



Library & Information History Group

News from the Chair

Hello! My name is Kathryn Peak and I am the new chair of the Library and Information History Group. I am taking over from Jill Dye, whose experience and expertise stay on the committee as co-editor of our journal, *Library and Information History*. I am also very grateful to her for helping me with the handover of roles. I am not a librarian (yet!) but am in the last few months of my DPhil at St Cross College, Oxford, with my research focused on late medieval English book history. Until recently I also worked in Magdalen College Library in Oxford, and hope to return to working in an academic library once my doctoral work is complete. All of which is to say that I spend a lot of my time working in, researching, and writing about the history of libraries, collections, and historical patterns of acquisition, book ownership, sharing, glossing, and readership. I am therefore so happy to become chair of the Library and Information History Group, alongside the group's amazing committee. I am looking forward to supporting the group in engaging with latest research, putting on events (such as our online conference on 29th and 30th June on *Work in Progress* – details below), and fostering a supportive networking space for library folk and researchers interested in information history.

Please get in touch if you have any queries or ideas (kathryn.peak@stx.ox.ac.uk). I look forward to meeting and hearing from you in the future.

Kathryn Peak

Chair, CILIP Library & Information History Group

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Let them use cards!

Exploring the motivations behind the creation of the 1791 French cataloguing code



Figure 1: Auguste Couder (1789–1873), *Le Serment du Jeu de Paume*, 20 juin 1789. Public Domain.

After decades of social and political inertia, and after years of economic mismanagement, the unthinkable had been achieved. When Louis XVI had called for the return of the Estates General to search for solutions to the ongoing financial crisis in 1788, the Three Estates duly attended. They consisted of the nobility, the clergy and the commoners.

From the start of the sessions on 5th May 1789, individuals from the Third Estate were committing small acts of rebellion to express their frustration and outrage. When they realised that they were going to be outvoted

on solutions, they voted to call themselves the National Assembly. When Louis XVI had the building that they were in closed down, they reconvened in the Royal Tennis Courts and, on 20th June 1789, took the Tennis Court Oath, in which they swore that they would not disband until they had written a new constitution for France.

Even then, it was far from clear what path lay ahead for them. Yet many historians through the years have pinpointed this oath as the start of the French Revolution, which abolished the French monarchy and the feudal system, and destroyed the hold the Church had over society. This was partly

achieved through waves of confiscation of property from ecclesiastical institutions and, later, nobles.

The parliamentary archives reveal that, in the case of ecclesiastical libraries being confiscated, it was naturally assumed that there were either current inventories of books, or that they would be easily drawn up and sent to Paris. Within a fortnight of ecclesiastical property being confiscated, the National Assembly decreed that religious libraries were required to deposit catalogues of books in their libraries and to confirm that no books had been withdrawn since the transfer of ownership to the state. This November 1789 decree was followed by three decrees being passed in April and twice in October 1790 reiterating this requirement. My research was unable to definitively uncover the reasons for this inability to meet these decrees, but the parliamentary archives reveal discussions about concerns of the literacy of local government workers and trustworthiness of former members of institutions still working in them.

Eventually, Ecclesiastical and Alienation of National Property Committees came together to form a joint subcommittee to address the lack of a complete national bibliography. This led to the Commission of the Quatre Nations being formed, and people appointed with responsibility of creating this inventory, including one individual who had been given authority over ecclesiastical libraries in Paris. This was the group that came together to create and publish the first attempt to create a national bibliographic standard.

The 1791 French cataloguing code

Once the commission recognised the need to explain the importance of standardised

records, it produced and published a set of instructions under the rather passive aggressive title of *Instructions pour procéder à la confection du catalogue de chacune des bibliothèques sur lesquelles les directions ont dû ou doivent incessamment apposer les scellés* (Instructions in order to proceed with the making of a catalogue of each library in which management has opposed or is incessantly opposing the seals). The instructions themselves stick to the business of solving the issues many had had in compiling records).

Fortunately, the writers made no further attempts to alienate their readers and chose to stick to the business of addressing feedback the commission may have received about issues with cataloguing. There is evidence that individuals from the Commission of the Four Nations actually inspected and visited libraries around Paris as they were creating their inventories and moving their books to depots for storage. It is therefore entirely possible that they were addressing feedback received first hand.

There is an attempt to define the essential qualities of someone undertaking this work; a person with a smattering of letters and, at the very least, knowledge of Latin. However, the wording of the original French suggests that this is a minimum level of knowledge required. Unfortunately, the ideal level of knowledge is never elaborated beyond that. A study of the meaning of the word 'letters' in late eighteenth century French society suggests an expectation that one had had an education dominated by book learning in the fields of literature, philosophy, history and languages. However, given the lack of universal education at the time, it remains difficult to define.

