as 'an Englishman by choice', if not by birth. Elton, *Account of the Entry of Sir Samuel Romilly into Bristol, on Thursday, April 2, 1812*, p.14.
[161] Emphasis in original. C.H. Walker, *An Independent Address to the Electors of Bristol Upon the State of the Representation of the People* (Bristol, 1812), pp.11-12, quoted in Brett, 'Liberal Middle Classes and Politics in Three Provincial Towns', p.94.
[162] Latimer, *Annals of Bristol in the Nineteenth Century*, p.52.
[163] See, for example, the opposition to the 'egalitarian school' in a political essay written by William Gladstone at Oxford in 1831. Bebbington, *Mind of Gladstone*, pp.15-27.

this literature, and its arguments, were making their way directly to voters through the managed and ordered medium of the subscription library.

VII

Anxieties aroused from the reading syllabus of Bristol members were heightened further by the specific context in which the 1812 contest occurred. The books of the subscription library could allow a reader to better understand the threats facing the British state, even if such a reading could be anxiety-inducing in itself. Some contended that the social and political upheavals arising from the French Revolution were part of a wider tapestry of danger, an international conspiracy involving Jacobins, corrupted Free Masons, the Illuminati and reading societies.[164] As the previous chapter observed, those propagating this theory could be subscription library members themselves, but the works of Augustin Barruel, John Robison and James Thomson were also regular features on subscription library shelves, with the legacy of these, and their ideas, remaining into the 1810s.[165] The New York Society Library held the books of all three authors, with the works of Barruel and Robison also present at subscription libraries in Birmingham and York.[166] The Bristol Library held both a French and English translation of Barruel's *Mémoires pour server a l'Histoire du Jacobinisme* (1797), the latter of which was borrowed by the library's future vice-president, Samuel Seyer, and Edward Protheroe, the victorious Whig candidate in 1812.[167] Borrowing records reveal that the texts of

[164] Emma Vincent, 'The Responses of Scottish Churchmen to the French Revolution, 1789-1802', *The Scottish Historical Review*, 73.2 (October 1994), p.194; Michael Taylor, 'British Conservatism, the Illuminati, and the Conspiracy Theory of the French Revolution, 1797-1802', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 47.3 (2014), pp.293-94.
[165] Augustin Barruel, *Mémoires pour Servir a l'Histoire du Jacobinisme* (London, 1797); John Robison, *Proofs of a Conspiracy against all the Religions and Government of Europe* (London, 1797); [James Thomson], *The Rise, Progress, and Consequences, of the New Opinions and Principles Lately Introduced into France; with Observations*. (Edinburgh, 1799).
[166] Barruel's work was also held by the Macclesfield Subscription Library. In total, Robison's book was held by six libraries in the ECLO database, including the Boston Library and the Trenton Library Company. 'Memoirs Pour Servir L'histoire Du Jacobinisme' and 'Proofs of Conspiracy Against all Religions and Governments of Europe carried on in Secret Meetings of Free Masons Illuminati and Reading Societies' records, ECLO.
[167] *Catalogue of the… Bristol Library Society* (1814), p.96; 'Memoirs Pour Servir L'histoire Du Jacobinisme' record, ECLO.

both Robison and Thomson, both of whom were Scottish and whose works were also printed in Edinburgh, circulated amongst readers, including Church of Scotland ministers, in Selkirk, Edinburgh, and Dunblane between 1797 and 1819.[168]

Michael Taylor argues that fears of an international conspiracy 'obsessed conservatives' during this period, but they were given new life by their repetition in subsequent publications that then circulated amongst subscription library readers.[169] Church ministers were active consumers of this content, but they could also be its producers, whether through their pulpit oratory, or the printed pamphlet. According to Barruel, Robison, and also Thomson, religion was the essential antidote to the fanaticism of revolutionary France.[170] Francis Randolph, the Church of England clergyman and Bristol Library member, made reference to these ideas in a sermon he preached in Bath in 1799 which was also published the following year, with a copy donated to the library on 8 July.[171] In 1799 another Bristol member, the Rev. Lewis Hughes (1747-1824), published a *Historical View of the Rise, Progress, and Tendency, of the Principles of Jacobinism*, a compilation of writing by Barruel.[172] Hughes had been encouraged to undertake his work by Folliot Cornewall (1754-1831), the bishop of Bristol and president of the Library Society between 1797 and 1802, but he also made extensive use of the library's collections.[173] Across

[168] *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Advanced search for 'Book Work: Proofs of a Conspiracy against all the Religions and Governments of Europe, carried on in the Secret Meetings of Free Masons, Illuminati, and Reading Societies',", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/search/p-1/0/0/advanced/bwids|2622>, [accessed 12/08/24]; *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Advanced search for 'Book Work: Rise, Progress, and Consequences, of the New Opinions and Principles lately introduced into France',", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/search/p-1/0/0/advanced/bwids|2286>, [accessed 12/08/24].
[169] Taylor, 'British Conservatism', p.294. Edmund Burke was convinced of Barruel's thesis and warmly praised his work in correspondence with him. See Edmund Burke to Abbé Barruel, 1 May 1797, *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, eds. Thomas W. Copeland, Peter J. Marshall, John A. Woods et al., 10 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958-78), X, p.39, quoted in Whatmore, *End of Enlightenment*, p.154.
[170] Whatmore, *End of Enlightenment*, p.153. [Thomson], *Rise, Progress, and Consequences*, pp.35-37.
[171] Taylor, 'British Conservatism', p.297, n.32; Francis Randolph, *Sermons, preached at Laura-Chapel, Bath, during the Season of Advent 1799* (Bath, 1800); *Bristol Minute Book*, eds. Skjönsberg and Towsey, p.246.
[172] Hughes had been a library member since 1796. *Bristol Minute Book*, eds. Skjönsberg and Towsey, p.208.
[173] *The New London Review*, 1.5 (May 1799), p.505; *The Gentleman's Magazine*, 72 (August 1802), p.743. Unlike other incumbents, Cornewall chaired a number of committee meetings as the library's president. *Bristol Minute Book*, eds. Skjönsberg and Towsey, pp.229, 239-41, 243, 249-51.

1797, Hughes borrowed both Barruel's *Histoire du Clergé, Pendant la Révolution Française* (1793) and numerous volumes of his *Mémoires pour server a l'Histoire du Jacobinisme*.[174] On 13 February 1798, he again borrowed the first volume of Barruel's *Mémoires*, before taking out John Robison's *Proofs of a Conspiracy against all the Religions and Governments of Europe* three days later. During the summer of 1798, Hughes was clearly in an important period of study and borrowed both Barruel and Robison again on four consecutive instances between 8 June and 23 July. As we have seen, a similar network of anti-Illuminist thinkers was also present at the Leighton Library. George Gleig, the Scottish Episcopal minister of Stirling, spread his warnings about the danger of 'Illuminism' across a number of formats. His sermons, which like Randolph's were also later published, made direct reference to the works of Barruel and Robison, as well as warning of the general immorality and vice which the French Revolution had let forth.[175] As we have seen, Gleig shared a personal connection with John Robison but also James Thomson, not only through their shared experience as Leighton Library members, but also their collaboration on the third edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1788-97), which Gleig co-edited.[176] His disdain for 'illuminism' permeated the *Enycyclopaedia's* essays on a range of subjects including 'Astronomy', 'Carpentry' and 'Philosophy', ideas which in turn made their way through to subscription library readers, such as those at the Leighton, who repeatedly borrowed its multiple volumes.[177] This theory of international conspiracy therefore reached subscription library readers through a variety of

[174] 'Borrowing Record for Hughes, Rev. Lewis (b. 1747 - d. 1824)', ECLO.
[175] Taylor, 'British Conservatism', p.297, n.32; George Gleig, *Sermons Preached Occasionally in the Episcopal Chapel, Stirling, during the Eventful Period from 1793 to 1803.* (Edinburgh, 1803). Gleig made explicit political warnings in a number of his sermons including that of 'Fruits meet for Repentance', 'God's Judgements despised by the Wicked', 'Civil Subordination, the Ordinance of God', 'The Rights of Christians', 'The Love of Mankind spring out of natural Affection, Gratitude to God', and 'Delusion believing a Lie'. It is in the latter sermon that Gleig makes direct reference to 'Illuminism'. See Gleig, *Sermons*, pp.327-28.
[176] Silvia Sebastiani, 'Conjectural History vs. the Bible: Eighteenth-Century Scottish Historians and the Idea of History in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*', *Lumen*, 21 (2002), pp.215-18; Nigel Aston, 'Gleig, George (1753-1840)', *ODNB* (September 2004); Taylor, 'British Conservatism', p.298.
[177] Taylor, 'British Conservatism', p.297. For the popularity of the *Encyclopaedia Britanica* at the Leighton Library, see below, Chapter One, p.78.

means: directly, through the work of Barruel, Robison, and Thomson; indirectly, through subsequent sermons, pamphlets and essays that repeated their ideas; and quite possibly through direct association with these authors (Thomson, Randolph, Hughes, and Gleig) in the library space.

This conspiracy theory, and its legacies in print, thrived on fear and terror. Yet the feeling of anxiety was a common feature of the reading process.[178] On a collective level, some worried about the ever-expanding size of the reading nation and the reach of printed material.[179] Individual worries could come also from numerous sources, whether from the content of reading material, or by the act of reading itself. Readers worried when they felt they were not putting sufficient time and effort into their reading as Anne Lister did when she chastised herself for having 'hitherto wandered over too many books with too little thought.'[180] Similarly, readers worried about reading the wrong material, spending too much time on books they categorised as frivolous and ephemeral.[181] Worse still, some might even enjoy such reading. William Gladstone privately censured himself for being repeatedly drawn back to a book he considered to be immoral:

> I read sinfully, although with disgust, under the pretext of hunting solely for what was innocent; but – criminal that I am – with a prurient curiosity against all the rules of pious prudence, and inflaming the war between the better qualities of man and the worse.[182]

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[178] It might also have been a common feature of the period. Whatmore, *End of Enlightenment*, pp.xxix-xxx.
[179] Lucy Newlyn, *Reading, Writing, and Romanticism: The Anxiety of Reception* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp.2-48. See, also, the similar fears voiced by John Eagles with regards to the 'March of Intellect', discussed below, in Chapter Six.
[180] Anne Lister's Diaries (vol. 5, 1821-1822), 26 February 1821, p.15, Lister Family Papers, West Yorkshire Archive Service, Calderdale, quoted in Charley Mathews, '"To do a little and well": Anne Lister's Reading Routine', *Reception: Texts, Readers, Audiences, History*, 15 (2023), p.27.
[181] Jacqueline Pearson, *Women's Reading in Britain, 1750-1835: A Dangerous Recreation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp.106-07.
[182] M.R.D. Foot and H.C.G. Matthew, eds, *The Gladstone Diaries: with Prime Ministerial Correspondence*, 14 vols (Oxford, 1968-96), 22 February 1849, quoted in Windscheffel, *Reading Gladstone*, p.125.

Mark Towsey has described the reading of history in this period, as being 'an outlet for readers' hopes and fears about the existential threat posed by Napoleonic France'.[183] Reading and self-reflection may also have provided a method through which readers attempted to impose some kind of order on the seemingly unprecedented series of events taking place around them, just as the Illuminati conspiracy attempted, at least to its proponents, to ascribe a logical explanation to the revolutionary tumult they witnessed.[184]

Belligerent relations between Britain and France ensured that the war had remained a consistent spectre in the experiences of British readers for much of the 1790s and 1810s, even intruding upon the reading of material which, on the surface, had little connection to it. In a letter to his cousin dated 11 October 1803, the Leighton Library borrower John Ramsay of Ochtertyre (1736-1814) reflected on the resumption of conflict after the short-lived Peace of Amiens and the resurgent threat of invasion.[185] Ramsay was then in the process of borrowing and rereading Sir John Dalrymple's *Memoirs of Great Britain and Ireland* (1771-88), a traditional whiggish history of the revolution of 1688.[186] Although Ramsay was exceedingly positive about Dalrymple's *Memoirs*, describing it as 'one of the most pleasing pieces of history I know', its reception was far more mixed, with many reviewers and readers deeply critical of the manner in which Dalrymple had discussed the political manoeuvrings of the Whig martyrs, Algernon Sidney and William Russell.[187]

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[183] Towsey, *Reading History*, p.65.
[184] Grenby, *Anti-Jacobin Novel*, pp.44-45. See also J.M. Roberts, *The Mythology of Secret Societies* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1972), p.15.
[185] John Ramsay to Elizabeth Graham, 11 October 1803, in *Letters of John Ramsay of Ochtertyre, 1799–1812*, ed. B.L.H. Horn (Edinburgh: Scottish Historical Society, 1966), pp.101-02.
[186] Nicholas Phillipson, 'Dalrymple, Sir John, of Cousland [*afterwards* Sir John Hamilton-Macgill-Dalrymple], fourth baronet (1726-1810)', *ODNB*, (August 2022). Ramsay borrowed the first two volumes on 19 September, and the second volume again on 7 November. *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Leighton Library: Register Ledger 1, page 160 (image and text view),", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/library/leighton/registers/15/102878/image-and-text>, [accessed 12/08/24]
[187] Ramsay to Graham, 11 October 1803, in *Letters of John Ramsay of Ochtertyre*, p.101. For the reception of Dalrymple, see David Allan, *Making British Culture: English Readers and the Scottish Enlightenment, 1740-1830* (New York: Routledge, 2008), pp.141, 234-35, 237; Towsey, *Reading History*, pp.121-24, 157-59.

Instead, Ramsay used Dalrymple's history to reflect upon the political circumstances of his own period. He gently lamented the lack of a 'great monarch' like William of Orange, or the support of 'great statesmen and great commanders, fit to cooperate with a heroe'.[188] Ramsay's search for the heroes of yesteryear and his reading of Dalrymple was complemented by the biographical dictionary *Biographia Britannica* (1747-66), the fifth volume of which Ramsay borrowed alongside Dalrymple's *Memoirs*.[189] Reflecting further, Ramsay noted the speed with which he was witnessing change:

> the decline of a great empire which, in the Greek era took hundreds of years may be atchieved [sic.] in one by perverse industry and the grossest abuse of peace and liberty and folly such as the world had never seen before. Woes me![190]

Those interested in reading more about the sources of imperial decline did not have far to look; as a number of scholars have argued, works of history dominated the reading habits of the period.[191] Of these, Edward Gibbon's *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776-89) proved to be by far the most critically and commercially successful.[192] Simply put,

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[188] Ramsay to Graham, 11 October 1803, in *Letters of John Ramsay of Ochtertyre*, p.101.
[189] On the *Biographia Britannica* and its biographical predecessors and successors, see Isabel Rivers, 'Biographical Dictionaries and Their Uses from Bayle to Chalmers', in *Books and Their Readers in Eighteenth Century England: New Essays*, ed. Isabel Rivers (London: Continuum, 2001), pp.135-69. Fittingly, the fifth volume of the second edition of *Biographia Britannica* was dedicated to Dalrymple. Andrew Kippis, ed., *Biographia Britannica: or, The Lives of the Most Eminent Persons who have Flourished in Great-Britain and Ireland, from the Earliest Ages, to the Present Times*, 5 vols. (London, 1778-93), V.
[190] Ramsay to Graham, 11 October 1803, in *Letters of John Ramsay of Ochtertyre*, p.102.
[191] Karen O'Brien, 'The History Market', in *Books and Their Readers in Eighteenth Century England*, pp.105-33; Towsey, *Reading History*, pp.1-10.
[192] Gibbon had earned more than £9,000 by the publication of the final volume of his history. Towsey, *Reading History*, pp.4-5. On Gibbon as a historian and thinker, the pre-eminent study remains J.G.A. Pocock's magnum opus, *Barbarism and Religion*, 6 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999-2015). See also Karen O'Brien and Brian Young, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Edward Gibbon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Whatmore, *End of Enlightenment*, pp.135-60. On the reception of Gibbon's *History*, see David J. Gary, 'Reading Roman History to Understand the French Revolution: Rufus King's Commonplacing of Edward Gibbon, 1799-1803', *Library & Information History*, 30.4 (2014), pp.233-53; Towsey, *Reading History*, pp.77-88, 94-96. On Gibbon's competitors in the writing of Roman history, see O'Brien, 'The History Market', pp.121-23; Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion*, III, pp.372-416; Richard B. Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment: the Moderate Literati of Edinburgh*, rev. ed. (1985; Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), pp.199-206.

one of Gibbon's 'master narratives', in John Pocock's terms, was that the corruption of civic and military virtue had led ultimately to the destruction of the Roman Empire.[193] Gibbon's work appeared in print at a propitious time, at the height of imperial anxiety and crisis, as the loss of the American colonies seemed to herald the wider doom of the British Empire.[194] As Ramsay's reading suggests, such fears were no less pertinent some three decades later. Similar worries at the spread of luxury and the resultant corruption of civic virtue obsessed readers and thinkers at the end of the eighteenth century, worried that such forces threatened the nation's military capabilities.[195] As another Leighton Library member, Anne Grant, observed: 'When a wealthy people cease to be warlike, they are the helpless prey of every hungry enemy that chooses to attack them.'[196] In this situation, despite the fears of a rapidly expanding fiscal-military state propelled by the finance and capital of the 'mercantile system', high taxation could actually be of benefit by acting as a 'salutary drain' on the finances of the richest.[197] Although the French could prove formidable foes, for Grant the ultimate enemy lay closer to home: 'the French we may hope to repel, if not overcome; but luxury will assuredly overcome us.'[198]

Gibbon's own reading of the causes that lay behind imperial decline were far more complex than this. The corruption of virtue was *a* factor in the decline of the Roman Empire, but it was

[193] For this and an overview of the multitude of narrative strands in Gibbon's *History*, see J.G.A. Pocock, 'An Overview of *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*', in *Cambridge Companion to Edward Gibbon*, pp.20-40. See also Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion*, III, pp.419-47.
[194] Kathleen Wilson, *The Sense of the People: Politics, Culture and Imperialism in England, 1715-1785* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp.435-36; Macleod, *War of Ideas*, pp.13, 41-44.
[195] J.G.A. Pocock, 'Gibbon's *Decline and Fall* and the World View of the Late Enlightenment', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 10.3 (1977), p.292; Sher, *Church and University*, p.202.
[196] Anne Grant to Mrs Brown, 23 August 1804, in *Memoir and Correspondence of Mrs. Grant of Laggan*, ed. J.P. Grant, 3 vols. (London, 1844), I, p.46.
[197] 'He who thinks wine too dear may drink less; and he who grudges the carriage-tax may ride on horseback, or stay at home.' Grant to Brown, 23 August 1804, in *Memoir and Correspondence of Mrs. Grant of Laggan*, I, p.46. For a definition of the 'mercantile system', and the fears surrounding it, see Whatmore, *End of Enlightenment*, pp.xxi-xxix.
[198] Grant to Brown, 23 August 1804, in *Memoir and Correspondence of Mrs. Grant of Laggan*, I, p.46.

not *the* factor; its doom lay primarily in despotism, not luxury.[199] To Gibbon, and thinkers such as Daniel Defoe, Montesquieu, David Hume, and Adam Smith, modern virtue had outgrown and thus fundamentally differed from that found in the ancient world.[200] Moreover, eighteenth-century Europe was not threatened by the moral corruption of its virtue. As it was, a Europe composed of small, diverse states was best placed to ensure a virtuous and moderate balance in matters civil, military, and economic and thereby maintain its liberty.[201] As Pocock once noted: 'One wishes that he [Gibbon] had lived to comment upon Napoleon, in whom he might have seen a Severus or a Philip the Arab.'[202] Whether Gibbon may have viewed Napoleon as a figure of stability amidst a turbulent period is another matter. Yet while he may not have lived to see such times, his readers certainly did. Moreover, as Richard Whatmore has recently discussed, by the end of his life, Gibbon was acutely aware of the threats a militant revolutionary France posed to Europe's smaller states.[203] Gibbon's work thus retained a direct relevance into the 1800s and the 1810s. Such a relevance is marked out in the works continued borrowing at subscription libraries. *Decline and Fall* was borrowed on 301 occasions between 1800 and 1836 across the subscription libraries in the Books and Borrowing database.[204] At Bristol, Gibbon's *History* was borrowed on twenty-four occasions in 1812. Indeed, excluding periodicals, *Decline and Fall* was the third most popularly borrowed work overall amongst all the library's subscribers, behind only Anna Seward's *Letters* (1811) and James Bruce's *Travels*

[199] Pocock, 'World View of the Late Enlightenment', pp.293-95; J.G.A. Pocock, 'Gibbon and the Shepherds: The Stages of Society in the *Decline and Fall*', *History of European Ideas*, 2.3 (1981), p.196; Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion*, III, pp.307-24, 419-47.
[200] Pocock, 'World View of the Late Enlightenment', p.292.
[201] Pocock, 'World View of the Late Enlightenment', pp.294-95; Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion*, III, pp.313-14.
[202] Pocock, 'Gibbon and the Shepherds', p.196.
[203] Whatmore, *End of Enlightenment*, pp.146-60.
[204] The subscription libraries in the Books and Borrowing database consist of the Dumfries Presbytery Library, the Leighton Library, Orkney Library, Westerkirk, and the Wigtown Subscription Library. In total, 48,961 borrowings were made from these libraries between 1800 and 1836. These figures are taken from an advanced search of the Books and Borrowing database for the borrowings of Gibbon's *Decline and Fall* between 1800 and 1836 from the five subscription libraries.

to Discover the Source of the Nile (1790).[205] The consistent popularity of Gibbon's work, even two decades after the publication of its final volume, led a member, in late November 1817, to request that the library purchase another copy of it, this time in octavo, a request that was approved at the next committee meeting on 2 December 1817.[206]

For John Ramsay, Gibbon's *History,* whilst he was not always complimentary of it – 'though written in a fascinating style, [it] contains a great deal of sugared poison nicely enamelled' – formed an important element of his reading of historical literature.[207] Ramsay was almost certainly rereading Gibbon when, between April and September 1800, he consecutively borrowed all six volumes of *Decline and Fall*.[208] This kind of reading enabled readers to better understand both the local and national context in which they were situated, a grounding that shaped their political thoughts and actions; whether merely commenting on contemporary events, or actively participating in them. The final chapter of this thesis amalgamates together the different elements of political reading that have been hitherto examined - the individual reader, the reading community, reading in a period of crisis, and the social politics of the subscription library - to analyse the subscription library on the eve of parliamentary reform in 1832. The resumption of raucous and mass-participatory political campaigns in the later 1820s, ranging from the abolition of the slave trade to the lifting of penal laws and the widening of the electoral franchise, produced new challenges to the ordered and polite serenity of the

[205] BCL, B7483, Borrowing register, 1811-12 and B7484, Borrowing register, 1812-13. Seward was borrowed on thirty-six occasions, Bruce on twenty-seven.
[206] BCL, B26780, Bristol Library Society, Proposal book, 2 January 1816-7 September 1830, p.30; BA, LS/M/4, Committee minute book, 1807-23, 2 December 1817. This was the 1813 edition in twelve volumes, as listed in the 1834 catalogue. *A Catalogue of the Books belonging to the Bristol Library Society: To which are Prefixed, the Rules and Regulations.* (Bristol, 1834), p.97. The library already held the two volume *Miscellaneous Works of Edward Gibbon* (1796), edited and donated to the library by his literary patron, John Baker Holroyd, 1st Earl of Sheffield. *Bristol Minute Book*, eds. Skjönsberg and Towsey, p.210.
[207] John Ramsay to Elizabeth Graham, 23 October 1806, in *Letters of John Ramsay of Ochtertyre*, p.187.
[208] Ramsay interspersed his reading of Gibbon with the borrowing of Robert Lowth's *Isaiah* (1779), the *Universal History* (1736-44), and the *Transactions of the Royal Society of Edinburgh* (1788). *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Leighton Library: Register Ledger 1, page 120 (image and text view),", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/library/leighton/registers/15/102761/image-and-text>, [accessed 13/08/24]

subscription library. Yet the discourses of these campaigns also influenced political debates and divisions that occurred within the library. In this respect, library debates reflected, and were partly shaped by, the national political debates occurring in the context around them.

Chapter Six: 'The necessity of sharing in the spirit of the age': Reform and Reading in the Subscription Library

> *Their chief defect has been an exclusive and aristocratic spirit in their conditions of membership and in the choice of works supplied. In many instances they have been rendered subservient to the wishes of one or two individuals who have desired rare, expensive, and learned works, which were unsuited to the taste of the general reader. In this respect they have become, for the most part, intellectual catacombs of learning instead of repositories of useful knowledge.*[1]
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> James William Hudson, *The History of Adult Education* (1851).

Marking the end of what has come to be termed the 'long eighteenth century', 1832 has been referred to as the defining year in the end of one epoch and the beginning of another.[2] Any explanation for why political reform occurred in 1832 must contend with the role played by 'public opinion', however it is defined, upon political change.[3] This is not just limited to its

[1] J.W. Hudson, *The History of Adult Education, in which is Comprised a Full and Complete History of the Mechanics' and Literary Institutions, Athenæums, Philosophical, Mental and Christian Improvement Societies, Literary Unions, Schools of Design, etc., of Great Britain, Ireland, America, etc. etc.* (London, 1851), pp.195-96, quoted in W.R. Aitken, *A History of the Public Library Movement in Scotland to 1955* (Glasgow: Scottish Library Association, 1971), p.26.

[2] For the conceptualisation of the 'long eighteenth century', see J.C.D. Clark, *English Society, 1660-1832: Religion, Ideology, and Politics During the Ancien Regime*, rev. ed. (1985; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp.16-19. The first edition of *English Society* was published in 1985. All subsequent citations are from the second edition published in 2000. See also J.C.D. Clark, *The Language of Liberty 1660-1832: Political Discourse and Social Dynamics in the Anglo-American World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

[3] This is not to minimise the significance of the events which preceded the eventual passage of reform, most notably the collapse of the Duke of Wellington's administration in 1830, the passing of Catholic Emancipation in 1829, the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts in 1828, or the death of Lord Liverpool in 1827. On the demise of the Wellington administration in 1830, see Peter Jupp, *British Politics on the Eve of Reform: The Duke of Wellington's Administration, 1828-30* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), pp.3-8; William Hay, *The Whig Revival, 1808-1830* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp.160-63; Rory Muir, *Wellington: Waterloo and the Fortunes of Peace, 1814-1852* (London: Yale University Press, 2015), pp.383-400. In the view of John Cannon, 'Catholic emancipation was the battering ram that broke down the old unreformed system'. John Cannon, *Parliamentary Reform, 1640-1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), p.191. Michael Brock

influence upon the immediate passage of the Reform Act, the growth of political unions from 1830, popular disorder after the failure of the first Reform bill in October 1831 and the threat of similar action during the 'days of May' 1832, but on the wider expansion of the political nation, which quickened in the decades preceding 1832.[4] Previous popular campaigns, even when unsuccessful and not explicitly political, contributed to this widening politicisation.[5] Participation in the administrative elements of the subscription library had the same effect, introducing individuals to the mundane elements of practical politics involving committees, motions, regulations and amendments, as well as political theatre's dramatic elements, the public speech, open ballot or electioneering.

concurs, 'after emancipation Reform was unavoidable'. Michael Brock, *The Great Reform Act* (London: Hutchinson, 1973), p.65. See also, Clark, *English Society*, p.33. On splits within the Tory party that existed before, but publicly surfaced after Liverpool's death, see Stephen M. Lee, *George Canning and Liberal Toryism, 1801-1827* (London: Royal Historical Society, 2008), pp.156-62.

[4] Frank O'Gorman, *Voters, Patrons, and Parties: The Unreformed Electoral System of Hanoverian England, 1743-1832* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), pp.225-316; Nancy D. LoPatin, *Political Unions, Popular Politics and the Great Reform Act of 1832* (Basingstoke: St. Martin's Press, 1999), pp.5-13; Edward Royle, *Revolutionary Britannia? : Reflections on the Threat of Revolution in Britain, 1789-1848* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p.73; Gordon Pentland, *Radicalism, Reform and National Identity in Scotland, 1820-1833* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2008), pp.120-21. Linda Colley links a growing British identity and mass involvement in the Napoleonic War effort with a widening of political rights and participation. Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837*, rev. ed. (London: Yale University Press, 2008), p.370.

