



68th IFLA Council and General Conference

August 18-24, 2002

Code Number: 063-111-E
Division Number: VII
Professional Group: Library History RT
Joint Meeting with:
Meeting Number: 111.
Simultaneous Interpretation: -

The community library in Scottish history

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Introduction

Historically Scotland has supported all the major forms of library activity, both for the general public and for privileged user groups. However the form of library activity which has proved to most important in an international comparative context are the libraries of local communities, the origins of which date back to the late 17th century and whose inspiration and rationale are deeply imbedded in Scottish cultural and intellectual values. The administrative model of the community library took a variety of forms but the predominant one was the subscription library. These were run like clubs or societies and members paid an entry fee to join and an annual subscription which was used to buy books and pay administrative costs. The library society (as they were often called) was governed by an annual general meeting at which a committee was elected which ran the library on a day to day basis. The model was therefore essentially democratic. This was the predominant model in the 18th century. In the 19th century new administrative models appeared influenced by secular utilitarianism and religious evangelicalism. They were less directly democratic in character but retained the model of management by committees which were usually composed of leading figures in the local community.

The seventeenth century background

The origins of modern Scottish library activity lie in the seventeenth century at a time when the prevailing religious ideology was Episcopalianism. Consequently such models of organisational thought as existed such the Kirkwood experiment (See below) tended to be centralised ones. The origins of library organisation lay in the universities and the donations they were able to attract. University libraries were founded or reorganised at St. Andrews (1612), Glasgow (1577), Aberdeen, King's College about 1495 and also in Aberdeen, the library at Marischal's College was founded in the early seventeenth century.

Thanks to patronage it was able to employ Scotland's first university librarian from 1632. Edinburgh University Library predates the university itself, being founded in 1580 and taken over by the university in 1584.

Special libraries too, originated in the late seventeenth century. The Advocates' Library, originally a lawyers' library, was founded about 1680. Its speedy adoption of a wide-ranging acquisitions policy and its recognition as a legal deposit library soon made it the country's de facto national library. Its first printed catalogue, issued in 1692, was Scotland's first printed catalogue of a library, rather than a private collection. The first medical library, that of the Royal College of Physicians in Edinburgh, was founded in 1682, the year after the College itself. A librarian and a deputy were appointed in 1683.

Strategies of wider access were also emerging. Libraries either benefited from or grew out of the work of private collectors. During the restoration period most book collectors were Episcopalians and among the middling ranks of society Episcopalian clergy took the lead. They developed wide ranging liberal traditions of book use which included literature, history and law as well as books on religion which covered a wide theological spectrum. Another tradition was however emerging. This was a movement away from literature towards history, memoirs, sermons and religious and theological controversy often related to political issues. Although this tradition was found in other parts of Europe in Scotland, in the eighteenth century, it became associated with Calvinism and the origins of working class book use. In the 1690s Episcopacy was abolished in favour of Calvinist church government and the Calvinists took control of the universities. Many Episcopalian clergy, including leading book collectors, lost both their parishes and contact with the universities which they had formally patronised with gifts of books. They began now to look to local communities as potential beneficiaries of their patronage.

The consequence of this was the somewhat diffuse First Endowment movement which included twenty libraries founded between the Reformation and 1800 and comprised some which could be considered to be early school libraries or future components of academic libraries. The first parochial library was founded at Saltoun in East Lothian in 1658 by Norman Leslie, minister of Gordon in Berwickshire.¹ The main period of the First Endowment movement was 1680 - 1720 and included such well known institutions as Innerpefferay library (founded c1680) and the Leightonian Library in Dunblane (founded 1684). As a movement it bore all the hallmarks of its ideological origins. Libraries tended to be small, not usually exceeding a few hundred volumes because they had begun life as private libraries or had been formed with the proceeds of small bequests. They were located mainly in east and central Scotland reflecting the distribution and circulation of books in the seventeenth century. Unlike in England secular control was much more marked. The small stocks, largely composed of religious books and containing many books in foreign languages, were as inimical to the creation of large user groups as were their original regulations but stock expansion and imaginative management in the eighteenth century greatly liberalised and extended the use of some including Innerpefferay library, the John Gray Library at Haddington and Dumfries Presbytery library.

