

The Growth of Public Literacy in Eighteenth-Century England.

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Steven Cowan

**Very special thanks to Professor Gary McCulloch
and to Professor Richard Aldrich**

Abstract

This thesis investigates the extent to which the acquisition of literacy during the eighteenth century arose independently of and thus separately from formal schooling. It further examines what counted as 'literacy' during the eighteenth century and how it was connected to orate forms of communication and expression. The thesis uses a wide variety of sources in order to demonstrate that there is scope for extending the historiography of literacy and communicative practice during the eighteenth century. It is argued that recent developments in digitized data-bases have opened up new opportunities for further research.

The thesis argues that literacy was spread more broadly both geographically and socially in eighteenth century England than is often recognized. The thesis begins by setting public literacy in its broader social and historical contexts. The term 'public' is used because throughout the thesis literacy is viewed as a social act of communication and as a set of social practices. This view is rooted in two distinct critical traditions. One derives from the American historians Bailyn and Cremin who argued that understanding education required relocating learning into wider social setting. The other derives from the new literacies movement which seeks to understand literacies as complex social phenomena rather than as simple acquired basic skills. There is a focus throughout upon the social and cultural settings that gave rise to a distinctively educated public during the eighteenth century which, by the close of the century, had started to spread into and across all social classes. The three empirically based chapters develop this theme and show how certain public and social contexts offered opportunities for both individuals and groups to engage in a range of literacy practices. Through a study of the way that communications were structured in coffee houses the thesis reveals the profoundly educative impact that these institutions had particularly in the earlier decades but also, continuously across the century. Following this, and through a study of interlinking biographies of self-taught men who made their mark upon the society, it is shown that many commoners managed to acquire degrees of learning other than through formal instruction. Finally, there is a focus upon the emergence of an independent and authentic set of literacy practices among common readers during the later part of the century, a movement that helped to shape future of broad working class organizations in the following century and one which at times was perceived by the state to be tantamount to treasonable practice.

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Abbreviations

ECCO	Eighteenth Century Catalogue Online
HO	Home Office
LCS	London Corresponding Society
SCI	Society for Constitutional Information
TS	Treasury Solicitors

A note about the ECCO data base.

This database has been produced by Gale Cengage Learning. It was the most ambitious single digitisation project ever undertaken and resulted in an online library of over 136,000 titles and editions (over 155,000 volumes), published between 1701 and 1800, and printed in English-speaking countries, or countries under British colonial rule. The majority of works in ECCO are in the English language but there are also works printed in Dutch, French, German, Italian, Latin, Spanish and Welsh. A strength of this collection is the way it presents variant editions through decades of re-publishing of works such as dictionaries.

Full-Text Searching of more than 26 million pages takes the user directly to Primary Source material in facsimile copy of its original. Therefore the researcher is able to access elements of the form of the published work as well as the content. ECCO is supported by catalogue records from the English Short-Title Catalogue.

Since ECCO's original release, the ESTC has uncovered a wealth of valuable new material and new holdings of previously unavailable titles. Rapid developments in scanning technology enabled Gale to digitise works too fragile to be handled at the time of ECCO's original production. *ECCO Part 2: New Editions*, consists of material filmed from 2003 onwards. ECCO Parts I and II combined now contain over 180,000 titles (200,000 volumes). The titles in ECCO Part II cover the same subject areas as the original collection, with an emphasis on titles within Literature, Social Science and Religion. This second edition includes nearly further 50,000 titles and 7 million pages from the library holdings of the British Library, Bodleian, Cambridge, National Library of Scotland and the Ransom Center which is located at the University of Texas. The Ransome Centre specializes in eighteenth-century journals, whereas the Bodleian possesses the largest collection of printed ephemera from the period. The advent of such comprehensive data-bases has transformed the possibilities for broader, culturally informed research into literacy practices during this period.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

Key research questions

There are three intertwined research questions directing the present thesis, each addressing a facet of historical literacy. These questions direct the research towards investigating how and where literacy was acquired, what social norms applied to forms of communicative practices, and finally addresses the complex question of the spread of literacy during a key period of Britain's history. Firstly, to what extent did the acquisition of literacy during the eighteenth century arise independently of and thus separately from formal schooling? Secondly, what counted as 'literacy' during the eighteenth century? And how was it connected to orate forms of communication and expression? Thirdly, to what extent did public literacy spread both geographically and socially in eighteenth-century England? These questions are inter-related and so are addressed concurrently in each chapter. The social realities of communicative practices are multi-layered and multi-faceted and care should be taken by historians to integrate cultural processes as we risk losing sight of the relations that exist between different layers of a complex social reality.

Area of study¹

The broad area of study for this thesis is aspects of the educational and learning experiences of people from the labouring and artisan classes in England during the eighteenth century. There have been few sustained and focussed studies over the past sixty years, which set out to explicitly address the link between the educational and cultural formations of the eighteenth century, especially of those from labouring and artisan classes.² John Brewer recognized the significance of this cultural connection when he devoted about one-tenth of his text to the linked themes of print, literary and reading culture in his seminal work *Pleasures of the Imagination*.³ By contrast Roy Porter devoted just ten pages to educational issues in his standard reference work *English Society in the Eighteenth Century*.⁴ Within the field of the history of education in Britain there has been a marked deficit in attention to educational processes and developments during the eighteenth century, despite the evident historical significance of the period generally, as well as of the lasting legacy of certain intellectual and cultural practices which emerged and became consolidated during this period. It is a period

often described under the name of ‘the Enlightenment’, a term which has been subject to contestation.

The connection being made between ‘educational’ and ‘cultural’ is significant throughout the study because the intention is to broaden out from the habitual and narrower focus upon teachers, schools and school practices that marks out the concerns of a certain type of history of education writing. This approach follows that of Bernard Bailyn who as long ago as 1960 argued that in order to uncover the essences of educational experience during the period of the American colonies, the historian had to diminish the place given to formal schooling institutions and practices. Instead, Bailyn stressed that social agencies other than the school, the college, curriculum or teaching styles for example, were the means whereby transmission of cultural experiences and values from one generation to the next took place. Bailyn’s view locates forms of learning and cultural transmission firmly within interlinked social agencies such as family, apprenticeship and community and shows the way that as traditional structures dissolved under the impact of changing circumstances, newer, more formalised and institutionalised forms became necessary to either support or replicate what was achieved previously within a family setting and patriarchal social formation. Bailyn argues that one of the consequences of historical approaches which are centred upon seeking antecedents of more recent institutionalised forms, is to direct historians towards anachronistic reconstructions.⁵ The three thematized chapters towards the end of this thesis offer examples of how such a critical approach can explore aspects of literacy practices embedded within various social and cultural settings.

Ten years after Bailyn’s seminal essay, again working within an American historical context, Lawrence Cremin responded to Bailyn’s strictures and produced a study in which the relationships between movements of ideas (political and religious ideologies) are given prominence and precedence over detailed considerations of ‘Institutions’ when covering eighteenth century educational themes.⁶ The emphasis therefore for Cremin is upon how settings such as ‘household’, ‘church’, ‘school’, ‘college’ and ‘community’ inter-relate. This thesis, following Bailyn and Cremin, therefore challenges the tradition of a grand expansive narrative tracing the gradual extension of literacy through the agencies of charitable and public schooling.⁷

The critical approach adopted here stands in contrast to that adopted for example, by Nicholas Hans in his study of formal schooling and learning during the eighteenth century in Britain.⁸ The base data for Hans’ work came from an analysis of 5,500 males who were found in entries in the *Dictionary of National Biography*. As Hans says:

...all men born between 1685 and 1785 who received any formal education in any school are included. Men who received their training exclusively through experience in their vocations are excluded. Thus all sailors, soldiers, surgeons, architects, musicians, painters and craftsmen, who did not attend any school and became famous through practical application of their natural talents alone are excluded, because in their cases their eminence was the result of special inborn ability for some particular vocation. (p.16)

Therefore, from the outset, Hans' work eliminates consideration of wider social and cultural contexts within which education and literacy were acquired. Additionally, through this selection criterion, Hans avoids the need for almost any discussion of how the bulk of the population acquired varying degrees and forms of learning and literacy, as many of those excluded by him, came from the families of commoners rather than from families linked to prosperous merchants, landowners, rural gentry, manufacturers and businesspeople. Hans' last statement cited above concerning 'special inborn ability' obscures the possibilities for a social and cultural approach to understanding the education of such people. An instructive case in point is that of James Brindley (1716-72) whose 'learning' was acquired through years of practical experience during an extended apprenticeship as a wheelwright, and his subsequent engagement as manager of engineering construction projects. In chapter 5 there is a detailed discussion of the education and range of literacy practices of Thomas Coram, another figure who would have been left out of Hans' sample. Whilst Hans' approach marginalizes and indeed excludes such a person, this study seeks to place people such as Coram and Brindley and the processes that led to them being able to achieve what they did, at the heart of the story. This study therefore locates itself within a critical tradition that has become embedded within the historical practice of American history of education, but barely at all in relation to the study of eighteenth-century educational themes and developments in England.⁹ The present study focuses upon social agencies that enabled a majority of people to share in the processes of cultural transmission which lie at the heart of educative purpose and experience.

There follows a brief outline of the long tradition of counter-literate practices within labouring and artisan classes as it would be a mistake to argue that developments that accelerated and intensified during the eighteenth century were new to that period.

The historical legacy

In order to understand the main historical thrust of the present thesis it is necessary to prepare the ground with a brief account of the social and political contexts in which literacy practices existed in parts of Britain in the early modern period. There was a longer tradition of commoners' literacy in England, often hidden and concealed, stretching back to the Lollards.¹⁰ Within this tradition, transmission of elements of literacy occurred through itinerant teachers, 'mechanic' preachers and family members and had one main purpose – that of giving the reader an ability to read their own Bible.¹¹ Evidence of the presence of such a social development can be seen from a letter sent to the Archdeacon of London by Bishop Tunstall on 24th October 1526:

...many children of iniquity, maintainers of Luther's sect, blinded through extreme wickedness and wandering from the way of truth and the Catholic faith, craftily have translated the New Testament into our English tongue, intermeddling therewith many heretical articles and erroneous opinions, pernicious and offensive, seducing the simple people, attempting their wicked and perverse interpretations to profanate the majesty of the Scripture which hitherto hath remained undefiled, and craftily to abuse the most holy word of God and the true sense of the same; of which translation there are many books imprinted; some with glosses and some without, containing in the English tongue that pestiferous and most pernicious poison dispersed throughout the whole diocese of London in great numbers.¹²

The passage reveals the seriousness with which the church authorities and Government viewed the combined spread of dissenting ideas, secularisation of religious discourse and the availability of printed matter to the poor and labouring classes. Tunstall describes the work as being in "our English tongue" as if to stress the fact that dissemination is through reading and discussion involving "the simple people" whose level of understanding is immediately contrasted with "the majesty of the Scripture". He shows alarm at the presence of texts "some with glosses and some without...in the English tongue..." implying that many readers did not feel any need for assistance when reading their text, whilst other texts accompanied by glosses were directing readers' attentions to particular interpretations. The works he is concerned about are "dispersed throughout the whole diocese of London in great numbers".