[5] These included the revival of the campaign for electoral reform in 1779, 1790, 1809, 1816 and 1822, but also for the abolition of slavery after 1823. Cannon, *Parliamentary Reform*, *passim*; O'Gorman, *Voters, Patrons, and Parties*, pp.365-67; H.T. Dickinson, *The Politics of the People in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995), pp.251-54; Joanna Innes and Arthur Burns, 'Introduction', in *Rethinking the Age of Reform: Britain 1780-1850*, eds. Arthur Burns and Joanna Innes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp.40-44; Colley, *Britons*, pp.350-60; Pentland, *Radicalism, Reform and National Identity*, pp.27-31. There was also the campaign for Catholic Emancipation. G.I.T. Machin, *The Catholic Question in English Politics, 1820-30* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1964); Fergus O'Ferrall, *Catholic Emancipation: Daniel O'Connell and the Birth of Irish Democracy* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1985); Wendy Hinde, *Catholic Emancipation: A Shake to Men's Minds* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992); Jennifer Ridden, 'Irish Reform Between the 1798 Rebellion and the Great Famine', in *Rethinking the Age of Reform*, pp.274-92. Petitioning formed a major aspect of all these campaigns, and had an important politicising effect in of itself, providing for the right to meet, politically, to discuss petitions. Robert Poole, *Peterloo: The English Uprising* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), pp.94-95; Henry J. Miller, *A Nation of Petitioners: Petitions and Petitioning in the United Kingdom, 1780-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023). In Scotland, popular campaigns were led to reform royal burghs and abolish the ecclesiastical law of patronage and other restrictions upon the Church of Scotland. Valerie Honeyman, '"That ye may judge for yourselves": The Contribution of Scottish Presbyterianism Towards the Emergence of Political Awareness Amongst Ordinary People in Scotland Between 1746 and 1792', unpublished PhD thesis (University of Stirling, 2012); Pentland, *Radicalism, Reform and National Identity*, pp.14-17, 63-64.

Just as the period since 1760 had seen a widening of what could be constituted political action, definitions of what 'Reform' could mean, the hopes and dreams of its adherents, could be as broad. Historians have not been slow to recognise this facet of political action in the decades leading up to 1832.[6] A recognition of this broad definition of 'Reform' partly explains the actions of those who joined together under its banner but who had little to gain, electorally, from what was a fairly conservative alteration of the political system.[7] These individuals, whether they met in public meetings on the outskirts of Dunblane in the 1810s, in St Peter's Fields in Manchester in 1819, or on Bristol's streets in October 1831, associated 'Reform' with not only an extension of political and legal rights but with a wider social and economic alleviation of their hardship.[8] Even those who stood to benefit from electoral reform saw it as

[6] See variously, John A. Phillips, *The Great Reform Bill in the Boroughs: English Electoral Behaviour, 1818-41* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), pp.15-61; Dickinson, *Politics of the People*, pp.226-31; Philip Harling, *The Waning of 'Old Corruption': The Politics of Economical Reform in Britain, 1779-1846* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996); Innes and Burns, 'Introduction', in *Rethinking the Age of Reform*, pp.2-3, 23-25, 32-33; Joanna Innes, '"Reform" in English Public Life: the Fortunes of a Word', in *Rethinking the Age of Reform*, pp.71-97; Malcolm Chase, *Chartism: A New History.* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), pp.7-9, 19-22; Gregory Claeys, *The French Revolution Debate in Britain: The Origins of Modern Politics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp.163-64; Pentland, *Radicalism, Reform and National Identity*, pp.7-48; Mark Philp, 'The Fragmented Ideology of Reform', in *Reforming Ideas in Britain: Politics and Language in the Shadow of the French Revolution, 1789-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp.11-39; Malcolm Chase, *1820: Disorder and Stability in the United Kingdom* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), pp.17-18, 205; Steve Poole and Nicolas Rogers, *Bristol from Below: Law, Authority and Protest in a Georgian City* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2017), pp.336-37; Ian Cawood and Tom Crook, 'Introduction: Corruption and the Reform of Public Life in Modern Britain', in *The Many Lives of Corruption: The Reform of Public Life in Modern Britain c.1750-1950* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2022), pp.15-27.

[7] Brock, *Great Reform Act*, pp.138-39; Pentland, *Radicalism, Reform and National Identity*, pp.201-06; Philip Salmon, 'IX. The English Reform Legislation, 1831-32', *HoP*, <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1820-1832/survey/ix-english-reform-legislation#footnoteref3_qi3cbzt>, [accessed 26/03/24]. Although the scope of the initial Reform Bill shocked contemporaries, the reaction of radicals to Grey's proposals and the subsequent bill was mixed. Brock, *Great Reform Act*, pp.148-52, 161-64; Cannon, *Parliamentary Reform*, pp.213-18; Ian Newbould, *Whiggery and Reform, 1830-41: The Politics of Government* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1990), pp.63-67. Disappointment over the degree of change enacted by the Reform Bill was also a major impetus for the Chartist movement. Chase, *Chartism*, pp.2-5.

[8] Stirling Council Archives, PD16/4/2, Diary of Dr James Lucas, pp.9, 166-68 and *Scots Magazine*, 1 August 1814, both cited in Michael Penman, 'The Declaration of Arbroath: Georgian Editions, Libraries and Readers, and Scotland's "Radical War" of 1820', *The Scottish Historical Review*, 101.3 (2022), p.494. See also [*A Notice Requesting the People of Dunblane to Boycott a Political Meeting*], 5.5184, National Library of Scotland. This notice was signed by James Stirling of Keir (1766-1831), William Stirling of Kippendavie (b. 1787), Captain James Stirling (b. 1789), and the three ministers of Dunblane, the Anti-Burgher John Wallace, the Burgher James Anderson and the minister of the Kirk, John Grierson. The National Library of Scotland lists the notice as circa 1815, however it likely was not printed until after 1818 when Grierson was ordained as the minister of Dunblane.

a route to wider social or economic alteration.[9] It was this promise of the potential of change that seemed widespread by the end of the 1820s that led the Rev. Joseph Porter (d. 1833) to urge his fellow library members of the 'necessity of sharing in the spirit of the age' and supporting the motion of reform proposed at an adjourned general meeting of the Bristol Library Society held on 5 May 1828.[10] Porter's urgings were ultimately in vain, with the reform motion derailed by a wrecking amendment which called for the retention of the existing rules, the rejection of all new rules and the immediate adjournment of the meeting passed by a majority of three votes.[11] The library meeting in May 1828 marked the culmination of years of effort, involving debate, procedure and written reports by those in favour of change. In an unprecedented display of open dissent, the meeting descended into rancour, accusations were hurled, and speakers shouted down. The events were reported in the local newspaper press and roundly condemned. Open disunity of this kind was a rare occurrence in subscription library management. In the words of the *Bristol Mercury*, 'we have to express our regret at proceedings so incompatible with what we should expect from a meeting of literary gentlemen'.[12]

Porter's invocation of the 'spirit of the age' mirrors the use of the same term by William Hazlitt in the title of his set of biographical essays on those who epitomised the 'pervasive cultural temper' of his time.[13] Many of these essays had originally appeared in various periodicals but they were collectively published together in 1825 as *The Spirit of the Age*.[14] Hazlitt was not the first writer to seek to define this 'spirit', with others, such as David Hume, Johann Gottfried

[9] Thomas Attwood (1783-1856), the founder of the Birmingham Political Reform, supported electoral reform because he believed that it would introduce a new class of political representatives to Westminster that were reflective of the concerns of commercial and middling society. LoPatin, *Political Unions*, pp.19-22. Some supporters in Bristol saw it as an essential precondition to the abolition of slavery. Terry Jenkins, 'Bristol: 1820-32', *HoP*, <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1820-1832/constituencies/bristol>, [accessed 09/01/24].
[10] 'Bristol Library Society', *Bristol Mercury*, 13 May 1828.
[11] 'Bristol Library', *Bristol Mirror*, 10 May 1828.
[12] 'Bristol Library', *Bristol Mercury*, 13 May 1828.
[13] Patrick Story, 'Hazlitt's Definition of the Spirit of the Age', *The Wordsworth Circle*, 6.2 (1975), p.97.
[14] [William Hazlitt], *The Spirit of the Age: or Contemporary Portraits.* (London, 1825).

Herder, Gilbert Wakefield, John Keats and Percy Shelley, using it or similar language in the preceding half a century to refer to either the 'times' or those 'spirits' or 'genius' that epitomised it.[15] Hazlitt's own understanding of the 'spirit' ('the progress of intellectual refinement, warring with our natural infirmities'), which he had defined in a separate essay two years earlier, described his belief in a 'dualistic struggle' between progressive historical change and the regressive aspects or, in Hazlitt's words, 'natural infirmities' of human nature, the hope of reform meeting crushing reality in a manner in which Bristol Library members present at the meeting in May 1828 would have seen firsthand.[16] In this respect, Hazlitt could well be viewed as a writer of the 'end of enlightenment' as conceptualised by Richard Whatmore, especially in regard to his pessimistic reading of human nature and its capacity for reform and progress.[17] Hazlitt's essay on John Scott, 1st Earl of Eldon, provides an impressive barrage against those arraigned at the forces of change. To Hazlitt, Eldon is the 'thorough-bred Tory' whose chief concern remains the retention of 'prerogative and power, and against every proposal for the advancement of freedom' whether this was legal reform, Catholic Emancipation or the abolition of the slave trade.[18] Described as an ox, Eldon was 'fixed and immoveable', motivated by little more than malice and greed.[19] In calling for his fellow library members to recognise 'the necessity of sharing in the spirit of the age', Joseph Porter may have been referring to Hazlitt's work, but he was certainly referring to the spirit in which he and others wrote, the sense that change was everywhere and possible, but also susceptible to defeat in a warring

[15] Story, 'Hazlitt's Definition', pp.97-100.
[16] William Hazlitt, 'On the Pleasure of Hating' (1823), in *The Selected Writings of William Hazlitt: Volume 8, The Plain Speaker*, ed. Duncan Wu (London: Routledge, 1999), p.119; Story, 'Hazlitt's Definition', pp.99-100; Duncan Wu, *William Hazlitt: The First Modern Man* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp.360-61.
[17] Richard Whatmore, *The End of Enlightenment: Empire, Commerce, Crisis* (Padstow: Allen Lane, 2023), pp.xxix-xxxii, 310-13. In later life, Catharine Macaulay also became deeply pessimistic about whether a public tainted by luxury and vice could ever successfully morally redeem itself. Similarly, Mary Wollstonecraft believed that a population needed to be morally reformed before it could be politically reformed. Whatmore, *End of Enlightenment*, pp.106-08, 119-33, 278-87.
[18] [William Hazlitt], *The Spirit of the Age: or Contemporary Portraits.*, rev. ed. (1825; Menston: Scolar Press, 1971), p.355.
[19] 'The King's hand is velvet to the touch – the Woolsack is a seat of honour and profit!' [Hazlitt], *Spirit of the Age*, p.356.

intellectual climate.[20] He, like Hazlitt, believed that whether at a national or a local library level, this opposition to reform was connected, 'observing with great felicity, that there was an ELDONIAN party out of the House of Lords as well as in it'.[21] Reading, readers, and print lay at the centre of this debate and perceived struggle. In Hazlitt's view, at stake was 'intellectual refinement' and the progress of reason buffeted between the two opposing political poles of William Gifford's *Quarterly Review* and Francis Jeffrey's *Edinburgh Review*.[22] To library reformers, change of its proceedings were necessary to rescue it from the 'languid' state it found itself in and thereby increase its utility to the city of Bristol.[23] Despite great differences in scale, in the minds of library members, there was little distinction to be drawn between reform occurring at a national level and at a local level.

Political events, whether national or local, reflected onto the manner in which members engaged with the subscription library in both their borrowing of books from it and their participation in its associational, and also political, elements. This, in another manner, was political reading. The same was true in the reverse: reading and participation in the subscription library also reflected back onto the manner in which members read and engaged with political events. Abolitionist texts at the Leighton Library were borrowed in response to contextual political events but also affected how readers responded to these events. The same process occurred in Bristol when library members read the causes, circumstances, and significance of the riots in 1831 within the context of the campaign for parliamentary reform. A few years

[20] Although *Spirit of the Age* seems not to have been present in the Bristol Library, the library did have extensive runs of both the *London Magazine* and the *New Monthly Magazine* where many of Hazlitt's portraits were originally published. BCL, B26785, Bristol Library Society, Library MSS, maps, periodicals acquisitions and donations, pp.48, 50. Porter was a regular reader of the library's periodicals, borrowing the *Edinburgh Review*, the *Quarterly Review* and the *British Critic* on multiple occasions during the 1820s. For example, see BCL, Bristol Library Society, Borrowing registers, B7502, fol. 50, September 1827-June 1828, pp.27, 64, 132, 138, 156; B7503, fol. 51, June 1828-April 1829, pp.10, 18, 76, 82, 94, 108, 145, 150; B7504, fol. 52, April 1829-January 1830, pp.12, 67, 107, 126, 146, 160, 175; B7505, fol. 53, January 1830-November 1830, p.11 and *passim*.

[21] 'Bristol Library Society', *Bristol Mercury*, 13 May 1828. Emphasis in original.

[22] Story, 'Hazlitt's Definition', p.105.

[23] 'Bristol Library', *Bristol Mirror*, 10 May 1828.

earlier, the reading and methods of these same members upon the question of library reform occurred within and was shaped by the context of the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts. The politics in Britain at the end of the 1820s occurred in very different contexts from those of the decade before. Lodestones such as electoral or constitutional reform, whilst never vanishing from the political debate earlier in the decade, now dominated political discourse. Moreover, popular political participation increasingly formed a significant aspect of these campaigns, demonstrating a bedrock of support to which political actors could make reference.[24] Recognising this context is key not only for understanding how and why political change occurred between 1828 and 1832, but also for understanding the manner in which this permeated into the ordinary lives of individuals, as its imposition upon the debates of the Bristol Library Society demonstrates.

I

Political single issues did not only relate to constitutional change, with a resurrected campaign for the abolition of slavery from 1823 also proving politically and discursively dominant. Of course, these debates were significant in Bristol, where the abolition of slavery was treated not only as a moral question but also one of drastic economic significance for a large section of Bristol's political class.[25] Those connected to the Leighton Library also stood to be affected by abolition, not least the various branches of the Stirling family, traditionally considered to be amongst the collection of families which made up Glasgow's 'sugar aristocracy' of slaveowners and West India traders.[26] Although rarely library borrowers, the Stirlings were important financial supporters of the Leighton Library from the 1730s onwards and were

[24] Miller, *Nation of Petitioners*, pp.229-52.
[25] This question dominated the debates of the 1826 election in the city. Phillips, *Great Reform Bill*, pp.90-91; Terry Jenkins, 'Bristol: 1820-32', *HoP*.
[26] Stephen Mullen, *The Glasgow Sugar Aristocracy: Scotland and Caribbean Slavery, 1775-1838* (London: University of London Press, 2022), p.54. On the Stirlings exclusively, see William Fraser, ed., *The Stirlings of Keir, and their Family Papers* (Edinburgh, 1858).

regularly loaned the Leighton's cash reserves, on which they paid interest.[27] Across six decades of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and from interest accrued on loans provided over a period of twenty-eight years, the Leighton received over £218 from various members of the Stirling family.[28]

Despite the Stirlings' local prominence, abolitionist sentiment did make itself known in Dunblane and various communities in Perthshire and Stirlingshire. Religious communities in Scotland were prime movers in the revival of the popular campaign for the abolition of slavery from 1823, whether by facilitating debates on abolition at the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, or by petitioning Parliament as a congregation.[29] Secessionist congregations were

[27] These loans were to the value of either £100 or £200. Some Stirlings were library members. Both John Stirling of Keir and Cawder (1704-57) and Patrick Stirling of Kippendavie (1704-45) matriculated at the library on 27 December 1734, paying five shillings (three pounds in pound Scots) and one pound and ten shillings respectively. USA, Leighton MS 25, Leighton Library, Leighton Library matriculation book, 31 October 1734-1814 [hereafter Leighton MS 25, Matriculation book]. In the early nineteenth century, the library was subscribed to by Catherine Georgina Stirling, the wife of Patrick Stirling of Kippendavie and Kippenross (1782-1816), and her son John Stirling of Kippendavie and Kippenross (1811-82), the latter making seven borrowings from the library in the years 1823 and 1830. *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Advanced search for 'Borrower: John Stirling ',", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/search/p-1/0/0/advanced/brids|29613>, [accessed 21/03/24]. Catherine Georgina Stirling was signed into the matriculation book as 'Mrs Patrick Stirling', paying one pound and ten shillings for a subscription of two years. 'Mrs Patrick Stirling' was also signed onto page 233 of the main borrowing ledger by the librarian on 4 November 1810, although no borrowings were ever recorded. Leighton MS 25, Matriculation book; *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Leighton Library: Register Ledger 1, page 233 (image and text view),", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/library/leighton/registers/15/103097/image-and-text>, [accessed 21/03/24]. At the time of his death, John Stirling's grandfather, and Catherine's father-in-law, John Stirling of Kippendavie and Kippenross (1742-1816) had a fortune of over £146,000. Mullen, *Glasgow Sugar Aristocracy*, p.312. Catherine's father, John Wedderburn (1743-1820), owned numerous plantation estates in Jamaica. Her mother, Mary Bedward (1764-1835), was also descended from a slave-owning family and passed on her family's estate, along with 344 enslaved individuals, to Catherine after her death. In the 1840s, her son, John Stirling, used the family's wealth to invest in the expansion of the railways in Perthshire and central Scotland. Tara Leishman, 'Legacies of Transatlantic Slavery in Stirlingshire and Perthshire', *History Scotland*, 22.2 (March/April 2022), pp.30-35.

[28] Between 1746 and 1747, £200 was loaned to 'Mr Stirling of Keir', possibly James Stirling (1679-1749), who paid ten pounds in interest. Between 1754 and 1758 the same amount was loaned to Sir William Stirling of Ardoch (1729-99), who paid a total of thirty-seven pounds, four shillings, and four pence in interest. Between 1774 and 1789, £100 was loaned to 'Mr Stirling of Keir', probably Archibald Stirling (1710-83), who paid at least a total of ninety-three pounds and fifteen shillings in interest. Between 1809 and 1817, £100 was loaned to James Stirling of Keir and Cawder, who paid thirty-eight pounds and seventeen shillings in interest. See respectively, USA, Leighton MS 16, Leighton Library, Minutes of the meetings of the trustees, 31 October 1734-March 1822, 6 September 1748, 27 October 1757, 27 October 1766, 13 October 1774, 1 October 1776, 27 October 1779, 31 October 1780, 29 October 1782, 12 October 1784, 21 November 1786, 7 October 1788, 1 December 1789, 4 December 1810, 2 January 1812, 2 May 1815, 19 August 1817.

[29] Iain Whyte, *Scotland and the Abolition of Black Slavery, 1756-1838* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), pp.184-90. Pentland, *Radicalism, Reform and National Identity*, pp.28-29.

particularly active in this regard, with a third of them estimated to have submitted petitions to both houses of Parliament between September 1830 and April 1831.[30] Dunblane's two secession churches were no different in this regard, with both the anti-Burgher and Burgher congregations petitioning the House of Lords, respectively in November and December 1830.[31] The form and language of these grassroot efforts were partly shaped by an associational network of abolition societies, the largest of which was in London, but which in Scotland included societies in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen, Perth and Paisley.[32] Abolitionists differed in their opinion regarding how quickly slavery should be abolished. At a well-attended and well-publicised meeting of the Edinburgh Society for the Promotion of the Abolition of Negro Slavery, held in Edinburgh's Assembly Rooms on 8 October 1830, the literary critic and dean of the Faculty of Advocates, Francis Jeffrey, proposed a motion calling for abolition at 'the earliest possible opportunity', a pace of action far too slow for the Rev. Andrew Mitchell Thomson, the leader of the evangelical party in the Church of Scotland, who argued for the insertion of the word 'immediately' into the motion.[33] A successive meeting held on 19 October unanimously adopted Thomson's amended motion and pointedly renamed the Society as The Edinburgh Society for the Abolition of Negro Slavery, in demonstration of its new 'immediatist' position.[34] Debates such as these influenced the language adopted by petitioners,

[30] Whyte, *Scotland and the Abolition of Black Slavery*, pp.202-03. See also, Miller, *Nation of Petitioners*, pp.145-47. Dissenting chapels in Bristol also participated in this round of petitioning to Parliament. Jenkins, 'Bristol: 1820-32', *HoP*.
[31] *Journals of the House of Lords*, 63 (26 November 1830), p.133; *Journals of the House of Lords*, 63 (16 December 1830), p.177.
[32] Whyte, *Scotland and the Abolition of Black Slavery*, pp.87-91.
[33] *Edinburgh Advertiser*, 12 October 1830, quoted in Whyte, *Scotland and the Abolition of Black Slavery*, p.190, see also pp.190-97. Henry Cockburn reported that Thomson's opposition to the original motion 'produced an unexpected and awkward discussion' which caused the city's Lord Provost, who had been chairing the meeting, to walk off in disgust. Henry Cockburn, *Memorials of His Time*, rev. ed. (1856; Edinburgh: T.N. Foulis, 1910), pp.436-37. For Thomson, see Stewart J. Brown, 'Thomson, Andrew Mitchell (1779-1831)', *ODNB* (September 2004).
[34] Whyte, *Scotland and the Abolition of Black Slavery*, p.197.

especially those from congregations which were often bolder in their demands than those from civic bodies, and they also influenced the reading habits of subscription library members.[35]

Three months after this Edinburgh meeting, on 17 January 1831, the Rev. James Anderson, Burgher minister of Dunblane and leader of one of the congregations which had petitioned the House of Lords almost exactly a month earlier, borrowed William Dickson's *Letters on Slavery* (1789) from the Leighton Library.[36] Written some five decades earlier by the Dumfriesshire-born Dickson, *Letters* was a forceful condemnation of slavery in principle and practice, which offered a detailed representation of the treatment of enslaved individuals on Caribbean plantations.[37] Like most campaigners in 1789, Dickson argued for the abolition of the slave trade, rather than the immediate abolition of slavery itself, believing that this would lead to an improvement in the condition of enslaved people in the West Indies.[38] By 1831, Dickson's *Letters* were hardly a recent example of abolitionist literature and it is likely that the recurrence of abolitionist debates, both locally and nationally, influenced Anderson to seek the text out from his local subscription library.

The Leighton's collection of abolitionist texts was not large, with only James Ramsay's *Essay on the Treatment and Conversion of African Slaves in the British Sugar Colonies* (1784) joining Dickson's work on the library's shelves.[39] Nor were these texts regularly borrowed, being taken

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[35] Whyte, *Scotland and the Abolition of Black Slavery*, pp.202-04.
[36] *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Leighton Library: Register Ledger 1, page 342 (image and text view),", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/library/leighton/registers/15/103424/image-and-text>, [accessed 22/03/24].
[37] Whyte, *Scotland and the Abolition of Black Slavery*, p.138; H.T. Dickinson, 'Dickson, William (bap. 1751, d. 1823)', *ODNB* (October 2016).
[38] Dickinson, 'Dickson, William' *ODNB*.
[39] Nevertheless, writing critical of the slave trade and slavery could be found, and read, in other works in the library. For example, Adam Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, 3rd ed. (London, 1768), pp.435-52; Francis Hutcheson, *A System of Moral Philosophy*, 3 vols. (Glasgow, 1755), III, p.204, cited in Whyte, *Scotland and the Abolition of Black Slavery*, p.51; William Paley, *The Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy.*, 8th ed., 2 vols. (London, 1791), I, pp.236-40; William Robertson, *The History of America*., 2 vols. (London, 1777), I, pp.225-26; Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations.*, 2 vols. (London, 1776), I, pp.78-107. See also Roger Anstey, *The Atlantic Slave Trade and British Abolition, 1760-1810* (London: Macmillan, 1975), pp.94-125. However, as C. Duncan Rice has argued, these intellectual

out of the library in only ten instances between 1788 and 1831.[40] Nevertheless, each of these occasions coincided with the abolition of the slave trade or slavery featuring prominently in a national political context, for example because of debates on legislation or in petitions delivered to Parliament. Written during an earlier iteration of the anti-slavery movement, Ramsay's *Essay*, like Dickson's, reviewed the maltreatment of enslaved individuals in British colonies but was generally cool on the prospect of the immediate abolition of slavery, instead preferring a programme of education, Christianisation and reform in the management practices of planters to improve the situation of enslaved people.[41] No definitive record survives of when Ramsay's *Essay* was ordered by the Leighton's trustees, but it seems likely to have been just as the issue was discussed in the House of Commons. For example, in May 1787 a motion was proposed in the Commons by William Pitt the Younger that the next session of Parliament consider the circumstances of the slave trade, a first step, its supporters hoped, in its suppression and ultimate abolition.[42] Indeed, the work was borrowed on three instances during the year in which Pitt's motion was debated and passed by both the Commons and the Lords.[43] The first occasion, on 3 March 1788, by John Ramsay of Ochtertyre, occurred before the opening of the parliamentary debate in May, yet the second instance, on 21 June, by Alexander Blackadder of Blair Drummond, came in the midst of political drama, as a motion to ameliorate the conditions on slave ships jumped back and forth between the Commons and the Lords, only to be passed when Pitt made it clear that defeat would lead to the dissolution of his

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arguments did not necessarily equate to action. C. Duncan Rice, 'Archibald Dalzel, the Scottish Intelligentsia, and the Problem of Slavery', *The Scottish Historical Review*, 62.174 (October 1983), pp.121-36.

[40] *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Advanced search for 'Book Holding: An essay on the treatment and conversion of African slaves in the British sugar colonies.',", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/search/p-1/0/0/advanced/bhids|11649>, [accessed 22/03/24]; *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Advanced search for 'Book Holding: Letters on Slavery.',", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/search/p-1/0/0/advanced/bhids|17312>, [accessed 22/03/24].

[41] J. Watt, 'Ramsay, James (1733-1789)', *ODNB* (January 2008).

[42] John Ehrman, *The Younger Pitt. Volume One: The Years of Acclaim* (1969; repr., London: Constable, 1984), p.392.

[43] Ehrman, *Years of Acclaim*, pp.393-95; Anstey, *Atlantic Slave Trade*, pp.267-70.

government.[44] As neighbours and acquaintances, Ramsay and Blackadder may have discussed these parliamentary proceedings as well as their shared reading of James Ramsay's *Essay*.[45] The next period in which the text was in circulation came in May 1790, shortly after a motion designed to limit the importation of enslaved people into the West Indies had been defeated in the Commons on 19 April.[46] Ramsay's *Essay* was now joined in circulation amongst the Leighton borrowers by Dickson's *Letters on Slavery*, published in 1789. Indeed, the two texts were read by and exchanged between the same readers. On 25 April, John Wright of Torbrex borrowed Dickson's *Letters*, whilst on 8 May, Ramsay's *Essay* was borrowed by David Doig (1718/19-1800), the writer and rector of Stirling Grammar School.[47] As in the case of John Ramsay and Alexander Blackadder, Wright and Doig were known to each other, for the borrowing register records that the two met of their own accord outside the library to swap their books, before each returned the other's book on 15 May.[48] The literature itself played a role in encouraging this method of consecutive reading, with Dickson making repeated reference to

[44] *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Leighton Library: Register Ledger 1, page 16 (image and text view),", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/library/leighton/registers/15/102449/image-and-text>, [accessed 22/03/24]; *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Leighton Library: Register Ledger 1, page 17 (image and text view),", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/library/leighton/registers/15/102452/image-and-text>, [accessed 22/03/24]; Ehrman, *Years of Acclaim*, p.394. Ramsay's *Essay* was borrowed for a third time in 1788 on 1 September by the Rev. John Robertson (d. 1795), the minister of Dunblane, by which time, Pitt's motion had finally been passed on 11 July. *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Leighton Library: Register Ledger 1, page 18 (image and text view),", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/library/leighton/registers/15/102455/image-and-text>, [accessed 22/03/24].

[45] *Letters of John Ramsay of Ochtertyre, 1799–1812*, ed. B.L.H. Horn (Edinburgh: Scottish Historical Society, 1966), pp.110, 162-63.

[46] Ehrman, *Years of Acclaim*, p.399.

[47] *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Leighton Library: Register Ledger 1, page 38 (image and text view),", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/library/leighton/registers/15/102515/image-and-text>, [accessed 22/03/24]; *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Leighton Library: Register Ledger 1, page 28 (image and text view),", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/library/leighton/registers/15/102485/image-and-text>, [accessed 22/03/24]. On Doig, see Gordon Goodwin, revised by Jeffrey R. Smitten, 'Doig, David (1718/19-1800)', *ODNB* (September 2004).