As for the cataloguing process itself, it is made clear that that is all the cataloguer is to

concentrate on. It is certainly not their business to shelf tidy or otherwise change the order. The work essentially required two sets of cards; one to have a number on to put inside the title- though it is made clear that multi volume works are only expected to have a numbered card in the first volume on the shelf- and the other to also have a number that matches the numbered slip. This second card will have the bibliographic record written on it. However, the reassurance that these instructions would suit collections of any size, including 15,000, 20,000 and 25,000 would offer little comfort to a lone cataloguer responsible for creating a list of that many books, only to then discover that they are expected to create a duplicate copy to send to Paris much later on in the instructions.

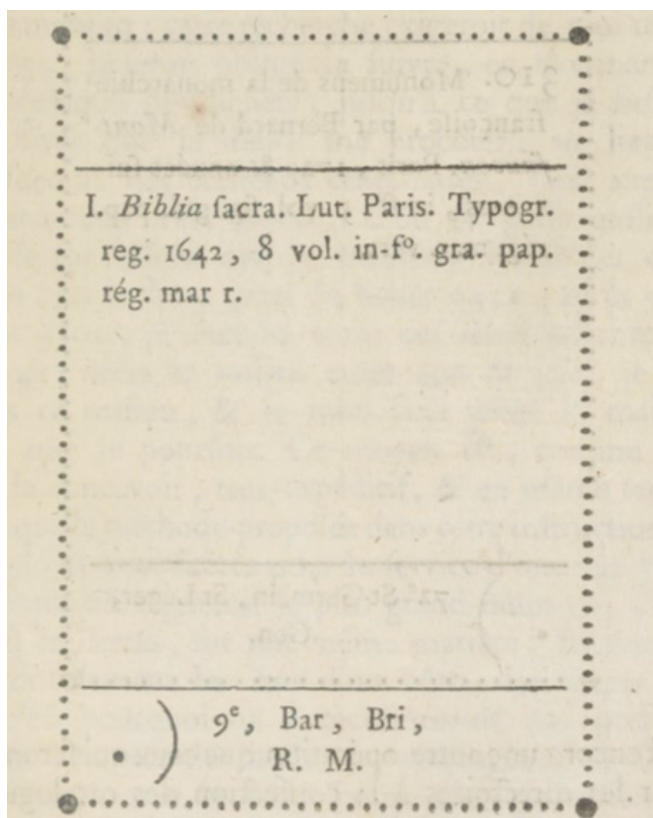


Figure 2: An example catalogue card for a 17th century bible, taken from *Instructions pour procéder à la confection du catalogue de chacune des bibliothèques sur lesquelles les directions ont dû ou doivent incessamment apposer les scellés* (Paris, 1791), p.11.

Four specific examples are given of books that were standard texts to be found in a French ecclesiastical library of the time: a bible, the writings of Samuel Bochart and Montfaucon, and the fables of La Fontaine. Each example highlights common problems associated with the work, such as not all works having an author, as in the case of the Bible. This choice may help highlight the expected level of education required for the task, and there are points in the instructions where the writer suggests that matters of discretion, such as recording the condition the work is in, should be left to the intelligence of the cataloguer. There are also some brief instructions on cataloguing manuscripts which seem to recognise that they would require specialist knowledge that may not be available, and an acceptance that it would be adequate to describe the writing as either old fashioned or modern. Again, it is largely left to the cataloguer to describe any manuscripts in a way that closely follows the instructions given about books.

Events after the publication of the code

A handful of researchers have attempted a guess on the number of cards completed and sent back to Paris in the way the instructions dictated. The number varies wildly between four and seven figure numbers, depending on whether cards rejected for the poor-quality information on them were included. A 1794 pamphlet published as a report on bibliography by Henri Grégoire described what the librarians in Paris were receiving from the provinces which was, in short, a mess. Many records were not only incorrectly formatted, but they had also been returned on scraps of paper or in notebooks. One record did not always equate to one copy of an item in the collection, and Grégoire complained bitterly

that many records were returning stating that there was an assortment of books in a variety of different languages that were undecipherable to the cataloguer. He rallied against people who had not the ability to catalogue books and manuscripts written in English, German, Greek or Hebrew, nor to decipher handwriting, denouncing them as the *sans culottes des bibliothèques*.

However, the instructions clearly instructed cataloguers to make use of the materials around them. Playing cards were merely recommended. However, so many other elements of the cataloguing process were left to the intelligence of the person reading the instructions that it is only natural that people would be looking to make do with what they could find. As mentioned before, the instructions were circulated to all departments across France. In themselves, they could be applicable to a collection of any size. However, in the case of larger collections containing hundreds or thousands of titles, it is a huge assumption to assume that the cataloguers will be able to source a similar number of playing cards. Had the instructions considered explaining what the overall purpose of the work would be, perhaps cataloguers would have understood the necessity of using such a format. However, given that there are reports of paper shortages at the time, it is difficult to know whether this would have changed the outcome.

Ultimately, the cataloguing code failed to have the desired impact due to what we may now call inadequate project management. According to Grégoire, the blame for this fell squarely on local government and the cataloguers incapable of following simple instructions. What local government and cataloguers made of this my research was unable to determine; writing during the pandemic meant that I had to

make do with resources that were available online. Grégoire's reports on bibliography and vandalism were my only primary sources reflecting on the project.