By the 1520s even printed books remained relatively scarce and English printing remained weak in comparison to the industry elsewhere in Europe, and it was only during the mid-seventeenth century that this relative weakness of the industry in relation to continental production and distribution was altered.¹³ But some forty years after Caxton's first English work, we can see the ecclesiastical authorities fulminating against the uncontrollable spread of commoners' literature.¹⁴ Here the term 'commoners' is used in distinction to that of 'gentry' because those ordering the books and distributing them were drawn from the merchant classes, their families, their circles of attendants, servants, followers and customers and distributed amongst the poor by wealthier adherents to dissent. Amongst these families and houses, there were close commercial and intellectual links with the Low Countries where most of the clandestine printing was undertaken. To facilitate the import of such goods it was necessary to be able to call upon reliable bargemen who presumably were co-religionists and secured safe delivery of contraband often to landing spots along the East Anglian coast or along the isolated stretches of the Thames Estuary.¹⁵ The Lollard tradition of meeting privately and secretly in order to read and debate persisted, despite the most serious repression.¹⁶ The following is an extract from the testimony of a William Baker of Cranbrook in Kent describing meetings that took place in 1509:¹⁷

Also this dependant saith that he didde redde unto John Bampton, William Riche, Edward Walker, and to the same yong man, Walker's acqayntaunce, upon the said Childermas nyght in the house of the said Walker, a booke of Mathewe, where yn was conteyned the gospellis in Englisshe; with the which redyng the said John Bampton, William Riche, Edward Walker and the said yong man were contented and plesid, saying that it was pitie that it might not be knowen openly. The which redyng in the said booke as they understood it was ayenst the sacraments of thaulter, baptisme, Matrymony, and preesthode.

For the purposes of this study it is interesting to note that in the arraignment records only six out of Fifty-seven suspected Lollards within the Canterbury diocese were recorded as being literate. As the testimony above shows, commoners understood that it was better to keep their personal literacy a private and concealed matter having to concede the power of state proscription even if, "it was a pity that it might not be known openly". If the larger numbers of illiterates amongst the Lollards of Canterbury was a true figure, it would suggest that

there were lead readers whose presence was essential when groups met. It would also suggest that men and women who might not be able to read were prepared to go to considerable lengths in order to have regular access to the printed word in English. Other key features of such families were the way that they were part of hidden networks stretching across entire counties and that they operated within received traditions that had endured since the mid-fifteenth century. People met in open fields, in controlled small numbers and at privately arranged times in order to avoid detection. But in such practices lay the origins of the contestation over time, place and space, of assembly and expression which was to develop into a public sphere where people could read and listen and discuss independently of the State.

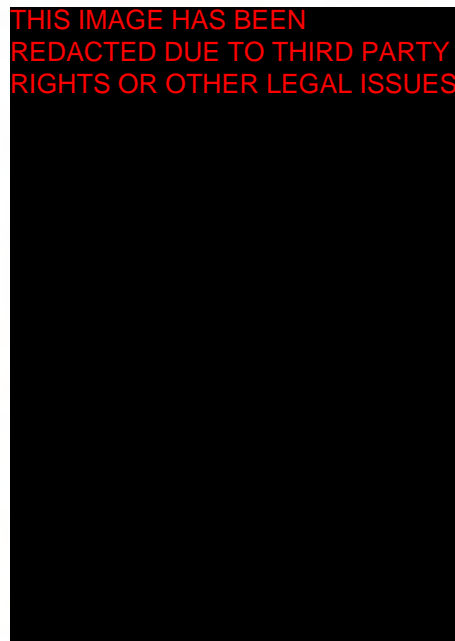


Fig. 1. The beginning of the book of St. John, written in English, probably from a pocket Wycliffe translation.

In the figure above one can see a page from a pocket Wycliffe Bible. The form of the book makes it easy to conceal and to transport. The elaborate illustrations key it into the dominant visual qualities of revered and sacred books acting as a way of legitimating it as a text. This example is late fourteenth century. Books such as these multiplied during the fifteenth century despite suppression after the Oldcastle rebellion and later resurfaced in greater numbers with the advent of printing.

The purpose of making this initial digression into the earlier period of ‘dissent’ is to demonstrate that submerged groups operating amongst the common people, who congregated in order to read and discuss, free from direction by those in authority, were a

long-established tradition generations long before the eighteenth century and indeed long before the outburst of independent, free-thinking during the Civil War of the 1640s. One view is that the intensity of the fervour for reading and publishing in the mid-seventeenth century was partly the product of generations of suppression – a sort of bottling-up effect which exploded once the cork was released.

Although the statement above of William Baker is a formal deposition made by someone abjuring in order to save himself, the details nevertheless reveal practices of reading, free association, travelling in order to meet, discussion of reading, concern about legal restrictions and routine defiance of the law at considerable personal risk. There is coyness in this carefully edited statement about admitting that what is being read is a printed version of a part of Tyndale's translation of the New Testament. The prosecution by Archbishop Warham in 1510-11 of Lollards in Kent, included Twenty-one women none of whom are recorded as being literate. Yet it is known that there was a tradition of women gathering amongst themselves for similar purposes to those of male Lollards, suggesting that care was taken for any literacy to be kept quite hidden from public view, as reading amongst the poor and labouring classes was essentially a shared activity undertaken within the safety of the private or domestic sphere.¹⁸

One of the key changes that took place during the seventeenth century and which eventually multiplied to become a major social force during the eighteenth century was the twofold process of the secularisation of reading amongst the poor and labouring classes and the transformation of reading practices from being essentially private, family practices as with the Lollard tradition, into being freely acknowledged and performable within the public domain. An iconic figure within this long tradition is John Bunyan (1628-1688) who is interesting because, although he challenges the drift towards secularisation he nevertheless fights for the right to express dissenting views within the public domain.¹⁹ Thus, although the self-taught reader is viewed throughout this study as an important cultural and educational development of the eighteenth century no claim is made in what follows that it is somehow *solely* a product of that century. The growth in numbers of self-educated men was a by-product of the availability of texts within a cultural market. So it is not surprising to see the emergence of this social type during a period of political breakdown in the 1640s and 50s when control over what was published and allowed to circulate was weakened. After decades of accumulation of extant published texts, a market for the sale and re-sale of books was created and this was a necessary basis for the rise in numbers of self-educated individuals. Without texts there is no reading. It was the availability of books and print of all

sorts that acted as a necessary backdrop for the emergence of the self-taught commoner. That is why even up to the 1840s the key political issue for defenders of the established order was rarely only the content of particular publications but rather the price at which it circulated because it was this factor most of all that controlled the ease with which the poor could purchase it. By the beginning of the eighteenth century, as a glance at almost any edition of a newspaper will reveal, there was an extensive new and second-hand book market. When in 1720, Thomas Cox came to consider who Bunyan was in relation to other authors of his times he revealingly remarked:

John Bunyan, author of *Pilgrim's Progress*, and several other little books of an antinomian spirit, too frequently to be met with in the hands of the common people, was, if we mistake not, a brazier of Bedford.²⁰

That literacy was widespread in many places is inadvertently revealed by the casual “too frequently met with in the hands of the common people”, and as if to underscore his concern, Cox adds, “if we mistake not, a Brazier of Bedford”. A brazier was often a locally-based, itinerant handyman who collected metal articles for mending at a forge which he had at home. People from this social stratum, only rarely feature as central characters in historical accounts, and this study is an attempt to redress that imbalance within the history of literacy and education of the eighteenth century.

The early publishing history of *Pilgrim's Progress* reveals something of significance for historians of education.²¹ Within two years of publication, pirated editions were being printed and before Bunyan's death editions of 10,000 were being bought out by publishers. Within a decade of Bunyan's death in 1688, the work had been transmuted into ballad form, chap book tale, abridgements, re-writes, sequels and the like; a veritable sub-industry providing different forms of the theme and tale to a differentiated reading market. This multiplicity of form and scale of publication tells us that readers came in different guises and in much larger numbers than many earlier estimates of the numbers of literates have suggested. Another aspect of this readership is that it was not until Southey's famous 1830 edition of *Pilgrim's Progress*, that the literary establishment embraced the book, so for about a hundred and fifty years the circulation and popularity of the work grew from the base upwards, signalling the arrival *en masse* of a new constituency within the literate polity and market. The next text to achieve such a status of becoming a massive best-seller, a major influence upon the lives of hundreds of thousands of its readers and an established classic of

the dissenting sensibility, was Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man*, first published in 1791. This thesis focuses upon the period from the death of Bunyan to that of Paine, by which time, it is arguable that a majority of commoner households not only possessed copies of both of the above works but, more importantly, knew their contents in detail, often memorised.

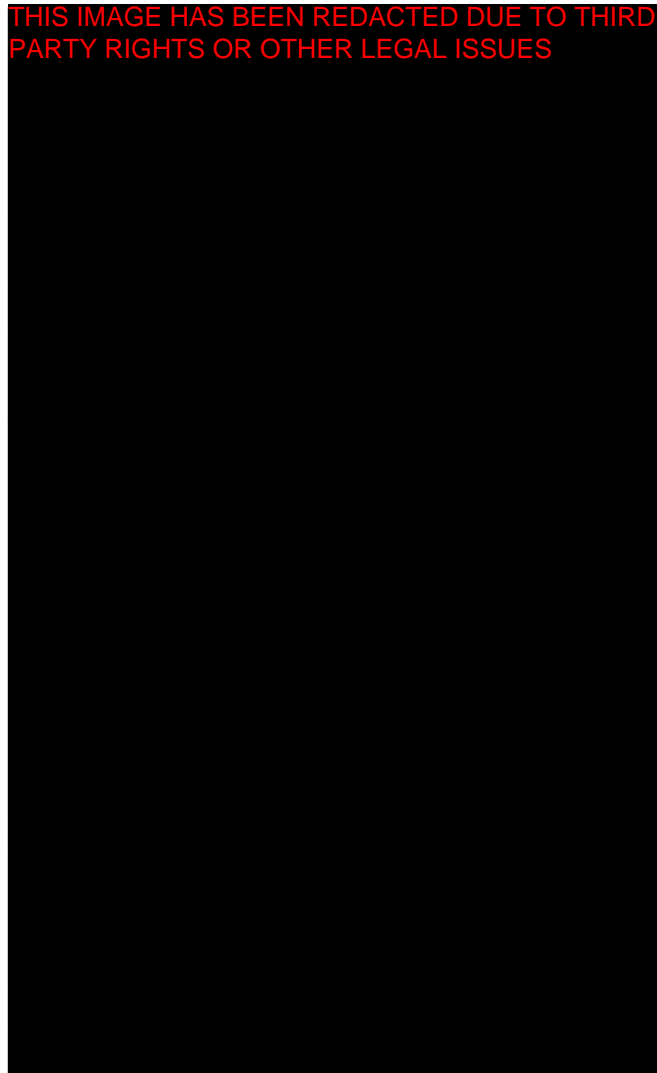


Fig. 2. 1794. Advertisement from Leeds intelligencer March 3rd. 1794

In Fig. 2 above is an advertisement from 1794, for a subscription edition of the complete works of John Bunyan at 6d per week, running into over 80 octavo volumes with recommendations by the well-known dissenting authors Ryland and Priestley. The works are advertised as being with “New Types” and on “good Paper” with “near 140 copper plate engravings”. By the late eighteenth century Bunyan is gradually being absorbed into the canon, the first ‘popular’ author to have achieved such status.²² Hitherto, within studies of history of education, the history of reading such as is shown in the example above has not

featured prominently partly because of the tendency to deal with a work such as *Pilgrim's Progress* within the time-frame of its authorship rather than within that of its reception and influence. The present thesis argues for the value of including such a focus.²³

Eighteenth-century history is a field which recently has seen major studies which cover important aspects of how learning and knowledge assumed new forms. Jenny Uglow's study of the Lunar Society and Vic Gattrell's work on the relationship between print culture and urban life begin to open up radically different areas of social experience than are usually to be found within history of education.²⁴ Indeed, historians of education seem to have found it difficult to consolidate their research and attention upon the eighteenth century, preferring instead to view it as somehow being a period which brings certain trends within early modern education either to fruition or to an end. Conversely, the period is viewed as one in which the beginnings of important, but subsequent developments in education took place. The period is thus relegated critically into being a postscript or prelude to some other more significant period such as is seen in Rosemary O'Day's sweep through three centuries of 'early modern' educational history, or Margaret Spufford's focus upon seventeenth-century chapbooks and literacy which at times, strays into the early part of the eighteenth century.²⁵ Yet any glance at the advertising sections of a provincial newspaper from the period reveals a society in which the circulation of printed matter was widespread, implying that the spread of literacy was considerable. In Fig.3 below, for example we can see the extent to which advertisements for books featured in the provincial press. In this edition of the *Leeds Intelligencer* a majority of the notices are for books.