[48] As recorded on p.28 of ledger 1: 'Mr W: gave Dickson to Mr Doig and got from him Ramesay [sic.] which is just now returned [15 May]'. *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Leighton Library: Register Ledger 1, page 28 (image and text view),", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/library/leighton/registers/15/102485/image-and-text>, [accessed 22/03/24].

Ramsay's *Essay* throughout his work, encouraging his readers to consult it for a further account of the treatment of the enslaved.[49] Between January and March 1792, Dickson engaged in a tour of Scotland on behalf of the London Committee for the Abolition of the Slave Trade, distributing abolitionist literature and meeting ministers of the Church of Scotland and Secession churches.[50] Just as Dickson was concluding his tour of Scotland, his work was again borrowed, on 20 March 1792, from the Leighton Library, this time by the Rev. Christopher Tait, minister of Kincardine-in-Menteith.[51]

As in the case of Tait, the decision of James Anderson, in January 1831, to take out a work of abolitionist literature that was now over four decades old seems to be a response to his particular context, the meeting of the Edinburgh abolitionist society in October 1830 and the submission of his congregation's petition a month later. Reading Dickson's work with the benefit of hindsight, it would have been clear to Anderson, as it was later to Dickson himself, that the hopes of the abolitionists of the 1780s and 1790s had been misplaced: the abolition of the slave trade had resulted in no meaningful improvement in the circumstances of enslaved people in the West Indies.[52] As such, Anderson's reading may have confirmed his view that the immediate abolition of slavery was now required. This was reflected in the language of the petition signed by Anderson's congregation, which urged the House of Lords to take on the issue of abolition directly 'and to pass a Law by which the Slave Proprietors shall be compelled to emancipate their Slaves immediately, or without unnecessary Delay'.[53] Whatever its significance upon his views, Anderson's borrowing record, and the borrowing records of other

[49] For examples, see William Dickson, *Letters on Slavery* (London, 1789), pp.7, 11-14, 60.
[50] J.R. Oldfield, *Popular Politics and British Anti-Slavery: The Mobilisation of Public Opinion Against the Slave Trade, 1787-1807*., rev. ed. (London: Routledge, 1998), p.61; Whyte, *Scotland and the Abolition of Black Slavery*, pp.74-78; Dickinson, 'Dickson, William', *ODNB*.
[51] *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Leighton Library: Register Ledger 1, page 60 (image and text view),", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/library/leighton/registers/15/102581/image-and-text>, [accessed 22/03/24].
[52] Dickinson, 'Dickson, William', *ODNB*.
[53] *Journals of the House of Lords*, 63 (16 December 1830), p.177.

abolitionist texts at the Leighton Library demonstrates that readers turned to subscription libraries during times of political debate.

II

Just as the use of the subscription library impacted the manner in which individuals responded to political events, political events affected the library use and ordinary lives of library members. At no time was this clearer to users of the Bristol Library than during the three days between 29 and 31 October 1831, when Queen Square, only one street removed from the library on King Street acquired a national notoriety when it became the epicentre for rioting, looting and disorder. The Bristol Riots of 1831, in the words of one historian 'the most infamous example of [reform] disorder', have been analysed variously for their significance in the passage of parliamentary reform and crowd disturbances in this period.[54] Over three days of disorder, official buildings, including the Mansion House, the Customs House and the Bishop's Palace, were sacked and burned, private residences were destroyed and three of the city's gaols were emptied and fired.[55] The period between the introduction of the first Reform Bill to

[54] Miles Taylor, 'Empire and Parliamentary Reform: The 1832 Reform Act Revisited', in *Rethinking the Age of Reform*, pp.307-08. For an analysis of the Bristol riots in regard to the perceptions of crowds and popular disturbances in this period, see Mark Harrison, *Crowds and History: Mass Phenomena in English Towns, 1790-1835* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp.289-314; Jeremy Caple, *The Bristol Riots of 1831 and Social Reform in Britain* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1990); Poole and Rogers, *Bristol from Below*, pp.325-57; Poole, *Peterloo*, p.390; Steve Poole, '"Some Examples Should Be Made": Prosecuting Reform Bill Rioters in 1831-32', in *Political Trials in an Age of Revolutions: Britain and the North Atlantic, 1793-1848*, eds. Michael T. Davis, Emma Macleod and Gordon Pentland (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), pp.240, 243-44, 245-48, 252-53. For its analysis in the context of parliamentary reform, see W.N. Molesworth, *The History of the Reform Bill of 1832* (London, 1865), pp.282-99; Llewellyn Woodward, *The Age of Reform, 1815-70*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), p.83; Brock, *Great Reform Act*, pp.250-53; Cannon, *Parliamentary Reform*, p.227; Phillips, *Great Reform Bill*, pp.65-71; LoPatin, *Political Unions*, pp.93-97; Edward Royle, *Revolutionary Britannia? : Reflections on the Threat of Revolution in Britain, 1789-1848* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p.73. See also Phillipa Morris, 'Military Intervention in the Bristol Riots of 1831', *Army Quarterly* 127 (1997), pp.176-82.

[55] The following account of the Bristol Riots is drawn from Lant Carpenter, 'On the Bristol Riots', *Monthly Repository and Review of Theology and General Literature*, 5.60 (December 1831), pp.840-52; W.H. Somerton, *A Narrative of The Bristol Riots, on the 29th, 30th, and 31st of October, 1831* (Bristol, 1831); [John Eagles], *The Bristol Riots, Their Causes, Progress, and Consequences.* (Bristol, 1832); Susan Thomas, *The Bristol Riots* (Bristol: The Historical Association, 1974); Phillips, *Great Reform Bill*, pp.65-71; Harrison, *Crowds and History*, pp.291-301; Poole and Rogers, *Bristol from Below*, pp.331-42.

Parliament in March 1831 and the successful passage of the Reform Act in June 1832 excited a great deal of popular agitation, not all of it violent or antagonistic.[56] Centrally located in their communities, subscription libraries were frequently a close witness to such activities. In early April 1831, crowds gathered in the centre of Dunblane, and directly outside the Leighton Library, to celebrate the recent passage of the Reform Bill through its third reading in the House of Commons.[57] A large bonfire was lit and although an effigy of the Duke of Wellington was burned, the proceedings remained peaceful.

The actions of the Bristol crowd in the same year occurred in an altogether different context and were very differently motivated. Beyond the physical devastation caused, the impacts of the riots upon the daily lives of Bristol's citizens are visible in the Bristol Library's borrowing register.[58] The immediate cause of the disturbance was the visit to the city of its recorder, the MP for Boroughbridge, Sir Charles Wetherell, to oversee the Bristol assizes. In the context of fierce debates during the passage of the Reform Bill in Parliament, Wetherell had made himself deeply unpopular to Bristol citizens with his repeated assertions that Bristolians were 'indifferent to reform'.[59] Wetherell went further in his assessment, described by John Phillips as representing 'his usual tenuous grasp of reality', in asserting that 'Reform Fever has a good deal abated in Bristol'.[60] It was clear to all, though perhaps not to Wetherell himself, that his visit on Saturday 29 October would excite a degree of disorder. As usual the Bristol Library was open, with the librarian in attendance between eleven in the morning until four in the

[56] Brock, *Great Reform Act*, pp.294-302; Cannon, *Parliamentary Reform*, pp.236-37; LoPatin, *Political Unions*, p.13; Toke S. Aidt and Raphaël Franck, 'Democratization under the Threat of Revolution: Evidence from the Great Reform Act of 1832', *Econometrica* 83.2 (March 2015), pp.508-17.
[57] *Stirling Journal and Advertiser*, 7 April 1831, cited in Bill Inglis, *A Scottish Town: Dunblane, 1560-1919* (Stirling: Jamieson and Munro, 2016), p.257. On the Bill's passage through the Commons, see Brock, *Great Reform Act*, pp.161-88.
[58] BCL, B7507, Bristol Library Society, Borrowing register, fol. 55, October 1831-August 1832.
[59] *Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd series, 6, pp.698-99, quoted in Phillips, *Great Reform Bill*, p.66.
[60] *Journal of the House of Commons*, 27 August 1831, quoted in Phillips, *Great Reform Bill*, p.67.

afternoon.[61] Saturday was generally a quieter day for borrowings, because the library did not reopen in the evening between seven and nine as it did mid-week. Library members were perhaps mindful of the potential for disturbance, and this Saturday was quieter still.[62] Wetherell's attempt to open the assizes at Guildhall was prevented by a vocal attendant crowd. He, along with the city's mayor, Charles Pinney, retreated to the Mansion House, on Queen Square, where they were shortly besieged by several thousand people. Attempts by the magistracy and a small military force to clear the square peacefully failed; meanwhile Wetherell, in disguise, fled across the neighbouring rooftops. The worst of the violence came in the early morning of the 31 October when the Mansion House was attacked and finally overrun.[63] Afterwards, elements of the crowd then split into two. A first group remained in Queen Square amongst looted furniture and alcohol, completely destroying the Mansion House and two sides of the square, whilst a second group proceeded to target symbols of the Corporation, the recorder and the bishop of Bristol throughout the city. The city's toll houses were attacked and destroyed, the gaols were methodically liberated, and the Bishop's Palace burnt. Although by Monday 1 November the vigour of the crowd had largely petered out, when it came, the military response was both brutal and indiscriminate, resulting in the estimated death of over four hundred people.

These events badly affected the running of the Bristol Library. After a usual day of business on Saturday 29 October, record keeping in the library's borrowing register became erratic and remained so for the next two weeks.[64] As usual, the library was closed on Sunday 30 October

[61] The opening times had most recently been amended at a general meeting of the society held on 23 March 1829. BA, 32079/LS/M/1, Bristol Library Society, Minute book of General meetings, 2 December 1772-28 March 1870 [hereafter BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book], 23 March 1829.
[62] Only nine borrowings were made, compared to sixteen the previous Saturday, the 22 October. BCL, B7507, Borrowing register, 1831-32, pp.3-4, 9.
[63] Carpenter, 'Bristol Riots', p.844; Somerton, *Narrative of The Bristol Riots*, p.18; Harrison, *Crowds and History*, p.295; Poole and Rogers, *Bristol from Below*, p.333.
[64] BCL, B7507, Borrowing register, 1831-32, pp.9-13.

(amid the height of the violence). It remained closed on Monday 31 October when a general order was made to suspend all business in the city centre and for individuals to remain at home.[65] There was no meeting of the library committee as scheduled on Tuesday 1 November, and the library seems to have remained closed until Friday 4 November.[66] Thereafter, some business in the library took place, books were returned and new books taken out, although the date of these borrowings were not recorded, an unprecedented example of failed record keeping in the Bristol Library's borrowing registers.[67] It is only from 11 November, some two weeks after the riots, that normal service properly resumed and a date of borrowing provided for all books thereafter taken out of the library.[68] Nevertheless, there may have still been some nervousness amongst library members about venturing into the city centre even after this date, with the usual meeting of the committee delayed again on 15 November after only three members attended.[69]

Explanations for the cause and significance of the Bristol Riots have shifted over time. The earliest histories of the riots focused on the perceived desire for plunder and excessive behaviour of the crowd and argued that their chief cause lay in the failure of an outdated civil power to control the violent underclass that was the mob.[70] A revisionist, and one might say sympathetic, take on the Bristol Riots has been provided by Steve Poole and Nicholas Rogers, who have both stressed the elements of political agency within the crowd's actions.[71] It is far

[65] Carpenter, 'Bristol Riots', p.851.
[66] BA, 32079/LS/M/5, Bristol Library Society, Minute book of Committee, 1 April 1823-20 December 1836 [hereafter BA, LS/M/5, Committee minute book, 1823-36], 1 November 1831.
[67] See particularly, BCL, B7507, Borrowing register, 1831-32, pp.11-12.
[68] BCL, B7507, Borrowing register, 1831-32, p.13.
[69] BA, LS/M/5, Committee minute book, 1823-36, 15 November 1831.
[70] *Bristol Gazette*, 3 November 1831, cited in Poole, Prosecuting Reform Bill Rioters', p.238; John Arthur Roebuck, *History of the Whig Ministry of 1830, to the Passing of the Reform Bill*, 2 vols. (London, 1852), II, pp.231-35; Cannon, *Parliamentary Reform*, p.227, n.1; Thomas, *Bristol Riots*; E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, rev. ed. (1963; London: Penguin, 2013), pp.327-30. For a critical analysis of these approaches, see Harrison, *Crowds and History*, pp.301-05; Poole and Rogers, *Bristol from Below*, pp.325-29.
[71] As both have noted, although the riots attracted a national coverage in the press, there was very little public response to its military suppression, which resulted in the injury and deaths of hundreds of unarmed men and

easier to represent a burning city, as various illustrations and newspaper descriptions sought to do, rather than understand the meaning or purpose of the crowd that gathered together. Rather than 'reform' constituting the sole motivator for action, institutional failures at the level of local government and a breakdown in public order offers a far more accurate explanation for the violence and disorder of the three days in late 1831.[72] Wetherell's open challenge to Bristolians to demonstrate their support for political reform once more exposed the gap in opinion between Bristol's citizens and the Corporation and its recorder, a disconnection that had fermented discontent for decades.[73] Few of those who took to the streets had a material interest in parliamentary reform or even a clear definition of what 'reform' constituted.[74] Even Tory commentators, who were apt to think of the worst of the crowds, acknowledged that their cause was due to far more complicated matters than simply the dangerous and 'perilous experiment' that was the Reform Bill.[75] As such, '"reform"… lent shape and meaning to every action of the crowd', whether this was criticism of legal or ecclesiastical institutions, at the social and economic conditions participants found themselves in, or even an explanation for the looting of private property.[76]

III

Neither the members nor the institution of the Bristol Library Society were unaffected by the events of the Bristol Riots. Located just one street away from Queen Square, the library was in

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women. Peterloo, even with a smaller death toll, excited a much larger public outcry. Poole and Rogers, *Bristol from Below*, p.325. Other deadly popular disturbances in 1831 also attracted little public outrage. In June, Harriet Arbuthnot noted that there was little public response to the death of twenty-five protestors in a riot at Merthyr Tydfil. Harriet Arbuthnot, *The Journal of Mrs Arbuthnot 1820-1832*, ed. Francis Bamford and the Duke of Wellington, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1950), 8 June 1831, II, p.424, cited in Muir, *Wellington*, p.413.

[72] Poole and Rogers, *Bristol from Below*, pp.325-36.

[73] Crowds regularly gathered in this period when they felt their views were being misrepresented by their elected representatives. Take, for example, the mass public meeting held in Edinburgh on 8 December 1830 to refute the assertion made by William Dundas that Scotland opposed parliamentary reform. Pentland, *Radicalism, Reform and National Identity*, p.88.

[74] Poole and Rogers, *Bristol from Below*, pp.336-37.

[75] [Eagles], *Bristol Riots*, p.21.

[76] Poole and Rogers, *Bristol from Below*, p.336.

exceptionally close proximity to the epicentre of the violence as crowds of rioters, magistrates and military forces moved through its two adjoining streets that led south. There is no evidence to suggest that any library members were participants in the riots. Certainly, none of the 114 tried for riot, plunder or the destruction of property were library members.[77] Library members held positions at multiple levels of the civic apparatus that responded to the riots. The most famous of these individuals was the city's mayor, Charles Pinney. As was usual for a person of his civic prominence, Pinney was a member of a diverse array of educational and charitable associations in Bristol, including the Philosophical Society, the Mechanics' Institution and the Asylum for the Blind.[78] He had been a member of the Bristol Library since 1810, having been transferred a share by his father John Pretor Pinney and had also served on the library's committee between 1827 and 1829.[79] Associational involvement preceded civic representation and Pinney was elected to the Common Council in 1822 and had the bad fortune to be elected mayor a couple of months before the riots.[80] Although he had already acquired greater public prominence in 1830 for his appearance during the general election and for chairing a meeting in support of the revolution in France that year, his position as Bristol's mayor during the 1831 riots provided him with national prominence.[81] Along with the other magistrates and members of the military, Pinney was blamed for having failed to protect the city properly and was tried in Bristol on these charges in October 1832. However, he was soon acquitted the following

[77] *Trials of the Persons Concerned in the Late Riots, Before Chief Justice Tindal, and Justices Bosanquet and Taunton, Which Commenced Monday, January 2, and Ended, January 14, 1832, At the Guildhall, in the City of Bristol* (Bristol, 1832), pp.10-11, 18; Poole and Rogers, *Bristol from Below*, p.325.
[78] BCL, B1523, *Rules and Orders of the Bristol Mechanics' Institution, for the Promotion of Useful Knowledge among the Working Classes.* (Bristol, 1825), p.3; Graham Bush, *Bristol and its Municipal Government, 1820-1851* (Bristol: Bristol Record Society, 1976), p.133; Harrison, *Crowds and History*, p.81; Elizabeth Baigent, 'Pinney, Charles (1793-1867)', *ODNB* (March 2021). Other library members, such as Thomas Daniel and Peter Baillie (1771-1811), were also as actively involved in associational affairs in Bristol. On Daniel, see above, Chapter Five, p.247. On Baillie, see above, Chapter Three.
[79] BA, 32079/LS/M/4, Bristol Library Society, Minute book of Committee, 24 March 1807-22 March 1823 [hereafter BA, LS/M/4, Committee minute book, 1807-23], 2 October 1810; BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 19 March 1827, 23 March 1829.
[80] Alfred Beaven, *Bristol Lists. Municipal and Miscellaneous* (Bristol, 1899), p.91.
[81] Harrison, *Crowds and History*, p.78; Baigent, 'Pinney, Charles', *ODNB*.

month and was praised for having 'acted according to the best of his judgement with zeal and personal courage'.[82] This judgement, along with Pinney's subsequent political career, in which he continued to serve in the Common Council and afterwards the reformed Corporation until 1853, should lead us to query Mark Harrison's assertion that the riots 'ruined' his reputation.[83]

Other library members found themselves at the heart of events in late October 1831. Present alongside Pinney during the siege of the Mansion House on 30 October was the alderman Abraham Hilhouse, whose family had made their fortune as shipbuilders.[84] It was Hilhouse who read the Riot Act immediately after the building was attacked on the morning of the 31 October.[85] Later the same day he led a group of sixty citizens and constables in a failed attempt to prevent the sacking of the new Gaol.[86] Other library members occupied various positions during the later trial of the rioters. Both Charles Bowles Fripp (1805-49) and Joseph Metford junior (1755-1833) served on the trial's Grand Jury, whilst as the Clerk of the Arraigns, it was the duty of William Diaper Brice (d. 1849) to read the indictments against the accused.[87] The

[82] *Trial of Charles Pinney, Esq. in the Court of King's Bench, on an Information, Filed by His Majesty's Attorney-General, Charging him with Neglect of Duty, in his Office as Mayor of Bristol, During the Riots.* (Bristol, 1833), quoted in Baigent, 'Pinney, Charles', *ODNB*. See also Poole and Rogers, *Bristol from Below*, pp.351-52.
[83] Harrison, *Crowds and History*, p.88.
[84] On the Hilhouses, see Bush, *Bristol and its Municipal Government*, p.34; Andrew Whitefield, *Mr Hilhouse of Bristol: Shipbuilder for the Navy 1749-1822* (Bristol: Redcliffe, 2010), *passim*. Although he never served on the library committee, in 1825, Abraham Hilhouse, then the Master of the Merchants' Hall, was appointed to a sub-committee of library members tasked with examining proposals for a new library building in another area of the city. BA, LS/M/5, Committee minute book, 1823-36, 6 December 1825.
[85] Poole and Rogers, *Bristol from Below*, p.334.
[86] [Eagles], *Bristol Riots*, p.102. Hilhouse was also later examined during the court-martial of Lieutenant-Colonel Thomas Brereton (1782-1832), the resident field officer, during his trial in 1832. [Eagles], *Bristol Riots*, p.308. Andrew Whitefield repeats the anecdote that Abraham Hilhouse, upon the arrival of mounted troops in the city, refused to accompany them to Queen Square because he had not been on a horse for eighteen years. Whitefield, *Mr Hilhouse of Bristol*, pp.147-48. Yet as John Latimer noted, who Whitefield also references, this story was later repudiated by a witness. John Latimer, *The Annals of Bristol in the Nineteenth Century* (Bristol, 1887), p.171.
[87] *Trials of the Persons Concerned in the Late Riots*. On Fripp, see Kathleen Hapgood, *The Friends to Literature: Bristol Library Society 1772-1894* (Bristol: Avon Local History & Archaeology, 2014), p.22. On Metford, see *Bristol Minute Book*, eds. Skjönsberg and Towsey, p.140. On Brice, see Bush, *Bristol and its Municipal Government*, pp.28-29; John Lyes, *'A Strong Smell of Brimstone': The Solicitors and Attorneys of Bristol 1740-1840* (Bristol: The Historical Association, 1999), pp.20-22. Brice had also been present at Sir Charles Wetherell's attempted opening of the Bristol assizes at Guildhall on 30 October and had been shouted down by the crowd when he attempted to open the proceedings. *Trials of the Persons Concerned in the Late Riots*, p.7. See also BA,

workshop of William Edward Acraman (1799-1874) was broken into, and the crowd seized a number of tools, including hammers, crowbars, iron wedges and spanners, for the resulting attack on the new Gaol.[88] Other library members lost homes and property including the mayor Charles Pinney, the bishop of Bristol, the merchants Benjamin Bickley, James Cunningham and the chocolatier Joseph Storr Fry (1767-1835).[89]

Of these individuals, the one to suffer the most financially from the riots was the bishop of Bristol and president of the Library Society, Robert Gray (1762-1834). Gray was an expected target of the crowds by virtue of being amongst the twenty-one Anglican bishops who had voted against Grey's Reform Bill earlier in the year.[90] He was a vocal opponent of parliamentary reform, speaking against it on numerous occasions in the Lords and voting against the Reform Bill in 1831 and April 1832.[91] On 31 October, the Bishop's Palace, Gray's traditional residence in Bristol, was ransacked and fired. By this time, Gray had already fled the city, although not without earlier attending the regular cathedral service, demanding that it proceed as planned.[92] Just as the symbolic residence of the bishop of Bristol was attacked, the crowd expressly targeted symbols of Gray's lifestyle, particularly his wine cellar and library.[93] Indeed, conservative commentators recounted in detail the destruction of 6,000 volumes of books held in the Palace and adjoining Chapter House. John Eagles, a member of the Library Society, recounted one such instance, the destruction of '[a] large and valuable bible bound in velvet, full of plates, and presented to the Chapter by Bishop Wilson': 'a sacrilegious ruffian knelt on the book as he tore out the leaves, and then with horrible execrations threw it into the

32079/LS/M/3, Bristol Library Society, Minute book of Committee, 31 March 1789-10 March 1807, 15 March 1803; Beaven, *Bristol Lists*, p.326.

[88] [Eagles], *Bristol Riots*, p.101.

[89] Somerton, *Narrative of the Bristol Riots*, p.28; *Trials of the Persons Concerned in the Late Riots*, p.27.

[90] Brock, *Great Reform Act*, p.247

[91] B.H. Blacker, revised by M.E. Clayton, 'Gray, Robert (1762-1834)', *ODNB* (June 2020).

[92] Blacker and Clayton, 'Gray, Robert', *ODNB*.

[93] Somerton, *Narrative of The Bristol Riots*, pp.24-27.

blazing fire of the Palace'.[94] Joan Williams has referred to this, the almost complete destruction of the Bristol Cathedral Library, as perhaps the greatest library disaster of the period, and the damage might well have been worse had some of the crowd succeeded in their objective to start a fire in the Chapter House.[95] In all, the estimated losses suffered by the Bishop were thought to approach £10,000, including the loss of all his private papers.[96]

In late 1831, Gray would hardly have been an unproblematic figure for the library to be associated with. As was customary, Gray had been invited to become a library member shortly after his elevation to the bishopric of Bristol and he was elected the society's president on 7 May 1827.[97] The bishop of Bristol had always served as president of the society, and his connection with the library provided it with a prestigious link to the established church.[98] It was largely a symbolic role, with bishops generally rare attendees at library meetings.[99] When in attendance, the president was expected to chair the meetings of the library committee, which Gray did on a couple of instances between 1827 and 1831.[100] Gray was a far more regular borrower from the library and borrowed in various degrees each year between 1827 and

[94] [Eagles], *Bristol Riots*, p.119. There is no evidence to support Eagle's claim that the individual responsible for the destruction of the bible was a member of the Bristol Political Union. Thomas, *Bristol Riots*, p.22.
[95] Joan Williams, 'Ecclesiastical Libraries', in *The Cambridge History of Libraries in Britain and Ireland, Volume II 1640-1850*, eds. Giles Mandelbrote and Keith A. Manley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p.313; Somerton, *Narratives of The Bristol Riots*, pp.26-27; [Eagles], *The Bristol Riots*, pp.118-19. See also Beriah Botfield, *Notes on the Cathedral Libraries of England* (London, 1849), pp.1-4. Libraries were frequently targeted during periods of rioting. See, for example, the destruction of Joseph Priestley's laboratory and library in Birmingham in 1791, the loss of which he valued at £4083 10s 3d. Douglas McKie, 'Priestley's Laboratory and Library and Other of His Effects', *Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London*, 12.1 (August 1956), pp.114-36. See also Charles Parish, *History of the Birmingham Library* (London: Library Association, 1966), pp.29-31; Peter M. Jones, *Industrial Enlightenment: Science, Technology and Culture in Birmingham and the West Midlands 1760-1820* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), pp.192-200; Robert E. Schofield, 'Priestley, Joseph (1733-1804), *ODNB* (October 2013); Jonathan Atherton, '"Nothing but a Birmingham jury can save them": Prosecuting Rioters in Late Eighteenth-Century Britain', *Midland History*, 39.1 (2014), pp.91-95.
[96] Blacker and Clayton, 'Gray, Robert', *ODNB*.
[97] BA, LS/M/5, Committee minute book, 1823-36, 19 March 1827, 7 May 1827.
[98] *A Catalogue of the Books belonging to the Bristol Library Society: To which are Prefixed an Account of the Institution of the Society, and its Rules & Regulations.* (Bristol, 1814), p.xi.
[99] Skjönsberg and Towsey, 'Introduction', in *Bristol Minute Book*, p.xiii.
[100] BA, LS/M/5, Committee minute book, 1823-36, 31 July 1827, 25 September 1827, 15 January 1828, 29 December 1829, 25 January 1831.