The remaining history of libraries during the early years of the Revolution make for more sobering reading. A decree passed on the 25th October 1793 (known officially by then as 4 brumaire an II as the Revolutionary calendar had been adopted that month) defended damaging and destroying books under the pretext of erasing symbols of the nobility. One librarian, Ormesson de Noyseau, opposed this decree, and was remembered in bibliographies published within living memory of the French Revolution for doing so. He was guillotined for his beliefs on 20th April 1794.

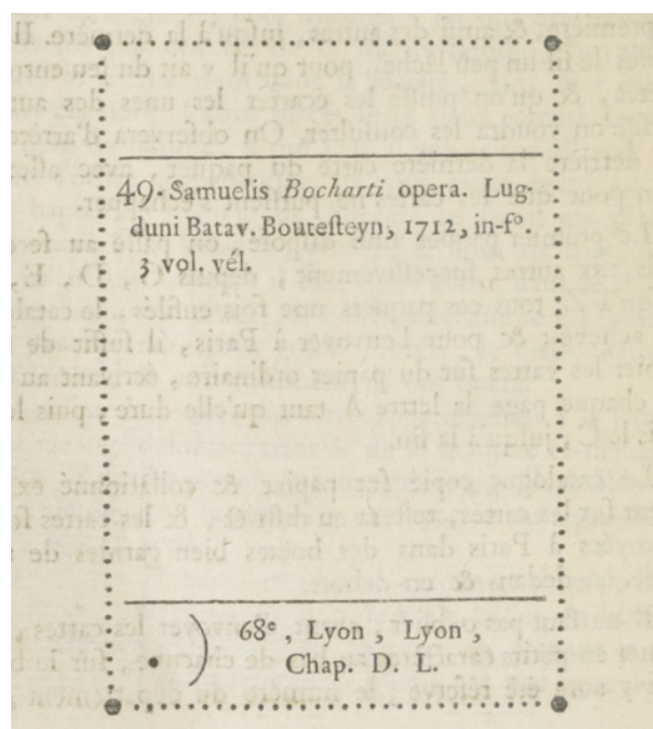


Figure 3: Another example catalogue card, taken from *Instructions* (Paris, 1791), p.10.

However, the early years of the French Revolution saw attempts to create a better society for all, with people openly advocating for access to education and learning for all and a determination to do

better by everyone. Frustratingly, concepts like free education were not made a reality until the 1880s, over a century later. It would be easy to conclude this as being, in the words of Dickens, 'the best of times and the worst of times'. However, one only needs to follow current events in this day and age to realise that these actions that lead to further destruction are happening again and again. It is easier to suggest grand ideas, but much more difficult to effectively see a project all the way through.

This exploration of the creation of the 1791 French cataloguing code started as an exploration of a piece of library history. I was unable to come to a conclusion on whether the National Assembly was primarily motivated by the desire to know what books were amongst the property confiscated from ecclesiastical institutions

from a belief that knowledge is power or whether it merely wanted to know what was of value and could be sold to raise funds for the difficult times ahead. However, it is clear that those working on the cataloguing code itself were convinced that understanding what books were at the disposal of the nation had the potential to create a society that offered more chances to all. By attempting to impose a national bibliographic standard in a format that could be relatively easily manipulated, any resulting catalogue would create opportunities to support the lofty goals the French Revolution hoped to achieve.

Anne Watson,
Collections Librarian for the Egypt & Sudan,
Middle East and Greece & Rome,
British Museum

James Ollé Awards

James G. Ollé (1916-2001) was an active teacher and distinguished writer in the field of library history; the Library and Information History Group has offered awards in his memory since 2002 with the intention of encouraging a high level of activity in library and information history. Individuals may apply for an award of up to £500 each year for expenses relating to a library history project.

Please note that the award is not intended to support conference attendance.

James Ollé Award recipients will be asked to write a report (maximum 1000 words) of the work undertaken for inclusion in the LIHG's Newsletter, and may be invited to present a short paper at an LIHG conference or meeting, such as the AGM.

To apply for the award, please send a short CV, statement of plans and draft budget to the LIHG's Awards Manager. Applications may be made throughout the year.

Dr Dorothy Clayton, Awards Manager, LIHG

Tel: 0161 826 3883; or 07769658649; Email: dorothy.clayton@manchester.ac.uk

Conference Report

Reading and Book Circulation, 1600-1800

Libraries, Lives and Legacies Festival of Research,
University of Stirling, 17-18 April 2023



Figure 1: Isaac Cruikshank (–1811), *The Lending Library*. Public Domain.