Although at first hostile to Episcopalian traditions of book use Calvinist clergy soon became more sympathetic partly because of the need to tackle the problems of ignorance, alleged irreligion and political instability in the Highlands. The General Assembly of the Church of Scotland adopted in 1705 a proposal by James Kirkwood, a former Scottish Episcopalian clergyman to set up small libraries in the Highlands.² The scheme was a watered down version of that proposed by Kirkwood in a publication entitled *An overture for founding and maintaining of Bibliotheks in every paroch throughout this kingdom, humbly offered to the consideration of this present* [Scottish General Assembly of the Church of Scotland] *Assembly* issued in 1699. This proposed, inter alia, that every parish in Scotland should have a library and that a union catalogue of all the libraries should be centrally maintained. Although the sophisticated centralised organisational model proposed was not influential the idea that library provision in the Highlands should be the product of intervention from the Lowlands was still being applied two hundred years later.

The eighteenth century achievement

The 18th century marks the origin of publicly available library provision in Scotland on a large scale.

This was partly based on the circulating library, but much more on institutional provision which was highly appropriate to Scotland's needs. The subscription library and its accompanying ideology are Scotland's distinctive contribution to library history, although it was also important in both England and New England.

The subscription library movement was divided on class lines with libraries for the middle classes and separate libraries for the working classes. The latter were cheap to join and consequently smaller. Book selection policies and administration were influenced by the Scottish Enlightenment. Circulation and subscription libraries complemented one another, the former being usually run in conjunction with bookshops and were found mainly in the big towns. Subscription libraries which were smaller developed initially in market towns and villages, subsequently expanding into the cities. The first circulating library in Britain was founded in Edinburgh by Allan Ramsay in 1725 and the first working class subscription library in Britain was founded at Leadhills in 1741. (It was not originally a working class library but subsequently became so). The first true middle class subscription library may have been founded at Dumfries in 1745 but the first definite foundation is Kelso in 1751. Thereafter the movement grew steadily. A second working class subscription library appeared at Wanlockhead in 1756 but no more appeared until the 1790's, the principal decade of expansion in both Scottish working class and middle class libraries.

Circulating libraries pioneered large scale provision by the standards of the time and developed sophisticated loan services while subscription libraries were a form of community development but they shared a common ideological foundation in Enlightenment values which can be seen in their book selection policies.

Circulating libraries 1725 – 1800

Circulating libraries were a rarity in Scotland compared with England and, like endowed libraries, were limited in geographical distribution, although in a less eccentric fashion. There were, before 1801, some 369 circulating libraries in Britain as a whole, only thirty one (8% of the total) being in Scotland. Ramsay's foundation set a precedent, for the circulating library remained mainly in the large towns and on the east coast where much of the population was concentrated as were the outlets for retail bookselling. Edinburgh was the main centre, having seven libraries over the period, followed by Aberdeen and Glasgow with five each. Dundee and Paisley had two each. Other centres were Dunbar, Banff, Elgin, Inverness, Leith, Peebles, Perth, Peterhead, Irvine and Beith.³

Their stocks were large by the standards of the period, 5,000 or more volumes not being unusual. The largest was James Sibbald's in Edinburgh, which had 20,000 volumes in 1786.⁴ Large circulating libraries in terms of stock size matched university libraries.

The circulating library was the first kind of library in Scotland to offer a high quality lending service although at a correspondingly high cost. Loan periods and borrowing rights varied with the ability to pay. Because some libraries had a borrowing category of country members they served rural hinterlands as well as immediate urban areas. Collections of foreign language books especially French titles were commonly held. Sibbald even pioneered the loan of non book materials by offering a print lending service.

The stocks of circulating libraries were composed largely of non fiction which usually accounted for about 80% of stocks and contained the leading standard authors of the day as well as more popular material. History, divinity, voyages, travels, poetry, plays and novels were the subjects advertised by Isaac Forsyth of Elgin. An analysis of Sibbald's catalogue of 1786, shows that history and geography accounted for 19% of the stock. Literature also accounted for 19% while science and technology comprised 20%. Such a pattern of specialised book provision was quite common for other circulating libraries had specialist collections on music and theology, subjects which were otherwise difficult to study outside an academic environment.⁵

It is notable that the circulating library was the only type of library in Scottish history that did not have an essentially institutional base.

Subscription libraries 1741 - 1800

The subscription library arose partly out of deficiencies of other types. The bulk of new potential library users were in central and south western Scotland and were poorly served by endowed and circulating

libraries, the latter being extremely expensive anyway. Market towns and villages had either few or no bookshops and there was a need to develop book purchase and use along cheap and easily manageable lines. The 18th century was an age of societal activity and closely knit intimate communities. A type of library which combined community government and control in a societal framework with relatively inexpensive book purchase and use was the obvious strategy. Book selection and library management policies could be developed which reflected the intellectual needs and social values of the community.