1832.[101] Some of these instances came on the same day or close to Gray's attendance at a committee meeting, implying that he was present in the library to collect his own books.[102] Yet had Gray ventured down the hill from College Green to the Bristol Library Society during the period of heightened tension in late 1831 he likely would have found himself a personal target of any crowds. On the same day that Gray borrowed two essays written by Richard Whately, the future archbishop of Dublin, George Henry Law, the bishop of Bath and Wells, found himself verbally assaulted and pelted with stones after he had attended the consecration of a new church of St Paul's in Bedminster.[103] A handbill circulated some days earlier had advertised the occasion and, although calling for calm, invited reformers to receive the bishop 'with every demonstration of respect that becomes his exalted rank and late vote in the House of Lords'.[104] These events mirrored similar occurrences across the country, where anti-reform peers and bishops found themselves the subject of popular discontent.[105] Gray must have kept the two volumes he borrowed from the Bristol Library on 24 October close to him because both survived the destruction of his residence and were eventually returned to the library on 10 January 1832.[106] The following day, Gray made another borrowing, a work recorded in the register as 'Grotius', later returned on 1 February 1832.[107] Neither of these instances would

[101] See BCL, B7502, Borrowing register, 1827-28 to B7507, Borrowing register, 1831-32, *passim*.
[102] For example, Gray borrowed John Russell's *Establishment of the Turks in Europe* (1827) and the first volume of Walter Scott's *Chronicles of the Canongate* (1827) on 15 January 1828, attending the meeting of the library's committee the same day. BCL, B7502, Borrowing register, 1827-28, p.85. Either side of a committee meeting on 29 December 1829, Gray borrowed the first volume of William Mitford's *History of Greece* (1784) and the first volume of a work recorded as 'Gibbon', possibly either Edward Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, of which the library had both the first edition and an 1813 edition, or his *Miscellaneous Works*, again owned by the library in two editions (1796 and 1814). BCL, B7504, Borrowing register, 1829-30, pp.173-74. Gray's borrowing entries in the register seem to be generally signed by the librarian.
[103] Gray's borrowings, recorded in the register as 'Whateley's [sic.] Essays', were probably *Essays on Difficulties in the Writings of St. Paul* (1828) and *Essays on Some of the Peculiarities of the Christian Religion* (1828). BCL, B7507, Borrowing register, 1831-32, p.5; 'Consecration of St. Paul's Church at Bedminster', *Bristol Mercury*, 25 October 1831; 'St. Paul's Church at Bedminster', *Bristol Mirror*, 29 October 1831.
[104] 'Consecration of St. Paul's Church at Bedminster', *Bristol Mercury*, 25 October 1831.
[105] Michael Brock records that those attacked as a result of mistaken identity included a bishop who had voted for the Reform Bill, the Roman Catholic bishop of Cork, a dissenting minister, and a reforming MP. Brock, *Great Reform Act*, p.248.
[106] BCL, B7507, Borrowing register, 1831-32, p.5.
[107] BCL, B7507, Borrowing register, 1831-32, p.50.

have required Gray's physical presence in the library, nor did he attend any further meetings of the Library Society before his death on 28 September 1834.[108]

Whilst the Bristol Library was extremely fortunate to have been left undamaged by the riots, members would have found their access to its collections severely impacted.[109] The flames did spread into King Street, where the Library Society was located and where many of the buildings were made from wood and plaster. Warehouses burned and collapsed, whilst the heat from the flames ruptured the pavement.[110] On 31 October, a cellar located opposite the Library Society, and full of brandy, caught aflame resulting in burning spirits issuing forth from the sewer vents.[111] The damage would have been more substantial had not a group of the streets' residents acted conscientiously and safely removed further barrels of alcohol from a store located in close proximity to the library.[112] Of parallel danger to any library member was the use of force by the military in the riots' aftermath. This began on the morning of the 31 October when armed dragoons charged and sabred the remains of the crowd still gathered in Queen Square, killing approximately 120.[113] These actions were repeated over the next two days, as armed special constables joined the soldiers with the intention 'not simply to disperse [the crowd] but to maim and kill all those with whom they came into contact'.[114] A number of innocent bystanders were attacked, in one instance observed by library member the Rev. Lant Carpenter (1780-1840).[115]

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[108] Blacker and Clayton, 'Gray, Robert', *ODNB*.
[109] Hapgood, *Friends to Literature*, p.19.
[110] *Trials of the Persons Concerned in the Late Riots*, p.27.
[111] Carpenter, 'Bristol Riots', p.849; J.F. Nicholls and John Taylor, *Bristol Past and Present*, 3 vols. (Bristol, 1882), III, p.332.
[112] *Trials of the Persons Concerned in the Late Riots*, p.18. One of those involved in the rescue of this brandy and rum was Samuel Waring, who was also a resident on King Street, at No. 25, and was able to save half his property by moving it to an avenue located on the library's eastern wall. *Trials of the Persons Concerned in the Late Riots*, p.18.
[113] Poole and Rogers, *Bristol from Below*, pp.337-42. In this, there was a great deal of similarity with the actions of the Manchester Yeomanry at St Peter's Fields in 1819. Harrison, *Crowds and History*, pp.311-12; Poole, *Peterloo*, p.318.
[114] Poole and Rogers, *Bristol from Below*, p.340.
[115] 'At no great distance from me, a soldier broke his sword on a man, who was remote from all others, and who appeared as little engaged in riot as myself'. Carpenter, 'Bristol Riots', p.850.

Few of the injured made their way to the infirmary for fear that they would be arrested as accessories to the riot.[116] In all, it is estimated that 250 individuals were injured with at least 400 killed, an unprecedented death toll for public disorder.[117] Soldiers continued to patrol the streets until 5 November, by which time command had been assumed by General Sir Richard Jackson who had arrived from London with further reinforcements.[118]

Although liberal commentators deplored the extent of the violence wrought upon the crowd, few considered the actions of the army to be unjustified. Indeed, many believed that they should have acted earlier in the proceedings.[119] In November 1831 the army's regiments were drawn up within a ruined Queen Square and publicly praised by General Rowland Hill, 1st Viscount Hill and Commander-in-Chief of the British Army, for their actions.[120] The Library Society also showed their appreciation. A meeting of the library's committee on 29 November 1831 granted free admission to the library for three months to Major General Jackson, his aide-de-camp Captain Dunlop and Colonel Ferguson from the 52nd regiment.[121] The attendance at this committee meeting implies that this was an action that received cross-political support, from conservatives such as the vice-president, the Rev. John Eden, and master of Bristol Grammar School, the Rev. John Joseph Goodenough (1779?-1855), to liberals and reformers both within and outwith the library including William Pyle Taunton (d. 1850), George Webb Hall (b. 1765) and Lant Carpenter.

The destruction of the Bishop's Palace and its library should lead us to consider why the same fate did not befall the Library Society. There was certainly nothing to prevent this occurring.

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[116] Poole and Rogers, *Bristol from Below*, p.341.
[117] Harrison, *Crowds and History*, pp.299-300; Poole and Rogers, *Bristol from Below*, p.340.
[118] Carpenter, 'Bristol Riots', p.851; Poole and Rogers, *Bristol from Below*, p.341.
[119] Carpenter, 'Bristol Riots', p.844; *Trials of the Persons Concerned in the Late Riots*, pp.9, 20-21. In contrast, W.H. Somerton believed that it should have been the duty of the magistrates and civic volunteers to disperse the crowds, rather than the military. Somerton, *Narrative of the Bristol Riots*, pp.39-40.
[120] Poole and Rogers, *Bristol from Below*, pp.341-42.
[121] BA, LS/M/5, Committee minute book, 1823-36, 29 November 1831.

At the height of the troubles on 30 October, the city's authorities had almost lost control over events, as the systematic looting and torching of buildings on Queen Square demonstrates. In the case of targeting symbols linked to the Corporation and Tory establishment, it may have been that the library survived because there were more prestigious targets with longer histories. Although never before stormed, both the Mansion and Customs House had seen their windows repeatedly smashed during previous crowd disturbances, whilst the emptying and razing of Bristol's three gaols owed itself to the long running saga and discontent that had been thrown up by their construction and funding.[122] In contrast, the Library Society acquired substantially less social opprobrium, even if it was linked, both personnel-wise and financially, to the Corporation, who ultimately owned the library building.[123] The fact that the library was never explicitly targeted lends further credence to the view that the crowd always retained agency over its actions and was not overcome by a desire to inflict random destruction. It should also lead us to query the depiction of the library, largely presented by nineteenth-century historians, as the stooge of an unpopular Corporation.[124]

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[122] Harrison, *Crowds and History*, p.64; Poole and Rogers, *Bristol from Below*, pp.281, 335.

[123] See above, Chapter One, pp.91-92. The Library Society's links to the Corporation may not have been popularly known, it may have been viewed simply as a private society. Except for a row of houses on Queen Square, private property was not generally targeted by the crowds in 1831. Harrison, *Crowds and History*, pp.305-07. Moreover, elements of the crowd moved away from Queen Square to target institutional symbols. It is significant to note that the Hall of the Society of Merchant Venturers, which was located only one building west of the library, where King Street and Prince's Street met, was also not targeted. The Society did decide to cancel their annual audit dinner for 1831, and their Hall was later used to hold the Court Martial of Thomas Brereton. John Latimer, *The History of the Society of Merchant Venturers of the City of Bristol* (Bristol: Arrowsmith, 1903), p.276; Patrick McGrath, *The Merchant Venturers of Bristol: A History of the Society of Merchant Venturers of the City of Bristol from its Origin to the Present Day* (Bristol: Society of Merchant Venturers, 1975), pp.45-46, 271-72. The location of the library, and the geography of its nearby streets, may also have helped it escape harm. The Custom and Mansion House were both located on the north side of Queen Square and were eventually completely engulfed by flames. Fire from both spread over Little King Street, that lay directly behind them, and onto buildings on King Street, sometimes called Great King Street. These were then soon aflame and, although a danger of its own accord, may have blocked off access to the library from the east. Carpenter, 'Bristol Riots', p.849; *Trials of the Persons Concerned in the Late Riots*, p.27; Nicholls and Taylor, *Bristol Past and Present*, III, p.332.

[124] For examples, see Charles Tovey, *The Bristol City Library: Its Founders and Benefactors; Its Present Position in Connection with the Library Society; and Its Future Prospects; To which is Added, Plans and Estimates for Converting the Building into a Free Library; With a Catalogue of the Books Belonging to the Citizens*. (London, 1853); Edward Edwards, *Memoirs of Libraries: Including a Handbook of Library Economy*., 2 vols. (1859; repr.

IV

Amongst the published accounts which first documented the events of the riots, two were written by library members of opposing political persuasions. The earliest of these to appear in print was a letter written by the Rev. Lant Carpenter to the editor of the *Monthly Repository* and published in December 1831.[125] As the minister to the Unitarian congregation at Lewin's Mead Chapel, Carpenter was an influential member of the community.[126] In an earlier life, he had served as the librarian to the Liverpool Athenaeum between 1802 and 1805, the city's second subscription library, founded in 1797.[127] He also involved himself in the administrative affairs of the Bristol Library Society and was elected onto the library committee in 1828.[128] Indeed, he was in this position at the time of the riots and rushed to the library on the morning of the 31 October for fear that the building was in danger.[129] As his predecessor at Lewin's Mead had done, Carpenter associated with the liberal wing of Bristol's Whigs.[130] At the general election in August 1830 he voted for the unsuccessful liberal Whig candidate, Edward Protheroe junior (1798-1852) and had publicly spoken in favour of parliamentary reform at a meeting on Queen Square a couple of weeks prior to the riots.[131] In this regard, Carpenter's views differed markedly from those of his fellow library member the Rev. John Eagles. Although no longer resident in Bristol by 1831, Eagles had had a long association with the

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Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), II, pp.735-36, 740-47; George Pryce, *A Popular History of Bristol, Antiquarian, Topographical, and Descriptive* (Bristol, 1861), pp.269-71; E.R. Norris Mathews, 'History of the Public Library Movement in Bristol', *The Library* 1 (1896), p.202; Anthony Beeson, *Bristol Central Library and Charles Holden* (Bristol: Redcliffe Press, 2006), pp.5-6.

[125] Carpenter, 'Bristol Riots'. Carpenter's letter was published again the following year as Lant Carpenter, *A Letter from the Rev. Dr. Carpenter to the Editor of the Monthly Repository, on the Late Riots at Bristol* (Hackney, 1832).

[126] Alexander Gordon, revised by G.M. Ditchfield, 'Carpenter, Lant (1780-1840)', *ODNB* (January 2008).

[127] *The First Minute Book of the Liverpool Athenaeum, 1797-1809*, eds. David Brazendale and Mark Towsey (Liverpool: The Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, 2020), p.158.

[128] BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 24 March 1828.

[129] Carpenter, 'Bristol Riots', p.849.

[130] See above, Chapter Three.

[131] 'Aug 1830 Bristol', ECPPEC, <https://ecppec.ncl.ac.uk/case-study-constituencies/bristol/election/Aug-1830/>, [accessed 19/01/24]; *Bristol Mirror*, 15 October 1831.

Bristol Library. He became a library member in 1807 and in 1813 succeeded his father's seat on the library committee, remaining on it until 1820.[132] He retired to Bristol from his position as an Anglican curate in 1841 and resumed his connection with the library by becoming its vice-president, serving until his death in 1855.[133] This was an unsurprising step for a man who shared personal connections with his two predecessors, having been educated by the Rev. Samuel Seyer and appointed to his first curacy by his immediate predecessor the Rev. John Eden.[134] The three men also shared broadly the same political views, as exemplified by Eagles's regular contribution to *Blackwood's Magazine* between 1831 and 1855.[135]

Indeed, the political views of Eagles and Carpenter largely shaped the way in which they described and understood the three days of disorder in Bristol in October 1831. Both commentators were clear that the events which they had witnessed were to be wholly deplored, with even Carpenter referring to the crowd as either the 'mob' or 'the dregs of the city', largely formed of young men.[136] Nevertheless, he was sympathetic to some of their complaints, particularly to accusations of electoral corruption.[137] Carpenter's analysis of the situation may also have been shaped by the personal connections he forged through the Bristol Library. For example, whilst he was deeply critical of the city's 'self-elected Corporation', which he

[132] BCL, B7530, Bristol Library Society, Subscription Book, 1773-1872, 23 March 1807; BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 22 March 1813, 22 March 1819. Eagles's father, Thomas Eagles had served on the library's committee since its inception in 1773, until his death in 1812. *Bristol Minute Book*, eds. Skjönsberg and Towsey, p.245; BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 23 March 1812.
[133] Gordon Goodwin, revised by Anne Pimlott Baker, 'Eagles, John (1783-1855)', *ODNB* (September 2004); BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 22 March 1841, 19 March 1855.
[134] Anon., 'Introduction' in John Eagles, *The Sketcher*. (Edinburgh, 1856), p.v.
[135] Goodwin and Baker, 'Eagles, John', *ODNB*. These essays were later collectively published in 1856 and 1857. Eagles, *Sketcher*; John Eagles, *Essays Contributed to Blackwood's Magazine* (Edinburgh, 1857). Eagles had plumped for Richard Hart Davis in the election of October 1812, voting for Davis again, alongside the conservative Whig Edward Protheroe Sr. (1774-1856), in June 1818. 'Oct 1812 Bristol', ECPPEC, <https://ecppec.ncl.ac.uk/case-study-constituencies/bristol/election/Oct-1812/>, [accessed 19/01/24]; 'June 1818 Bristol', ECPPEC, <https://ecppec.ncl.ac.uk/case-study-constituencies/bristol/election/June-1818/>, [accessed 19/01/24]. On Seyer, see BA, 44954/1/1, Manuscript volumes compiled by Seyer and others, Calendar of events in Bristol, 1820-27, pp.28-29.
[136] Carpenter, 'Bristol Riots', p.847. See also *Trials of the Persons Concerned in the Late Riots*, p.5.
[137] Carpenter cites one instance in which he met a 'decently dressed workman' who was fired from his job for having voted against the wishes of his employer. He believed that this sort of practice severed the paternalistic bonds between rich and poor which held society together. Carpenter, 'Bristol Riots', p.850.

believed had failed 'to promote those purposes of improvement which the exigencies of the times require', this criticism did not extend to its mayor, Charles Pinney, who was 'a man of religious character, of liberal views, and of known humanity'.[138] Pinney's 'liberal views', as in the case of Carpenter, included the support of parliamentary reform, and the two men had also served together on the Bristol Library Society's committee in 1829.[139] More broadly, Carpenter blamed the cause of the riots chiefly on Wetherell and an anti-reform faction in the city which had inflamed passions on the question of parliamentary reform and Catholic Emancipation.[140] Not all of this faction were tarred with the same brush. Thomas Daniel, Bristol's most senior and influential Tory figure and another of Carpenter's fellow library committee members, had chaired the public meeting in February 1829 in opposition to Catholic Emancipation but was praised as 'a man of undoubted talent and official ability'.[141] However, Carpenter was critical of others, particularly the 'anti-reform newspaper – Felix Farlay's [sic.] Bristol Journal' (hereafter the *Bristol Journal*) which he believed had raised the political temperature by throwing 'firebrands among the supporters and the opponents of the measures of Government on these great national objects'.[142]

V

John Eagles's account of the riots, published in 1832, offered a very different interpretation of proceedings, a customarily sensationalist, paranoid and conspiratorial reading of events. Eagles had previously written about the riots in the columns of the *Bristol Journal* as well as an article titled 'What Caused the Bristol Riots?' in *Blackwood's* in March 1832.[143] Absolving the

[138] Carpenter, 'Bristol Riots', pp.840, 841.
[139] Harrison, *Crowds and* History, p.81; Jenkins, 'Bristol: 1820-32', *HoP*; Baigent, 'Pinney, Charles', *ODNB*. BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 24 March 1828.
[140] Carpenter, 'Bristol Riots', pp.841-42.
[141] Carpenter, 'Bristol Riots', p.841.
[142] Carpenter, 'Bristol Riots', p.842.
[143] [John Eagles], 'From TheManInTheMoon.', *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal*, 26 November 1831; [John Eagles], 'What Caused the Bristol Riots?', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine.*, 31.192 (March 1832), pp.465-83.

magistrates of nearly all blame, Eagles believed that the riots were caused by a host of factors, including malicious external interference from groups beyond Bristol and dangerous political experimentation at a national level by the Whig government of Earl Grey.[144] Political upheaval had been caused by Catholic Emancipation, the French Revolution in July 1830 and an 'unholy alliance' between the Whigs, the Radicals and political unions.[145] Dramatically, Eagles described the situation:

> England is now actually governed by the Political Unions. The Parliament of Birmingham issues edicts. There is little law, little punishment… Revolution is openly sought; if by intimidation, and the form of law, well; if not, by violence.[146]

These forces, which Eagles believed constituted a nation-wide conspiracy, had together with individuals in the city, incited the crowds to such an extent as to risk the city's destruction.[147] In Eagles's view, the role printed matter played in this conspiracy had been key in that it had provided the essential inspirational material for pro-reform speakers. Eagles made reference to the influence of an ephemeris, *The Prophetic Messenger* (1831), whose frontispiece he had seen pasted 'in the windows of all the low shops'.[148] In Eagles's view this had depicted 'the magic circle of conspiracy' which amongst its images included a burning city, armed soldiers, a seated skeletal figure and a crowned serpent coiling around a tree in which was embedded an

[144] [Eagles], *Bristol Riots*, pp.4-65.
[145] For quote, see [Eagles], *Bristol Riots*, p.7. In Eagles's view, the passage of Roman Catholic relief had materially wounded both the Whigs and the Tories, as well as mortally harming the fabric of the constitution 'which secures our persons, our property, and our privileges'. [Eagles], *Bristol Riots*, p.16. Eagles defined the Radicals as 'the mass without political knowledge – men of inflamed passions and little understanding and education'. [Eagles], *Bristol Riots*, p.4.
[146] [Eagles], *Bristol Riots*, p.26.
[147] There is no evidence to support Eagles's accusation of a national conspiracy at work. Thomas, *Bristol Riots*, pp.21-22.
[148] [Eagles], *Bristol Riots*, p.39.

axe inscribed with word 'REFORM'.[149] Eagles quoted a passage from the frontispiece, emphasising for dramatic effect the size of the font in which it appeared:

> MONARCHS TREMBLE, NATIONS MOURN,
>
> Ocean rage and cities burn.
>
> Gazing with a prophet's eye,
>
> THUS WILL RAPHAEL READ THE SKY.[150]

The 'Raphael' here referred to was a pseudonym used by the author and publisher of *The Prophetic Messenger*, the Bristol-born astrologer and journalist Robert Cross Smith (1795-1832).[151] Founded in 1826, the almanac had swiftly acquired a notable popularity and was selling 8,500 copies by 1831.[152] Its frontispiece, or hieroglyphic, which so excited Eagles, was a useful marketing ploy which Smith used to sell his almanac. Printed and published between September and November for the following year, the hieroglyphic included lavish illustrations which depicted between six to nine scenes of the future to come.[153] Materially, these were large fold-out copperplate engravings and lithographs which were, as Eagles discovered, intended to be pasted up for view in shop windows.[154] Readers could attempt to decipher the proceedings themselves or wait for all to be revealed in the following year's almanac. Eagles's reading of the hieroglyphic was clearly shaped by his experience of the Bristol Riots: the axe of 'Reform' and the city in flames had achieved a new, darker, symbolism by November 1831. Yet it is

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[149] [Eagles], *Bristol Riots*, p.39. An image of the frontispiece, referred to as a 'Hieroglyphic', is provided in Christopher Pinney, 'Prophetic Pictures, Or, What Time is the Visual?', in *Lineages and Advancements in Material Culture Studies: Perspectives from UCL Anthropology*, eds. Timothy Carroll, Antonia Walford and Shireen Walton (London: Routledge, 2020), p.165.

[150] [Eagles], *Bristol Riots*, p.40. Despite Eagles's assertion, these final four lines did not appear 'in larger letters' on the frontispiece.

[151] Ellic Howe, *Urania's Children: The Strange World of the Astrologers* (London: William Kimber, 1967), pp.28-31; Patrick Curry, *A Confusion of Prophets: Victorian and Edwardian Astrology* (London: Collins & Brown, 1992), pp.47-49; Katharine Anderson, 'Smith, Robert Cross [*pseud.* Raphael] (1795-1832)', *ODNB* (September 2004).

[152] Curry, *Confusion of Prophets*, pp.51-52; Pinney, 'Prophetic Pictures', p.160.

[153] Pinney, 'Prophetic Pictures', pp.159-61.

[154] Pinney, 'Prophetic Pictures', p.159; [Eagles], *Bristol Riots*, p.39.

important to note, and this was a nuance that Eagles was not interested in, that Smith's hieroglyphics had always used a range of images when predicting the future. For example, the 1830 hieroglyphic had also included portents of disaster that could have been viewed symbolically had the Bristol Riots occurred a year earlier, including ecclesiastical buildings on fire, crowds cheering 'Reform' and the appearance of military regiments, along with images with little explicit political meaning, including that of a naval battle, a funeral cortege and an erupting volcano.[155] Smith's diversity of images allowed him to cater for a range of future possibilities and he explained any additional pictures as representing 'events that have yet to follow'.[156] Nevertheless, Eagles was clear in his reading: *The Prophetic Messenger*'s hieroglyphic was visual proof of a conspiracy 'pretty deeply and cunningly laid' by the 'Revolutionists'.[157] These images provided a visual instruction to the crowds and, in Eagles's view, lyrical fuel for the speeches of reformers. His account of the riots placed substantial blame upon a series of pro-reform speeches made by Bristolians, which he proceeded to quote and analyse.[158] Through his reading of *The Prophetic Messenger*, he was now able to connect the words of these reformers with the 'Revolutionist' conspiracy he observed in the hieroglyphic's images. Yet he was also able to connect the campaign for parliamentary reform pursued by a 'respectable' middling class to a publication and its social underclass of readers which consisted mainly of rural labourers and the urban working class.[159]

The one speaker that Eagles accused of making direct use of *The Prophetic Messenger*'s material was Matthew Bridges. Bridges had been a member of the Bristol Library Society since

[155] For Smith's hieroglyphic for 1830, see Pinney, 'Prophetic Pictures', p.162.
[156] Raphael [Robert Cross Smith], *The Prophetic Messenger, with Two Almanacs for 1830*. (London: William Charlton Wright, 1829), quoted in Pinney, 'Prophetic Pictures', p.164.
[157] [Eagles], *Bristol Riots*, p.41.
[158] [Eagles], *Bristol Riots*, pp.31-41.
[159] Curry, *Confusion of Prophets*, p.52.

1825, and at the time of his speech and the riot served on the library's committee.[160] He had been a supporter of Catholic Emancipation and had donated his *Protestant and Catholic* (1827), an imitation of William Dryden's *The Hind and the Panther* (1687), to the library in February 1827.[161] Eagles referred to a speech made by Bridges at a packed meeting for reform held at the Guildhall on 21 January 1831. In Eagles's view, Bridges had been guilty of not only 'leaving on the minds of the ignorant a deep sense of injury for undefined wrongs', but of also providing a template for the violence Bristol would witness nine months later.[162] Bridges had warned that without reform there would be 'Civil War… Thrones, and Mitres, and Truncheons of Office, would go down into the pit together, and England… would sit down in despair amidst the awful thunders of Jehovah'.[163] To Eagles, such a vision seemed remarkably similar to the scenes predicted by the *Prophetic Messenger* which had then unfolded in October 1831:

> The work [*Prophetic Messenger*] furnished him with a rhapsody, which, as an orator, he was proud to display, without having either meaning or intention. But in acquitting Mr. Bridges of *intention*, can the cool public acquit him of inflaming the populace, and giving them a most dangerous confidence in "ulterior measures?"[164]

Eagles was certainly unwilling to provide Bridges with the benefit of the doubt. Indeed, there were inconsistencies in his account which he used to purposely malign the intentions of Bridges and other reformers. Eagles accurately describes the hieroglyphic, published in 1830, predicting the year 1831 but also refers to this as *The Prophetic Messenger*.[165] The same title

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[160] BA, LS/M/5, Committee minute book, 1823-36, 1 February 1825; BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 22 March 1830. Bridges served on the library committee until 1832. BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 19 March 1832.
[161] BA, LS/M/5, Committee minute book, 1823-36, 27 February 1827. Bridges' poem was reviewed, somewhat critically, by a number of religious periodicals. *The Christian Family Advocate* referred to it as a 'very servile, but lamentably unsuccessful imitation of Dryden'. *The Christian Family Advocate*, 2.15 (July 1827), pp.85-86, for quotation see p.86. See also, *The Imperial Magazine*, 9 (May 1827), pp.475-77; *The Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine*, 3rd Series, 6 (May 1827), p.334.
[162] [Eagles], *Bristol Riots*, p.37.
[163] [Eagles], *Bristol Riots*, p.38.
[164] [Eagles], *Bristol Riots*, p.41.
[165] [Eagles], *Bristol Riots*, p.39.

could refer to the almanac that was published in November 1831 which explained the predictions which had appeared in the year's frontispiece.[166] Eagles refers the reader to 'the Predictions' where he reads further evidence of conspiracy.[167] In this, it is unclear whether he is referring to an entry of text below the hieroglyphic or to the almanac, *The Prophetic Messenger*.[168] While the latter would have been available to Eagles, whose account was published in 1832, it would not have been seen by the crowds who gathered in Bristol in the final days of October 1831. More significantly, it would certainly not have been available to Bridges, who delivered his speech on 21 January 1831 at a public meeting to discuss parliamentary reform. It is also noteworthy that Eagles's first extensive account of the causes of the riots, published in *Blackwood's* in March 1832, included no discussion of either *The Prophetic Messenger* or its influence upon Bridges, further proof that Eagles may have purposefully misinterpreted the timeline of events for political ends.[169] It also demonstrates that this was a line of criticism that Eagles developed well after the riot's aftermath.

VI

Whether Eagles was being merely careless or malicious with his facts, he, and other elements of the conservative press, purposely highlighted, both before and after the riots, intemperate

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[166] Pinney, 'Prophetic Pictures', p.164. Pinney quotes from this almanac but provides no reference for it other than describing it as having been published in November 1831. Another almanac, *Raphael's Witch or Oracle of the Future.* (London, 1831), is listed in the bibliography of the volume in which Pinney's essay is included but does not include the section quoted by Pinney, nor any description of the hieroglyphic. This almanac does include, on its final page, an advertisement for books published by William Charlton Wright, including 'The Prophetic Messenger, for 1827, 1828, 1829, 1830, and 1831. All bound together in one volume, with five Hieroglyphics', implying that it is an additional almanac to the *Prophetic Messenger* which was already in print. *Raphael's Witch*, p.182.

[167] '*Death is preparing his phantom dart – soon will strike… Lo the time is at hand.* Chance can do nothing'. [Eagles], *Bristol Riots*, p.41. Emphasis in original.

[168] An image of the hieroglyphic for 1831 is reproduced in Pinney's essay but does not include any of the text quoted by Eagles. Pinney, 'Prophetic Pictures', p.165. Potentially confusing matters further, parts of the predictions quoted by Eagles appear almost verbatim in a pamphlet published in Edinburgh in 1830. *Extraordinary Predictions! A Full and Particular Account of the Most Astonishing Prophecies and Predictions, Concerning the Revolutions, War, Reform, &c That is Said Will Happen in the Various Nations of Europe, &c in the Different Months of this Eventful Year, 1831. By a Celebrated Jewish Prophet, From Poland.* (Edinburgh, 1830), F.3.a.13(121), National Library of Scotland.