I applied for the LIHG Bursary to attend this conference, because it resonated strongly with the research topic of my 2017-18 AHRC Networking Grant, *Claimed from Stationers' Hall*, when we were investigating surviving music in the British Legal Deposit libraries of the Georgian era. Although my network was interested in books rather than music, I had immersed myself in the Georgian borrowing records of St Andrews University Library, and had taken a particular interest in the music borrowing habits of women of that era, so the opportunity to hear more about what people borrowed apart from music was understandably irresistible. On the subject of

borrowing records, the opening introduction to the 'Books and Borrowing 1750-1830 project' and demonstration of the digital resource by Katie Halsey, Matthew Sangster, Kit Baston, and Maxine Branagh-Miscampbell was fascinating, offering so much data for investigation. With my own memories of St Andrews' borrowing records, I was not entirely surprised to learn that not all of their data has yet been transcribed. (On a practical note, my notes observe that Katie is looking for volunteer testers of the database; I leave that remark for readers of this report to pick up!)

The following panel on Reading Practices in Non-Institutional Spaces was just as interesting, with Tim Pye's 'Had, Lent; Returned: Borrowing from the Country House Library', along with Abigail Williams speaking about non-elite book use in rural settings, and Melanie Bigold's paper about women's book legacies, particularly attracting my attention. Whilst my own interest has been in formal library borrowing, I am conscious that 'my' borrowers took music away for their leisure-time enjoyment, and these papers served as a reminder that musicians were probably just as likely to have borrowed music outwith the more regulated library environment. Similarly, the concept of the *Sammelband* is very familiar to me – that was how libraries kept their legal deposit music. Sam Bailey invented a useful new verb, 'Sammelbanding', during the course of their talk on 'The Reading and Circulation of Erotic Books in Coffee House Libraries' – an

interesting topic, albeit far removed from my own research.

Kelsey Jackson Williams' hands-on session with books from the Leighton Library, in an exhibition curated by Jacqueline Kennard, was the perfect after-lunch session, offering the chance both to stretch one's legs on the way there, and to inspect some rare selections from the Leighton; there was a distinct hum of muted voices as delegates recognised interesting authors, not to mention physical features of the books on display.

Parallel sessions meant making some tough choices, but I opted for the second panel on circulation, hearing Angela Esterhammer talk about John Galt's various publishing ventures – an intriguing history – followed by Cleo O'Callaghan Yeoman's 'Still my ardent sensibility led me back to novels'. (I reflected that St Andrews' first music cataloguer, Miss Elizabeth Lambert, had read a wide variety of books, and whilst her reading included travel accounts, religious books, and books on botany and conchology, she certainly wasn't averse to reading a good novel, too.) Next came Amy Solomon talking about Anne Lister's considerable book collection at Shibden Hall, and how she had made an inherited collection of her own, as well as keeping commonplace books, diaries, and reading journals. I regret having missed seeing the films about her diaries, and the two more recent 'Gentleman Jack' series on the television.

The first keynote paper was given by Deidre Lynch, on 'The Social Lives of Scraps: Shearing, Sharing, Scavenging, Gleaning'. I am sure I was not the only delegate pondering as to whether any of my own 'scraps' would survive to intrigue future

readers, but more importantly, Deidre's paper reminded us that proper 'books' are only a small proportion of the vast amount of printed material still surviving, often against the odds and far from their original context. During the pandemic, I started writing my second monograph on music from the late Victorian era through to 1950 – daringly modern! - and I must confess that some of my eBay purchases certainly were 'scraps' – an invoice from a Glasgow publisher; a letter-head; an empty record sleeve and another publisher's sample book of some of their latest popular music publications. Listening to Deidre, I felt vindicated that my purchases did indeed fill out part of the larger story that I'm trying to tell.

On the second day, the opening plenary roundtable chaired by Jill Dye addressed borrowers' records across Scotland, and I was delighted to hear from several people with whom I was already acquainted, three of them through my own AHRC Networking project.

We heard about the library of Innerpeffray, the National Library of Scotland, and Edinburgh, Glasgow and St Andrews' University Libraries. It was a long while since I had heard about Innerpeffray, so it was great to hear more about it. As for the university libraries, I knew mainly about their music holdings, their borrowing and archival records as they related to music, so it was interesting to me to hear about the bigger picture, so that I could place my own special interests into the wider context.

For the third panel, I again had to make a choice, and opted for the panel on Readers, Libraries and Loss. Jessica Purdy gave a fascinating talk on 'Libraries of Lost Books?', speaking about chained church libraries, and

the fact that their tight security and still pristine condition suggest that the books might as well have been 'lost' as far as most of the local residents were concerned. Elise Watson, too, made us reflect upon just how many publications of Catholic devotional material had been published, even if they were so ephemeral that there are now "'Black Holes" of Ephemeral Catholic Print.'

For the fourth panel, I opted to attend the panel on 'Education', hearing Maxine Branagh-Miscampbell talking about the Grindlay bequest and 'Childhood Reading Practices at the Royal High School, Edinburgh'. The Grindlay bequest was valued sufficiently that it was all added to stock, even though some material was never going to be of interest to young or teenage boys. Mary Fairclough gave an interesting talk on 'Barbauld's An Address to the Deity and Reading Aloud', probably surprising many of us when we heard about the subsequent life of Barbauld's poem in other publications, and reduced down to singable hymn-length by hymn-book editors. I have recently encountered Victorian publishers appropriating evangelical hymns for magic lantern shows, but I had not considered that poetry might also be 'trimmed down' and repurposed as hymns.