Another striking feature of the way that education in the eighteenth century tends to be dealt with by historians is in terms of absences, deficits or inadequacies. We sometimes encounter for example, the apparent failure of the SPCK schools project in the early part of the eighteenth century to establish a system of primary education; or the poor quality of the widespread Dame Schools supervised by 'teachers' who were often, it seemed, semi-literate themselves; or again, the decline in quality of schooling for the gentry within the great public schools.²⁶ As if to render the scene even less appetising to prospective researchers, one encounters the moralistic conservatism of the blue-stocking brigade towards the end of the eighteenth century, whose motives for extending schooling to certain sections of the poor seem so at variance with more recent and modern educational value systems.²⁷ This thesis challenges such negative perceptions of the field and of the period and instead shows, through a series of linked case studies, that there is a rich field for historians of education to plough.

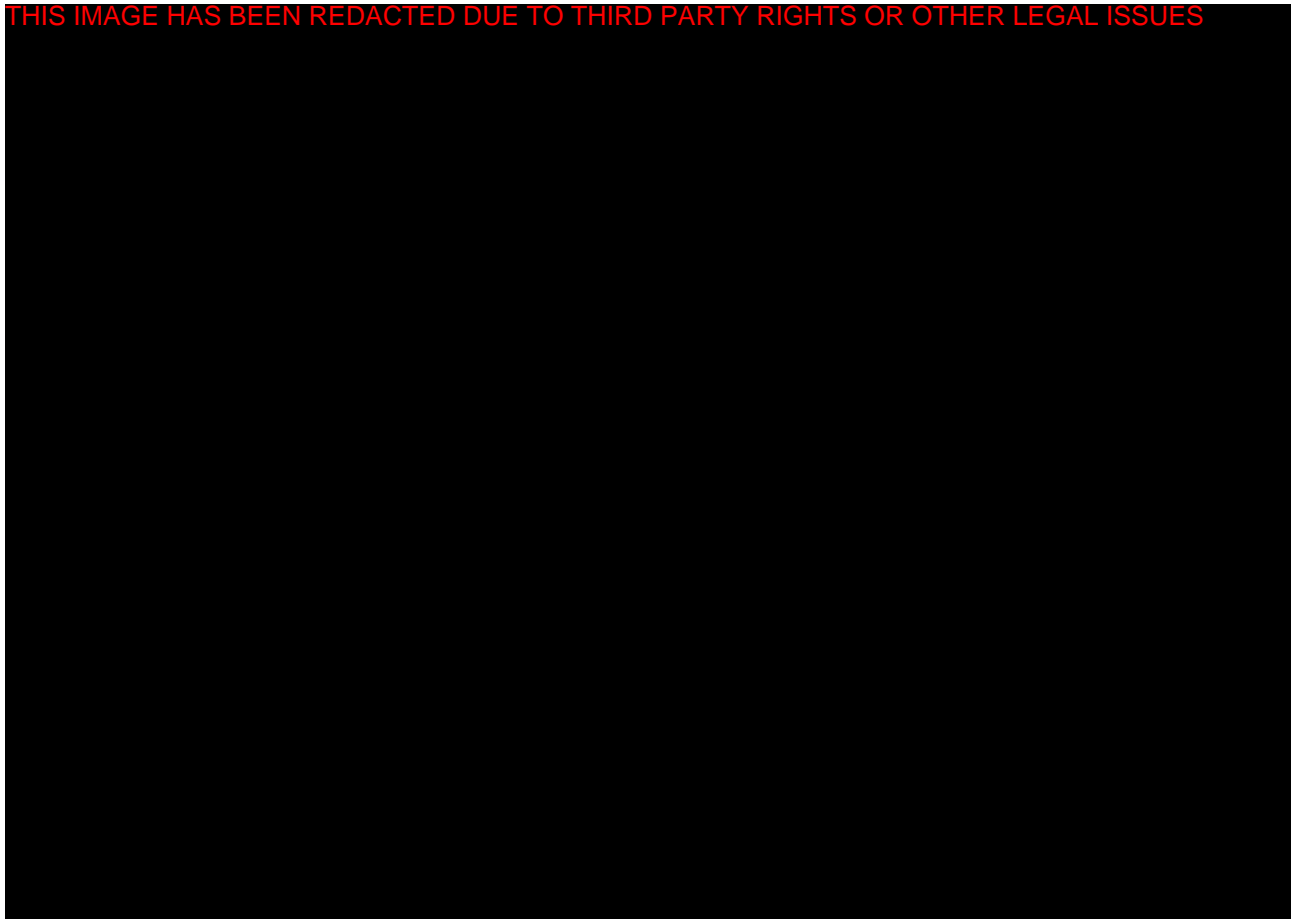


Fig. 3. Detail from the back page of the *Leeds Intelligencer*, Monday March 3rd. 1794.

However, it would be impossible to cover such a broad canvas fully within the scope of a single thesis such as this, so here the focus is upon two principal aspects of the educational experience and formation of the period. The first of these is the link between oracy and literacy, with the attendant notion of communicative ‘practices’.²⁸ The second is the emergence during this century, of large numbers of socially-mobile self-educated individuals. These two themes are present throughout what follows and regularly intersect. Issues of how people, of whatever ages or stages in life, acquire and use speech, memory, listening, recognition and reading are central ones in education. The key feature here will be the link between orate and literate cultural practices, something that hitherto has not been a prominent feature within studies about historical literacy in England. Additionally, any detailed consideration of these issues takes one beyond the schooling focus of mainstream history of education, and moves instead, towards the terrain of historical cultural studies. It will be one of the contentions of this thesis that by shifting the critical focus thus, one becomes open to an abundance of potential sources and materials for a history of education of the period.

Cultural and educational practices as fundamentally important as reading, listening, remembering, accessing memory, writing – oracy and literacy - exist in social, temporal and spatial contexts, so the settings which are explored later in this thesis attempt to cover a number of distinctive facets of the society. These include an examination of how self-taught commoners were able to enter and participate in the social settings of the rising middle classes, the relationship between political awareness and the steady growth in circulation of print, as well as the creation of centres of literate practice and traditions within labouring and artisan communities. Each of these offers a distinctive setting within which substantive educational experience took place continuously, and which contributed over time and through generations, into an accumulation of cultural practices and traditions which helped shape the period.

One continuous backdrop to these social contexts is the growth of the urban space – especially London, which by the beginning of the eighteenth century had become larger than Rome had ever been. By the end of the century cities such as Sheffield, Manchester and Birmingham had expanded into conurbations which had swallowed up a string of once-separate rural villages. Major port towns had also expanded creating powerful regional centres such as Liverpool, Bristol, Southampton, Newcastle and the Clyde.²⁹ W.B. Stephens has traced the growth of literacy in nineteenth-century urban centres, especially where there is evidence of settled populations.³⁰ One possibility that is explored within this study is the way that the sheer size and complexity of the urban space creates a distinctive need for signing, labelling, direction and posting which are absent in smaller, more traditional rural towns. The emerging differences in the physical spaces within which people moved and lived; between the rural and the urban, is therefore a consistent feature throughout this study. Another aspect of social and cultural change that characterizes this period is the altering relationship between print and speech as means of communication in particular in urbanizing settings. This lays a basis for one of the key features of the present study; the linkage between the orate and literate as shared aspects of public literacy practices.

Orate and literate practices

Despite the fact that Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* was published in volumes previously unthought-of, partly because of the myriad forms in which it was appropriated, it remains the case that the majority of the reception of the work remained essentially orate and aural in character as people listened to it being read and told by others. When thinking about a piece of writing from the early-modern period such as this, it is revealing to historicize it in terms of

authorial intent and expectation about reception. Bunyan would have presumed that the majority of people who encountered his writings would have done so as ‘hearers’ rather than as readers, presented orally by the appointed lay reader or preacher of the dissenting group to which they belonged. The linking of reading and writing practices with speaking and listening is important for this study because, since the inception of mass schooling during the nineteenth century operating under a variation of the Bell or Lancaster systems, the dominant pairing has been between reading and writing. Within this pedagogic paradigm, the natural spoken word was often suppressed in favour of vocalised drills. By historicising literate practices one uncovers a different balance which reinstates the use of the spoken word to prominence within learning, alongside the written and/or printed word.³¹ In order to exemplify this broad theme, the study examines several settings such as early eighteenth-century coffee-house culture in which orate and literate practices and hybrid forms appropriating from both, were created within a social setting which were profoundly educational for those who participated in these social settings.

The extent to which a combination of orate and literate practices lay at the heart of learning processes for self-taught individuals is further explored in some depth, during the chapter tracing the learning lives of several men. And this theme is further developed during the chapter which considers how hundreds of thousands of men were able to assimilate basic components of democratic philosophy towards the last decades of the eighteenth century, drawing upon intellectual and cultural resources developed in the chapel, reading club and workshop. This study therefore draws from the core insights of the work of Walter Ong concerning the historical significance of the relationship between the orate and literate but without necessarily following his somewhat structuralist periodizations which do not translate easily into the critical cultural frameworks being explored in what follows.³² The contention throughout the study is that one cannot understand literate form and literate practices during this historical period without effectively linking them to the orate communicative practices which prevailed. Although the structuralist elements of Walter Ong’s work on *Oracy and Literacy* have come under sustained criticism from advocates of the New Literacy Movement, nevertheless here, elements from his work are identified that have been influential in shaping the direction of my research and the evolving framework for this thesis. A key feature that informs much of the current research is Ong’s notion of the historicity of linguistic forms and their relationship to social and cultural practices. He uses the striking analogy of a social technology to describe various ways of reproducing the word in both its spoken and written form. Ong sought to relate forms of communication and language production to a range of

other forms which co-exist with each other to varying degrees. This is analogous to Bakhtin's ideas of inter-textuality and dialogism in which the way that a cultural practice such as literacy is understood derives from the way that it is located within a network of interlocking practices and discourses, all of which have specific historical characteristics.³³ Ong points to the way that some orate forms are derivative from and dependent of, prior literate forms and vice-versa, and that some literate forms which may appear new and innovative actually grow out of a transformation of prior orate forms. Ong sought to explore the relationship between speaking and listening as active elements within communication processes with reading and writing/print perceived as being an engagement with disembodied voices. Although there are broad, generalizing and totalizing tendencies within his thinking, there are also contradictory aspects which draw attention to reading and writing technologies being situated socially and historically in contexts in which actual communication happened. Broadly speaking, Ong is part of a movement that seeks to move beyond narrowly defined notions of literacy, a tradition which in Britain began with the work of Andrew Wilkinson in the late 1960s, who insisted that the central aspect of teaching language lay in developing and facilitating listening with speaking and then relating these to reading and writing.³⁴ Wilkinson argued against separating out speaking skills and learning into a specialist box within English teaching, arguing instead for a cross-curricular and whole-school approach. This anticipated by more than five years the Bullock Report³⁵ which highlighted the integral connections between oral and literate language use and demonstrated the essentially problematic nature of normative definitions of literacy. This leads to the use within this thesis of a term that is designed to encompass both orate and literate practices and forms – communicative practices.