The progress of the movement illustrates these points. Between 1745 and 1800, forty three middle class libraries were founded, more than half (twenty seven) being formed between 1791 and 1800. Only five were north of the Tay and twenty seven were south of the Forth/Clyde line. The county with the most was Roxburgh but by 1801, Glasgow, Aberdeen and Paisley still did not have any, although Dundee and Edinburgh did. An urban base of about 2,000 people with an accessible rural hinterland was perfectly adequate. Kaufman has pointed out that the middle class subscription library movement involved the participation of leading citizens of the community,⁶ men who called themselves gentlemen and who frequently associated for other purposes. Membership was drawn mainly from the middle strata of society although at either end it shaded off into other categories, knights and earls at one end and prosperous tradesmen at the other who represented a link with the working class movement. The middle ground was made up of landed proprietors, ministers, civil servants, solicitors, businessmen, doctors and members of other middle class occupations including transients like army and navy officers. They usually comprised a fair cross section of their local community and were not representative of overt factions, either political or religious. Women were readily admitted as members but were not numerous and took no part in administration unless they were employed as librarians.

Administrative ideologies reflected the social values of their founders. Middle class libraries were often known as proprietary libraries because members had joined by paying an entry fee, the equivalent of purchasing a share, which made them 'proprietors' of the library. Entry fees in the 18th century were about a guinea. The annual subscription was about 6/-. The members elected a committee who managed the library, selected the books and appointed a librarian. The librarian was entirely subservient to the committee, usually part time and was unlikely to earn more than £5 per year. As an initial step booksellers were sometimes retained as librarians. They supplied both premises to house the library and sold books for its stock. This was done at Ayr and Kilmarnock and helped to keep down costs.⁷ In 1755, Kelso Library, by giving a large order for books, was able to obtain them more cheaply than they could be bought in London.

It is clear from the diary of George Ridpath⁸ (1717-1772) who was parish minister at Stichel, near Kelso, how middle class subscription libraries facilitated the development of book use. Ridpath read **extensively**. During the period 1755-61 he read about 150 monographs as well as contemporary newspapers and periodicals. His main subject interests were history, science, medicine and the classics. Many of the books he read were recent publications and he also read the *Philosophical Transactions* regularly to keep abreast of modern scientific research. Without the library much of this would have been impossible. Although a clergyman Ridpath read no theology, a reflection of contemporary Moderate values. The library regulations also facilitated intensity of use. In June 1756 Ridpath returned the *Georgics*, 'my month being out'.⁹ However some old practices survived. He read almost no fiction and he usually read each book several times, frequently taking notes.

How administration and attitudes to book use developed can be seen from the first two years of Duns Public Library, founded in October 1768. The library had eighteen founder members mainly tenant farmers, although there were four ministers. One of the ministers was elected president and a local solicitor (writer) as secretary. A list of orders was made up and copies were sent to different Edinburgh booksellers to find out who would supply the books mostly cheaply. James Young, the local bookseller was appointed librarian, at a salary of £2 per year. He was not asked to supply books for stock, presumably because he would not be able to compete with large bookshops in Edinburgh.

The initial bookseller's order consisted of eighty five items and included Robertson's *History of Scotland*, Anson's *Voyages* and *Don Quixote*. The main subject areas covered were history, social sciences and some literature. Religion, theology, science and technology were largely ignored. The books arrived in early December.

Arrangements with booksellers usually proved unsatisfactory and this seems to have been the case at Duns, for the clerk wrote to Alexander Hay of Drummelzier, a local landed proprietor, asking for permission to keep the books in the town house. Hay, answering in the affirmative on Christmas day, accurately identified the nub of the issue.

'It must give me great pleasure to think that Dunse is in a way of becoming a Seat of Literature, Arts and Sciences, tho' I must owe I should have still more was there a possibility of its becoming a Settlement for Industry, Trade and manufactures'...¹⁰

Hay had accurately perceived that the role of the library was to promote social science values, not those of commerce, industry or agriculture, despite the predominance of farmers among the membership.