[169] [Eagles], 'What Caused the Bristol Riots?'.

language employed by reformers. Bridges's speech had first appeared in print in the *Bristol Journal*, the newspaper Lant Carpenter would accuse of throwing 'firebrands' amongst Bristolians and inciting the riots.[170] In contrast to the briefer report of the meeting which appeared in the *Bristol Mirror*, the *Bristol Journal* used almost three full columns in its account of the previous day's events, quoting the speakers and the motions of the meeting as they were carried.[171] Of course, neither Eagles nor the *Bristol Journal* were neutral observers. Established a century earlier, by the time of the early nineteenth century *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal* was owned, edited and printed by the Bristol bookseller, author and circulating library owner John Mathew Gutch.[172] Although a vocal critic of the Corporation, Gutch largely maintained the *Bristol Journal's* editorial stances: a provincial Toryism that consisted of unequivocal support for the established church, opposition to the abolition of slavery and to parliamentary reform as conceived in Grey's Reform Bills.[173] Indeed, on this latter point, Gutch had overseen a considerable hardening of the paper's editorial stance. During the 1810s, the paper had been in favour of some measured parliamentary reform including the extension of 'the elective franchise to the whole of the middle class', albeit if only to restrict the right to vote to men of property.[174] Despite absolving the magistrates of much of the blame for the riots, Eagles had collaborated previously with Gutch by writing a number of Latin verses which had first appeared in the *Bristol Journal* and which criticised Bristol magistrates for absenteeism and for overseeing a general malaise in Bristol's economy.[175] His earliest commentary on the causes

[170] 'Meeting for Reform in Parliament', *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal*, 22 January 1831.
[171] 'Bristol Meeting for Parliamentary Reform', *Bristol Mirror*, 22 January 1831.
[172] Ian Maxted, 'Farley Family (*per.* 1698-1775)', *ODNB* (January 2008); Elizabeth Baigent, 'Gutch, John Mathew (1776-1861)', *ODNB* (January 2016).
[173] James J. Sack, *From Jacobite to Conservative: Reaction and Orthodoxy in Britain c. 1760-1832* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp.8, 50, 54, 62; Keisuke Masaki, 'The Development of Provincial Toryism in the British Urban Context, c.1815-1832', unpublished PhD thesis (University of Edinburgh, 2016), pp.56-64, 67-74.
[174] *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal*, 15 March 1817, quoted in Masaki, 'Development of Provincial Toryism', p.39. See also Poole and Rogers, *Bristol from Below*, p.314.
[175] These were later published collectively by Gutch in 1826. [John Eagles], *Felix Farley, Rhymes, Latin and English, by TheManInTheMoon* (Bristol, 1826).

of the Bristol Riots had appeared in the *Bristol Journal* on 26 November 1831, written under his usual pen name of 'TheManInTheMoon'.[176] Gutch would also print Eagles's account of the riots in 1832.[177]

As well as highlighting the intemperance of the language employed by Matthew Bridges, Eagles did similarly with the words of William Pyle Taunton, a fellow library member. Indeed, Taunton, like Eagles, Bridges and Carpenter, also served on the Bristol Library's committee during this tumultuous period in the city's politics.[178] As we will later see, he also played a significant role in attempting to reform aspects of the library's regulations in 1828 and 1829. Taunton was a vocal supporter of parliamentary reform and had chaired numerous meetings in the city in support of it.[179] It was on 21 January 1831, the same occasion in which Matthew Bridges had spoken, that Taunton was supposed to have remarked, 'Should I show respect to a magnificent cathedral, by prohibiting the use of the brush and the shovel, lest the *vermin* should be disturbed and the *filth* removed?'.[180] Although he did not explicitly say it, Taunton's description of the '*vermin*' and the '*filth*', preventing the restoration of the 'magnificent cathedral' that was the constitution, dipped into a wider discourse and popular reaction against

[176] In this, Eagles made reference to his previous criticism of the Bristol Corporation writing that he was 'no panegyrist of the Corporation; and in other times, ere political agitation became an English fashion, have pretty freely given an opinion as to the non-residence of the Magistracy within the city'. [Eagles], 'From TheManInTheMoon.', *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal*, 26 November 1831.

[177] [Eagles], *Bristol Riots* (Bristol, 1832). Eagles was not the only conservative library member who published with Gutch. In 1819, Gutch published John Scandrett Harford's critical biography of Thomas Paine. John Scandrett Harford, *Some Account of the Life, Death, and Principles of Thomas Paine* (Bristol, 1819). See below, pp.368-69.

[178] Taunton was first elected to the library's committee in 1827 and served until 1832. He was also later elected for a second term between 1835 and 1838. BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 19 March 1827, 19 March 1832, 23 March 1835, 19 March 1838.

[179] At the Great Room in Princes Street on 16 July 1830, at the Guildhall on 21 January 1831 and 24 September 1831 and at the Assembly Rooms on 14 May 1832. Jenkins, 'Bristol: 1820-32', *HoP*. Other library members present at the meeting held at the Guildhall on 24 September 1831 included Robert Bright, Sir Charles Abraham Elton and Joseph Reynolds. 'Reform Meeting', *Bristol Mercury*, 27 September 1831. Steve Poole refers to Taunton as one of Bristol's 'radicals' for his opposition to the Bristol rioters being tried and judged by local magistrates and jurors. Poole, 'Prosecuting Reform Bill Rioters', p.244.

[180] Emphasis in original. [Eagles], *Bristol Riots*, p.36. Eagles admitted that he did not think that Taunton was a 'revolutionist' himself: 'It is not attempted to be asserted, that Mr. Taunton had the slightest notion, that he was encouraging such proceedings; but what does he think *now* of the effect and tendency of such speeches?'. [Eagles], *Bristol Riots*, p.37.

the bishops in the House of Lords whose votes had be seen as instrumental in the defeat of the Reform Bill.[181] Indeed, the bishop of Bristol, Robert Gray, who had voted against the Reform Bill on 8 October 1831, had found himself depicted in just such a way in a satirical print titled 'The Rat Hunt; or John Bull and his Master turning out the Vermin'.

'The rat hunt; or John Bull and his master turning out the vermin.', (1831), satirical print, British Museum, 1868,0808.9407.[182]

Like Bridges' speech, Taunton's words were quoted directly in a column in the *Bristol Journal* the following day.[183] However, they did not appear in the account of the more politically neutral

[181] Brock, *Great Reform Act*, p.248.

[182] Published by John Fairburn in 1831, this print depicted Gray as a mitred rat-bishop who, alongside Lord Eldon, Robert Peel and the Duke of Wellington, all as rats, gnawed away on the 'Malt that lay in the house that Jack built'. John Bull, armed with a pitchfork inscribed with the word 'Reform', seeks to drive the rats away and is supported by a dog with the wigged head of Henry Brougham and, from the sidelines, by a vocal William IV. The representation of political opponents as rats was a recurring trope in satirical prints. For example, see James Gilray's depiction of the Foxite Whigs as rats because of their support for parliamentary reform in 1797. British Museum, 1868,0808.6634, James Gilray, 'Parliamentary-reform, -or-opposition-rats, leaving the house they had undermined.', (1797), satirical print. My thanks to Emma Macleod for this reference.

[183] 'Meeting for Reform in Parliament', *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal*, 22 January 1831.

Bristol Mirror which was published the same day.[184] Taunton's speech acquired a new significance in the aftermath of the riots, although it was Eagles and other conservative print outlets who resurrected his words. Eagles used them again in his essay in *Blackwood's* in March 1832, as well as his published account of the riots in the same year.[185] It was their appearance in *Blackwood's* that probably gave them the greatest publicity, and the excerpts were being repeated in newspapers as late as December 1832 as proof of the irreligion of reformers.[186] Eagles was the principal actor in these efforts to malign the intentions and motives of reformers, but he was significantly abetted by John Mathew Gutch. In his entry in the *ODNB*, Elizabeth Baigent describes Gutch as having 'sought to understate divisions in Bristol society', yet his hardening of the *Bristol Journal's* editorial stance, the direct quotation and amplification of the most incendiary rhetoric employed by reformers and his publication of Eagles's account of the riots seems to imply the opposite, that both Gutch and Eagles explicitly played upon political divisions within Bristol society in order to malign the motives of their political opponents. In this respect, Lant Carpenter was accurate when he accused both men of the 'bad spirit which has been continually manifested by the anti-reform newspaper – Felix Farlay's [sic.] Bristol Journal'.[187]

VII

Just as the national political context influenced how commentators responded to the upheavals of the riots in 1831, so too did the wider context influence the manner in which subscription library members engaged with the question of reform within the Bristol Library. In Bristol, many of the principal actors in debates concerning national political reform, including William

[184] 'Bristol Meeting for Parliamentary Reform', *Bristol Mirror*, 22 January 1831. On the *Bristol Mirror*, see Peter Brett, 'The Liberal Middle Classes and Politics in Three Provincial Towns: Newcastle, Bristol, and York – c.1812-1841', unpublished PhD thesis (University of Durham, 1991), p.120.
[185] [Eagles], 'What Caused the Bristol Riots?', p.480; [Eagles], *Bristol Riots*, p.36
[186] 'The Three Rooks', *Albion and the Star*, 28 September 1832; 'The Three Rooks', *Barbadian*, 12 December 1832.
[187] Carpenter, 'Bristol Riots', p.842.

Pyle Taunton, Matthew Bridges, Lant Carpenter and John Eagles, were as vocal and active upon how or whether the subscription library should be reformed. Just as debates on national political reform revolved partly upon the question of who should be considered to be within the political nation, the topic of reform of the subscription library also revolved around that of access.[188] Library reformers were acutely aware that the Bristol Library was serving a smaller and smaller proportion of Bristol's citizens, and their recommendations for reform were intended to increase the appeal of the library to new subscribers.[189] These attempts at reform excited opposition for a number of reasons. Some members opposed alterations to the library's regulation on the principle that any changes made were bound to be poor ones. Others were opposed precisely because they favoured maintaining the exclusivity of the library space.[190] The latter view was clearly that of John Eagles who, although not at that time resident in Bristol, commented from afar on the cultural and associational developments of the city. These very local debates occurred within a wider context and discussion about not only the identity and breadth of the public sphere and political nation, but also the new and expanding forces acting upon it.

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[188] Brock, *Great Reform Act*, pp.37-41, 137-48; Phillips, *Great Reform Bill*, pp.302-03; Matthew McCormack, *The Independent Man: Citizenship and Gender Politics in Georgian England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), pp.187-98; Pentland, *Radicalism, Reform and National Identity*, pp.20-21 Thomas Ertman, 'The Great Reform Act of 1832 and British Democratization', *Comparative Political Studies*, 43 (2010), pp.1009-11; J.G.A. Pocock, 'The Varieties of Whiggism from Exclusion to Reform: A History of Ideology and Discourse', in *Virtue, Commerce, and History*, rev. ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp.307-10.

[189] Although the library's membership had steadily risen during the early nineteenth century, this increase was rapidly outpaced by the growth in Bristol's overall population. Moreover, the library attracted very few new proprietors during this period, with only five new shareholders admitted between 1816 and 1832, compared to seventy-three in the preceding fifteen years. See below, pp.123-24. Reformers at the Charleston Library Society, which faced a similar disconnect between the stagnant size of the library membership and a rapidly growing urban population in which it was situated, also argued that the source of that library's woes lay in the fact that it was too exclusive. James Raven, *London Booksellers and American Customers: Transatlantic Literary Community and the Charleston Library Society, 1748-1811* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 2002), pp.68, 79.

[190] For examples, see the speeches made by the Rev. John Joseph Goodenough and the Rev. Richard Gordon Bedford at the library meeting held on 5 May 1828. 'Bristol Library', *Bristol Mirror*, 10 May 1828; 'Bristol Library Society', *Bristol Mercury*, 13 May 1828.

These cultural and social shifts, sometimes referred to as the 'March of Intellect', involved a widening access to print and popular education and the subsequent testing of class and economic boundaries.[191] Liberal commentators were more likely to associate this 'march' with positive forces of change. In York, Whig-radical papers used the phrase the 'march of intellect' to refer to an imagined relationship between progressive scientific knowledge and social reform, reflecting a wider conception of the term that Michael Brown associates with the Whigs, who saw science as a tool for progress and improvement.[192] In contrast, Tories, such as Eagles, whilst recognising the benefits and prestige brought about by scientific knowledge, were more likely to associate it with what Brown has referred to as the 'conservatively minded restoration of civic glory'.[193] Reform of the subscription library was also viewed in these terms. Customarily, Eagles associated such changes with violence, atheism and radicalism, an overthrow of the social order brought from the periodical press in the '*Reviews*', '*Close Columns*' and '*Magazines*'.[194]

> Now mobs erect triumphal arch
> For General "Intellect on the march."
> Atheist stalks forth a pioneer,

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[191] Brian Maidment, 'Caricature and Social Change 1820-1840: The March of Intellect Revisited', in *Shaping Belief: Culture, Politics, and Religion in Nineteenth-Century Writing*, eds. Victoria Morgan and Clare Williams (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008), pp.149-70. See also Alan Rauch, *Useful Knowledge: The Victorians, Morality and the March of Intellect* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), pp.1-7, 22-25; David S.K.J. Magee, 'Popular Periodicals, Common Readers and the 'Grand March of Intellect' in London, 1819-34', unpublished PhD thesis, (University of Oxford, 2008), pp.1-3.

[192] Michael Brown, *Performing Medicine: Medical Culture and Identity in Provincial England, C. 1760-1850* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), pp.118-19. See also Leslie Mitchell's discussion of the Whigs and the 'March of Mind', a belief in the inevitability of progress and improvement. Leslie G. Mitchell, *The Whig World, 1760-1837* (London: Continuum, 2007), pp.99-116.

[193] Brown, *Performing Medicine*, p.119; [Eagles], *Rhymes, Latin and English*, p.93. To Eagles, with the proper management by its Corporation and by utilising the charity of its merchant class, Bristol had the potential to be a modern-day Florence:

> Raise private galleries of your own,
> Let in your taste your wealth be shown.
> The Medici were men of trade,
> Yet see what Florence has been made'.

[194] [Eagles], *Rhymes, Latin and English*, p.104.

And bully Steam as engineer,

His horse-artillery force increases

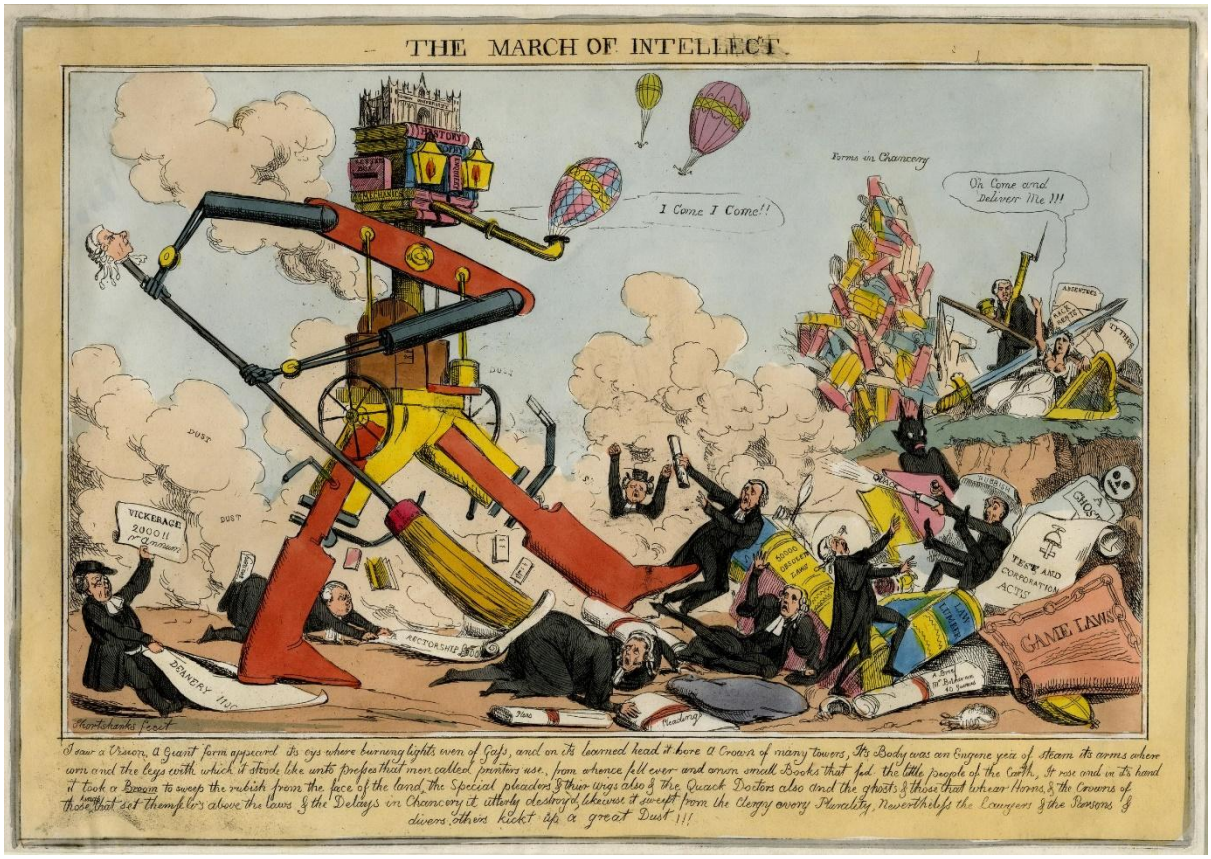
Merely to blow you all to pieces.

While rebel-standards flourish o'er 'em,

And *Patent Broom* sweeps all before 'em.[195]

Eagles's description of 'General Intellect' was clearly influenced by similar description of this phenomenon in the satirical periodical *John Bull*, which he references.[196] His use of the imagery of steam and the '*Patent Broom*' also pre-empts the similar iconography used in a popular print by Robert Seymour, which depicted a steam-driven automaton, crowned with the newly founded London University, using a broom to physically sweep away clerics, doctors, lawyers and the vestiges of 'Old Corruption', the Test and Corporation Acts, obsolete laws and tithes.

[195] [Eagles], *Rhymes, Latin and English*, p.104.
[196] [Eagles], *Rhymes, Latin and English*, p.104. This is likely to be *John Bull*, 27 March 1826.



Robert Seymour, 'The March of Intellect, (1828-30), satirical print, British Museum, 2003,0531.29.

Eagles associated these forces with the rapid expansion of literary and philosophical societies throughout the country and, in Bristol, the establishment of the Bristol Institution for the Advancement of Science, Literature and the Arts in 1823.[197] Although not expressly critical of the Institution, Eagles was hardly complimentary of a society that he believed spent far too long debating abstract notions or putting on cheap chemical tricks to wow audiences who attended the regular lectures.[198] Yet the Bristol Institution was hardly a 'radical', or even a 'popular', society. Michael Neve has described it as an exclusive and conservative 'non-utilitarian' society whose membership was cross-partisan but also 'elitist and established'.[199]

[197] 'Since now Philosophy's in vogue,/ And far-fetch'd lecturers disembogue.'. [Eagles], *Rhymes, Latin and English*, p.103. On the growth of literary and philosophical societies, see Peter Clark, *British Clubs and Societies, 1580-1800: The Origins of an Associational World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp.110-15; Hilton, *Mad, Bad, and Dangerous People?*, pp.168-73; Jon Mee and Jennifer Wilkes, 'Transpennine Enlightenment: The Literary and Philosophical Societies and Knowledge Networks in the North, 1781-1830', *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 38.4 (2015), pp.599-600.
[198] See, respectively, [Eagles], *Rhymes, Latin and English*, pp.102 and 69.
[199] Michael Raymond Neve, 'Natural Philosophy, Medicine and the Culture of Science in Provincial England: the cases of Bristol, 1790-1850', unpublished PhD thesis, (University College London, 1984), pp.128, 154.

In this respect it was similar to the Bristol Library, although administratively it was structured differently.[200] Eagles was not a member of the Institution himself, but its membership consisted of Tory Anglicans, Whig Dissenters and a number of library members, including his associate John Mathew Gutch.[201] Nevertheless, Eagles was clearly perturbed by the Bristol Institution's 'popular' elements, possibly its concession that subscribers need not be shareholders (not the case for the Bristol Library), but also almost certainly the popularity of its lectures, which were thought to draw crowds of around 250 people.[202] In comparison, Eagles praised the Bristol Library for its unpretending nature, its restraint and exclusivity:

> There was a place where Learning rais'd
> Her unassuming head unprais'd –
> Stands she still pinch'd for room and cold,
> The while Philosophy, more bold,
> Grows strong and lusty, to belabour
> Her modest unpretending neighbour?[203]

In the 1850s, Eagles would adopt the same approach to the question of the expansion of rate-funded public libraries, a scheme he described as 'mere folly'.[204] 'Who are they … who are to select the works?', wrote Eagles in one such essay that was published posthumously in *Blackwood's* in March 1856, 'Or, if every donation be to be accepted, what a pretty library would be put before the public, of sedition, immorality, and irreligion'.[205] Eagles's views were

[200] For an overview of the administrative structuring of the Bristol Institution, which actually comprised two societies, see above, Chapter One, p.68, n.135.
[201] Neve, 'Natural Philosophy', pp.136-39. Unsurprisingly, there was a great degree of overlap between the membership of the Bristol Library Society and the Bristol Institution, as noted above, Chapter One, p.68, n.135.
[202] [Eagles], *Rhymes, Latin and English*, pp.65, 101-03; Neve, 'Natural Philosophy', p.148.
[203] [Eagles], *Rhymes, Latin and English*, p.113. Eagles also made reference to the Society's librarian, John Peace: 'Now Heav'n preserse it from such din,/ And even keep good Peace within.'
[204] Eagles, *Essays Contributed to Blackwood's Magazine*, p.421. This essay, one of a series titled 'Civilisation. - The Census', first appeared in *Blackwood's Magazine*, 77.473 (March 1855), pp.309-30.
[205] Eagles, *Essays Contributed*, p.421.

probably coloured by the fact that the Society was, in 1855, then in the process of being, rather ignominiously, ejected from its building on King Street.[206] He is likely to have played a significant role on the Library Society's approach to a new public library and may have prevented efforts by some reformers to merge the two libraries together.[207]

VIII

The exclusivity so prized by Eagles came at a cost, as other library members recognised.[208] Other specific complaints regarding the practices and regulations of the subscription library led to the unprecedentedly tumultuous library meeting held on 5 May 1828. Reform of the library was concerned with not only the question of access but a range of problems, many long lasting, and for which a range of solutions were requested. In the view of library reformers, these issues were interlinked and thus their solution demanded a more substantial analysis and reform of the library system rather than just piecemeal changes. This came in the form of a written report, produced by a sub-committee selected at an adjourned general meeting on 7 May 1827, which was intended to examine whether the Library Society should be moved from its present location and 'whether it would be desirable to adopt any new rules on regulations, or any modification of the existing rules for the better regulation of the Society'.[209] The completed report, delivered at a specially convened general meeting held on 21 January 1828, outlined a range of issues and solutions that were all intended to be rectified together.[210] Thus, the manner in which

[206] BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 22 March 1841, 9 January 1856; Hapgood, *Friends to Literature*, pp.24-27.
[207] This was certainly the view of Charles Tovey, a liberal councillor and library reformer in Bristol, who favoured the merger of the Society with a new public library. Tovey, *Bristol City Library*, p.53. In a later pamphlet, Tovey would claim that this proposal was rejected by library members. Charles Tovey, *A Free Library for Bristol: with a History of the City Library, its Founders and Benefactors* (London, 1855), pp.16-17.
[208] See above, pp.123-24.
[209] BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 7 May 1827.
[210] BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 21 January 1828. The sub-committee produced both a written report on the library's present circumstances, and an address to the inhabitants of Bristol in the form of a circular letter which explained 'the advantages which the Bristol Library affords'. Both documents were copied into the general meeting minute book for the meeting at which they were presented on 21 January 1828. They will be hereafter cited, respectively, as BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 1827 Report and BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 1827 Address.

change was sought, an 'all or nothing' approach, inevitably raised the stakes for the meeting in which the report was eventually voted upon.[211] More broadly, other reformers employed the same tactic. For example, Grey's Reform Bill was a single, though substantial, piece of legislation which aimed at rectifying a number of deficiencies perceived to be in the unreformed system, the redistribution of parliamentary seats and changes to the franchise for both counties and boroughs.[212]

As we will see, the 1827 report recommended a whole raft of changes designed to reform the culture of the library space, ease the running of the library and remedy specific issues. In addition to having drafted this report, the sub-committee had also written and circulated 'an address explanatory of the advantages of that institution, with a view to increase the number of its supporters, and extend its utility'.[213] Although this letter focused principally on 'the advantages which the Bristol Library affords', including providing a value and an estimate of the size of the collection, the rates of membership and the library's opening times, the letter acknowledged the difficulties faced by the library.[214] 'The Special Committee thinks it proper to notice such advantages as the Library possesses in its present state, rather than expatiate upon the improvements of which it may be capable', nevertheless, it did succinctly list the improvements it believed would remedy the library's present state: 'by an alteration of its rules,

[211] This meeting was held on the 5 May 1828. BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 5 May 1828.
[212] Brock, *Great Reform Act*, pp.138-39.
[213] BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 1827 Address.
[214] 'Yet, with all these advantages, it must be admitted, that the increase of subscribers to the Bristol Library has not kept pace with the population of the neighbourhood; nor have the benefits of this Institution extended in proportion to those of literary Societies in other parts of the Kingdom. Indeed, the Bristol Library exhibits an anomaly in the history and progress of the literature of the country, at this time; for not more than two new shares have been taken, for four or five years, and not more than five or six for about twenty; and yet many Institutions, more limited in their resources, and less favoured, in many respects, by local circumstances, have, within that time, doubled, or even tripled, the number of their members. Three hundred subscribers out of a population of 120,000, within a circumference of five miles from the Bristol Library, is a very small number; and an income of less than £500 a year, in proportion to the wealth, leisure, education, and general improvement of that population, is "poor indeed".' BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 1827 Address.

by greater facilities of accommodation on access, by a change, or increase of the Librarian's hours of attendance, or by a more varied or extensive supply of books'.[215]

These complaints, although given a new form in 1827, were not recent and had plagued the Library Society for much of its history. In this respect, the report should be judged as a response to the rumbling discontent that had been raised in fits and spurts over the preceding decades, indeed in a very similar way to other national campaigns for reform.[216] Probably the chief complaint concerned the present location of the library. The library's collection was rapidly filling its King Street building, with opportunities for further expansion limited by its central location amongst the industry of the docks.[217] Surrounded on all sides by Bristol's floating harbour, the library was a distance away from the pleasurable terraces of Clifton, where many committee members had their homes.[218] In 1814, a special general meeting of the library had unanimously resolved five motions including that 'the Rooms occupied by the Society are insufficient for its present accommodation' and 'that a more spacious situation be procured, sufficient for the probable increase of books'.[219] Despite this clear direction, no practical steps were taken to move the Library Society.[220] The authors of the 1827 report believed that it was

[215] BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 1827 Address.
[216] John Cannon, *Parliamentary Reform*; Innes and Burns, 'Introduction', in *Rethinking the Age of Reform*, pp.7-21.
[217] As early as 1804, the general meeting empowered the library committee to 'expend any Sum not exceeding Thirty Pounds in providing Shelves for the Books which at present for want of Room are lying scattered about the Library.' BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 19 March 1804. Further new shelves were fitted in 1826, near the fireplace in the library's inner room. BA, LS/M/5, Committee minute book, 1823-36, 18 July 1826.
[218] Hapgood, *Friends to Literature*, pp.15-18. Constructed in 1809, Bristol's floating harbour fundamentally changed the physical environment of the city and the manner in which its sewer waste had been disposed of. Where it had previously been swept away by tidal rise and fall, stagnant water and sewage now accumulated in the harbour docks. Complaints at this situation had been raised as early as September 1810, and the problem was said to have been particularly bad during the summer of 1825. In 1828, the construction of a new culvert under Prince Street Bridge was said to have alleviated the problem somewhat. Peter Malpass, *The Bristol Dock Company, 1803-1848* (Bristol: Avon Local History & Archaeology, 2014), pp.20-23.
[219] BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 15 August 1814.
[220] Despite it having been resolved that 'no alteration, of which the present Rooms are capable, will furnish convenient accommodation for a longer time than about five years', it seems that the library committee's first intention was to explore opportunities to expand its existing King Street residence, rather than move location. BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 15 August 1814. On 20 December 1814, the committee appointed nine gentlemen, mostly consisting of committee men, 'for the purpose of considering a plan for the enlargement of

the location of the library that lay behind its inability to attract new shareholders. Indeed, they concluded their circular letter by expressing the hope that 'at no distant period, the treasures which the Bristol Library now possesses, will be deposited in an edifice in a more eligible site, and adequate to receive its accommodating stores for ages'.[221]

A second complaint, raised in 1827 but again of long lasting concern, regarded the library's opening times and the hours in which the librarian was in attendance, with members complaining that the library was simply not open long enough.[222] Significantly, motions to rectify these complaints and extend the library's opening hours almost always came from the general meeting, rather than from the library committee, implying that it was a complaint felt by the membership at large.[223] It was then the task of the committee to implement the wishes as outlined at the general meeting a process which represented, in the words of Mark Towsey and Max Skjönsberg, 'an unusual reversal to the conventional operating structure' and the library's settled hierarchy.[224] Complaints about relatively mundane matters could become an impetus for further regulatory change. It may have been the wish to extend the opening hours further that led to an additional general meeting to be called in 1808 'To define the duties and

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the library' and work with a committee appointed by the Corporation to consider the same. However, there is no further record of either of these committees meeting. BA, LS/M/4, Committee minute book, 1807-23, 20 December 1814.