This perspective will inform the discussion about the essentially quantitative tradition of history of literacy studies which takes place in the next chapter where it is argued that most contributors to this tradition failed to historicize the term 'literacy' and thus incorporate orate practices in their definitions.

Bounds of the research

It became evident during the research phase of this thesis that the topic was potentially huge because issues of oracy and literacy and their associated forms of communicative transmission and reception, lie at the heart of most activities which fall within the scope of educational and cultural practices. So the following chapters have necessarily had to be selective and illustrative in relation to the main research questions. There are therefore two

distinct sections, with chapters 1-3, focussing upon theoretical, historiographical and methodological issues. This has been necessary to explore why there had been such a deficit in educational and literacy studies for the eighteenth century. The second section provides a progression from this of three contextualised empirical studies beginning in the early part of the period under consideration, followed by a focus across the entire period and concluding with a study within the final decade of the century. This progression is why the chapters are in the order that they are and why the critical and methodological chapters precede them.

Consequently, there are many topics and themes that have not been included within the current thesis which would have been worthwhile to include. For example, the geographic framing is limited to 'England'. This is necessary for a study concerned with literacy practices and cultures because of the distinctive schooling traditions of Scotland which created widespread literacy throughout the child population earlier than other countries followed only by Sweden. Despite this, the Scots presence within the English story will be apparent throughout, as will an emerging British-American voice. The linguistic issues that existed in Ireland and Wales create an inflection in the debate which is largely absent in England, although issues of regional and emerging urban dialects in England deserve more sustained attention within historical literacy studies. Yet even so, homogenized notions of 'England' may risk missing the significant social and cultural distinctiveness of regions such as the West Midlands, East Anglia and the changing West Country.³⁶ A further omission from this study is that of the colonies where there are distinctive histories of literacy to be examined. It would for example, be worthwhile to examine in a further study, how the mercantile and colonial system affected learning and literacy amongst all social classes in port towns and this is touched upon in chapter 5 in relation to two of the educational autobiographies.

Additionally, care needs to be taken in studies such as this, not to impose more recent political categories upon a past age. The idea of 'Britain' in the early eighteenth century would have included the American colonies and any full account of literacy during the period would need to take account of the way that developments on the other side of the Atlantic interacted with opinions back in England, especially amongst dissenting communities and amongst people in port towns who had almost continuous contact with the people and the affairs of the colonies. For example, when Paine wrote and published *Rights of Man* in 1790/91 he did so as an American even though its subject matter is very much about Britain. By the end of the eighteenth century this interaction had changed in character as for many, developments within the USA were being held up as an ideal to be emulated in contrast to the institutionalised corruption within the British state.³⁷ The loss through emigration of hundreds

of thousands of literate commoners to the colonies is also a major part of the history of literacy in Britain during the eighteenth century, which renders all the more remarkable the steadily rising engagements with public literacy practices throughout the period.

Similarly, the Port of London had for centuries been the base for continuous trade with the Dutch and Flemish territories. This intensified with the arrival in the late seventeenth century of northern French Huguenot émigrés who settled in substantial numbers in east London, Kent and East Anglia. Such major movements of people from Europe and across the Atlantic broke the insular and parochial character of large parts of England and, as Graff and Vincent have shown, social developments that were taking place in Britain were reflective of and sometimes mirrored, those taking place elsewhere.³⁸

It must be acknowledged also that much of the focus of the present study is essentially urban and London-based, so might not be wholly representative of the country as a whole. Despite this, the impact of London was decisive in virtually all respects, and as cities like Birmingham, Sheffield, Leeds and Manchester grew towards the end of the century, they always did so with the umbilical cords of politics, trade, administration and communications firmly connected to the metropolis. One of the most distinctive features of the 'educational' formation of the country from the beginning of the century onwards, was the way that the burgeoning magazine and newspaper industry focussed readers' minds at precisely the same time on the same topics however far apart they lived.³⁹ In a literal sense a national community of readers became a reality irrespective of geographic separation. Another distinctive facet of the London scene was the way that it absorbed people from the whole nation who nevertheless retained important and continuing links with their family's place of origin. When mass migrations began to happen from the rural to the urban, especially during the second half of the eighteenth century, this actually had the effect of linking the rural hinterlands ever more closely than before with the urbanised towns and cities. It will be seen later in the study that when Corresponding Society meetings took place in London there would invariably be people present with family links in cities such as Norwich, so the links were familial and not simply abstract and philosophical. This partly explains the rapidity and sheer geographic reach of for example, radical self-educative activity.

Another self-imposed boundary for the study is the relative absence of focus upon schools and schooling. Part of the purpose of the present work is to make out a case for extending perspectives in educational studies of the eighteenth century beyond that afforded by examining schooling contexts. Another reason for not focussing mainly upon schooling is that when this has been done, there has been a tendency to produce an account which

describes the educational experiences of the more prosperous social classes. Much of the purpose of the present study is to explore the possibilities of producing an account of educational experiences of the mass of the population, who may have had access only to limited schooling. Amongst other topics, it would have been worthwhile to include a separate chapter on the place of song and ballad in the transference of aspects of literate culture from one generation to the next, or on the influence of cheap picture books, as the pioneering work of Victor Neuberg remains to be built upon within eighteenth century history of education studies.⁴⁰ Recent major works such as by Jill Shefrin (2009) have detailed bibliographic study of the growth of cheap and popular family-based learning toys designed to introduce reading to the young.⁴¹ Shefrin's work builds upon earlier studies such as that by J.H. Plumb (1975) which began a critical engagement by historians with more recent pedagogical and developmental theories of childhood.⁴² Unfortunately considerations of space and the depth of treatment that would be required do not permit this within the present thesis.

Type of study

Although this study falls into the field of history of education it has been influenced by perspectives and approaches that arise in other disciplines. Chief amongst these is the study of the history and development of language and communications. Walter Ong's distinction between oracy and literacy is critically appropriated, especially with respect to arriving at an historicised sense of communicative practices in the age prior to the installation of Koenig's press at *The Times* in 1814, an event which marked a turning point in the relation of publishers to 'mass' readerships. In addition to Walter Ong's work on the technologizing of the word, the seminal work of Robert Darnton, *The Forbidden Bestsellers of Revolutionary France* demonstrated how studies of reading and reception could move away from essentially bibliographic traditions and move instead towards accounts of social and cultural practices which shaped how people viewed the world they lived in.⁴³ Darnton's focus was upon social processes of circulation and reception, placing reading into the daily lives of ordinary people. This was one of the key starting points for the present study.⁴⁴

There is also a vast literature on literacy per se and the present study is intended as a contribution within this field. Some of the most illuminating writing within this field is historically grounded and the discussion which follows in the next chapter is historiographical. A re-evaluation of earlier research into historical literacy is underway which challenges previous assumptions about literacy being principally about individual skills and competences.

For example in the 2006 special edition of *Paedagogica Historica*, Bruce Curtis talks of “distributed literacy” whereby the concept is considered as the outcome of collective processes which are social and material and not perceived predominantly as being essentially individual, physiological and psychological processes.⁴⁵ Curtis argues that this critical approach involves a paradigmatic shift towards the social production of texts and an examination of textually-mediated social relations. Implicit within this argument is the notion of also examining the interaction of both dimensions upon each other, thus enabling us to produce a rich account of the social and historical contexts in which practices occur. In the same publication, David Lindmark and Per-Olaf Erixon write of “the multitude of literacy concepts” as well as of the “diversity of theories and methods”.⁴⁶ They refer to “various aspects of literacy in history of education”, and stress the need to focus upon “transitions, practices and functions of literacy in education”. This splintering of previously unquestioned assumptions about the nature of literacy is summarised by Barton, Hamilton and Ivanic (2000) who argue that literacy is best “understood as a set of social practices” which can be “inferred from events which are mediated by written texts”.⁴⁷ Different areas of social life generate different forms of literacy. These differences often reflect the differential power of institutions rendering some forms more visible than others. An understanding of literacy necessitates locating practices historically especially as literacy practices are “frequently acquired through processes of informal learning and sense making”. Gunther Kress talks about meaning making through the production of signs. Instead of ‘competencies’ Kress prefers ‘signs of learning’ which contain within them elements of design which by contrast with competence “foregrounds a move away from anchoring communication in convention as social regulation”.⁴⁸ Thus the present work has sought to draw together strands from both recent and past thinking about historical literacy and to accord value to “signs of learning” rather than the more simplistic and abstracted concept of literacy perceived as a set of fixed and identifiable competencies. As we shall see, signs of learning were strongly regulated during the eighteenth century by social conventions in a power struggle between social classes vying for influence and dominance.

The research approach

The initial period of the research process was quite difficult because of chasing intuitive leads and following up suggestive references. The more that was read from amongst a wide range of existing literature, the clearer it became that there was a significant gap in the

historiography. But whilst this confirmed the opportunity for doing something original, there was a lack of direct predecessors either to follow or to critique.

Therefore there followed a systematic reading and study of the history of the Corresponding Societies which were the first independent organisations for the self-education of ordinary working men in Britain. This was important for the present study because this organization was directly responsible for spreading literacy amongst artisans and wage labourers through its nation-wide network of committees. It was also the case that many of its prominent members had been subject to state repression, imprisonment, transportation and bankruptcy precisely because of their role in spreading radical ideas through various forms of written and printed documents. However, it was soon apparent that within the literature about this organization, there was a strong emphasis upon the political legacy as most historians were engaging with the subject from progressive and libertarian standpoints. Another strand amongst the literature might be described as reclamatory; an attempt to reinstate the reputations and works of forgotten political leaders such as John Thelwall, whose educational impact during the 1790s was so substantial that William Pitt's Treasonable Practices Bill of 1796 was widely reputed at the time and since, to be specifically directed towards stopping his lectures from Beaufort House off the Strand in London.⁴⁹ Despite this there was little focus upon the specifically educational work that such people engaged in.