The book selection policy of the Scottish proprietary library in the 18th century was to amass a vernacular collection of predominantly non-scientific secular titles for which there was an anticipated demand. Imaginative literature, history, geography and biography were the most popular subject areas. Reading vogues were broadly similar in England and Scotland, except that there was demand for fiction in Scotland which could not be satisfied by other means.¹¹

There was a good deal of uniformity in library stocks. Greenock's second catalogue of 1792 (637 volumes) contains about 360 volumes in common with the Duns catalogue of 1789 (1,105 volumes) more than half of the former and just under a third of the latter.¹² The comparison is really closer than these figures suggest for the same author is sometimes represented by different titles and the same subject is sometimes represented by different authors. Kaufman also noted stock overlap in five libraries, two of them circulating.¹³ An examination of the minutes of Ayr and Kirkcudbright subscription libraries shows that the books bought were often not new publications which indicates a desire to build a standard stock, rather than just acquiring currently published material and the surviving shelf stock of Greenock Library tells a similar story. Such book selection policies gave access to the values of the age.

Working class library provision and the ideology of mutual improvement

Despite detailed lists of rules middle class subscription libraries were rather poorly administered¹⁴ and the main thrust of ideological development lay with the working class subscription libraries. Some important early principles can be identified from a study of the origins of Leadhills Reading Society.

The subscription library movement originated in Leadhills for several reasons. The Leadhills/Wanlockhead complex was one of the few major capital intensive concerns in Scotland at that time and was greatly expanded in the 18th century.¹⁵ In 1770 there was a population of 1,500 of whom 500 worked in the mines.¹⁶ At that time less than half of them would have worked for the Scots Mines Company, a major investor in development. The miners were organised into partnerships of from two to twelve men and each partnership entered into a 'bargain' with the mine owner to raise ore at a certain price in a particular part of the mine. The ore raised was then smelted on site by smelters who, along with the miners, formed the village's working class elite. A typical lead mining village also included lead washers, joiners, blacksmiths, shopkeepers and a minister, doctor and schoolteacher. There would also be people like shepherds who were economically uninvolved in the community. The lead mining companies who dominated the mining villages enjoyed a well justified reputation for paternalism. While this included strict discipline, even extending to moral issues, it comprehended a measure of benevolence and a real attempt to encourage self help. In view of the remoteness of mining villages it is not surprising that the constructive use of leisure was a major preoccupation. The lead mining companies appreciated that the promotion of education and reading could facilitate this.¹⁷ The overall aim was to create well disciplined communities with some appreciation of the constructive use of leisure.

To promote these policies, James Stirling of Garden (1692-1770) was appointed mines manager at Leadhills in 1734 by the Scots Mines Company. Stirling's contribution to the foundation of the library and the philosophical principles which underpinned it are difficult to assess because he lacks an adequate biography.¹⁸ He was interested in Venetian glassmaking and was a distinguished mathematician who was

denied the academic career he was entitled to because of his Jacobite opinions. He came to Leadhills in 1734 and remained there until his death.

Prior to Stirling's arrival the miners had a reputation for independence of spirit and violence of temperament. Stirling introduced a comprehensive programme of reforms. The number of ale sellers was reduced, the working day was shortened to six hours to lessen the danger of lead poisoning and a surgeon and a schoolmaster were brought in. Old age pensions, sickness benefits and a charity fund were introduced. He drew up a comprehensive code of rules governing the miners' behaviour, both above and below ground, and encouraged them to build proper stone cottages for themselves. The miners were also encouraged to take in land from the surrounding waste to grow their own food, especially green vegetables as they and their families were subject to vitamin deficiency diseases.¹⁹ The scheme was so successful that it was copied at Wanlockhead and adopted in a modified form at Westerkirk.

The circumstances surrounding the foundation of the library are rather less clear cut. W.S. Harvey, the industrial archaeologist and mining historian, has examined the bargain books for the 1740s in which mining company overseers recorded their 'bargains' with partnerships of miners. Bargains were signed for by one of the partners, known as the 'taker'. Harvey found that some takers were only able to make their mark while other signatures were so bad as to be illegible. It should be noted that the takers' names had already been recorded by the overseers so the takers had only to copy it down. As will be shown below, in the context of the library, reading and writing were linked skills, although this was by no means generally the case in 18th century Scotland. On the other hand, some miners had prior experience of book use. The subscription list appended to Isaac Ambrose's *Prima media and ultima...* (1737) contains six Leadhills names including James Muir, workman and Hugh Manson, miner. Two more, Edward Douglas and John Weir were original members of the library.

Near contemporary sources credit Stirling with the foundation of the library as part of his package of reforms.²⁰ The *Old Statistical Account* appears to give the credit to the miners but this probably refers to the fitting up of a new library **building** which was being done at about the time the parish minister was writing. Certainly Robert Forsyth supports this.²¹ The association with Allan Ramsay mentioned in secondary sources from the late 19th century onwards, is entirely spurious. The legend appears to have originated at the time of the centenary celebrations in 1841.