Having met the next speaker, Duncan Frost, the previous evening, and heard something about his research; readers will not be surprised that I was determined to hear his paper, since it did indeed have a musical subject: 'Bird Books: Advertising, Consumption and Readers of Songbird Training Manuals'. Who would have thought that so many books were written about catching and training songbirds to sing in captivity?! Whether you played a flageolet, used a wind-up music box, or whistled to your

bird, it must have proved a time-consuming but entertaining hobby for both men and women. The authors of these books appeared, on the face of it, all to have been men. (Who knows if there were any pseudonyms?!) The most intriguing aspect of this genre of books was in fact that, despite many pages dedicated to all aspects of caring for and training your bird, there was significantly little information about the kind of tunes that you might want to teach it.

The second and closing keynote lecture was delivered by Andrew Pettegree, on 'The Universal Short Title Catalogue: Big Data and its Perils'. Professor Pettegree was at pains to underline not only what the USTC had achieved, but also its shortcomings, or rather, what it was not. We were also reminded of some aspects that I have encountered in my own work: that books in libraries were not the only copies of these titles; they would have existed plentifully outside libraries, and so might other books which we can now only trace by, for example, publisher's catalogues and advertisements. Moreover, library catalogues can conceal different editions, or show duplicate entries, depending on minor differences in cataloguing approaches.

Since my own networking grant, I have had to reflect upon the benefits of the work, and the impact the research has had. One of the outcomes that I identified then, was that library history research created effectively a 'third space' where librarians and academic scholars – and those like myself, straddling both library and research worlds – could meet and beneficially share our insights and learning. Having attended this conference on 'Reading and Book Circulation' – which addressed a much wider era than I had done – I realised that I had experienced exactly the same kind of meeting of minds again. I had heard about the interesting research of

other scholars in genres very different from my own, but similarities of approach and a common interest in library and book history meant that I felt I had an underlying understanding enabling me to benefit from their fresh insights.

I am most grateful to the Library and Information History Group for enabling me to attend this wonderful and thought-provoking conference. Besides having such a rich array

of papers to listen to, I certainly did benefit from the opportunities to talk to other delegates. It was a treat to be able to take two days out of normal routine in such a beautiful setting, giving me plenty of food for thought for the future.

Karen E McAulay,
Music and Academic Services Librarian
Royal Conservatoire of Scotland

CILIP LIHG Online Conference

Work in Progress: Growing Libraries, Evolving Libraries
29-30 June 2023

Registration is now open for the CILIP LIHG Online Conference, taking place over two panels on Thursday 29th and Friday 30th June 2023. We have great speakers presenting around the broad theme of 'Work in Progress'. Our programme includes:

- Nadine Kozak - 'There are books on every position in the house': The Schuster's department store library, 1922-1937
- Isla Macfarlane - Touring the Library: the Library of Innerpeffray and Literary Tourism
- Ted Simonds - Enhancing Sion College Library's provenance cataloguing with placement students
- Simone Monti - Reconstructing the history of an Early Modern library - St Catharine's College's 1633 and its collection of early printed books
- Jill Dye - The impact of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland's historic library on Scotland's national collections
- Anne Watson - Let them use cards! Or, an exploration of the motivations and context behind the creation of the 1791 French Cataloguing Code
- Maria Franchini - The history and development of a parochial library told through its catalogues
- Phoebe Cooper - 'They out-last brass, iron and marble': book survival and the University of Edinburgh Library 1555-1650

Please register on our [eventbrite](#) page. The event is free and open to all. For any queries, please contact kathryn.peak@stx.ox.ac.uk.

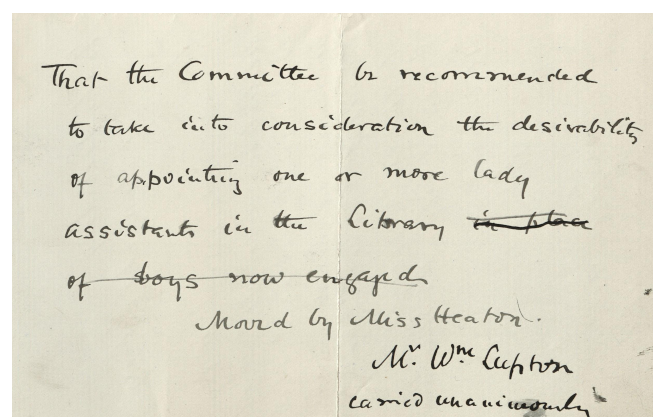
Biding Our Time

Victorian Lady Assistants at The Leeds Library

In 1871, Manchester Public Free Libraries advertised for “a respectable, intelligent young woman” to work “as assistant”. This request kickstarted a furore of articles debating the value of the “recent” female library assistant “experiment” that lasted into the next decade and beyond. Census records do reflect an increase in women with occupations listed as ‘Librarian’ or ‘Assistant Librarian’ during the period, from 113 in 1841 to a still-increasing 222 by 1881. Whether they belonged there, however, was another matter – and a contentious one.