A systematic study of original pamphlets, and publications, including newspapers surrounding Thomas Paine came next, especially examining the various editions of *Rights of Man, Parts One and Two*. One of the source bases for this study was the bound collections of such papers lodged in the Goldsmith's Library of Economic Literature in Senate House, University of London, or similarly-bound collections of contemporary publications in the British Library. Original editions of any biographical sources were studied, along with Paine's own writings. This supplemented extensive research into Paine's impact and legacy which had previously been undertaken amongst State papers in the National Archives. Allied to copies of *Rights of Man* were many and varied contemporary pamphlets by both radical and conservative authors. These revealed the extent to which a public ferment about the right to print, publish, distribute, meet and write existed. Such wide-ranging reading and research confirmed some disputed estimates that the political ferment of numbers from amongst the artisan and nascent working class (wage labourers working in manufacturing and mining), yet nowhere within the existing academic literature on education and literacy could one find the story of these active participants in what was clearly a cultural upsurge. The story instead,

tended to be told through mini-biographies of certain key leaders of the radical movement even though hundreds of thousands of people from across the social spectrum were also involved. Key texts adopting a biographical approach focussing upon leaders were Brian Simon's seminal influential study *The Two Nations and the Educational Structure 1780-1870*, or incidental coverage in passages within larger biographies, such as Osborne's study of Major John Cartwright (1972).⁵⁰

As one of the central aspects of the present thesis is the distinction being drawn between reading and writing in order to make the argument that they were not necessarily linked in eighteenth-century minds with respect to assessing whether someone was 'literate' or not, the present author set about identifying and assembling a collection of a range of artefacts from the period that were connected to writing and reading practices. In so doing a view emerged that the concept of 'literacy', understood as the acquisition of basic reading and writing during primary schooling, was an historical construct and was not something that had become fixed in either meaning or use during the eighteenth century. In this support was received from Alan Cole, director of the Museum of Writing which is located within the School of English Studies at London University. Throughout this phase of the research Alan Cole has permitted the present author privileged access to an unrivalled range of eighteenth-century artefacts connected with literacy practices.

There followed a study of early English dictionaries looking for the evolution of meanings of key words such as 'Literacy', 'Reading' and 'Education'. Following in Raymond Williams' footsteps was a highly instructive process, especially when undertaking the search using original sources and not relying upon etymological summations produced by lexicographers working from later periods.⁵¹ The fruits of this study appear in the following chapter where a broader range of eighteenth-century literature concerning literacy than has been undertaken before is examined.

As much of the critique embedded in this thesis stems from a critical reading of studies which are located within the quantitative tradition, there was a need to have direct, personal experience of working with original parish marriage registers. For this purpose examples of the separate registers for Quakers and the official Anglican registers for parishes within Middlesex were used. Such direct engagement with original source materials, rather than printed abstracts of the contents of such registers, brought into focus that these materials were a far richer source than some have suggested. Much of the data that quantitative historians have used has been drawn from the published Phillimore records of information contained within the parish registers.⁵² This massive undertaking allows for a comprehensive use of the

material but obliterates the specific, formal and material qualities which they possess as sources. Here the thesis argues that it will be possible to move a step further than writers like David Vincent who seek to marry the use of quantitative and qualitative approaches to the history of literacy, and show how these sources can be used *qualitatively* because of the special features they contain.

The advent of comprehensive databases has transformed possibilities within historical studies. Gale Cengage Learning, have now digitised 230,000 separate titles published between 1700-1800, many in multiple editions and crossing every genre under the heading of *Eighteenth Century Collection Online*. This has allowed researchers to identify and access works which previously might have taken a lifetime to uncover. It also offers possibilities for moving beyond the received and established canon of core works and to recover publications which were of significance at the time but which later fell into obscurity. Many of the references to publications to be found in this thesis come either from personally owned or digitised copies uploaded onto ECCO. Further research possibilities have opened up with the digitisation of the British library newspaper archive and the advent of online archives such as *London Lives* and to some extent this study is a product of this excitingly-transformed research landscape.⁵³

The significance of the study in relation to existing literature

The significance of the present study lies in the way that it explores aspects of educational experience and practice during a historically important period. A brief examination of general histories of the period reveals very little attention being given to education, and even less to the specific topic of literacy, despite the evident centrality of both to the wider culture. For example, Dorothy Marshall devotes just two pages to education in her 1960, *Eighteenth Century England*, whilst Frank O’Gorman assigns just one page (168) to the subject but does manage nearly three pages on ‘The Politics of Print’ (127-29) in his 1997 *The Long Eighteenth Century: British political and Social History 1688-1832*.⁵⁴ In J. H. Plumb’s (1963) *England in the Eighteenth Century*, schooling and literacy are presented in two pages, one of which is a somewhat caricatured portrait of Wesley’s views on education and children. In Paul Longford’s (1989) *A Polite and Commercial People* there is an Eleven-page discussion about aspects of middle-class learning and culture which at least situates literacy and learning within wider social contexts such as publishing, training for commerce and the creation of class identities. Jeremy Black’s (2001) *Eighteenth Century Britain 1688-*

1783, contains a two-page discussion of women's literacy (pp 86/7) and the same on literacy levels (pp 96/7) out of a total of 307 pages. The chapters on 'Culture and the Arts' (Ch.10) and 'Enlightenment and Science' (Ch.9) are mostly hagiographical in that they recount the influence of a series of major figures in certain fields. J.C.D. Clarke manages a brief discussion about the internal culture within the great public schools in his (2000) *English Society 1660-1832*. It would therefore appear that there is a tradition of not considering education and the processes by which people outside of non-elite circles acquired knowledge as being of anything but passing interest. The implied message is that commoners were poorly educated and not essentially participants in the broad cultural movement which came in future years to be called the *Enlightenment*. Some redress has been taking place, particularly under the influence of feminist historians working within history of education who have sought to reclaim the contributions of several women educators.⁵⁵ Yet such studies have a tendency to focus upon elite provision of schooling for a minority of children of the poor, or upon ideas for schooling for the middle and upper classes. A notable addition to the field which expressly addresses issues of the lives of commoner girls and women has been by Steedman who uncovers the 'hidden' sensibilities of commoner women presented in their own right rather than through the gaze of their employers.⁵⁶ The field seems to be fragmented into separate sub-disciplines where partial treatments of apprenticeships in specific industries exist within economic history, or the cultural milieu of the coffee house is explored in relation to politics, or engineering and construction practices are detailed in technical and scientific histories.

The present thesis shows that there is a wealth of relevant and accessible source material from which educational historians can draw. By stepping a little beyond traditional disciplinary boundaries it is possible to reveal features of educational experience and practice that hitherto might not have been explored as fully as they deserve. Therefore one explicit intention behind the present thesis has been its cross-disciplinary character, drawing inspiration from several academic fields.

A further significance of the present thesis is to show that the field of historical literacy studies is by no means exhausted and that what has been achieved by scholars like David Vincent and W.B. Stephens for the nineteenth century remains to be done for the preceding century. The period is one that deserves sustained attention because many of these issues and themes are ones that resonate with our own times when basic assumptions about education, learning and literacies are being challenged and, in many instances, transformed. Recent developments in archival data bases enable different types of studies to be undertaken

especially the increased availability of the ordinary, everyday, reading matter used by common readers.

Key concepts

This sub-section explains succinctly how key terms are used throughout this thesis. This is necessary because so many taken-for-granted concepts now have different meanings to those which were in use during the eighteenth century. Additionally, many key concepts of the social sciences post-date the period, so certain uncritical uses of them within historical accounts have the effect of distorting the material the historian is working with. It is argued here that there is need to historicize the critical categories that frame this thesis. The key concepts include:

state, literacies, communicative practices, social class, popular.

The thesis is framed around the interaction between these concepts and so traverses aspects of culture and politics, education and learning, and social identity.

The state

The first of these key concepts is the term 'state' used in connection with ideas about institutions and government. The term is potentially confusing within historical writing because of its long established currency to denote the condition of something as well as its use in relation to expressing something verbally. It is a notable omission in Raymond Williams' book *Keywords*.⁵⁷ The concept is of major importance throughout the present thesis because of the structuring relationship that exists in all political and social formations between organizations of power and control, and broader cultural spheres such as publishing and education. For a study such as this, the term is used in relation to the contested boundaries between licensed and officially legitimated cultural activities and the freer, spontaneous and liberated forms of communicative action that challenged or contested state sanctioned activities. Earlier comments relating to John Bunyan, touched upon a person who faced imprisonment not so much because of what or how he said certain things, but rather for his absolute defiance of the mechanisms of state legitimation of the established religion. Essentially Bunyan transgressed the boundaries between formal state authority and informal social license. Throughout this thesis, the concept '*State*' has been used in a broader sense

than ‘*Government*’, to include social institutions and agencies such as the Church of England, the courts and magistracy, military, militias, customs and excise and local vestries. In most localities it was the established church and parochial authorities working with locally resident gentry that formed the backbone of the presence of State authority in the area, so to exclude them from within the definition, would be problematic.

By being inclusive in one’s definition of what social forces and groups constituted the state, one is able to achieve two things. Firstly, the idea of social realities as being layered and multi-faceted is encapsulated. This helps us to understand how consent was encouraged not solely through compulsion, but through other social agencies such as local associations and obligations, traditions and patterns of deference. Secondly, such an inclusive definition allows the historian to explore the relations that existed between formal and informal agencies, institutional and cultural, bureaucratic and human. The power of the state in eighteenth-century Britain often arose not from the impact of any one particular agency but through the way it connected with another agency at local level.

Literacies as communicative practices

This thesis has been strongly informed by the writings of the new literacies movement, and aligns this work with more recent cultural and linguistic researchers such as Brian Street and Colin Lankshear.⁵⁸ This wider perspective about language and literacy can be traced back to the 1960s and became part of the orthodoxy of teacher training from the late 1960s onwards as the work of teacher academics such as James Britton and Douglas Barnes became the common sense of the times.⁵⁹ Mainstream publishers such as Penguin and Pitman produced books for a popular market, of educationally-centred studies which explored literacy as a central theme. An influential example is Pitman which in the 1960s published two of John Holt’s radical books which examined the social processes of learning and schooling and touched upon long-since-buried ideas of community learning arising from within naturally occurring social settings.⁶⁰ Another key British author was Britton who, for example, emphasised the critical importance of speech within education throughout the entire human development process from infancy to later teens, thus challenging head-on, the institutionalised and taken-for-granted practices within schools, that language and literacy should focus primarily upon certain limited and artificial forms of writing practice (1970).⁶¹ ‘Literacy’ therefore becomes a social attribute rather than being seen as only a set of definable, objective skills. There is a shift from a focus upon ‘*competencies*’ perceived as fixed attribute

and towards a notion of '*practices*' as a range of embedded, motivated and meaningful social exchanges between people. The emergence and range of perspectives within a broad field of literacy studies is summarised by Naz Rassool (2009) who argues that:

Conceptually, literacy is multifaceted and thus requires different levels of analysis within a broad and flexible framework that incorporates complexities. These include, inter alia, historical relations, social practices and institutions, locality as well as individual and group subjectivities, and the tension that exists between agency and specific state-sanctioned political and hegemonic projects.⁶²

This thesis is undertaken in the spirit of enquiry outlined by Rassool above and explores the extent to which approaches and insights developed within the New Literacies Movement can be applied to historical research into literacy. Yet, hitherto much history of education writing which considered literacy has uncritically adopted the narrowest of definitions derived from nineteenth-century schooling practices for the poor. This tradition is considered in some detail within the following critical and historiographical chapter. One consequence of viewing literacy in a restrictive way is that historical accounts have tended towards an excessive focus upon those providing literacy, rather than upon the experiences of those acquiring it. Also, the focus has tended to be upon the formal institutional settings in which literacy was taught rather than upon the social and cultural contexts in which it developed. The use of the plural – literacies - is one aspect of the intellectual and critical shift in literacy studies, highlighting the multi-faceted nature of the way that literacy is manifested throughout society. This stresses that the phenomenon should not be reduced to a few simple skills that a person can acquire from an external source, but is rather something that people experience and reproduce through a variety of social practices which cannot be separated from the living contexts in which they appear and present themselves.