[221] The committee may have overstepped their authority in intimating this change in their circular address without the sanction of the general meeting. They made reference to this in their written report. 'So fully were your Committee in prospect on this subject, that they felt it useless to circulate any address with a view to excite the public interest in behalf of your institution, without some allusion to the possible change of its local site; and it is in this view that they ventured to insert the concluding paragraph of their address'. BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 1827 Report. The committee had 'no hesitation' in recommending the library's removal to 'College Green or its vicinity' at the earliest possible opportunity.

[222] This was not a complaint voiced only at Bristol. The founders of the Liverpool Athenaeum, in 1797, explained that they were motivated to do so because the Liverpool Library was only open four hours a day. *First Minute Book of the Liverpool Athenaeum*, eds. Brazendale and Towsey, p.29.

[223] For example, it was a general meeting on 24 March 1806 that decreed that the library open additionally on Saturday mornings. BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 24 March 1806.

[224] Skjönsberg and Towsey, 'Introduction', in *Bristol Minute Book*, p.xxiii. In one such meeting on 22 March 1790, the general membership moved that the library's opening hours should be extended across five days of the week, a demand that the committee was forced to respond to at their next meeting on 30 March 1790, where they began the process of hiring a new assistant librarian. *Bristol Minute Book*, eds. Skjönsberg and Towsey, pp.21, 163.

settle the Salary and other emoluments of any future Librarian and Sub-Librarian', and which in turn saw the library's hours extended further.[225] A following complaint, in many ways related, concerned members' access to new and popular books.[226] Again, this was a problem that had always plagued the library, but is likely to have worsened as the decades wore on as the popularity of some authors, such as Walter Scott, exponentially grew.[227] In light of this, the 1827 report recommended the purchase of a second, or even a third copy of 'works of popular interest', acknowledging a shift in the library's purpose from the supply of scholarly and classical works of reference towards more popular literature.[228] It also recommended that members be allowed to borrow three books at once rather than two. Indeed, the report fully concurred with this change in function by asserting 'that it is the intention of this, and similar institutions, to supply in the first place, such works as are of the most extensive interest and utility, and afterwards to look to the higher departments of Science and Literature'.[229] This was a more popular conception of the library's purpose, more in line with a liberal conception of the 'March of Intellect', than conservative library members may have wished for.[230]

Whilst the report considered proposals to improve these standard aspects of library life, it also considered changes to electoral procedures in the library, particularly the method in which the committee was elected. This was a far more significant alteration to propose considering that the committee represented the administrative head of the library and oversaw its day-to-day

[225] BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 31 October 1808. These were again extended further at the general meeting the following year. BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 20 March 1809.
[226] The 1814 catalogue made reference to this 'general complaint of subscribers, that they can rarely get a sight of the new Publications'. *Catalogue of the… Bristol Library Society* (1814), p.xvi.
[227] Despite repeated entreaties, a system of fines for the late return of books was never widely implemented. See above, pp.128-34.
[228] BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 1827 Report. In 1825, a letter to the *Bristol Mercury* complained that the library's books were 'ill adapted to the general reader.' 'Bristol Library', *Bristol Mercury*, 24 January 1825.
[229] BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 1827 Report.
[230] See above, p.327.

operation. The electoral practices of the Library Society had been criticised before and the issue of their reform had been raised at previous general meetings in 1781, 1789 and 1799.[231]

Objections to the manner in which the committee were elected persisted into the nineteenth century and excited a degree of commentary in the Bristol newspapers with one, or possibly multiple library members using the platform of the newspaper to complain about election practices, frequently voicing their concerns in March upon the eve of the general meeting.[232] 'On Monday evening, at the great room King street, will be performed the annual farce, called "The Election of a Committee"', wrote one correspondent to the *Bristol Mirror* on 16 March 1811.[233] Members frequently complained that 'printed lists', pre-circulated printed material which listed the names of those to be elected to the committee, prevented a true contest taking place, leading to the committee consisting of 'the same persons for ever and ever'.[234] The same member, this time writing following the general meeting held on 20 March 1815, declared that '"The Committee" have, as usual, ELECTED THEMSELVES' and believed 'the first step towards their unhorsing, is *never to use a printed list*.'[235] The greatest fault with this method of election was that it produced a committee of members who had little interest in improving the library, or even in attending committee meetings. One repeat correspondent to the *Bristol Mirror* paid close attention to the attendance of committee members at meetings, proceeding to tally, in two letters published in 1811 and 1815, the attendance, or lack of it, of committee members at meetings in 1811, 1813 and 1814.[236] Although anonymous, these letters were

[231] *Bristol Minute Book*, eds. Skjönsberg and Towsey, pp.13, 20, 30-31. See also, Skjönsberg and Towsey, 'Introduction', in *Bristol Minute Book*, pp.xxv-xxvi.
[232] 'To the Members of the Bristol Library Society', *Bristol Mirror*, 16 March 1811; 'Bristol Library Society', *Bristol Mirror*, 25 March 1815; 'To the MEMBERS of the BRISTOL LIBRARY SOCIETY', *Bristol Mirror*, 22 March 1823; 'Bristol Library', *Bristol Mercury*, 24 January 1825.
[233] 'To the Members of the Bristol Library Society', *Bristol Mirror*, 16 March 1811.
[234] 'To the Members of the Bristol Library Society', *Bristol Mirror*, 16 March 1811. See also, Skjönsberg and Towsey, 'Introduction', in *Bristol Minute Book*, pp.xxv-xxvi.
[235] 'Bristol Library Society', *Bristol Mirror*, 25 March 1815.
[236] 'To the Members of the Bristol Library Society', *Bristol Mirror*, 16 March 1811; 'Bristol Library Society', *Bristol Mirror*, 25 March 1815. The correspondent correctly noted that Richard Bright and the Rev. Dr. Joseph Atwell

clearly penned by those with a committed interest in the management of the Library Society and with its political mechanisms. For these library members, clearly their membership of the library was worth more to them than it being simply a useful way to access books. Members placed a great importance on the manner in which the library was administered and invested their time and energy in engaging in the political debates which concerned this. Subscription libraries were valuable institutions; the annual subscription was a not inconsiderable yearly expense, and all shareholders had a material interest in their shared enterprise succeeding. This was the view of one letter writer, '*An Old Member*', to the *Bristol Mirror* on 22 March 1823:

> Gentlemen, - Our Committee will probably do us the favour of *re-electing themselves* next Monday: for we seem to have acquiesced in this system, with *singular* good nature; - but don't they carry the joke a little *too far*, in persisting to return those who, every year, derive pecuniary benefit from our expenditure?[237]

Rarely, these kinds of accusations received a reply in the newspaper. In this instance, a '*New* Member' writing in the *Bristol Mercury*, replied that 'If the proprietors will not trouble themselves to exercise their privileges [attend general meetings], they alone are to blame if interested individuals creep in'.[238] As reformers elucidated in debates in both the library and in print, the solution to this unsatisfactory state of affairs lay in a change to the library's regulations and the implementation of a rule which would require a certain number of committee members to retire each year. Such a rule was not uncommon across other

Small (d. 1814) had attended no committee meetings during their tenure of office in 1810. Their campaign, to shine a light upon non-attending committee members, may well have been influential in the fact that Bright was not re-elected to the library's committee at the next general meeting held on 18 March 1811. Whilst Joseph Small was, he served for only another year until 23 March 1812, a period during which he again attended no committee meetings. BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 18 March 1811, 23 March 1812; BA, LS/M/4, Committee minute book, 1807-23.

[237] 'To the MEMBERS of the BRISTOL LIBRARY SOCIETY', *Bristol Mirror*, 22 March 1823.

[238] 'To the Editor of the Bristol Mercury', *Bristol Mercury*, 24 March 1823.

associational societies and subscription libraries.[239] Indeed, it had been debated previously at the Bristol Library, at a general meeting in 1789, and was proposed again by a reformer in a letter to the *Bristol Mirror* in 1811.[240] That library members felt the need to engage in debates in the newspaper press demonstrates their strength of feeling about their library membership. The same debates also occurred within the library itself.

IX

The succession of letters which appeared in the Bristol newspapers may have had a significant effect upon beginning the process of library reform. In January 1825, another letter, complaining about the library's state of management appeared in the *Bristol Mercury* and sought to revive the debate for reform.[241] Critically, whereas previous letters had appeared in the Bristol press mere days before the general meeting in March, here it was hoped that a far earlier intervention would prove effective. The usual complaint aimed at the manner in which the committee was elected and the use of printed lists was made.[242] Yet this criticism was now employed in a new fashion. This method of election not only produced a disconnect between the elected committee and the main body of subscribers but also a further disconnect between the books ordered by the committee and those favoured by the majority of readers.[243] These criticisms, including that it took too long for the most popular books to circulate amongst the

[239] The Liverpool Athenaeum had such a rule from its outset, as it seems did the Bristol Institution, where eight new members of the 'Council' were elected at the annual meeting. *First Minute Book of the Liverpool Athenaeum,* eds. Brazendale and Towsey, p.19; BA, 32079/PL/M/1, The Philosophical and Literary Society, later attached to the Bristol Institution 1823-1870, Minute book, 10 December 1823-25 August 1828, 25 May 1826.
[240] Skjönsberg and Towsey, 'Introduction', in *Bristol Minute Book*, p.xxv; 'To the Members of the Bristol Library Society', *Bristol Mirror*, 16 March 1811.
[241] 'Bristol Library', *Bristol Mercury*, 24 January 1825.
[242] 'The present affairs of the City Library are conducted by a close Committee, elected in a way that illustrates all the advantages of the system of election by nomination.' 'Bristol Library', *Bristol Mercury*, 24 January 1825.
[243] 'The list of Subscribers presents the names of many ladies; yet with an ostentatious display of classical and polemical learning, hardly one book in twenty is adapted to the general reader.' The letter writer further complained that the committee favoured the purchase of Greek or Latin texts over those of the 'popular works of the day'. 'Bristol Library', *Bristol Mercury*, 24 January 1825.

subscribers, were raised again in the 1827 report, but they were now linked to the need to reform the library's electoral practices.

Electoral reform of the library was now seriously debated for the first time in three decades, at a general meeting on 21 March 1825.[244] After the usual business had been concluded a motion, 'that a certain number of the Committee should vacate their places every year and the same number of new members be elected in their stead', was debated, moved and 'carried by a considerable majority'.[245] It may have taken the library some time to adjust to the practicalities of this change. As recorded in the library's minute book, the new rule did not actually stipulate how many committee members should vacate their places.[246] The following year, on 20 March 1826, the rule was more formally rewritten to make clear that three committee members should retire and were to remain out of office for a year.[247] The general meeting in 1826 was significant for two further respects. Firstly, the meeting asked the committee 'to consider of, and adopt, the most efficient means of carrying into effect Rule 5, Sec IX', effectively asking them, as the letter to the *Bristol Mercury* in 1825 requested, to enable the most popular books to be circulated more quickly amongst the subscribers.[248] Secondly, the general meeting also ruled

[244] BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 21 March 1825.
[245] BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 21 March 1825.
[246] In the end, two new committee members were elected in 1825, John Joseph Goodenough and Richard Smith, in the places of Charles Abraham Elton and William Brame Elwyn. BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 21 March 1825. However, both men had already been long serving committee members, Goodenough from 1820 and Smith from 1817, and the re-election of both to the committee in 1825 came after only a brief hiatus of a year. BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 24 March 1817, 20 March 1820.
[247] BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 20 March 1826. As seems to have been the case in 1825, however, the election of the committee proceeded irrespectively of this new rule and all the same committee members were re-elected. According to the text of the rule as recorded in the minute book, if three vacancies did not occur from death or resignation, the committee was supposed to decide 'by lot or otherwise' who would retire. This method of choosing was more formally discussed at a meeting of the committee on 11 April 1826 and on 6 June 1826, where latterly it was decided those members who attended the fewest number of meetings, with the exception of the dean of Bristol and 'senior Alderman', should retire. BA, LS/M/5, Committee minute book, 1823-36, 11 April 1826, 6 June 1826.
[248] BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 20 March 1826; 'Bristol Library', *Bristol Mercury*, 24 January 1825. This matter was finally considered by the committee at a meeting on 18 July 1826, although very little changed as a result. The committee reiterated that a register was to be kept in the library for members to request books already in circulation and that after this, the librarian was to write to borrowers requesting them to return said book. BA, LS/M/5, Committee minute book, 1823-36, 18 July 1826. Neither of these were new rules. *Catalogue*

that any future attempts to alter the library's rules would have to be intimated in advance of the general meeting before they could be formally proposed and voted upon.[249] This represented a considerable tightening of the existing rules which had previously only required such a step for the act of raising the entrance money.[250] This was an extra administrative burden that had the potential to slow what were already very slow procedural steps. Changes to the library's rules could only be voted upon at the general meeting, which took place once a year. Moreover, any successful motion required two-thirds support to pass. The need for there to be advance notice for all potential changes decreased the likelihood that either side could take advantage of a sparsely attended general meeting.[251] Conservatives within the library may well have been aware that they were entering a period of profound debate over the future direction of the library.

It was at the next general meeting, on 19 March 1827, that the true significance of the changes to library regulations made in 1826 were felt. The three new members elected to the committee, John Howell, Charles Pinney and William Pyle Taunton, were all committed reformers, both in regard to library and parliamentary reform.[252] Howell and Taunton would both play a significant role in the support and drafting of the 1827 report.[253] Yet the 1827 general meeting was also significant in that it was not chaired by the Society's vice-president, Samuel Seyer. Twelve days prior to the general meeting, Seyer had written to the Society declaring his intention to resign as vice-president on account of ill health.[254] Seyer was eventually persuaded

of the… Bristol Library Society (1814), p.xvi. For the 'Books Engaged' register, see BCL, B26782, Bristol Library Society, Books engaged, 8 January 1816-15 February 1827.

[249] For an example of this, see BA, LS/M/5, Committee minute book, 1823-36, 5 March 1833.

[250] BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 21 April 1806. This may have been the compromise library reformers struck in order to change the method in which the committee were elected.

[251] In 1830, a proposal to change the rules to allow for the election of three vice-presidents was vetoed on the ground that prior notice for it had not been given. BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 22 March 1830.

[252] On Pinney and Taunton, see above, pp.304-05, 321-22.

[253] BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 7 May 1827, 21 January 1828, 24 March 1828.

[254] 'It is no longer in my power to attend to the duties of the office which I hold in that Society, as I have been accustomed to do'. BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, Samuel Seyer's resignation letter, 7 March 1827.

to remain in his position and seems to have been present at the general meeting on 19 March 1827, although, critically, he did not chair it.[255] It is reasonable to assume that Seyer's absence in this regard, his first in twenty-six years as vice-president, decisively affected the conduct and outcome of the meeting.[256] It contributed to the election of three pro-reform committee members, but it also firmly set in train what reformers hoped would be substantial changes to further aspects of the library's management.

The 1827 meeting immediately proceeded to enact changes and tackle the problems faced by the Society. The committee was asked to consider whether the library could be opened for more hours than it presently was.[257] The abolition of the hated printed lists, as reported in the *Bristol Mirror*, was also proposed and passed 'without a dissenting voice!' and thus rid the library of 'a proposition, which has for the last thirty years almost annually, and often very violently, agitated the Society.'[258] The greatest significance of the meeting, however, was that it planned to hold an additional general meeting in two months' time. Ostensibly, the purpose of this

[255] 'Bristol Library', *Bristol Mirror*, 24 March 1827. After Seyer's intention to resign became known, the committee, meeting on 13 March 1827, ordered a 'Deputation', consisting of the library's treasurer, George Fisher junior, as well as John Joseph Goodenough and Andrew Carrick, to visit Seyer 'to express the great regret felt by the Committee at this notification' and ask him to reconsider 'and continue to the Society the benefit of his valuable services.' Evidently, they were successful in their pleas. BA, LS/M/5, Committee minute book, 1823-36, 13 March 1827.

[256] BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book. Seyer was replaced in the chair by Dr Andrew Carrick, a physician at the Bristol Infirmary from 1810. Born in Stirling in 1767, Carrick studied in Glasgow and Edinburgh before settling in Clifton in 1795. He had served on the committee of the Bristol Library since 1812 and was an active participant in Bristol's associational culture and was a member of the Bear's Cub Club, Bristol College, the Clergy Society and the Bristol Institution. See variously George Munro Smith, *A History of the Bristol Royal Infirmary* (Bristol: J.W. Arrowsmith, 1917), p.179; Henry Alford, 'The Bristol Infirmary in My Student Days, 1822-1828', *Bristol Medico-Chirurgical Journal*, 8.29 (September 1890), pp.170-72; Patricia Craig, 'The First B.M.A. Meeting in Bristol', *Bristol Medico-Chirurgical Journal*, 98.3 (July 1983), pp.104-08; BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 23 March 1812; Neve, 'Natural Philosophy', p.145.

[257] BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 19 March 1827.

[258] 'Bristol Library', *Bristol Mirror*, 24 March 1827. No prior notice of this proposal was given in advance of the general meeting, seemingly in direct violation of the motion agreed at the previous general meeting on 20 March 1826. BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 20 March 1826. However, it may be that this was seen to be merely the clarification of an existing rule rather than the passing of a new one. It was ruled that alongside the printed summons sent out to all members alerting them to the date of the general meeting was to be included a copy of all new and amended rules passed since the last catalogue was printed in 1814, a copy of the treasurer's accounts for the society, and a list of all the library's members, with the names of committee members marked. Despite the report in the *Bristol Mirror*, there was no explicit reference made to the printed lists of the committee. BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 19 March 1827.

meeting was to oversee the election of the bishop of Bristol, Robert Gray, in his customary position as president of the Library Society. Yet in addition to this, the general meeting also resolved that this additional meeting should take into consideration 'whether by any and what means, the extension and prosperity of the Society may be expected to be promoted.'[259] As the *Bristol Mirror* observed, this was an attempt to find a solution to the 'languid state of existence' in which the library found itself.[260] It was also a resounding cry, echoed by the newspaper, in favour of change and reform in the form, first, of the identification of the problem, and then its solution: 'the evils must be pointed out before the remedy could be administered.'[261] Moreover, the *Bristol Mirror* warmly welcomed the equanimity of spirit it saw displayed amongst the Bristol Library's members, which it believed was a testament to the city's polite associational culture:

> It is with great pleasure we add, that there was not exhibited, during the whole evening, the least spark of angry feeling. Indeed but one wish seemed to pervade every member present, which was, to place the Society in an attitude worthy of the rank which the city of Bristol ought to (and we trust will) hold in the republic of letters and of science.[262]

Of course, such a spirit was not to remain, but library reformers must have felt that the initiative was with them to fundamentally change the direction of the library.

The adjourned general meeting was held on 7 May 1827 with Samuel Seyer once again absent from the chair, on this occasion held by Henry Beeke (1751-1837), the dean of Bristol.[263] The meeting confirmed the bishop of Bristol in his usual position as the president of the library before moving onto a discussion of the library's future. A series of resolutions were proposed

[259] BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 19 March 1827.
[260] 'Bristol Library', *Bristol Mirror*, 24 March 1827.
[261] 'Bristol Library', *Bristol Mirror*, 24 March 1827.
[262] 'Bristol Library', *Bristol Mirror*, 24 March 1827.
[263] BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 7 May 1827.

by Christopher George (1786-1866) who prefaced them with, in the words of the *Bristol Mercury*, 'some very pertinent and judicious remarks upon the reasons which … had occurred to retard the progress and prosperity of the Society'.[264] A lead manufacturer, George, like many of his fellow library reformers, was prominently involved in Bristol's associational culture and its electoral politics, being a consistent and active supporter of Whig candidates in the city, particularly those of a more liberal persuasion.[265] Intending to attract more subscribers to the library, the meeting, following George's suggestions, resolved to form a sub-committee of nine library members who were instructed first, to draw up 'an address explanatory of the nature and advantages of the institution' and, secondly, 'to consider how far it may be expedient to remove the Library to a more eligible situation, and whether it would be desirable to adopt any new rules on regulations, or any modification of the existing rules for the better regulation of the Society'.[266] These were eventually to become the circular letter and report delivered to the next general meeting, held on 21 January 1828, and voted upon on 5 May 1828. The names of those chosen to serve upon this sub-committee are again instructive of the interrelation between Whig politics in Bristol and support for library reform. While the sub-committee contained members of all political persuasions, the majority were Whigs, all of whom would go on to be vocal supporters of parliamentary reform.[267] Like their Tory counterparts in 1812, these library

[264] 'Bristol Library Society', *Bristol Mercury*, 14 May 1827.

[265] George was a member of the Bristol Institution and a committee member of the Mechanics' Institution. BCL, B1523, *Rules and Orders of the Bristol Mechanics' Institution, for the Promotion of Useful Knowledge among the Working Classes.* (Bristol, 1825), p.3; Neve, 'Natural Philosophy', p.402. In June 1818, George voted for and supported the candidature of Hugh Duncan Baillie against the incumbent-Whig, Edward Protheroe (1774-1856). David R. Fisher, 'Bristol: 1790-1820', *HoP*, <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1790-1820/constituencies/bristol>; 'June 1818 Bristol', ECPPEC, <https://ecppec.ncl.ac.uk/case-study-constituencies/bristol/election/June-1818/>. At the election of March 1820, George plumped for Henry Bright. 'Mar 1820 Bristol', ECPPEC, <https://ecppec.ncl.ac.uk/case-study-constituencies/bristol/election/Mar-1820/>, [accessed 08/03/24]. In 1830, he was involved in and chaired a number of Whig meetings. He also acted as one of the proposers for Edward Protheroe junior, who he voted for in the August 1830 election. Jenkins, 'Bristol: 1820-32', *HoP*; 'Aug 1830 Bristol', ECPPEC.

[266] BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 7 May 1827. The sub-committee were to be formed of 'five gentlemen selected from the standing Committee and four from the general body of Subscribers'.

[267] These Whigs included Christopher George and William Pyle Taunton, as discussed above, as well as Robert Bright and Joseph Reynolds. Both Bright and Reynolds, as well as Taunton, were present at a reform meeting

members were united by their political beliefs, merchant backgrounds and associational participation as library members.[268] In many respects, their active engagement in seeking to reform the Library Society was a continuation of their practice in their political careers.

The sub-committee were allowed to use the inner room of the library for their meetings and were asked to deliver their findings at a future general meeting.[269] This general meeting was held seven months later and was evidently a significant affair, with the Bishop of Bristol now installed as president of the society and the chair of the meeting.[270] The sub-committee's report and address were presented to the meeting and entered into the minutes. The meeting agreed, unanimously, that the library's present location was problematic and began collecting what was called 'The Removal Fund' to allow the library to be moved to a location 'more central and convenient of access.'[271] Moving onto the main report, the meeting warmly welcomed many

held at the Guildhall on 24 September 1831. 'Reform Meeting', *Bristol Mercury*, 27 September 1831. On Bright, see also Bush, *Bristol and its Municipal Government*, p.169. Reynolds was also a speaker, alongside Lant Carpenter, at a pro-reform meeting held in Queen Square on 12 October 1831. *Bristol Mirror*, 15 Oct 1831. For both, see also Jenkins, 'Bristol: 1820-32', *HoP*. Other members of the sub-committee included Richard Brickdale Ward (1778-1853), who had plumped for the Tory candidate, Richard Hart Davis, in October 1812 and who had voted for James Evan Baillie and Davis in August 1830. Both Joseph Porter and William Lewton (or Lawton) Clarke (1777-1867) also voted for Baillie and Davis in August 1830. 'Oct 1812 Bristol', ECPPEC; 'Aug 1830 Bristol', ECPPEC. Neither of the two remaining sub-committee members, Henry Beeke or John Howell, are recorded as having voted in Bristol's elections. On Beeke, see R.D. Sheldon, 'Beeke, Henry (1751-1837)', *ODNB* (September 2004).

[268] Joshua J. Smith, 'Reading against Reform: The Bristol Library Society and the Intellectual Culture of Bristol's Elections in 1812', *Parliamentary History*, 43.1 (February 2024), p.122.

[269] BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 7 May 1827.

[270] This was the first meeting since 24 March 1800 to have been chaired by the bishop of Bristol. *Bristol Minute Book*, eds. Skjönsberg and Towsey, p.32; BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 21 January 1828.

[271] The money for this 'Removal Fund' was to be raised from the entrance fee paid by new members and deposited in the local bank of Miles, Harford, & Company, the owners of which were also library members. New library members were allowed to reclaim their money were it not spent on the library's removal within two years, implying that for some new members the removal of the Library Society from King Street was a *sine qua non* for their admission. This plan had been in place for some time, originally formulated by the library's committee and had led to the sudden admission of a number of new members. Dr Paris Dick was admitted on these terms as a new member on 3 July 1827. BA, LS/M/5, Committee minute book, 1823-36, 3 July 1827. Another library member, William Falls, was admitted on the same terms at the following meeting on 17 July 1827, while a further ten new members were admitted on 31 July 1827. BA, LS/M/5, Committee minute book, 1823-36, 17 July 1827, 31 July 1827. There was evidently some confusion over whether the library committee had the authority to devise new terms of admission, or whether such a power was reserved to the general meeting. By December 1827, the library was delaying the admission of new members until the matter had been settled at a general meeting, to the discontent of a number of gentlemen who threatened to withdraw from the library. BA, LS/M/5, Committee minute book, 1823-36, 18 December 1827. These admissions were

of the suggestions proposed but appointed a further 'Special Committee' formed of three library members 'to frame rules & regulations in accordance with the suggestion in the Report.'[272] Two of this group of three, referred to as 'the triumvirate' in the Bristol papers, John Howell and William Pyle Taunton, had helped to author the 1827 report.[273] The final member of this 'Special Committee', George Webb Hall, again had impeccable political credentials. A lawyer, sheep farmer and agricultural lobbyist, during the 1810s, Hall had been the leader of the Central Agricultural Association which lobbied government for the interest of southern and eastern agriculturalists.[274] Hall was an energetic and persevering campaigner who made use of a range of political methods including public meetings, pamphlets, the newspaper press and petitions to Parliament.[275] It was the use of these methods that would lead Sir John Sinclair to describe Hall as 'a species of "Hunt" in Agriculture'.[276] Nevertheless, Hall would go on to become secretary of the Board of Agriculture in July 1820, following the death of Arthur Young.[277] His star had somewhat waned by the time of the late 1820s following the government's move against agricultural protectionism, but his involvement in the attempted reform of the Bristol Library demonstrates he remained an active political campaigner.[278] The 'triumvirate' of Hall, Taunton, Howell, were requested to work quickly and were asked to submit their written recommendations 'ten days before the General Meeting in March next'.[279] The suggestions

not recorded as new members in the library's cash book. BA, 32079/LS/F/1, Bristol Library Society, Cash book, 2 December 1772-24 April 1871.

[272] BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 21 January 1828.

[273] BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 7 May 1827.

[274] David Spring and Travis L. Crosby, 'George Webb Hall and the Agricultural Association', *Journal of British Studies*, 2.1 (November 1962), pp.115-31; Boyd Hilton, *A Mad, Bad, and Dangerous People?: England, 1783-1846* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p.270; Chase, *1820*, pp.152-54, 207.

[275] In the first six months of 1819, Hall's Central Agricultural Association oversaw the delivery of some 280 petitions with 100,000 signatures to Parliament. Chase, *1820*, p.152.

[276] John Sinclair to Arthur Young, 20 October 1819, quoted in Rosalind Mitchison, 'The Old Board of Agriculture (1793– 1822)', *English Historical Review*, 74.290 (1959), p.64.

[277] Chase, *1820*, pp.152-53.

[278] Spring and Crosby, 'George Webb Hall', pp.128-31; Hilton, *Mad, Bad, and Dangerous People?*, pp.264-68, 305-07; Chase, *1820*, p.207. Hall's continued involvement in the Bristol Library also demonstrates that Hall did not die in February 1824, as Spring and Crosby believed. Spring and Crosby, 'George Webb Hall', p.131.