The evidence suggests that not only were the miners not the founders of the library, they were not even its original membership. The library's list of members from 15th April 1743 until 1902 still survives and records 870 names, beginning with the core membership of 23 in 1743.²² Occupations are not given but some of the names recur in the document known as the 'Leadhills Diary' which appears to be the diary of one Matthew Wilson and covers the period, June 11th 1745 to July 12th 1746.²³ Wilson was a senior mines clerk and occupied a middle management position. He was a trusted confidant of Stirling and a frequent guest at his house.

Wilson joined the library in 1745 and immediately became a member of the committee. Some of the founder members of the library appear in the Diary as friends or colleagues of the author. It is difficult to identify any of the lower strata of employees among the early members. Wilson describes a number of men as labourers but none of them appears in the membership list. One of the founder members, John Wilson, is described as a miner but he employed workmen of his own. The position began to change in the late 1740s. Another John Wilson, this time a blacksmith joined in 1749 and other less prestigious occupations are found thereafter, such as John Weir, leadwasher, who joined in 1758. The miners initially had no exclusive rights to the library society which was more broadly based than it subsequently became. The rules drawn up in 1743, which have fortunately survived forbid office holding by grieves and overseers but this restriction only applied to a handful of individuals.²⁴

The foundation of the library was the keystone in a programme of social engineering²⁵ although its early history was probably more confused and uncertain than previously thought. An examination of the rules of 1743 which were amended in 1821 and again in 1859²⁶ demonstrates the complexity of the situation.

Prospective members had to pay an entrance fee of 5/- and an annual subscription of 4/- which was customarily paid quarterly. The society was governed by quarterly meetings, the first of the year, held at the beginning of January, being the 'anniversary' or annual general meeting. At each AGM a chairman

(preses) secretary, treasurer, librarian and three inspectors were chosen. The librarian had to keep the library, presses and books in good order, issue and discharge books and keep a record of the library's stock. For these services he had free use of the library. He was not, however, required to observe the physical condition of returning books and he did not have to monitor the operation of the circulation system. This was done by the inspectors who examined returned books for damage on loan nights. They could also go into any member's house and demand to see the library books in his possession. Policy was executed by a committee of twelve members which met monthly, principally to select books. Matthew Wilson identified this as the main committee function as early as 1745. Failure to obey the regulations was punishable by fines and in the most serious cases expulsion was threatened. Women were forbidden formal membership until about 1872 although before this women could claim reading rights during the minority of their male children under the inheritance rule (Membership was both inheritable and transferable). Any member refusing office could be fined. The loan period depended on the size of the book. Four duodecimos could be borrowed at a time but only one folio: The basic loan period was one month but this was doubled for quartos and folios.

The organisational model here anatomised and one which became universal is that of the reading society in which the members agreed to associate for a specified period of time, usually up to five years, in order to amass a collection of books which would be dispersed among the members at the end of the period. The library variant of the model is, of course, permanence but often the difference was more apparent than real. Successful temporary reading societies might be made permanent while libraries, intended to be permanent, might fail after a few years.

The size of the entry money and subscription lend support to the view that the library was not originally envisaged as a working class institution. Subscription rates declined over the years indicating the move to a working class base. By 1822 the annual subscription had fallen to 2/6 although the entry money had actually risen to 7/6 and by 1859 the annual subscription had fallen again to 2/- while the entry money had declined to only 3/-.

Such a band of subscriptions could never hope to raise a large income. Subscriptions for working class libraries customarily ranged from 2/- to 5/- per annum which might bring in an annual income of about £10. Outside patronage which was a major feature at Leadhills and is regularly referred to in the minutes was the only means by which incomes could be substantially augmented.

The spread of working class libraries from the 1790s onwards resulted in the growth of a large network of very small libraries, based on small communities. These libraries were administered in an amateur fashion, had little or no contact with one another and were incapable of substantial expansion. It was a picture which did not change until the 20th century which demonstrates the historic conservatism of Scottish libraries.

The philosophical model which underlay the rules was that of mutual improvement which is spelt out in the preamble to the original rules of 1743 and retained in subsequent amended versions.

'We, Subscribers, having agreed to form Ourselves into a SOCIETY, in order to purchase a Collection of Books, for our mutual Improvement, did ... condescend upon certain ARTICLES, to be observed by us, for the Establishment and Regulation of this our Society...'