A further shift is moving away from a sense of finite and identifiable skills toward the idea of literacy practices. This is necessary in order to conceptualize the relationship between what people do when they read and write with the social structures and contexts in which their actions are embedded and which they in turn help to shape. Another sense in which literacies in the plural need to be considered is the way that literacy practices arise from and are shaped by social institutions and by the power relationships.⁶³ Some forms of literacy are more dominant, have greater legitimacy for certain social groups, and are more visible and influential than others. The performance or enactment of literacies implies a sense of purpose

and direction. Therefore they contain social values and goals which give an impetus to them. The focus upon communicative action and competence directs attention towards rules of use rather than abstract rules of form. Any judgement about ability rests with social appropriateness rather than with conformity to an abstracted norm. Throughout this thesis the aim will be to show how acquisition of degrees and forms of literacy were intimately connected to the development of parallel communicative competencies and that the literary forms were often themselves organically related to orate forms and traditions.

Communicative practices are not a set of fixed and static values and performance standards. This is therefore a very different approach to conceiving of literacy as some sort of idealized fluency in reading and writing within a broadly homogenous community. When viewed as such, the training into literacy becomes a powerful form of socialization and homogenization into the values of the dominant groups in the society. When undertaken autonomously, training into literacy can become the opposite, strengthening senses of individualism and separateness rather than socialization into the norms of dominant social classes. As we shall see that is why the state cast such a concerned eye upon the reading practices of commoners, especially towards the close of the eighteenth century.

Social-class descriptors

Throughout this study the term ‘commoners’ is used to describe people from artisan and labouring occupational groups. This section explains why this term has been chosen rather than, for example, ‘working classes’. The language of orders, ranks, degrees and stations derives from earlier notions of a society in which individuals are connected in a hierarchical chain that was thought by many to be pre-ordained. This view was sanctioned by the established church and was the common experience of most people. Manners and behaviours were geared towards the realisation of this social chain in public through things like commoner women curtsying when someone from a higher social rank passed them in the street, or labouring men doffing their hats when a member of the local gentry passed by. Much of this sense of inevitability and naturalness derived from the social arrangements of fairly static, localised, rural communities. But this apparent tranquillity was not to last as “eighteenth-century England was a mobile and urbanizing society, in a commercial and industrializing economy”.⁶⁴

But in a highly mobile and fluxing social world new terms such as ‘sorts’, ‘parts’, ‘interests’ and ‘classes’ came into use primarily to designate a person’s relationship to

occupation, wealth or economic power and influence. As Corfield has pointed out, the tendency within language towards dualisms helped to fix social notions of positions with opposites such as high/low, upper/lower, superior/inferior, head/foot, great/mean, few/many, gentle/base, rich/poor, gentry/commoner, becoming common in everyday speech.⁶⁵ These dualisms both reflected and reinforced relations of domination and subordination. With the advent of more complex social formations and the growing presence of the bourgeoisie, triadic formulations became more common leaving a legacy in the language such as upper/middle/lower, leisured/working/idle to denote degrees of social location and position. Some terms fell out of use as social relations changed. In the harsher realities of early, urban, industrial Britain, the polite 'industrious' was superseded by the more matter-of-fact word, 'labouring'. The first appearance of the phrase 'working classes' was in 1789 by a Scots commentator John Gay (not the poet/playwright), significant because of its use of the plural.⁶⁶ This early use recognizes the segmentation and occupational differentiation within the laboring population in which the status of degrees of servant could be dramatically different from that of itinerant unskilled labourers.

A frequently used term was that of 'commoners' or the 'common people', reflecting shared access by right to common lands. This term became largely redundant after the impact of enclosures but it retained other connotations such as ordinariness, frequency and plainness for it to be used descriptively rather than as a term of insult. It is this term that G.D.H. Cole and Raymond Postgate choose for their book about the lower ranks of society with an interesting timeline spanning 1746-1946 thus incorporating the early industrial and agricultural transformations which fed into later intensifications of both processes. They stress the differentiation within, as much as between, social groups.⁶⁷ Had this study been concerned with the later period, the term 'working class/es' might have been a more appropriate one to use. In this there is agreement with the view of Aruna Krishnamurthy that the term displaced earlier terminology such as 'lower ranks' and 'commoners' after the failure of the 1832 Reform movement to address the concerns of the vast numbers of middle- and working-class agitators.⁶⁸ This failure was accompanied by unprecedented migration from rural to urban centres and the impoverishment of communities in the countryside. The new urban industrial realities created a need for a new set of social-class descriptors. This need was particularly apt in relation to new social formations within industrialized cities in the midlands and north where the dominance of particular industries created greater degrees of social unity and homogenous identity within the working population than in London which remained a swirling melting-pot.

‘Popular’ or ‘public’ literacy?

There have been a number of terms used to describe or encompass the majority of people occupying the broad base of the social pyramid. One of these is the term ‘mass’ which has often been aligned ‘literacy’ with the consequence of imposing ahistorical associations of the mechanised uniformities so characteristic of early Twentieth-century political and economic formations. ‘Mass’ identities and associations were, if anything, not fixed during the eighteenth century as the parochial remained a powerful influence upon lives and people. Although urban industrial workers and their families started to form distinctive social groups and social identities towards the end of the eighteenth century they remained in minorities until the first two decades of the nineteenth century. So although they were to become larger in size in relation to the whole population, it would be wrong to apply the term ‘popular’ to them until a much later date.

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Figure 4. 1734.
Social degrees structured into the title page of a *Builder’s Dictionary*.
Library of Congress. Special collections. S. 4187 (38)

It is difficult to use eighteenth-century terms in formulations such as ‘literacy and the lower orders’, because of the inescapable value-laden assumptions that have become so attached to these and similar expressions which eventually led to them being discarded from everyday public discourse and it is partly because of the awkwardness and redundancy of older terms that ‘popular’ came to be widely used even though during the eighteenth century and afterwards it had acquired a wide range of meanings and uses. People in the eighteenth century did not see themselves as part of an undifferentiated mass (if indeed they ever did), but rather as occupying a degree within rank as can be seen from Fig. 4 above, outlining social distinctions within the building industry.

The term ‘popular’ originates with legal definitions of interest which apply to everyone irrespective of their economic, political or social position. Only later does it acquire a distinctively new sense of ‘being well-liked’ or ‘widely favoured’. This secondary use derives from the practice of politicians seeking to ingratiate themselves with the populace through dispensing favours and gifts. Arising from this, the term became associated with appealing to inferior social groups for personal benefit and thus acquired negative and pejorative associations such as in the use of “popular literature” to designate publications that were perceived as being of lower quality. But words often have autonomous histories and their meanings can become inverted through appropriation, such as during the nineteenth century when ‘popular’ became a marker of value such as in the phrase ‘popular culture’ being used to indicate something that is produced by the people for their own use. This positive sense arises during the late eighteenth century and writers as startlingly different as William Cobbett and William Wordsworth in their own way, explore and present versions of this native, naive, authentic ‘popular’ voice often characterised as being unspoilt and somehow natural. This sense was to be further reinforced via figures such as John Ruskin and William Morris whose laudation of medieval arts and crafts and romanticization of the craftsman, became part of the ideological framework of the British labour movement.⁶⁹ This sense of the term ‘popular’ feeds into uses in which it implies an association with working-class political interests in distinction to middle class cultural or political interests. However, earlier uses and senses persisted and continued to evolve as seen in the emergence of the term ‘popularize’ to designate a process of presenting information, materials or knowledge in a generally accessible way. This nevertheless, implies a degree of simplification and lack of sophistication.

The term 'popular' linked to education comes into centre stage with the Newcastle Commission which published its report in 1861.⁷⁰ It presented itself as an investigation into 'popular' education which was an ideologized appropriation because it thus avoided using the term 'working classes' which by then, had assumed specific political connotations. Parliament had discarded the use of the term 'poor' or 'poorer' to designate an entire social group even though such a designation seemed appropriate to use for the 1818 Select Committee investigation into schooling.⁷¹ One reason why terms such as 'working classes' or 'poorer classes' would not have seemed quite appropriate is because at the time they would have emphasised the political and economic positioning of the legislature in relation to the social groups to which their investigations were addressed. So the adoption of the term 'popular' was an opportunistic one because it combined the dual senses then current in the use of the term, those of being broadly desired and liked, as well as the positive connotations of belonging to the people.⁷² Therefore throughout this thesis the term is avoided, with a preference instead for using 'public' and 'commoner'.

Format of the thesis

The thesis divides into two sections with the first focussing upon critical historiographical and methodological aspects and the second presenting thematic studies which explore more deeply, key aspects of the issues explored in the first section.

The second chapter discusses two concurrent traditions within historical literacy studies and opens up space for exploring aspects of this field into the eighteenth century. This section begins by tracing the way in which parish marriage registers have been used for statistically-informed discussions about literacy rates. This will describe two 'schools', one running from the 1830s through to the 1860s and the other beginning in the early 1960s and extending into the late 1990s. This quantitative tradition of discussing literacy rates has helped to connect history of education with the broader fields of politics, economics and policy and one feature of this part of the review is to show how historians working within this tradition, despite their avowed objectivity and empirical orientations, nevertheless reflected major ideological currents of the times in which they were writing. This discussion is followed by a review of the emergence in the post-war period (1940s onwards), of another 'qualitative' tradition which has several originating sources. This tradition examined a wide range of surviving documentary sources and emerged from disciplines as diverse as Bibliographical Studies, Social and Economic History, Cultural Studies and Literary Studies. One thing that unites

each strand within this ‘qualitative’ tradition of discussing aspects of historical literacy is that they took place against a background of developing forms of mass electronic media becoming culturally dominant; first telephones and phonographs, followed by radio and cinema, then television and vinyl moving through various forms of recording and replaying technologies and finally into the digitised and computerised era with the world wide web and sophisticated multi-face mobile devices. These technological developments raised important questions about the assumptions of literacy being a simple and easily identifiable set of basic skills acquired during early schooling. So it is against such social and cultural developments that the discussion of the ‘qualitative’ tradition takes place.

The term ‘literacy’ is shown to have its own history and current uses and understandings of it were not those of the eighteenth century. The principal source for this discussion will be the English dictionaries that were commonly available throughout the period. In order to pursue this, there follows a detailed exploration of the historical development of the term ‘illiterate’ and the evolution of the implied positive, ‘literacy’, which arises much later.