In The Leeds Library, a recent archive discovery has unveiled a microcosm of the same debate. The Leeds Library was founded in 1768 and today remains the UK’s oldest surviving subscription library. Its archive spans its entire 254-year history, but it was in reviewing its collection of 1880s correspondence that I found two documents concerning the hiring of a “lady assistant”. The Library was no stranger to women in its workforce. In fact, its second and third librarians were both women and both named ‘Mary Robinson’; they were mother and daughter, and clearly not into unique baby names. Mary Robinson II retired shortly before her death in 1825, however, and by 1886 the ensuing all-male committees hadn’t hired another woman since. In contrast, the Library

has always had female members: from 5 of the original 105 in 1768 to 55 in 1886. Women also used the memberships of male relatives to borrow books. It comes as no surprise, then, that some of these female members began to push for the Library to hire a woman. The first document is a motion to be read at the 1886 Annual General Meeting, in which Library members met to discuss Library business with the Committee. One side of the paper contains the motion:



That the Committee be recommended
to take into consideration the desirability
of appointing one or more lady
assistants in the Library in place
of boys now engaged.
Moved by Miss Heaton.
M. Wm. Lupton
Carried unanimously

Figure 1: A motion presented by the library members to the 1886 Annual General Meeting of the Leeds Library. From the Leeds Library archives.

“That the Committee be recommended to take into consideration the desirability of [...] one or more lady assistants”.

The other side carries a formal letter requesting the document be put into the General Meeting. Over both sides, it is signed by four female members and one male –

Ellen Besquith, Lydia Walley, Jane Buckton, William Lupton, and Ellen Heaton. The latter was an active campaigner for women's education, and all were middle- to upper-class, white, and employed at least one servant. They had the privilege needed to push for change. Even so, however, their

original intent for the lady assistants to replace "boys now engaged" was quashed – clearly a step too far for the other members at the meeting. With that amendment, the motion is marked as having been "carried unanimously"; a remarkable signal of support for women retaking their place in library staff.