[279] BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 21 January 1828.

were not to be voted upon at the next meeting; they were only to 'be presented for consideration with a view to determine whether the same shall be submitted to a *future meeting* for adoption.'[280] The meeting ended with the Bishop of Bristol requested to sign the meeting's resolutions and to circulate them to the city's mayor and master of the Society of Merchant Venturers.[281]

Up to this point, library reformers may well have been quietly confident about their prospects of engineering change. They had already overseen one reform to the method in which the committee were elected, a change that had enabled a succession of library reformers to be appointed to positions upon it. Moreover, they had maintained tight controls over the apparatus of change and the personnel appointed to the sub- or special committees, enabling them to control the direction and pace of this change. Yet the general meeting, to which all library members were invited, was a space beyond their control, where the ordered and bureaucratic elements of the library's administration met the popular and raucous unpredictability of the mass meeting.

X

Bristol's newspapers predicted that the library's next general meeting would be a contentious one. As the *Bristol Mirror* reported, 'Circumstances had arisen, which enabled those connected with the society to portend a storm, and their anticipations were well founded.'[282] The *Bristol Mercury* and, further afield, the *Dorset County Chronicle* both commented upon the larger than usual attendance.[283] Judging the meeting, held on 24 March 1828, by the library's minutes alone provides an exceptionally distorted account of events.[284] The report of the special

[280] Emphasis added. BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 21 January 1828.
[281] BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 21 January 1828.
[282] 'Bristol Library Society', *Bristol Mirror*, 29 March 1828.
[283] 'The Bristol Library Society', *Bristol Mercury*, 31 March 1828; 'Gloucestershire', *Dorset County Chronicle*, 3 April 1828.
[284] BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 24 March 1828.

committee was laid before the meeting and ordered to be read and circulated amongst the library's members. 5 May 1828 was then fixed as the date on which the resolutions would be considered and adopted or rejected. Three new members were elected to the committee, two of whom were prominent reformers, George Webb Hall and the Rev. Lant Carpenter. Yet the meeting was far from the cordial affair described in the library's minutes. The first flashpoint of the meeting arose from a miscalculation by the 'triumvirate' who attempted to settle the question of whether the new rules should be accepted then and there. As the *Bristol Mirror* reported, it was at this point in which 'discord threw down her apple'.[285] Opponents complained that the new rules had only been presented to the library ten days earlier and 'that not a tenth part of the society had seen them, or knew what they contained.'[286] Moreover, they complained that the 'triumvirate' had overstepped their authority in pushing for a vote to be held at that meeting. The previous general meeting had ruled that the new rules were only to be presented at this meeting and not formally proposed, and yet the notice which had called the present meeting had been written using 'a most lawyer-like phraseology … intended to enable the meeting to settle the whole concern in quick time.'[287] Arguably, the reformers had overplayed their hand and now faced their first public opposition. As the *Bristol Mirror* reported, 'The discussion… assumed a somewhat more belligerent aspect than was pleasant.'[288] Whereas a year earlier, Bristol's newspapers had been able to boast of the constructive and collective spirit they had previously observed, meetings such as that of 24 March 1828 were a mark of shame:

> Certain important changes being meditated, in which the future welfare, if not the very existence of the Society is involved, we think it most prudent to abstain from reporting

[285] 'Bristol Library Society', *Bristol Mirror*, 29 March 1828.
[286] 'Bristol Library Society', *Bristol Mirror*, 29 March 1828.
[287] 'Bristol Library Society', *Bristol Mirror*, 29 March 1828. Both William Pyle Taunton and George Webb Hall were lawyers. The notice calling for the general meeting is likely to have been drawn up by the librarian, John Peace, although under the direction of the library committee. BA, LS/M/5, Committee minute book, 1823-36, 26 February 1828.
[288] 'Bristol Library Society', *Bristol Mirror*, 29 March 1828.

> at length the remarks of the different members who spoke… as we would wish to heal rather than to irritate the differences which at present exist.[289]

The library meeting was more than simply an unedifying spectacle. In an age in which respectability was linked to identity, masculinity, personal and political virtue, the collapse of associational norms called into question an individual's suitability to participate in the political nation.[290]

The events of the meeting on 24 March 1828 were an ominous portent of things to come. Reformers had encountered the first popular opposition to their attempts to change the library's regulations and had been defeated. Perhaps worried about the potential opposition their changes could excite, they hoped to rush to a vote. They may also have believed that they had been invested with sufficient authority by the general meeting to decide such matters. A letter written to accompany the report and copied into the minute book, dated 13 March 1828, made this clear.[291] It reminded all concerned that the committee had been appointed by 'unanimous resolution', to offer practical suggestions for a report 'which was then presented, received, and unanimously adopted.'[292] The committee then proceeded with the task 'as required by the resolution investing them with that duty.'[293]

The decisive vote was now delayed until the next general meeting held on 5 May 1828.[294] Once again, the library's minutes provide no clue as to the furore unleashed by the meeting, recording only that a motion was moved that the new rules should be taken into consideration and that the following amendment was then passed: 'That the present existing Rules be retained – that

[289] 'The Bristol Library Society', *Bristol Mercury*, 31 March 1828.
[290] McCormack, *The Independent Man*, pp.187-88.
[291] This letter was copied below the minutes of the general meeting held on 24 March 1828. BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 24 March 1828.
[292] BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, Report of the Special Committee, 13 March 1828.
[293] BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, Report of the Special Committee, 13 March 1828.
[294] BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 5 May 1828.

the new Rules and Regulations proposed by the Special Committee be altogether rejected – and that this Meeting do now adjourn – the amendment was carried.'[295] Articles in Bristol's newspapers provided a more accurate account of the course of the meeting.[296] Indeed, this meeting was probably one of the most raucous in the library's history. Politics had always formed a central element of these meetings, whether in debates upon the library's administration or in the electoral aspects of elections to the library committee. Yet the conventions which governed most meetings of associational societies in this period and the emphasis upon polite, ordered and constructive debate, almost completely vanished during the meeting of the Bristol Library Society on 5 May 1828.[297]

The meeting was raucous, loud and combative, with procedural battles fought at every stage. Indeed, the first point of contention centred upon the method of how the meeting should even proceed. George Webb Hall, one of the report's authors, moved that the first chapter of the rules should be adopted as they were essentially 'descriptive'. A motion by Lant Carpenter, and seconded by Christopher George, proposed that 'the Rules presented should be taken *seriatim* [in order]', with any acceptable rules adopted and others considered, altered or rejected.[298] However, opponents to the new rules favoured their total rejection. It was the Rev. Richard Gordon Bedford (1767-1835?) who moved the eventually successful amendment that the new rules should be wholly rejected and the existing rules retained. Bedford at first argued that as his amendment concerned the rejection of the rules 'it was not well to consider them in detail',

[295] BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 5 May 1828.
[296] Events of the meeting were discussed in both the *Bristol Mirror* and the *Bristol Mercury*. 'Bristol Library', *Bristol Mirror*, 10 May 1828; 'Bristol Library Society', *Bristol Mercury*, 13 May 1828; 'Bristol Library', *Bristol Mercury*, 13 May 1828. The most detailed account of the general meeting is provided in the *Bristol Mercury*, under an article titled 'Bristol Library Society'. Unless otherwise specified, all following quotations are taken from here.
[297] Robert J. Morris, 'Clubs, Societies and Associations', in *The Cambridge Social History of Britain 1750-1950: Volume 3, Social Agencies and Institutions.*, ed. F.M.L. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp.412-15.
[298] A similar motion was supported by William Lewton Clarke. 'Bristol Library Society', *Bristol Mercury*, 13 May 1828.

but he was overruled in this. Nevertheless, he then proceeded to give a 'detailed examination of several of the proposed Rules'. He opposed the suggestion that subscribers could introduce a younger member of their family to the collection believing that 'this would lead to great disorder in the Library and interfere materially with the convenience of the Subscribers'.[299] He also forcefully opposed the intention to change the method of selecting the vice-president. Bedford's criticisms were 'with great feeling and earnestness, repelled' by Christopher George, who explained that changes in this regard were simply a 'provision for the future' and only considered by the committee because of Samuel Seyer's noted intention to resign in 1827.[300] Seyer himself then rose to reply, explaining that he found this particular proposition 'personally painful' and thought it 'inexpedient'.[301] He more broadly criticised the attempted changes and the opposition they had aroused from subscribers 'who have for many years pursued a tranquil undisturbed course'. Seyer's absence from the chair of the general meeting on 19 March 1827 had clearly been significant in setting in motion a chain of events which he believed now threatened to run away with themselves. Reflecting again on the pace of change witnessed, Seyer remarked 'how rapidly the stream of public opinion and improvement was advancing and extending, and how necessary it is for all established bodies… to command respect and co-operation, by making general utility the main object of their measures'. Institutions, such as the Bristol Library, had a duty to be responsive to these changes in public feeling, but they also had a requirement to resist them and not be 'dragged on by the rapid movement of public spirit… to check its excesses only, and to guide it into wise and salutary channels.' This was

[299] It was reported that Bedford's objections were attacked 'as absurd, useless, and injurious' by others. In response, Lant Carpenter observed, from his personal experience as the librarian of the Liverpool Athenaeum, that with suitable controls young men could be introduced from the age of seventeen, allowing the library to serve as 'a highly important and improving resource for the leisure hours of young men, at the period of peculiar moral danger.' 'Bristol Library Society', *Bristol Mercury*, 13 May 1828.
[300] For Seyer's letter of resignation, see BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, Samuel Seyer's resignation letter, 7 March 1827.
[301] 'Bristol Library Society', *Bristol Mercury*, 13 May 1828.

once again a conservative conception of associational culture that stressed exclusivity as the key source of civic prestige.

Like Seyer and Bedford, all of the most vocal opponents to library reform were Anglican ministers, including the Rev. John Eden, the man who would eventually succeed Seyer as vice-president, and the Rev. John Joseph Goodenough, who, in a future general meeting, would describe himself as 'an enemy to all innovations'.[302] The reforms also brought more library members into contact with the administrative and political elements of the Library Society. One member, speaking in opposition to the proposed changes, admitted that he had never attended the general meeting before, and described himself as having a 'want of experience in the usually admitted *bienséances* of Public Meetings'.[303] This 'inexperience' did not prevent the gentlemen from repeatedly interrupting other speakers. Whilst unusual for the conduct of library meetings, many of the other members would likely have experience of this, having spoken at much larger public meetings. Lant Carpenter spoke amidst cries of '*Question*, *Question*', whilst George Webb Hall found himself almost shouted down by his opponents, leading Christopher George to remonstrate with their opponents for their conduct.[304]

As the *Bristol Mercury* noted, library reformers were probably surprised by the extent of the opposition they then faced and, in hindsight, should perhaps have proceeded far more cautiously: 'if they cannot do all they desire, they should desire to do all they can'.[305] There were certainly those who favoured a third solution, some amendment of the proposed rules or the appointment of a new committee to continue with their consideration. Such a motion was proposed by Dr James Cowles Prichard, and supported by Lant Carpenter, that a new

[302] 'Bristol City Library', *Bristol Mirror*, 28 March 1829.
[303] This member, unnamed by the newspaper, opposed the proposed changes on the grounds that they were 'so absurd and destitute of sense and grammar', although he admitted that he had read no further of them than rule four. 'Bristol Library Society', *Bristol Mercury*, 13 May 1828.
[304] 'Bristol Library', *Bristol Mirror*, 10 May 1828.
[305] 'Bristol Library Society', *Bristol Mercury*, 13 May 1828.

committee could be appointed 'by whose labours the views of both parties in the Society might be met, and union of sentiment and operation obtained.' Procedural rules served to scupper this attempted reconciliation. Objections were raised that an amendment could not be made on another amendment, and that Prichard's conciliatory gesture could only be passed were Bedford's amendment to be negatived.[306] Bedford's amendment was then put to a formal vote and passed by 34 votes to 31, the proposed reforms rejected, and the meeting broken up.[307]

XI

Though unsuccessful in 1828, library reformers continued to raise elements of their reforms at subsequent meetings which continued to receive coverage in the Bristol papers.[308] Samuel Seyer's delayed resignation as vice-president in 1829 produced the potential for another flashpoint. This position had always been held by a Church of England clergyman, but the suggestion raised in 1829 and then 1830 was that the Society should elect two or even three vice-presidents to ensure a wider variety of members with a wider variety of interests were involved in the library's management.[309] The two opposing sides largely reflected the same divisions that had existed in the Society in 1828.[310] Again, library reformers were unsuccessful in their efforts but they did achieve some notable victories, including widening the rights of borrowers, extending the opening hours of the library and eventually doubling the number of

[306] The *Bristol Mercury* considered this to be a grave mistake: 'The lamp flamed too high; and instead of trimming it, it was (for the present) to be distinguished.' 'Bristol Library Society', *Bristol Mercury*, 13 May 1828.
[307] 'Bristol Library', *Bristol Mirror*, 10 May 1828.
[308] 'Bristol City Library', *Bristol Mirror*, 28 March 1829; 'Bristol Library Society', *Bristol Mercury*, 30 March 1830.
[309] BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 23 March 1829, 22 March 1830.
[310] For example, those in favour of electing multiple vice-presidents had all been involved in previous efforts to reform the library and included Richard Brickdale Ward, William Pyle Taunton, Christopher George, George Webb Hall and Joseph Porter. Their opponents included John Eden, John Joseph Goodenough and John Brent Cross. In 1829, reformers, including Richard Brickdale Ward, William Pyle Taunton, Christopher George, and Lant Carpenter, supported Andrew Carrick's unsuccessful nomination. 'Bristol City Library', *Bristol Mirror*, 28 March 1829; 'Bristol Library Society', *Bristol Mercury*. 30 March 1830.

committee members who retired annually.[311] These reforms emerged gradually over the next three years in a piecemeal process and without the major set piece event that marked 1828.

As library members themselves recognised, the difference between library politics and more traditional political action was only one of scale. All those involved in debates concerning library reform were politically experienced, as writers, debaters, and public speakers. Moreover, partisan divides were equally present in the library, with library reformers more likely to have been Whigs and active participants in other reformist campaigns. The actions and language employed in these library debates reflected this, as it did the 'government' of the Library Society and the preoccupation with procedure, consent, rights, conventions, legitimacy and mandates.[312] These debates were shaped by the wider political context, which library members read in different respects. Joseph Porter's description in 1828 of his library opponents as constituting an 'ELDONIAN party' reflected this, coming, as it did, in the immediate aftermath of the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts in which Lord Eldon and his 'party' had been vocal in their opposition.[313] Eldon's methods, particularly his attempted use of a wrecking amendment, may well have provided a blueprint for Richard Gordon Bedford's successful attempt to end the consideration of any new library rules.[314] Critically, the library meeting was another political venue in which a middling class could demonstrate their

[311] Even though the 1828 general meeting had ruled that the amended rules were to be wholly rejected, the library committee continued to consider them in detail at successive meetings between July and October 1828. See BA, LS/M/5, Committee minute book, 1823-36, 1 July 1828, 15 July 1828, 12 August 1828, 26 August 1828, 23 September 1828, 7 October 1828, 21 October 1828. On 21 October 1828, they settled on a series of resolutions which were eventually proposed and passed at the next general meeting, held on 23 March 1829. These included a relaxation of the rules concerning a member's 'privilege' to introduce a stranger to the collection and allowing the borrowing of three books rather than two. BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 23 March 1829. In 1831, the general meeting ruled that six, rather than three, committee members should yearly retire (although three of those retiring could be re-elected immediately to the committee). BA, LS/M/1, AGM minute book, 21 March 1831.

[312] 'Bristol Library Society', *Bristol Mercury*, 13 May 1828.

[313] 'Bristol Library Society', *Bristol Mercury*, 13 May 1828.

[314] G.I.T. Machin, 'Resistance to Repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, 1828', *The Historical Journal*, 22.1 (1979), pp.133-38; Clark, *English Society*, p.532. In 1829, Eldon was also the recipient of a petition, presented by the Presbytery of Dunblane to the House of Lords, in opposition to Catholic Emancipation. Stirling Council Archives, CH2/723/16, Dunblane presbytery, Minutes (1824-1843), pp.143-45.

suitability for political enfranchisement; an education in the art of politics as well as political reading

Conclusion

> *I begin with telling you that there is not one of these volumes which you will receive that does not contain something that is exceptionable, as well as much that is excellent; but every one of them is calculated to compel the serious and attentive reader to think for himself: and it is such reading only as produces this effect that is really valuable. […] In a word, the books you will receive you ought to read with attention, but at the same time with caution: for it is my wish that you think for yourselves.*[1]
>
> George Gleig, Brechin Synod Minutes, August 1814.

As this thesis has demonstrated the act of reading was often not an end of itself but a means to an end, an instigator of thought and (sometimes) of political action. The anxiety to promote the correct manner of reading reflected a recognition of its significance in this respect. A focus solely on the reading process cannot always be alive to its lasting political significance. Similarly, patronising the subscription library was not just about obtaining access to the newest publications, but also about justifying one's place amongst a political class. The original contribution to knowledge of this thesis has been to outline the significance of what came after the borrowing of a book or a subscription to a library. This was the politics of reading, which could act as an instigator of political action and of identity formation. In the period after 1789, political reading allowed British readers to make sense of the political change occurring in France and its implications for Britain. For most subscription library readers, this was an intense time of social dislocation, and they were able to search in their reading for historical

[1] Brechin Collection at the University of Dundee, MS 4/1/1/1 Synod Minutes, 1770-1814, 3 August 1814, quoted in Mhairi Heather Rutherford, 'Intellectual Culture and Episcopal Identity in Scottish Episcopal Libraries: The Case of the Brechin Library, 1780-1880', unpublished PhD thesis (University of Stirling, 2022), p.6. Emphasis in original.

parallels to better understand their own time. For others, the books of the subscription library served as the intellectual fuel for their conservative ripostes to what was perceived to be a foreign radicalism, with the venue of the library, like the club, the tavern, or the home, representing a space that needed to be intellectually defended. A facet of political culture largely ignored by political historians, political print was not just written, it was also read within the exclusive and managed homosocial space of the subscription library, its impact felt on both electoral politics and intellectual culture. An analysis of the politics of reading within a study of the politics of Georgian Britain therefore conjoins political ideas and political action, illuminating this facet of political participation for the first time, and enriching our understanding of British politics valuably. This chapter concludes by reiterating the elements of political reading at the subscription library hitherto examined, doing so with reference to a borrower from each of the case study libraries. These two individuals, although introduced in previous chapters, are here considered in-depth as emblematic of the political and personal significance of the Georgian subscription library for its members and for our understanding of politics of the period.

I

Described by Robert Burns as 'a queerish figure and something of a pedant', as the Master of Stirling Grammar School for forty years, David Doig was locally well known.[2] A borrower from the Leighton Library from at least 1786, many of Doig's closest local acquaintances were also library members.[3] He was a friend of John Ramsay of Ochtertyre, the writer and

[2] A.F. Hutchison, *History of the High School of Stirling* (Stirling: Eneas Mackay, 1904), pp.107-17; for Burns quote, see p.116. Doig perpetually suffered from poor eyesight and was known for a regular squint and his contorted face. 'Lord Kames's first remark when he met him was an unprintable but characteristic ejaculation on his ugliness.' Hutchison, *High School of Stirling*, p.116.

[3] *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Advanced search for 'Borrower: Mr David Doig ',", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/search/p-1/0/0/advanced/brids|3729>, [accessed 13/05/24].

correspondent, who raised a mural tablet in memory of Doig in his own garden.[4] In one letter to his cousin, Ramsay recounted an amusing anecdote of Doig's approach to his daughter and the reading of novels. 'Knowing he said that *Misses* will find means to read novels, he thought it best to give her the *least* exceptionable', in his opinion Hannah More's *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife* (1809).[5]

Doig's Leighton Library membership aided his circulation in networks religious, political, and intellectual. In this respect, he is an emblematic example of the significance of the politics of reading. His subscription to the Leighton Library brought him into contact with figures such as George Gleig, Episcopal minister of Stirling and, after Doig's death, bishop of Brechin and primus of the Episcopal church.[6] Doig and Gleig shared the same political and probably religious sentiments and collaborated together on the third edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1788-97), which Gleig co-edited.[7] For both men, the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* was more than just an intellectual exercise, in that it was a necessary ideological response to the French principles of its philosophical predecessor the *Enycyclopédie*, whose ideals were believed to have motivated the actions of revolutionary French Jacobins.[8] As we have seen, Doig's collaboration with Gleig brought him into the circle of conspiratorial writers such as John Robison and James Thomson, the latter also a Leighton Library member.[9] Both men, and likely Doig himself, were vocal proponents of the 'Illuminati theory', the belief that French

[4] Hutchison, *High School of Stirling*, pp.115-16; Gordon Goodwin, revised by Jeffrey R. Smitten, 'Doig, David (1718/19-1800)', *ODNB* (September 2004).
[5] John Ramsay to Elizabeth Graham, 11 September 1809, in *Letters of John Ramsay of Ochtertyre, 1799–1812*, ed. B.L.H. Horn (Edinburgh: Scottish Historical Society, 1966), p.259. Emphasis in original.
[6] Nigel Aston, 'Gleig, George (1753-1840)', *ODNB* (September 2004).
[7] Doig wrote articles on 'Mythology', 'Mysteries' and 'Philology' for the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Although it is not known for certain, Doig's religion is thought to have been influenced by his close friendship with Gleig and his education at the University of St Andrews. Goodwin and Smitten, 'Doig, David', *ODNB*.
[8] Silvia Sebastiani, 'Conjectural History vs. the Bible: Eighteenth-Century Scottish Historians and the Idea of History in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*', *Lumen*, 21 (2002), pp.213-15, 230-31.
[9] See above, pp.215-16, 225-27.

revolutionary and radical ideas were principally being spread by a network of underground secret societies, Illuminati clubs and masonic lodges.[10]

It is well acknowledged that the seismic events which occurred in France after 1789 and, from 1793, the resulting twenty-two years of almost continuous Anglo-French conflict had a decisive impact upon British politics and society.[11] The legacy of these events continued to be felt in the reading and library lives of British citizens in a number of aspects, shaping their use of the subscription library. For Doig and his circle, these events, and their reading, played a pivotal role in the formation of their intellectual and political ideas. Chapter Three observed both its practical and intellectual implications on the early life of Peter Baillie. War with France curtailed Baillie's opportunity to travel across the European continent, whilst his participation in Bristol's Volunteer Militia from 1797 brought him, just as his library membership did, into regular contact with the local gentry and the country's political and military elite. Despite this, Baillie's range of reading remained broad, encompassing European travel narratives, biographies of French political figures and even works with radical undertones. This is a marked contrast with the reading lives of those in the 1810s, analysed in Chapter Five. Here, a politically and militarily belligerent France induced anxiety amongst the elites of different reading communities. In Bristol, these anxieties contributed to the defeat of reformist candidates at the general election in 1812, whilst at the Leighton, the reading of history induced some to reflect negatively on the strength and stability of the British state. These elements of the politics of reading, as well as the cultural and political capital accrued by being a library member, are difficult to quantify conclusively. Nevertheless, a study of the records of the

[10] Michael Taylor, 'British Conservatism, the Illuminati, and the Conspiracy Theory of the French Revolution, 1797-1802', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 47.3 (2014), pp.297-98.
[11] A.D. Harvey, *Collision of Empires: Britain in Three World Wars 1793-1945* (London: Phoenix, 1994), pp.5-200; Roger Knight, *Britain Against Napoleon: The Organization of Victory, 1793-1815* (London: Penguin, 2014), pp.xxi-xxii, 463-74; Richard Whatmore, *The End of Enlightenment: Empire, Commerce, Crisis* (Padstow: Allen Lane, 2023), pp.295-309.

subscription library provides a route for scholars to do just this. As early as the 1960s, Paul Kaufman recognised the value of library collections not only for judging aspects of book circulation and reading trends, but also for a broader analysis of the social aspects of community libraries.[12] This study has adapted Kaufman's approach slightly to focus on their political, rather than the narrowly social, significances.

Looking beyond a search of institutional library records has enabled this thesis to judge the subscription library as a motivator for political actions, whether through reading, conversation, petitioning, or voting. This must first begin with a recognition that for many, the subscription library occupied a significant role in their everyday lives. At Bristol, networks of both Tories and Whigs interacted together within the shared library space. In Dunblane, a shared membership of the Leighton Library was one of the strands which connected David Doig with John Ramsay, George Gleig, James Thomson, and a network of local writers and scholars across rural Perthshire and Stirlingshire. This shared membership of the subscription library played a role in shaping political awareness, actions and identities, with real and practical implications.

Although the connection between Doig and Gleig has been recognised, their shared use of the Leighton Library has not been noticed.[13] Yet Doig's use of the Leighton Library may have had a significant effect in motivating the publication of the work for which he is now best remembered, his *Two Letters on the Savage State* (1792), written as a critique of *Sketches of*

[12] Paul Kaufman, 'The Rise of Community Libraries in Scotland', P*roceedings of the Bibliographical Society of America*, 59 (1965), pp.233-34.

[13] For examples, see Sebastiani, 'Conjectural History vs. the Bible', p.231; Goodwin and Smitten, 'Doig, David', *ODNB*; Silvia Sebastiani, *The Scottish Enlightenment: Race, Gender, and the Limits of Progress*, trans. Jeremy Carden (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p.169; Taylor, 'Conspiracy Theory of the French Revolution', p.298; Bill Jenkins, 'Theories of Universal Degeneration in Post-Enlightenment Scotland', in *Beyond the Enlightenment: Scottish Intellectual Life, 1790-1914*, eds. Aileen Fyfe and Colin Kidd (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2023), pp.139-40.

the History of Man (1773) by Henry Home, Lord Kames.[14] Kames's *Sketches* summarised three decades of his thinking on stadial theory, the belief that societies progressed through stages, and polygenetic theory, the belief that humanity was divided into different races, synthesising both with an added materialist explanation, that the natures of a people played a role in their progression and that this explained the diversities in different human cultures and societies.[15] It was the secular implications of this theory that Doig expressly challenged, in addition to the belief that man had at one stage in human history existed in a 'savage state' from which mankind had raised itself. In Doig's view this 'Savage State could neither have been universal, nor of long duration' precisely because humanity was incapable of progress of its own accord.[16] In fact, in this instance, it would have been more likely to degenerate:

> *Had all* mankind… been once in a state of absolute savagism they would not only have continued in that state, but would have still sunk lower and lower, till they had at last, in a manner, put off the character of humanity, and degraded themselves to the level of the beasts that perish.[17]

For Doig, human progress was only possible through contact with a more civilised society or 'supernatural' or divine intervention.[18] For those of Doig's view, the implications of this

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[14] C. Duncan Rice, 'Archibald Dalzel, the Scottish Intelligentsia, and the Problem of Slavery', *The Scottish Historical Review*, 62.174 (October 1983), p.135; Sebastiani, 'Conjectural History vs. the Bible', pp.222-31; Goodwin and Smitten, 'Doig, David', *ODNB*; Silvia Sebastiani, 'Enlightenment America and the Hierarchy of Races: Disputes Over the Writing of History in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1768-1788)', trans. Denis Griesmar, *Annales: Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, 67.2 (2012), p.243; Sebastiani, *Scottish Enlightenment*, p.169; Jenkins, 'Theories of Universal Degeneration', pp.140-41. Kames was not a member of the Leighton Library, although his grandson, Henry Home Drummond, was, subscribing to the library from 1810. *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Advanced search for 'Borrower: Henry Home Drummond ',", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/search/p-1/0/0/advanced/brids|29150>, [accessed 10/09/24].

[15] Sebastiani, *Scottish Enlightenment*, pp.73-78. See also Sebastiani, 'Conjectural History vs. the Bible', pp.218-21; Colin Kidd, 'Subscription, the Scottish Enlightenment and the Moderate Interpretation of History', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 55.3 (July 2004), pp.508-10; Jenkins, 'Theories of Universal Degeneration', pp.138-39.

[16] David Doig, *Two Letters on the Savage State, Addressed to the Late Lord Kaims* (London, 1792), p.23.

[17] Doig, *Two Letters*, pp.38-39.