Mutual improvement may be defined as the spiritual and intellectual development of the social individual through corporately organised intellectual activity, in this case, book use, and it reflected the wider preoccupations of the Scottish Enlightenment. Scottish philosophy in the 18th century was concerned with the environment, social sciences and the study of institutions. The ²⁷Scots believed in the natural sociability of man but that sociability had to be regulated by government and laws. The principal achievement of the philosophers of the Scottish Enlightenment was the development of the social sciences from moral philosophy. Scottish philosophy was both preoccupied with 'social man' and highly environmentalist in outlook. Institutions of all kinds could be used to mould and 'improve' individuals to function more responsibly in a collective environment; 18th century Scotland was noted for its enthusiasm for societal activity and some types of society aimed to promote intellectual development in a corporate framework.²⁸

The idea of mutual 'benefit' or mutual improvement seems to have been originated by John Locke who founded the first mutual benefit society in Amsterdam in 1687 which was subsequently continued in London. The connection between the mutual acquisition of knowledge and the co-operative use of books was soon made. In the early 18th century, book clubs, inspired by the principle of mutual improvement, began to be founded by English clergymen and there was also an example in Belfast founded in 1705. The idea of a 'mutual benefit' in connection with reading inspired Benjamin Franklin to found a book club in 1727 and later, the Library Company of Philadelphia the first subscription library in the English speaking world. Franklin acknowledged as his inspiration, John Locke, and an American thinker, Cotton Mather.²⁹

Initially, in Scotland mutual improvement took the form of discussion and debate and originated in Edinburgh debating clubs and societies, patronised by the literati, the men of the Scottish Enlightenment. The Easy Club founded by Allan Ramsay in 1712, aimed to promote mutual improvement in this way³⁰ and thereafter the term appears regularly in the rules of Edinburgh clubs and societies but the Leadhills rules of 1743 mark its first appearance in a library context in Scotland where the aim of pursuing the goals of mutual improvement through collective book use is first stated. The role of education and book use in the development of social man is redolent of the values of the period. One of the characters in the Gentle Shepherd asserts

'Because by education I was taught
To speak and act aboon their common thought'.³¹

The play, in fact, represents the model of a self regulating society which is exactly what the rules of Leadhills Reading Society aimed to make it. Not only would the books chosen reflect the social values of the period, the rules which emphasise self discipline, community purpose, regard for proper procedure and a high level of moral seriousness would promote the philosophy of social man. E.P. Thompson has called these four principles the rituals of mutuality.³² The spirit of the institution is summed up in rule 33.

'MEMBERS guilty of any Indecency or unruly obstinate Behaviour, at any of the Society's Meetings, or who shall, on any Occasion, offer any Indignity to the Society, shall be punished by Fine, Suspension or Exclusion, as the Society shall judge the nature of the Transgression to require'³³

The view that those entering society had to accept its rules reflects a wider world of 18th century belief.

The idea that mutual improvement could be pursued through the use of books, co-operatively acquired and used in a well regulated social environment was invented at Leadhills and in view of its close relationship to the overall policy of social engineering being pursued by Stirling it is difficult to believe that he did not participate in its invention although it was believed in Leadhills, a hundred years later, that James Wells, the Society's first president and village surgeon and William Wright, the first secretary and local schoolmaster had done most of the drafting of the original rules.³⁴ The philosophy of mutual improvement subsequently became the dominant ideology of working class library provision in Scotland although its further development cannot be linked directly with Leadhills. Between 1790 and 1822, fifty one working class subscription libraries were founded in Scotland and in the 1790s alone fifty two temporary reading societies were formed.³⁵ Mutual improvement and the socially scientific values of the Enlightenment were major motivations in their foundation. Although the philosophical drive waned the administrative ideology remained strong and was still current at the end of the 19th century. As an ideology it enjoyed widespread social approval although unfortunately it never attracted a major apologist. It is now accepted that Scotland, in common with other northern European countries, had a national educational ideology which aimed, at low cost, to instil basic literacy and numeracy into the entire population and encourage a participation in the search for knowledge at all social levels.³⁶ The ideology of mutual improvement complemented this by providing the literate with an inexpensive opportunity for book use.

The working class library movement was slow to spread but as the century progressed, factors emerged which facilitated its development. A potential user group lay in the skilled tradesmen of west central and southern Scotland. As well as developing traditions of literacy, book use and prosperity they were promoting traditions of corporate organisation. Unfortunately the history of trade societies seems to be an under-researched area. A Woolcombers' Society was founded in 1759. It had an entry fee and monthly charges. The Fenwick Weavers' Society, founded in 1761, is particularly important because it was one of the first to purchase foodstuffs in bulk which were then cheaply resold to members.³⁷ Subscription lists show that the weavers of Fenwick associated temporarily for the purchase of individual books and in 1808 they founded the Fenwick Library. The preamble to the regulations reiterates the values of mutual, improvement and even introduces a degree of historical perspective.