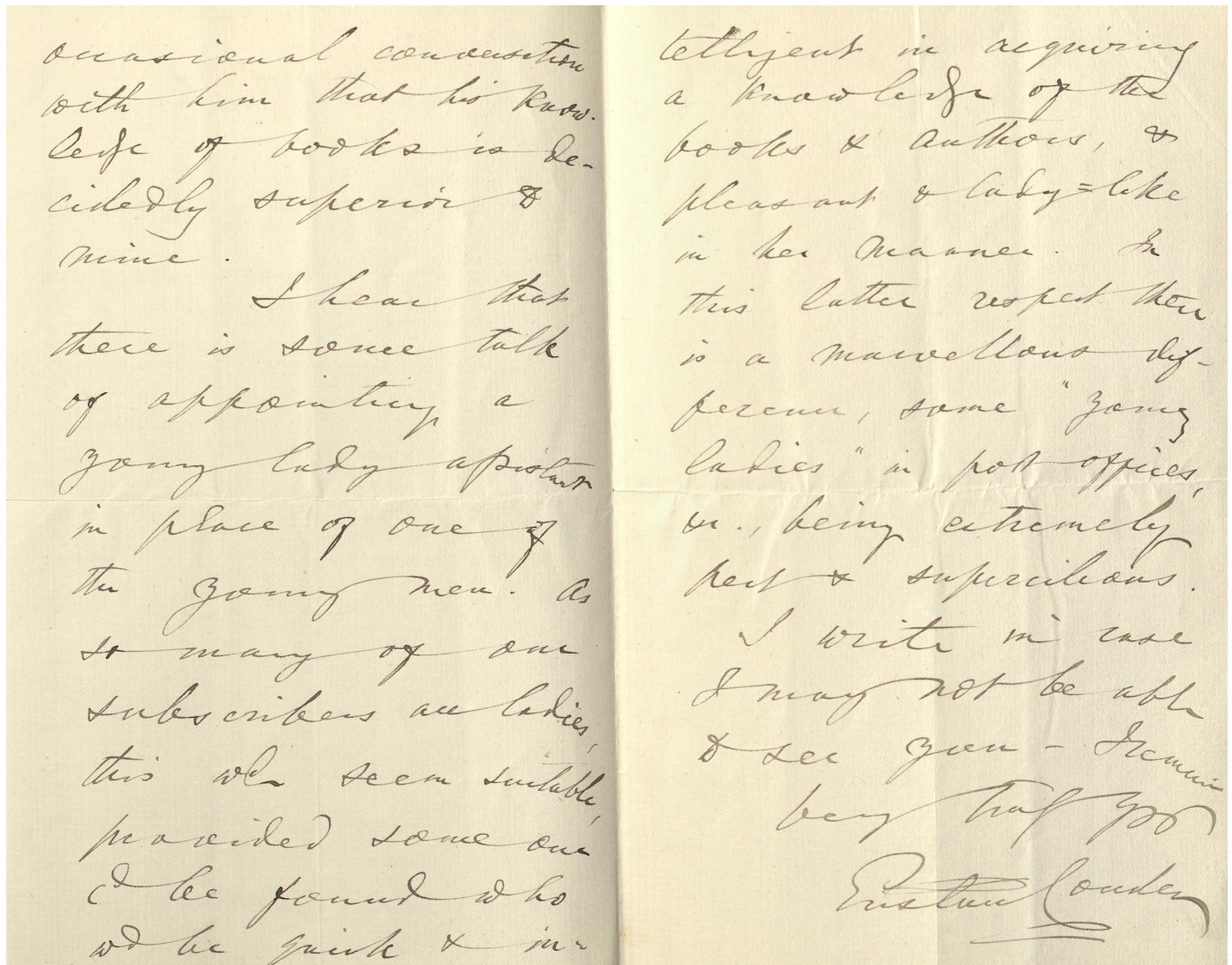


Figure 2: A letter from Eustace Couder suggesting the library consider hiring a "quick & intelligent" female librarian.

Further support is found in a second document from 1886; a February 4th letter from Committee member Eustace Couder excusing him from the February 8th 1886 meeting. He argues that "as so many of our

subscribers are ladies [hiring a woman] would seem suitable".

He is quick to note, though, that this is only "provid[ing]" the "young lady" is "quick & intelligent" and "pleasant & lady-like in her manner" – not like the "curt & supercilious" ladies working in the post offices. Cooper's conditional support serves as a perfect illustration of the expectations behind every

advancement permitted to women in the workplace during the period. If a woman is to be hired, she must be 'respectable'; white, middle-class, heterosexual, and unchallenging of the elite patriarchal definition of 'woman'.

Indeed, the reservations of the elite white Committee men are clear in the events that followed the General Meeting. Though the members "unanimously" agreed that the Committee must "consider" hiring a lady assistant, that is all the Committee proceeded to do. There is no mention of a lady assistant in the February 8th Committee meeting minutes. Though they hired multiple male assistants throughout the ensuing years, it wasn't until 1899 that the Library finally employed a woman. Miss Duckett was hired in December 1899 to "have charge" of the ground floor counter. Her arrival heralded the first time in 74 years that The Leeds Library had a woman on-staff – a torch carried by three more women over the next 50 years. In the same year as Miss Duckett's hiring, Lucy Toulmin Smith (Librarian for Manchester College, Oxford) published a paper on female Librarianship. She hoped:

"If men therefore have so recently entered into their inheritance [as Librarians], women may bide their time in patience, confident of success before long."

It wasn't until 1969 that the Library would hire its third female Librarian; but as one of eight women working at The Leeds Library in 2022, I hope we haven't kept Lucy waiting too long.

References

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Douglas, Janet, 'Women, Reading, and the Leeds Library', in Robbins, Ruth, and Webster, Christopher, (eds) *Through the Pages: 250 years of The Leeds Library*, Leeds: The Leeds Library (2018), pp. 105-121.

Niimi Day Gough,
Assistant Archivist,
The Leeds Library



Figure 3: Interior of the Leeds Library. Photograph by Michael D Beckwith. CC-BY-3.0

Library and Information History Essay Award 2022

Report from the recipients of the 2022 award

Sangster, M., Baston, K., & Aitken, B. (2021). *Reconstructing Student Reading Habits in Eighteenth-Century Glasgow: Enlightenment Systems and Digital Reconfigurations*. *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 54(4), 935-955. DOI:10.1353/ecs.2021.0098.

Our essay '*Reconstructing Student Reading Habits in Eighteenth-Century Glasgow: Enlightenment Systems and Digital Reconfigurations*' discusses student borrowings from the University of Glasgow, using these as a case study to examine how digital transformations of manuscript sources might help us move beyond received narratives and technologies of Enlightenment. It arises from a research project funded by the Carnegie Trust for the Universities of Scotland exploring six surviving borrowing registers – three detailing student borrowings between 1759 and 1771, three covering professorial loans between 1751 and 1790. Glasgow's eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century borrowing registers were unrecorded in digital catalogues until we began asking about them; now, thanks to the hard work of Robert MacLean, a considerable run of further fascinating ledgers has been unearthed.

We were interested in using Glasgow's ledgers to provide a fuller picture of eighteenth-century reading in institutional contexts. Fairly simple digital technologies have made it possible to do vastly more with historical administrative records than was previously viable. When he was conducting important early work on borrowing registers in the 1950s and 1960s, Paul Kaufman had to

spend a great deal of time interpreting archives in situ, could only publish his results in invariant forms and could not make the full data underpinning his research available to others. By contrast, transcribing and interpreting records in a simple database allows them to be connected, compared, sorted and manipulated so that queries can be framed and answered in seconds or minutes, rather than hours or days. Building digital resources based on easily-extractable open data means that as a community we are now in a position slowly but surely to accumulate a rich, widely available commons for studying the histories of books, readers and the networks and institutions that connect them.