The third chapter explores a number of methodological issues, particularly relating to the potential of certain types of artefact and document. This thesis began with an active and critical interest in sources for a history of literacy in the eighteenth century, seeking to cast a net wider than items relating to schools and schooling. It became clear that there were collections within government records which offered sources for historians of literacy and education.⁷³ Brian Simon had demonstrated in a way that remains fresh and relevant half a century later, how sources drawn from the radical political milieu of the times can be vibrant and rich for historical studies of education.⁷⁴

So the research interest expanded into seeking for other possible sources which might be used to inform a history of literacy during the eighteenth century. From the burgeoning sub-discipline of Book History, greater clarity of understanding arose about processes of reception, circulation and conditions of use of documents such as letters, pamphlets, newspapers and other ephemera. This discipline additionally directs students’ attentions towards examining contexts of use, the public and private spaces where meanings and significances may vary or indeed be multiple, concurrent and intersecting in character. It then becomes apparent that ‘education’; ‘learning’, the creation and circulation of ‘knowledge’; the transmission and reproduction of ‘culture’, all profoundly relevant to educational studies, took place in distinctive ways during the period under consideration. Yet, because sources such as newspapers and the settings in which they were read and circulated have not hitherto been the principal focuses for histories of education, such possibilities have been either missed or ignored. In chapter 4 which traces the

development of habitual secular reading around the coffee house, a range of such sources are used drawn either from the author's own collections, or from the four volumes of facsimiles edited by Markman Ellis.⁷⁵

The work of Walter Ong has been influential here, especially the way in which he posits the idea of all communicative practices being historically produced 'technologies of the word'. Ong proposes that certain eras have distinctive characteristics which arise from the particular inflections that exist between different forms of reproducing thoughts, ideas and feelings and exchanging them with others. Following Ong, it is argued here that a distinctive characteristic of the period in question is the way that literate forms became so completely dominant in centres of power that one has to describe the society generally as being 'literate' because of the shaping and determining influence which literate forms assumed. One example of this was the growth of a large centralised State bureaucracy, recording, finding out, directing, correcting and controlling. Yet at the same time the bulk of the population lived within a preponderantly orate cultural milieu although the structures within which they lived were in large part framed by literate practices.

Chapter 5, following Rose draws upon auto/biographical accounts of five self-educated men and compares themes across their lives.⁷⁶ They include Spence, Holcroft, Hardy, Coram and Pellow – all doubting Thomases. Each was largely self-educated yet each managed to produce remarkable work and make an impact upon the times in which they lived. Coincidentally they all had distinctive views on literacy and learning. The chapter draws from a wide range of literary sources which are connected to the reading lives of these self-educated men. All of these men came from humble beginnings, travelled, educated themselves intensively and extensively, and subsequently made their mark upon the wider world. Each brought traces of their individual life paths into their activities and they are presented as essentially typical of their times rather than as exceptions or somehow special. The argument within this chapter is that the absence of institutionally framed, continuing, further and higher education, created opportunities for individuals to develop and expand their intellectual horizons in varied and unpredictable ways. One expression of this was the technical ingenuity of craftsmen and engineers often working *ad hoc* in response to immediate production problems.⁷⁷ Out of this culture of self-taught individuals came the dynamism and progressivism of so much that was characteristic of Britain's expansion during this period. It is not however being argued that these forces were uniformly benign, as in many places their presence and application destroyed existing social and cultural arrangements. An extreme example was the settling, colonising and expansion of parts of America by Europeans seeking

a better and freer life whilst at the same time instituting slavery and triggering the genocide of indigenous populations. A unifying element between each of the mini-biographies is the intellectual restlessness and critical habit of each of the Thomases who are presented. The emphasis throughout has been to show both what was read by these self-educated men and the use to which they put such reading. Four of the Thomases featured in this chapter became prominent public figures within the radical movement of the 1790s, one disappeared from trace in middle age, another left his mark in education of the poor and in colonial settlement and trade, whilst another rose to become a noted literary figure of his times. Two others can be viewed as founders of different traditions within the labour movement.

When the educational practices and influence of Corresponding Societies are examined in chapter 6 the chief sources used are official state records and state trial papers. Additionally contemporary published commentary and records of events are used. These reveal the extraordinary extent to which issues that were essentially political and philosophical, had become part of widespread public discourse amongst commoners across the country. Even more significantly, these issues were being articulated in a way which made them relevant to some of the poorest social groups out of which came the generation that was to consolidate progressive Liberalism, Trade Unionism, Socialism and Co-operativism. Within the archives of the Home Secretary for example, or of various trials in the Treasury Solicitor's deposits at the National Archives, one can see collections of publications that were deemed seditious accompanied by commentaries about their sale and distribution. This material provides vivid glimpses into reading practices amongst the working classes and raises the question of whether the true and lasting impact of this radicalising movement lay not in the domain of political theory and action, but instead in the legacy of working-class literateness and self-improving enculturation which became such a distinctive feature of early nineteenth-century co-operative, trade union and socialist practice.

Although there is a detailed discussion of the quantitative study of historical literacy rates, based upon parish marriage register signature evidence, the case for the use of this source for 'qualitative' studies is argued. This arises through treating the original documents as sources themselves, rather than simply extrapolating data from them and ignoring their physical and material form. One of the legacies of the dichotomy that appeared to arise between the quantitative and qualitative traditions was that these registers were dismissed as being an unreliable source. But the error here was in seeing them as being *only* usable for discussions of literacy *rates* and not realising the value they may have for studies of writing practices.

A key chapter within the thesis deals with the origins of broadly spread public literacy within the coffee-house culture that sprung up after the Civil War. The historical significance lies in the fact that these secular social sites were independent of religious groupings. This secular character had profound implications around the country for the kinds of reading practices and materials that were used. Ellis has made the case for the historical importance of the coffee house in relation to the development of news-print culture and democratic political discourse and a different view is taken to that of Brian Cowan who attempts to downplay their significance.⁷⁸ Ellis traces the growth of coffee houses from their earliest beginnings in mid-seventeenth-century London to their spread around the country, becoming more numerous than any other type of establishment. This chapter re-considers many of the original sources that Ellis used, examining them in the light of the educational impact of these places upon succeeding generations of patrons. Of special interest is the way that different types of bourgeois discourse emerged within and around coffee houses, most of which fed into subsequent specialist fields such as literary criticism, financial and economic analysis, popular politics, standard plain English and so on. The chapter sets the scene early in the century in order to show that although schooling may have been only sporadically available, there was nevertheless a base in virtually every neighbourhood in every urban district, where *men* could gather to read, listen and discuss. This generality of discourse was quite innovative and became one of the hallmarks of the self-learning that is developed in chapter 5.

The second half of the thesis therefore progresses from the social space created within and around coffee-house culture where local centres of democratic literate practices became institutionalised across generations. The focus then moves into a consideration of how individuals could draw upon the collective cultural resources that were available to them within the public sphere to sustain remarkable levels self-directed learning. Following this is an examination of a specific cultural formation arising at the end of the eighteenth century which was responsible for spreading literacy amongst hundreds of thousands of commoners.

¹ For the structure of this initial chapter, the scheme proposed by J. Wellington et. al., (2005) *Succeeding with your Doctorate*, has been used, published by Sage. Pp 166/7.

² The period since the publication in 1951 of Nicholas Hans' landmark study, *New Trends in Education in the Eighteenth Century*. The most important feature of this study was the sustained way in which Hans assessed the occupational careers of a cohort of University graduates, all of whom came to exert considerable influence in the social and cultural spheres in which they operated.

³ Brewer, John (1997) *Pleasures of the Imagination*, pp 125-197. Harper Collins.

⁴ Porter, Roy (1991) [Revised edition] *English Society in the Eighteenth Century*, Penguin.

⁵ Bailyn, Bernard (1960) *Education in the Forming of American Society*, The Norton Library.

⁶ Cremin, Lawrence (1970) *American Education: The Colonial Experience 1607-1783*, Harper & Row. pp 475-479.

⁷ A work that falls within this tradition is that by J.M Goldstrom, (1972) *Social Context of Education: A Study of the Working-class School Reader in England and Ireland*, Irish University Press. This study examines school readers used by teachers for working-class children during the nineteenth century.

⁸ Hans, Nicholas (1951) *New Trends in Education in the Eighteenth Century*, R.K.P. London.

⁹ In July 2008 there was a special edition of *History of Education* edited by Dick, M & Watts, R. focussing upon education during the eighteenth century. Vol. 37, No. 4.

¹⁰ Gairdner, James (1908) *Lollardy and the Reformation in England*. Macmillan, London. The strength of this landmark study lies in how it traces continuities of religious dissent from the influence of Wycliffe through to the Henrican Reformation. A difficulty with Gairdner's approach is that by stressing the ongoing tradition of dissent, he loses focus upon what was specific to the Lollard tradition. For a more recent critical assessment see Rex, Richard (2002) *The Lollards*, Palgrave, Basingstoke, who argues a case against any direct influence upon Puritanism from Lollard traditions. Ch. 5. pp 115-142.

¹¹ So called as they were often drawn from artisan families, smithies, braziers, carpenters and the like.

¹² Cited in Foxe's *Martyrs*, iv. 666/7, and on page 228, Vol 2, Gairdner, *ibid*. Tunstall was one of the foremost renaissance scholars in England, a personal friend of Erasmus and author amongst other works, of the very first school mathematics book in English.

¹³ Bennett, H.S (1969) *English Books and Readers: 1475-1557*, Cambridge. Also, Febvre, Lucien, & Martin, Henri-Jean (1976) *The Coming of the Book*, New Left Books, London. This study provides a 'geography' of the expansion of the European book publishing and distribution industry from the mid-1400s through to the eighteenth century.

¹⁴ A discussion of the nomenclature of social class during the period follows.

¹⁵ Parts of the north Kent coast along the Thames/Medway estuaries were as wild and isolated as almost anywhere in England. Illicit books were smuggled in barrels from the Low Countries and distributed by itinerant preachers and through informal Lollard networks.

¹⁶ McSheffrey, Shannon (1995) *Gender and Heresy*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Ch. 3, pp 47-79.

¹⁷ From the *Register of Archbishop William Warham of Canterbury (1503-32)* Vol. 1. Lambeth Palace library. Cited in McSheffrey, Shannon, (1995) *Gender and Heresy*, University of Pennsylvania Press, pp 49/50

¹⁸ See McSheffrey, *ibid*, Ch. 4, pp 80-107, 'Lollards and the Family.'

¹⁹ Hill, Christopher (1988) *A Turbulent, Seditious, and Factious People: John Bunyan and his Church*, Clarendon Press, Oxford. In Chapter 7, Hill discusses the differences and tensions between Ranter and Quaker ideologies and their often complex relationship to the state, pp 75-84. The drive for liberty of expression, conscience and belief was not a simple dichotomy between state versus the people, but rather a series of interlocking contestations where interests and allegiances often crossed over each other. Bunyan, for example opposed the secular libertinism that flourished so openly in the urban space and which would have attracted severe action from parish officials in rural districts.

²⁰ Cox, Thomas (1720) *Magna Britannia et Hibernia*, pp 153, cited in Hill, C. (1988) p 348. Bunyan would not have regarded himself as an antinomian as he saw himself as one of the elect and thereby implicitly acknowledged the importance of a group of spiritual leaders and guides. Here Cox is directing a jibe at someone who challenged the Anglican authorities. Bunyan would however have challenged the notion that salvation was dependent upon due obedience to the laws of any particular church.

²¹ For a discussion of the early publishing history of *Pilgrim's Progress*, see Owen, W.R. pp 91-104 in Van Os, M. & Schutte, G.J (eds) *Bunyan in England and Abroad*, (1988) VU University, Amsterdam.

²² From the *Leeds Intelligencer*, March 3rd. 1794.

²³ Rose, J (2007) 'The History of Education as the History of Reading'. *History of Education*, Vol. 36, nos. 4-5, pp. 595-605.