"Everything which has a tendency to improve the condition of man, claims his cordial regard. For this end nothing can be better calculated than a Library adapted to the habits and various pursuits of the community where it is established. The utility of such institutions has happily been long acknowledged in Scotland; and to the diffusion of knowledge, of which they have been not the least considerable instruments, we are indebted, under God, for great part of that light and liberty which we enjoy. The pleasure which results from the perusal of well selected books, is often of the highest kind".³⁸

There is a clear link here between trade group solidarity and organisation and co-operative book use and the values of improvement. The Encyclopaedia Club of Paisley which may have existed as early as 1770 seems to have been one of the first to link book use with working class corporate organisation. It got its name because its small collection of books included a set of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Its president, for a time, was a blacksmith and its members included a barber and a handloom weaver. It was essentially a debating society and its meetings were conducted in a highly structured, formal fashion.³⁹

An administrative ideology existed to facilitate an intellectual ideology. In the 1790s, twelve working class libraries were founded and fifty two temporary reading societies of which fourteen were in Glasgow and twelve in Paisley,⁴⁰ reflecting a general growth in working class book use in Britain as a whole.⁴¹ They were founded mainly by small masters, aspiring professional men, shopkeepers, tradesmen, skilled artisans and workmen with a strong sense of corporate identity like coal or lead miners.⁴² In various ways improvement values were articulated. The term appears in Westerkirk Library's rules (founded 1792), deriving its inspiration from Leadhills.⁴³ Robert Burns, in an anonymous contribution to the *Old Statistical Account*, emphasised the transforming power of book use both for the individual and society.⁴⁴ An anonymous writer to the *Scots Chronicle* drew attention to the narrow mindedness of life in small villages and the lack of intellectual development where no library was present.⁴⁵ Walter Monteath, a member of the Reading Society of Tillicoultry described the need for corporate activity and emphasised the development of 'good moral character'. Plays and novels were strictly excluded from stock⁴⁶ an important reminder that censorship could be exercised within the working class itself.

These are comments from the inside but a notable outside observer was John Millar (1735-1801), professor of Civil Law at Glasgow University.⁴⁷ He collected a good deal of useful data on the movement which he published in the *Scots Chronicle* between 1796 and 1799. Millar believed the working classes of central Scotland to be the best educated and most 'intellectually improved' in Europe and therefore capable of benefiting from this new movement. Millar had deplored the dehumanising effect of the industrial revolution and the division of labour and believed that a means had been found to counteract this. He also extended the environmentalist argument by claiming that libraries could promote the perfectibility of man. As a political radical himself he thought that libraries could develop working class consciousness and promote political reform. While other correspondents supported this political argument they seem to have been members of temporary reading societies, rather than permanent libraries. While libraries and reading societies undoubtedly attracted the politically radical there is no evidence that permanent libraries had overtly political objectives and only one was ever criticised for political radicalism.⁴⁸

Although Millar's grasp of the situation was far from perfect he did appreciate that working class libraries should be controlled by the working classes themselves. Libraries administered for the working classes and not by them would lead to apathy and distrust, an accurate and widely ignored prophecy.⁴⁹

The development of book selection policies can be traced through the surviving records of early institutions such as Leadhills Library. There is some reason to think that the library was originally intended to be partly a technical library for the mine management but if such a policy did exist it was rapidly replaced, under pressure from the miners by one which favoured social science and religion. Stock development can be studied via the first catalogue, a manuscript catalogue of 1767 and the first printed catalogue, issued in 1800.⁵⁰

The dominance of history and religion is marked, an average of about 50% of the stock. Biography and travel are also healthily represented. Perhaps most interesting of all is the presence of imaginative literature represented in such classes as Miscellaneous, Literature, Periodicals and Fiction. Between 1767 and 1800 the percentage of fiction rose from 3.2 to 8.5%. A growing sophistication in working class book use can be perceived here. Working class book use in the 18th century has been portrayed as conservative and linked to a continuing preference for controversial religion. There is no doubt that this was the case at Leadhills where the miners were strongly inclined to Evangelicalism and indeed many joined the Free Church in 1843, but equally the miners were moving towards secular book use and even embracing fiction which, by the end of the 19th century would be the main component of book issues in most publicly available libraries.⁵¹ Without this move towards secularism the community library movement would not have continued to grow.