Our essay opens by laying out the potential of digital modes of interpretation and circulation before giving a general account of Glasgow University Library's eighteenth-century practices to contextualise trends in the borrowing records, which detail one among many sources of books available in Glasgow and which skew towards expensive multivolume works that would have been more difficult to access elsewhere. We then consider lists of most-frequently-borrowed authors and works, showing that the most popular authority of the Scottish Enlightenment in 1760s Glasgow was a Frenchman, Charles Rollin, whose works were borrowed just over twice as many times as the next-most-popular author. Rollin wrote two important multivolume educational works, the *Ancient History of the Egyptians, Carthaginians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Medes and Persians*,

Macedonians, and Grecians and the Method of Teaching and Studying the Belles Lettres, both of which strongly informed the curriculum in Scottish universities. Histories are particularly prominent among the most popular books, but digging down further into the data reveals – perhaps unexpectedly for a university library – that a considerable number of novels circulated, many of which were brought in via the copyright privilege possessed by all four Scottish universities between 1710 and 1837.

As well as looking at large-scale trends, the article explores the borrowings of particular individuals, including the library's most prolific reader, Henry Stevenson, who later became its librarian; the Unitarian minister and author William Hazlitt, father of the essayist and philosopher of the same name; and the Russians Ivan Andreyevich Tretykov and Semyon Efimovich Desnitsky, who were dispatched to Glasgow to study law and moral philosophy under Adam Smith, John Millar and Thomas Reid and who both became professors of law at the University of Moscow. The database can also be used to trace networks of sociable reading. The 1765 borrowings show a sequence of students in the same Logic class all starting Samuel Richardson's *The History of Sir Charles Grandison*, although only one of them made his way through all six of the novel's volumes. Locating popular books using the borrowing registers also let us find some excellent illicit marginalia in surviving copies, showing that students approached the library with levity and scepticism, as well as seriousness and reverence. In concluding, the article argues that while many qualities of digital systems draw from Enlightenment discourses, freeing data from assumptions based on the physical

limitations of bookshelves and pages using simple digital approaches lets us construct a fuller, more detailed and more democratic history of eighteenth-century reading, surfacing idiosyncrasies, continuities, sociality and forms of interconnection.

The data underpinning the essay is all openly available online as [Eighteenth-Century Borrowing from the University of Glasgow](#). Since completing this work, we have been lucky to be able to join up with Katie Halsey (University of Stirling) and a larger research team on the Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded project 'Books and Borrowing 1750-1830: An Analysis of Scottish Borrowers' Registers'. This project is creating a database of around 150,000 historical borrowing acts across eighteen Scottish libraries, including the Advocates Library; the libraries of the universities of Edinburgh and St Andrews; subscription libraries such as those at Selkirk, Westerkirk and Wigtown; the private library of Craigston Castle; and the circulating library that Robert Chambers ran in Edinburgh in the late 1820s. You can read more about our progress on [our website](#); the full database will be available later in 2023. We are always interested in hearing about other sets of historical borrowing records that we might be able to incorporate into future research – if you know of (or are responsible for) such materials, we'd be very grateful if you could get in touch!

Matthew Sangster,
Karen Baston and
Brian Aitken

Library History Essay Award 2023

The Library History Essay Award is an annual prize for the best article or chapter on library history published in, or pertaining to, the British Isles, within the previous calendar year. Introduced in 1996, the award is organised and sponsored by the LIHG and aims to support the publication of research into library history in the British Isles. **The prize is £350.**

Submissions should contain original historical research and be based on original source materials if possible. Evidence of methodological and historiographical innovation is particularly welcome.

Authors may put themselves forward for the prize but may make only one submission per year. Any member of CILIP may also nominate a published essay for consideration. Nominations (and any queries relating to the award) should be sent to the Group's Awards Manager, Dr Dorothy Clayton, (dorothy.clayton@manchester.ac.uk).

The deadline for submissions for the Library History Essay Award 2023 is **30 September 2023**. Please note: the article/book chapter must have been published in 2022.

Back Matter

The LIHG newsletter is produced twice a year. It contains short articles, news items, exhibition and conference announcements, notices of awards and bursaries, and reports on conferences, exhibitions, and site visits. We also highlight a selection of new publications. We are always looking for feature articles in the field of library and information history; descriptions of little-known historic libraries; information about projects with a significant historical component; new resources (print and digital); news items; and calls for papers.

We also welcome reports on conferences on any subject in library and information history and reviews of exhibitions. Recent graduates are invited to submit brief descriptions of their research projects. Please contact the editor, Alex Kither, if you would like to have news, events, exhibitions or calls for papers included in the newsletter: lihgnewsletter@gmail.com

Proposals for feature articles (length of article max. 2000 words) and descriptions of graduate research projects (max. length 750 words) should be accompanied by a short CV. Deadlines for contributions:

13 October 2023 (Winter 2023)

10 May 2024 (Summer 2024)

Information about events, conferences and bursaries is also disseminated via the [CILIP website](#).

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