[18] Doig, *Two Letters*, p.39. Doig believed that at one time there had existed 'a select race, a civilized society, a centre of politeness, science, and humanity established in the world' and from which language, art science and letters all stemmed.

rebuttal were profound since it was 'the universality of the *Savage State*' which Kames 'had made the basis of his philosophy of human nature'.[19] As George Gleig outlined in the preface, or 'Advertisement', to Doig's work this meant that the '*Mosaic history*' of polygenism and stadial history 'must unquestionably be false'.[20] As Silvia Sebastiani has observed, this was a refutation, not only of conjectural history but also the minimisation of religion and scripture that Doig believed underpinned both the French and Scottish Enlightenments.[21]

Doig's response to Kames was published in 1792 but was thought to have been written some two decades earlier. While the length of this delay has been much commented on, few scholars have considered what may have finally motivated Doig to put it into print.[22] Gleig explained that Doig finally published his work at the urging of his friends, although he acknowledged that this was 'the common apology made by every trifling scribbler for obtruding his own crude notions upon the world'.[23] Certainly, as most scholars reference, the context of the 1790s was significant and Doig's criticism of stadial histories, which were linked with a French 'atheist materialism', ensured that it, like Gleig's editorial ethos at the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, constituted a defence of the traditional social and political order.[24] Doig's contribution to this project should not be underestimated; his historical-philological articles were key to critiquing the theory of polygenism and the universality of a savage state and exactly echoed the same arguments he propounded in his *Two Letters*.[25]

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[19] George Gleig, 'Advertisement', in Doig, *Two Letters*, p.viii.
[20] Gleig, 'Advertisement', p.xiii. In his reference to this preface, David Jenkins does not seem to note that these were the words of Gleig, rather than Doig. Jenkins, 'Theories of Universal Degeneration', p.138.
[21] Sebastiani, 'Conjectural History vs. the Bible', p.231.
[22] [Alexander Fraser Tytler], *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of the Honourable Henry Home of Kames*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh, 1807), II, pp.141-42; Goodwin and Smitten, 'Doig, David', *ODNB*; Sebastiani, *Scottish Enlightenment*, p.169.
[23] Gleig, 'Advertisement', p.xii.
[24] Sebastiani, 'Enlightenment America and the Hierarchy of Races', pp.224-27. For quotation, see Sebastiani, *Scottish Enlightenment*, p.169. See also Kidd, 'Moderate Interpretation of History', p.508; John S. Warren, 'The French Revolution and the Transformation of Moderatism: The Silence of the Scribes', in *Beyond the Enlightenment*, p.61.
[25] Sebastiani, 'Conjectural History vs. the Bible', pp.222-24.

Yet Doig may also have been influenced by a wider array of sources than so far noted. In this, the Leighton Library may have played a significant role. He clearly valued the library as a specialist resource for accessing Latin and Greek works, with a borrowing entry dated 1 January 1787 recording Doig as borrowing a succession of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century texts.[26] Yet it may also be significant that directly prior to the publication of his *Two Letters*, Doig had been reading another critique of Kames and polygenism in a Leighton Library book, William Dickson's *Letters on Slavery* (1789), a work Doig first borrowed in June 1790 but then returned to repeatedly.[27] As discussed in Chapter Six, Dickson's work was one of two abolitionist texts in the Leighton and provided a vivid and critical analysis of the institution of slavery generally and the plight of enslaved individuals in the Caribbean.[28] Although Doig's personal stance on the question of the slave trade and slavery is unclear, his criticism of the universalism of Enlightenment conceptions of progress were not necessarily at odds with an abolitionist position, as George Gleig's essay on 'Slavery' in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* suggests.[29]

As part of his overall critique of slavery and the treatment of enslaved individuals, Dickson devoted letter nine to a refutation of polygenism and its place in the writing of Voltaire, David Hume and Lord Kames.[30] Dickson's case rested, not on philosophical reasoning, but on 'the *arguments* and the *facts* of writers' like himself who have lived long periods 'among different

[26] The first of these borrowings is entered into the register as 'Plato Ficino a very old copy'. *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Leighton Library: Register Ledger 1, page 11 (image and text view),", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/library/leighton/registers/15/102434/image-and-text>, [accessed 14/05/24].
[27] *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Leighton Library: Register Ledger 1, page 38 (image and text view),", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/library/leighton/registers/15/102515/image-and-text>, [accessed 14/05/24].
[28] Iain Whyte, *Scotland and the Abolition of Black Slavery, 1756-1838* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), p.138; H.T. Dickinson, 'Dickson, William (bap. 1751, d. 1823)', *ODNB* (October 2016).
[29] Sebastiani, 'Enlightenment America and the Hierarchy of Races', p.224; Sebastiani, *Scottish Enlightenment*, p.169.
[30] William Dickson, *Letters on Slavery* (London, 1789). On Dickson and Hume, see Danielle Charette, 'David Hume and the Politics of Slavery', *Political Studies*, 72.3 (2024), pp.872-73, 878.

tribes of men', urging his readers to seek out the writing of James Ramsay and Samuel Stanhope Smith, the latter having provided a 'masterly' refutation of 'the arguments of Lord Kaimes'.[31] Smith's criticism of Kames, like Doig's, was of the materialist premise of his thought and its confliction with biblical account. Although they came from different backgrounds, a number of scholars have linked together Smith's and Doig's criticism of Kames.[32] Perhaps it was the reading of Dickson's praise for Smith that encouraged Doig, aware that he had written his own response to Kames, to publish his *Two Letters*. He would likely have been aware of Smith's work, of which the Leighton Library held a copy.[33] Doig first borrowed Dickson's *Letters* on 15 June and held onto the book for almost the rest of the year, renewing his borrowing in July, August and September before returning it on 30 October.[34] His reading is unlikely to have altered the content of his *Letters*, the bulk of which he is thought to have written as an immediate response to Kames.[35] Yet it may have, in conjunction with the political context of the 1790s, motivated Doig to finally put his *Two Letters* to press.

If it was Doig's reading of Dickson which motivated him to publish his work then this was a direct example of the subscription library, or political reading, serving as an instigator for a political act, in Doig's case the criticism of conjectural history and its minimisation of

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[31] Dickson, *Letters*, p.60.

[32] Samuel Stanhope Smith and David Doig, *An Essay on the Causes of Complexion and Figure in the Human Species / Two Letters on the Savage State Addressed to the Late Lord Kaimes*, ed. Paul B. Wood (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1995); Sebastiani, *Scottish Enlightenment*, p.78.

[33] For the borrowings of which, see *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Advanced search for 'Author: Samuel Stanhope Smith ',", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/search/p-1/lname|Leighton Library/sortDate/advanced/aids|2272>, [accessed 14/05/24].

[34] *Books and Borrowing: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers, 1750-1830*, s.v., "Leighton Library: Register Ledger 1, page 38 (image and text view),", <https://borrowing.stir.ac.uk/library/leighton/registers/15/102515/image-and-text>, [accessed 14/05/24].

[35] It is unclear exactly when Doig wrote his letters. Letter one is dated 20 December 1774 but signed 5 November 1776. Although letter two refers to his letter of 'November last', it is dated 12 March 1775. Doig, *Two Letters*, pp.1, 70, 71. Alexander Fraser Tytler recorded that Doig sent his first letter to Kames anonymously, after which the two subsequently struck up a friendship. [Tytler], *Memoirs*, II, pp.140-43. Two letters from Doig to Kames are presently held in the papers of the family of Stirling Home Drummond Moray of Abercairny Perthshire and are dated 5 November 1776 and 7 June 1781. NRA GD24/1/582, Letters (2) to Lord Kames from Dr David Doig, Rector of Stirling Grammar School and philosophical writer, 1776-1781.

Providence. This is a literal example of the politics of reading in action, one which was of intellectual significance on Doig's thought. Important too were the social and ideological significances of Doig's library membership. Even if these latter elements of the subscription library are difficult to judge, they should not be underestimated. Doig's membership of the Leighton Library included him within a circle of letters and brought him into contact with a local network of writers and intellectuals. Although he was a gifted scholar, Doig's experiences in this regard would not have been unique. Indeed, when one considers the extent and breadth of the subscription library as an associational format, it seems likely that the political, social and intellectual significance of the library was extended to a remarkably large section of the population involved in civic and electoral politics. Although he considers all forms of book lending in this period, David Allan suggests that library use 'may well have been one of the few properly regulated and institutionalised cultural experiences … distributed relatively widely across very substantial swathes of contemporary society'.[36] The specific elements of the subscription library, the aspects of collective ownership, management and community, lends it an extra element of significance, especially in regards to its importance for the formation of a collective sense of civic identity.

This may have been an experience limited to the English-speaking Atlantic world. In comparison with those on the European continent, subscription libraries in the British Isles and across North America were remarkably widespread and almost completely free from state interference.[37] Although this thesis has limited itself, principally, to examining British subscription libraries there is nothing to prevent an analysis of the politics of reading at the American subscription library. Indeed, subscription libraries in both pre- and post-

[36] David Allan, *A Nation of Readers: The Lending Library in Georgian England* (London: The British Library, 2008), pp.225-26.

[37] In contrast, European subscription libraries were actively regulated. Keith A. Manley, 'Infidel Books and "Factories of the Enlightenment": Censorship and Surveillance in Subscription and Circulating Libraries in an Age of Revolutions, 1790-1850', *Book History*, 19.1 (2017), pp.175-91.

revolutionary America largely mirrored their British counterparts in terms of their administrative structure and the books they chose to stock.[38] This is not to say that there was no degree of difference between the subscription libraries of both countries. American subscription libraries were far more likely to be formally incorporated than those in Britain, hence the more regular use of the term 'Library Company' in the names of American subscription libraries.[39] These libraries also faced far greater physical dangers than those in the British Isles, not only the very real physical threats of war and revolution, but also the risk posed by political and societal breakdown.[40] American politics, and society more generally, between the 1770s until the 1800s found itself riven with political disagreements, first between

[38] Ross W. Beales and James N. Green, 'Libraries and Their Users', in *A History of the Book in America, Vol. 1: The Colonial Book in the Atlantic World*, eds. Hugh Amory and David D. Hall (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp.400-02; James Raven, *London Booksellers and American Customers: Transatlantic Literary Community and the Charleston Library Society, 1748-1811* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 2002), p.8; Sophie H. Jones, '"Very useful as well as ornamental": Social Libraries in Early American Communities', *Library & Information History*, 37.2 (2021), pp.109-15.

[39] See, for example, the existence of library companies in Baltimore (founded in 1796), Bridge-Town (1765) and Burlington (1758) in New Jersey, Hartford (1774) and Norwich (1793) in Connecticut, Hatborough (1755) and Norristown (1794) in Pennsylvania, and Providence (1753) and Redwood (1747) in Rhode Island. ECLO. The ECLO database lists a total of twenty-two libraries containing "Library Company" in their name, all of which were located in North America. It was far more straightforward for an American subscription library to obtain an act of incorporation, requiring an application to either the royal or state governor or the state legislative assembly. In contrast, a British subscription library seeking the same required either the granting of a royal charter or the passage of an Act of Parliament. In 1814, the Bristol Library contemplated applying for an Act of Parliament to enable it to be removed from the library building, along with the city's books, or to substantially expand the library building. The Society requested the support of the Corporation in this matter in a memorial delivered to it on 15 September 1814. A copy of this memorial is produced in Charles Tovey, *The Bristol City Library: Its Founders and Benefactors; Its Present Position in Connection with the Library Society; and Its Future Prospects; To which is Added, Plans and Estimates for Converting the Building into a Free Library; With a Catalogue of the Books Belonging to the Citizens*. (London, 1853), pp.35-36. The Corporation seems not to have acted on this particular request. BA, 32079/LS/M/4, Bristol Library Society, Minute book of Committee, 24 March 1807–22 March 1823, 20 December 1814. The following year the Society received a circular letter from the Newcastle Literary and Philosophical Society seeking support from a number of institutions for an application to Parliament for a general act of incorporation. The letter received by the Bristol Library seems not to have survived. In response, its vice-president, Samuel Seyer, explained that he did not believe a general Act of Parliament would work in this endeavour, even though the library favoured being incorporated in order to 'secure our property', to enlarge its premises and 'to oblige the minority to submit to the majority particularly in pecuniary matters'. Newcastle Literary and Philosophical Society, Correspondence Volume 1 1793-1815, Samuel Seyer to William Turner and Henry Edmonston, 24 June 1815. I am grateful to Harriet Gray for sharing this reference with me.

[40] For threats of the former, see below, Chapter Two.

patriots and loyalists and subsequently between Democrat-Republicans and Federalists.[41] The similarities of the circumstances and challenges faced by British and American subscription libraries thus raises the possible fruitfulness of a comparative study of both. As Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson recognised, both avid supporters of subscription libraries in their own states, American subscription libraries played a significant role in the formation of citizenship and identity at both a local and national level.[42] Whilst similar processes were at play in British subscription libraries, the particular context of the United States, a newly founded nation of citizens searching for a national purpose and identity, perhaps lent them a different significance.[43]

Whilst scholars of the British context have acknowledged these processes, situating the politics of reading at the centre of an analysis of the subscription library reveals its role within Georgian politics. This is not just a reassertion of the importance of print in the political world, a case made by numerous scholars over the previous two decades, but is instead about the processes involved in the dissemination and reception of printed material, the agency of the reader and the context through and within which this occurred. As this thesis has shown, the politics of reading at the subscription library found their form in numerous ways. Evidence exists to chart

[41] Marshall Smelser, 'The Jacobin Phrenzy: Federalism and the Menace of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity', *Review of Politics*, 8 (October 1951), pp.457-82; Marshall Smelser, 'The Jacobin Phrenzy: The Menace of Monarchy, Plutocracy, and Anglophobia, 1789-1798', *Review of Politics*, 21 (January 1959), pp.239-58; Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (1992; repr., New York: Vintage Books, 1993), pp.12-18; Stanley Elkins and Eric McKitrick, *The Age of Federalism: The Early American Republic, 1788-1800* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp.3-4; Joanne B. Freeman, *Affairs of Honor: National Politics in the New Republic* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), pp.xiii-xxiv; Michael A. Bellesiles, '"The Soil Will Be Soaked with Blood": Taking the Revolution of 1800 Seriously', in *The Revolution of 1800: Democracy, Race, & the New Republic*, eds. James Horn, Jan Ellen Lewis and Peter S. Onuf (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002), pp.59-86; John Ferling, *Adams Vs. Jefferson: The Tumultuous Election of 1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

[42] *Benjamin Franklin's Autobiography*, eds. J.A. Leo Lemay and P.M. Zall (New York: Norton, 1986), p.57; Thomas Jefferson to John Wyche, 19 May 1809," *Founders Online,* National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/03-01-02-0170>, [accessed 12/09/23]. On Jefferson's role in the founding of two subscription libraries in Virginia, see Chapter Two, p.112, n.50.

[43] It is perhaps for this reason that American studies of associational culture have been far more alive to the political significance of voluntary association in this respect. See below, Chapter Two, pp.110-11.

the specific and political ways in which some readers used a library's collection, but it is clear that all members valued the library for its social elements, that is, its ability to bring those who were accepted members of the body politic into contact with those who were not but aspired to be. As the example of David Doig once again suggests, these combined elements of membership of the subscription library are not intangible or impossible to judge. Doig's reading and social connections, greatly aided by his membership in the Leighton Library, influencing if not the content of his intellectual thought, then certainly their form and publication. The library was not a partisan space, but it was political.

II

> The ride from Perth to Stirling has nothing of peculiar interest except the town of Dunblane celebrated as the first scene of the apostolical Leighton's Episcopal labors, and still possessing an intellectual memorial of him in a valuable library provided by him, & enclosed of his own books, many of which I examined & found in them manuscript notes by the Bishop, full of learning & piety.[44]

John Scandrett Harford's (1787-1866) visit to Dunblane, sometime in late May 1825, came towards the end of his tour of Scotland. Travelling with his wife, Louisa Davis (d. 1872), Harford recorded their journey in his notebook, titling their adventures 'Our Scotch Tour in 1825'. Family wealth accrued across succeeding generations of Harfords in brass manufacturing and banking had enabled the Bristol-born Harford to be raised amongst Gloucestershire's landed elite.[45] He was a seasoned traveller, having toured the Lake District in August 1805, Ireland in 1812, France, Switzerland, and Italy between 1815 and 1816, and

[44] BA, 28048/J/6_1, Deeds and documents relating to the Harford family, Journal of John Scandrett Harford of tour of Scotland, 1825, ?1830.
[45] Peter Wakelin, 'Harford family (*per. c.* 1700-1866)', *ODNB* (May 2009); G.C. Boase, revised by Charles Brayne, 'Harford, John Scandrett (1787-1866)', *ODNB* (September 2004).

Prague and Germany in 1817, keeping a journal of his travels on each occasion.[46] In touring Scotland, the Harfords were following a route well-travelled by domestic tourists, one that had swiftly grown in popularity since the 1770s.[47] Travelling from the north east of England, they had first visited Edinburgh, then afterwards Glasgow, journeyed north to Iona and the Isle of Mull and then further north and east to Inverness, which Harford described as 'the capital of the North'. From there they travelled south, over land, and eventually to Perth, Dunblane, and Stirling. Harford's visit to Dunblane was quite possibly the highlight of this eastern leg of the 'Scotch Tour'. The death of his older brother, Edward Gray Harford (1783-1804), left a lasting religious impression upon him and, despite being born into a family of Quakers, in 1809 Harford was baptised into the Anglican church.[48] He was an active supporter of the Church Missionary Society and the Bible Society and became a close friend and correspondent of the evangelicals Hannah More and William Wilberforce.[49] Indeed, Harford is considered to have served as the model for More's protagonist in her *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife*, David Doig's 'least exceptionable' novel for young women.[50] Harford recognised Dunblane's episcopal significance. Like J.M.W. Turner before him, he was enthralled by Dunblane's ruined cathedral,

[46] BA, 28048/J/2, Deeds and documents relating to the Harford family, Journal of John Scandrett Harford of a tour of the lakes of Cumberland and Westmorland, August 1805; BA, 28048/J/3, Deeds and documents relating to the Harford family, Journal of John Scandrett Harford of a tour of Ireland, 1812; BA, 28048/J/4, Deeds and documents relating to the Harford family, Journal of John Scandrett Harford of a tour through France, Switzerland and Italy, 1815-1816; BA, 28048/J/5, Deeds and documents relating to the Harford family, Journal of John Scandrett Harford of a tour of Prague and German, 1817.

[47] Alastair J. Durie, *Scotland for the Holidays: A History of Tourism in Scotland 1780-1939* (East Linton: Tuckwell, 2003), pp.21-64; Nigel Leask, *Stepping Westward: Writing the Highland Tour c.1720-1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), pp.12-17.

[48] Boase and Brayne, 'Harford, John Scandrett', *ODNB*.

[49] Harford served as the mediator in negotiations for a marriage settlement between Charles Pinney and Wilberforce's daughter, Elizabeth Wilberforce (1801-32), in 1827. The engagement eventually fell through when Wilberforce acknowledged the extent of Pinney's West Indian connections. Madge Dresser, *Slavery Obscured: The Social History of the Slave Trade in an English Provincial Port* (London: Bloomsbury, 2001), p.203-04; Anne Stott, *Wilberforce: Family and Friends* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp.232-40.

[50] In 1909, Alice Harford described the Cœlebs inspiration as a 'family tradition', although it has also been repeated in Harford's entry in the *ODNB*. Alice Harford, ed., *Annals of the Harford Family* (London: The Westminster Press, 1909), p.66; Boase and Brayne, 'Harford, John Scandrett', *ODNB*. For quote, see Ramsay to Graham, 11 September 1809, in *Letters of John Ramsay*, p.259

which he described as 'the finest Edifice of its kind I have seen in Scotland'.[51] But it was Dunblane's connection with Robert Leighton that chiefly drew Harford to it. Robert Leighton was clearly a figure whom Harford, like Samuel Taylor Coleridge, greatly admired.[52] Visiting the Leighton Library, the 'intellectual memorial of him', brought Harford closer to Leighton's memory. It was through books and reading that Harford felt this connection the most, accessing and touching the very same books held by Leighton and reading his marginal markings, 'full of learning & piety'.[53]

Harford's religion formed a major element of his personal identity, and it was one aided by his membership of his own local subscription library, the Bristol Library Society. His connection to the library was personal and familial, with both Harford's father and grandfather being library members, as well as numerous members of his extended family and in-laws.[54] Indeed, Harford had first obtained membership of the library in 1808, having received the same share held by his older brother, Edward Gray Harford, whose death in 1804 had left such a deep impression upon John Scandrett.[55] Harford's election onto the library committee in 1811 at the age of twenty-four would also have brought him into regular contact with the elite of Bristol's Anglican community, not least the bishop of Bristol, William Lort Mansel (1753-1820), the library's president and chair of the committee, but also the dean of Bristol, Henry Beeke, who was a committee member between 1815 and 1837.[56] As in the case of Peter Baillie, examined

[51] Joseph Mallord William Turner, 'Dumblain Abbey, Scotland', Pencil and watercolour, 1806-07, D08157, Tate; BA, 28048/J/6_1, Journal of John Scandrett Harford of tour of Scotland, 1825, ?1830.
[52] On Coleridge and Leighton, and Leighton's wider popularity in this period, see below Chapter Five.
[53] BA, 28048/J/6_1, Journal of John Scandrett Harford of tour of Scotland, 1825, ?1830.
[54] This included Harford's father, John Scandrett Harford snr. (1754-1815), and grandfather, Edward Harford (1720-1806), and his younger brother, Charles Gray Harford (1788-1856). More distant relatives included Mark Harford III (b. 1768) of the Stoke Bishop Harford line, Joseph Harford (1741-1802) and his son Charles Joseph Harford of the Stapleton branch. For the various branches of the Harford family, see Wakelin, 'Harford family', *ODNB*.
[55] BA, LS/M/4, Committee minute book, 5 April 1808; Boase and Brayne, 'Harford, John Scandrett', *ODNB*.
[56] W.P. Courtney, revised by S.J. Skedd, 'Mansel, William Lort (1753-1820)', *ODNB* (January 2004); R.D. Sheldon, 'Beeke, Henry (1751-1837)', *ODNB* (September 2004).

in Chapter Three, Harford's service on the library committee would have provided him with practical experience in civic administration.

Harford's religion influenced his politics. His decision to convert to Anglicanism allowed for his appointment as a magistrate and deputy lieutenant for Gloucestershire and Cardiganshire in 1815, although his politics was also shaped by his marriage to Louisa Davis, the daughter of Richard Hart Davis Bristol's MP between 1812 and 1831 and a library member.[57] In 1819, Harford published a critical biography of Thomas Paine in which he lambasted his character and politics.[58] Like many of the readers surveyed here, the imposition of French politics into the British public sphere continued to play upon the fears of conservatives well into the nineteenth century. Despite the focus upon Paine, Harford devoted a considerable portion of his text to providing a narrative to the events of the French Revolution which occurred some twenty years earlier.[59] Here Harford wrote with one eye upon politics of his own time, warning that a new generation of radicals, following the practice of French revolutionaries, constituted a threat to the British state in 1819.[60] Once again, religious motivations encouraged Harford to act. In 1818, Richard Carlile (1790-1843), the radical publisher and writer, republished Paine's attack upon institutional religion, *The Age of Reason* (1796), firstly as part of a collected edition of Paine's works in 1818 and then as a separate edition the following year.[61] Harford's

[57] Boase and Brayne, 'Harford, John Scandrett', *ODNB*. For more on Davis, including his first election as the Member for Bristol in 1812, see Chapter Five. Harford had voted for Davis, as well as Edward Protheroe (1774-1856), in the election of 1818. He also supported Davis's election in 1830. 'June 1818 Bristol', ECPPEC, <https://ecppec.ncl.ac.uk/case-study-constituencies/bristol/election/June-1818/>, [accessed 26/03/23]; 'Bristol Election', *Bristol Mirror*, 24 July 1830.
[58] John Scandrett Harford, *Some Account of the Life, Death, and Principles of Thomas Paine* (Bristol, 1819).
[59] Harford, *Thomas Paine*, pp.5-12.
[60] Edward Larkin, *Thomas Paine and the Literature of Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p.171; J.C.D. Clark, *Thomas Paine: Britain, America, and France in the Age of Enlightenment and Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp.406-07.
[61] Franklyn K. Prochaska, 'Thomas Paine's *The Age of Reason* Revisited', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 33.4 (1972), p.574; Joel H. Wiener, 'Collaborators of a Sort: Thomas Paine and Richard Carlile', in *Citizen of the World*, ed. Ian Dyck (New York: St Martin's Press, 1988), pp.108-10; Robert Hole, *Pulpits, Politics and Public Order in England, 1760-1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp.207-08. Carlile was subsequently indicted and imprisoned for six years for its publication. Prochaska, '*Age of Reason* Revisited', p.575; Philip W. Martin, 'Carlile, Richard (1790-1843)', *ODNB* (May 2023).

biography of Paine was therefore written as a direct response to the recirculation of a work first banned in 1797.[62] Harford believed that political reading of the 'wrong' material was dangerous both to the mind of the individual and the wider body politic and his writing was an attempt to counteract this.[63] Like David Doig, Harford wrote with a specific, political, aim in mind, and his participation in the subscription library played a role in furthering this. Indeed, his efforts were praised by his fellow library members. A copy of his pamphlet was donated to the library and its vice president, Samuel Seyer, recorded that Harford's pamphlet was popularly and widely disseminated amongst the public.[64] Harford's election as a library committee member, between 1811 and 1817, provided him with another opportunity to influence the reading habits of others, this time by deciding which books were to be purchased by the library.[65]

Harford's and Doig's uses of the subscription library demonstrates the multi-faceted elements of the politics of reading, its influence upon them both personally and socially, its importance to their religious and political identities, and their attempts to influence its effect on others through their writing and, in Harford's case, service as a library committee member. Harford's visit to a small subscription library in Dunblane, the Leighton Library, in May 1825 was a brief and purposeful call to access the books once owned by Robert Leighton. Just as was the case at Bristol, without an introduction from an existing library member, Harford was required to pay for the privilege of access, recorded as the sum of one pound, one shilling and sixpence, or just over the cost of a two years' subscription.[66] If Harford recognised these similarities of

[62] Despite this, the Bristol Library had at one time owned both parts of the original editions of *The Age of Reason*, with the work borrowed from the library between 1796 and 1798. See below, pp.151-52.
[63] Harford, *Thomas Paine*, p.67.
[64] *A Catalogue of the Books belonging to the Bristol Library Society: To which are Prefixed, the Rules and Regulations.* (Bristol, 1834), p.108; BA, 44954, Manuscript volumes compiled by Seyer and others, 44954/1/1, Calendar of events in Bristol, 1820-27, p.13.
[65] BA, 32079/LS/M/1, Bristol Library Society, Minute book of General meetings, 2 December 1772-28 March 1870, 18 March 1811, 24 March 1817.
[66] Here Harford was following the practice of other landed subscribers. For example, both Francis Stuart, 9th Earl of Moray, and his son, also Francis Stuart, 10th Earl of Moray paid one guinea (or one pound and one shilling) to subscribe to the Leighton in 1807 and 1812 respectively. USA, Leighton MS 16, Leighton Library, Minutes of the meetings of the trustees, 31 October 1734-March 1822, 5 September 1809, 21 August 1812.

administrative structure between the Leighton and the Bristol libraries, he made no mention of this in his journal. In truth, he had little reason to do so. For someone of Harford's socio-economic status, the acts of subscribing to and visiting a library were regular everyday occurrences, as they were for hundreds of thousands of library members up and down the British Isles, requiring of neither note nor commentary. Yet the ordinariness of these actions, and of library membership more generally, should not lead us to underestimate their significance. Individuals valued the sense of belonging received from being a library member. Their membership was useful practically, the subscription library a valuable resource to diversify and enliven its members' reading lives. Yet the politics of reading extended far beyond the reading of the printed page. Socially these libraries imparted a sense of prestige on their members, proving the worthiness and respectability of a political class, some with the vote, some without the vote, but who all believed themselves worthy of being leaders and figureheads within their communities. These two elements were inherently political, as was the subscription library space, offering a venue for members to build connections across political and religious divides. Critically, these were societies which library members crafted on their own terms, socially and economically exclusive but in many cases politically broad. They were governed and administered as miniature societies with a mixture of democratic and constitutionalist administrative features for the collective benefit of the community. They were venues of social, and local, politics, featuring the same actors, the same discourses and divisions as at a national political level. Amidst riot, revolution and 'radical' tumult, the subscription library, like the British state, not only survived, but thrived.

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