By the end of the century book selection policies reflected both conservatism and change. Religion was still a popular subject, reflecting a continuing tradition of working class piety. Controversial religion also offered a means of pursuing dissident social behaviour in a world dominated by Moderate clergy and the Patronage system. Broadly socially scientific subjects like history, geography, biography and politics were also moving to prominence. Perhaps most notable and the harbinger of a major trend was the shift towards fiction, literature and periodicals. In view of the hostility to imaginative literature sometimes voiced from within the working classes this may seem surprising but it reflects the transmutation of a tradition, based on folklore, chapbook literature and heroic tales notably the adventures of Bruce and Wallace.⁵² The reconciliation of these apparently hostile traditions was now actively being pursued. Indeed, in 1864, a Leadhills resident ridiculed the utilitarian journalist, Harriet Martineau, for suggesting that the miners were excessively preoccupied with non fiction.⁵³

A study of five working class subscription library catalogues of the period⁵⁴ shows clear differences between working class and middle class book selection policies. The middle classes took to fiction and serial literature more quickly than the working classes and some working class libraries remained actively hostile to fiction until well into the 19th century but nonetheless a process of reconciliation was already taking place. Social sciences represented common ground with religion the main difference. The rise of Evangelicalism would maintain the difference and add fresh elements of complexity. Another meeting point was the mutual lack of interest in vocational reading, a consequence of the impact of the Enlightenment and the interest in social sciences which it generated. Among the working classes vocational reading is linked to the rise of the new middle class professions in the second half of the nineteenth century.

The subscription library in perspective

New types of publicly available library appeared in the nineteenth century all of which were characterised by middle class interventionism. They were the libraries of mechanics' institutes, churches of many denominations, libraries of the second endowment phase and rate supported libraries which eventually came to dominate. These latter were funded by wealthy individuals and were managed by committees of varying degrees of accountability. Most significant of all were the rate supported libraries which began to appear from 1853 onwards when the first Act was passed. A further Act, the Public Libraries (Scotland) Act of 1867, required library committees to contain equal numbers of elected members and householders, a clear recognition of the Scottish community library's inclusive traditions⁵⁵. The subscription tradition enjoyed varied fortunes. The last middle class subscription library was founded in 1826 by which time about seventy three had been established. Poor administrative standards and falling book prices meant

that many were already in decline. Some, such as Greenock and Langholm, survived into the twentieth century by assuming a more popular character but many disappeared. There were twenty five left by the end of the century. Working class subscription libraries suffered from small incomes, lack of resources, the inability to invest in development and vulnerability to the trade cycle. They were also unable to cope with the challenge of industrialisation and urbanisation. The movement survived successfully in the traditional heartland of the community library, the large village and the market town. By the end of the century there were eighty three⁵⁶.

Conclusion

Over a lengthy period libraries in Scotland have complemented and supplemented widespread, but limited, cheap education and given the average Scot opportunities to continue reading and book use after the conclusion of scholastic education. Libraries were based on small, inexpensive administrative units which were most effective outside major cities, much like the educational process itself. Scottish library history, apart from the period of middle class intervention in the early nineteenth century, has been marked by consensuality among social leaders in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and among political parties in the twentieth. Libraries have supported key factors in Scottish intellectual life. They have encouraged all social classes to participate in intellectual life and supported the Scottish rejection of a separate class of intelligentsia. Religion has been a major motivation to book use for all social classes, but especially for the working classes, in whose enthusiasm for controversial religion can be found the origins of working class intellectual independence.

The movement also has wider significance. The Scottish community library system although it recognised a common set of cultural and intellectual assumptions had no central organisation and was entirely self regulating and as such was a self regulating information system two hundred years before the Internet. The influence of the movement abroad has yet to be quantified but it must have been substantial. Scottish emigrants to the old white Commonwealth took with a system of values which could be replicated in Canada, Australia and New Zealand. There was in Tasmania, for example, in the mid 19th century, a subscription library at a place called Evandale which had been founded in 1847 by a young Scottish Presbyterian minister and its stock and style of management closely followed Scottish precedents⁵⁷. Perhaps most significantly of all Scotland was the first country in the world to have a national policy for public library provision.

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- ¹² Greenock Library. *Catalogue and rules of the Greenock Library*. Greenock: T. Murray, 1792; Duns Subscription Library. *A catalogue of books in the subscription library at Dunse*. 1789.
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