²⁴ Uglow, Jennifer (2002) *The Lunar Men*, Faber, London. Gatrell, Vic, (2006) *City of Laughter*, Atlantic books, London.

²⁵ O'Day, Rosemary, (1982) *Education and Society, 1500-1800: The Social Foundations of Education in Early Modern Britain*, Longman, London. Spufford, Margaret (1981) *Small Books and Pleasant Histories*, Methuen, London.

²⁶ Jones, M.G (1938) *The Charity School Movement*, Cambridge. Lacquer, T. (1976b) *Religion and Respectability: Sunday Schools and Working Class Culture*, New Haven. See Hollis, Christopher, (1960) *Eton: A History*, Hollis and Carter, London. Ch. IX pp 126-143, 'The Interbreeding of Fellowship'. This describes the corruption and decline of Eton College in mid-century.

²⁷ For a fascinating biography of contrasts, see Anne Scott's, (2003) *Hannah More, The First Victorian*, O.U.P. Scott attempts to reconcile the fervent anti-slavery campaigner with the socially-conservative educationist. It would be possible to take issue with the title of the book preferring instead to see More as someone who embodies and reflects essential contradictions of the times she lived in.

- ²⁸ Throughout this study the term ‘oracy’ is used in to establish a consistency in relation to the word ‘literacy’. This means not using Walter Ong’s preferred term of ‘orality’. One reason for making this slight shift is because ‘orality’ implies speech, whereas ‘oracy’ allows for speech and listening to be considered as unified activities.
- ²⁹ For the gradual opening to shipping of the Clyde up to Glasgow during the second half of the eighteenth century, see Hamilton, H (1963) *An Economic History of Scotland in the Eighteenth Century*, Clarendon. pp 218-220.
- ³⁰ See note 15 below.
- ³¹ See Darnton, R (1984) ‘Peasants Tell Tales: The Meaning of Mother Goose’, *The Great Cat Massacre*, Viking.
- ³² Ong, W (1982) *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*. Methuen.
- ³³ Holquist, Michael (1990) *Dialogism: Bakhtin and His World*, 2nd ed. Ch.3. pp. 40-66, ‘Language as Dialogue’, Routledge, (2002).
- ³⁴ Wilkinson, A (1967) *Spoken English*, University of Birmingham. pp. 11-15.
- ³⁵ Bullock Report (1975) *A Language for Life*. HMSO.
- ³⁶ Olsen, K (1999) stresses the continuing distinctiveness between the different parts of England in *Daily Life in 18th Century England*. Ch. 5. ‘The Provinces’.
- ³⁷ The term ‘United States of America’ was first coined by Thomas Paine.
- ³⁸ An extended comparative survey of the spread of literacy across Western Europe in the eighteenth century is provided by Graff, Harvey (1987a) *The Legacies of Literacy*, Indiana University Press, Indianapolis, Ch. 6. pp 173-257. The chapter is titled ‘Towards Enlightenment/Toward Modernity:1660-1780’ and covers developments in the German States, Italy, France, the Low Countries, Scandinavia and Iceland, the British Isles and North America. A summation of Graff’s broad approach can be cited when discussing the low countries, pp 220-223, ‘In the common Western European pattern, commercial and industrial developments (with their functional needs and dynamic imperatives), legacies of earlier traditions of literacy, state support, and religious motives combined in this process of geographical differentiation, largely upon religious lines’. Vincent, David (2000) *The Rise of Mass Literacy: Reading and Writing in Modern Europe*, Polity, Cambridge. Vincent deals with the nineteenth century using data from the Universal Postal Union. He argues that the key change from the eighteenth to nineteenth centuries with regard to literacy was a shift from the quest for literacy being essentially a personal one to it becoming a project of the state. This development happened across Europe at roughly the same time with the exception of certain Catholic areas and imperial Russia.
- ³⁹ W.B. Stephens establishes the geographical dimension as being of major significance in his systematic study of parish marriage register evidence in the nineteenth century. Stephens, W.B (1987) *Education, Literacy and Society 1830-1870: The Geography of Diversity in Provincial England*, Manchester University Press.
- ⁴⁰ Neuberg, Victor, (1971) *Popular Education in Eighteenth Century England*, Woburn Press, London. Despite its title, the book is largely a descriptive account of publishing and circulation of chap books. The discussion of similar sources for the seventeenth century by Margaret Spufford (1981) reflects a more complex critical appreciation of the link between these sources and reading practices.
- ⁴¹ Shefrin, J (2009) *The Dartons: Publishers of Educational Aids, Pastimes & Juvenile Ephemera 1787-1876*, Costen Press.
- ⁴² Plumb, J (1975) ‘The new world of children in eighteenth century England’. *Past and Present*. 67, pp 64-95.
- ⁴³ Ong, Walter (1982) *Orality and Literacy: the Technologising of the Word*, Routledge, .
- ⁴⁴ Darnton, R (1989) *Revolution in Print: the Press in France 1775-1800*, University of California Press, Berkeley, CA. Also, (1996) *The Forbidden Best-Sellers of Prerevolutionary France*. New York: Norton. These works focus upon the meanings that readers derive from their own reading practices.
- ⁴⁵ Curtis, Bruce (2008) ‘On distributed literacy: textually mediated politics in colonial Canada’. *Paedagogica Historica*, Volume 44, Issue 1 & 2 , pp. 233 - 244
- ⁴⁶ Lindmark David & Erixon, Per-Olaf (2008) ‘The Many Faces of Literacy, Introduction’ to Vol 44, *Paedagogica Historica*, Feb-April. pp 1-5.
- ⁴⁷ Barton, D, Hamilton, M and Ivanic, R (2000) *Situated Literacies: Reading and Writing in Context*. p.8. Routledge.
- ⁴⁸ Kress,G (2010) *Multimodality: A social semiotic approach to contemporary communication*. p.60. Routledge.
- ⁴⁹ Scrivener, M (2001) *Seditious Allegories: John Thelwall and Jacobin Writing*. Pennsylvania State University Press. The period of radical politics in the 1790s is dealt with at some length in Chapter 6.
- ⁵⁰ Simon, B (1974) *The Two Nations and the Educational Structure 1780 – 1870*, Lawrence and Wishart. First published in 1960 as, *Studies in the History of Education, 1780–1870*. Osborne, J (1972) *John Cartwright*, Cambridge University Press.
- ⁵¹ Williams, Raymond (1975) *Keywords*, Fontana, London.
- ⁵² For example the complete Middlesex Registers published 1909 – 38, Phillimore and Co., London.
- ⁵³ www.londonlives.org. brings together workhouse records, criminal registers, coroners’ reports, court orders and poor relief papers which were lodged in eight separate archives.

- ⁵⁴ Marshall, D. (1962) *Eighteenth Century England*, Longmans
- ⁵⁵ See the 'Presidential Address to the History of Education Society' by Ruth Watts in *History of Education*, (2005) Vol. 34 No.3 pp 225-241. Also, by Ruth Watts, summary of articles on 'Gender in History of Education Journal Since 1976', Vol.34, No. 6. pp 689-694. Three of these articles relate directly to themes of women educators during the eighteenth century. Of note is Mary Hilton's (2001) 'Revisioning Romanticism : Towards a Women's History of Progressive Thought, 1780-1850,' *History of Education*, Vol. 30, No. 6, pp. 513-26.
- ⁵⁶ Steedman, C (2009) *Labours Lost: Domestic Service and the Making of Modern England*, C. U. P.
- ⁵⁷ Williams, Raymond. (1976) *Keywords*. Fontana.
- ⁵⁸ Lankshear, C (1997) *Changing Literacies*.O.U.P. Lankshear (with Gee, Knobel and Searle) explore cultural, social and technological literacies stressing the embeddedness of interpretive and communicative practices. Lankshear, C. & Knobel, M (2006) *New Literacies: Everyday Practices and Classroom Learning*, OUP, is a more recent re-statement of basic themes and an application into communicative practices by young people both inside and beyond the boundaries of the school. This complements the work of Gunter Kress, 2003, *Literacy in the New Media Age*, Routledge, which also has a strong focus upon communicative practices amongst the young. Also, Street, B (1995) *Social Literacies*, Longman.
- ⁵⁹ Britton, James (1970) *Language and Learning*, Allen Lane the Penguin Press. Barnes, Douglas (1969) *Language, the Learner and the School*, Penguin.
- ⁶⁰ Holt, J (1964) *How Children Learn*, & (1968) *How Children Fail*, Pitman.
- ⁶¹ Britton (1970) *Ibid*. Ch. 6. pp. 219-272.
- ⁶² Rassool, Naz (2009) Literacy in Search of a Paradigm. Chapter 1, pp. 7-31. in .Soler, J., Fletcher, F., et al. Eds. (2009) *Understanding difficulties in Literacy Development: Issues and Concepts*, Sage, O. U.
- ⁶³ Barton, D. et al. (Eds.) (2000) *Situated Literacies*, Routledge. For a study of literacies in one town, Lancaster, Cumbria, see Barton D, & Hamilton, M (1998) *Local Literacies*. Routledge.
- ⁶⁴ Corfield, P (Ed) (1991) *Language, History and Social Class*, Blackwell. p.109.
- ⁶⁵ Corfield. P (1991) *Ibid*. pp 101-130.
- ⁶⁶ Krishnamurthy, A (Ed) (2009) *The Working Class Intellectual in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Britain*, Ashgate.
- ⁶⁷ Cole, G & Postgate, R (1971) 4th Ed. *The Common People*, pp 64-67. Methuen.
- ⁶⁸ Krishnamurthy, A (Ed) (2009) *The Working Class Intellectual in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Britain*, Ashgate . There are however, problems with the default male subject embedded within the writing of Krishnamurthy such as evidenced throughout Chapter 5, pp. 85-108 which deals with identities and influences of ale and coffee houses.
- ⁶⁹ A starting point for this section was the section from *Keywords*, (1978) by Raymond Williams, Fontana, pp. 198-99 for 'popular' and pp. 61-62 for 'common'.
- ⁷⁰ The official title of what came to be known as the Newcastle Commission was *The State of Popular Education in England*, 1861. 7 Vols. Pub. HMSO.
- ⁷¹ House of Commons (1968) *1819 Digest of Parochial Returns: The Education of the Poor*, Dublin University Press.
- ⁷² Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. Education Group (1981) *Unpopular education: schooling and social democracy in England since 1944*, University of Birmingham. This played upon the received ambiguities inherent in the widely used term 'popular'.
- ⁷³ HO and TS series at National Archives 1790s and 1840s.
- ⁷⁴ Simon, Brian (1974) *The two nations and the educational structure, 1780-1870*. Lawrence & Wishart.
- ⁷⁵ For a thematically organised collection of facsimiles of original sources see, Ellis, Markman (2006) *Eighteenth-Century Coffee House Culture*, 4 Vols. Pickering and Chatto.
- ⁷⁶ Rose, Jonathan (2002) *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes*, Yale Nota Bene,
- ⁷⁷ Dolan, Brian (2004) *Josiah Wedgwood: Entrepreneur to the Enlightenment*, Harper Collins. Corble, N. (2005) *James Brindley: The First Canal Builder*, pp. 32-35 retells the story of Brindley's working out of the solution to the Wildboarclough Mill contract in 1737.
- ⁷⁸ Ellis, Markman (2004) *The Coffee House: A Cultural History*, Phoenix. Cowan, B (2005) *The Social Life of Coffee: The Emergence of the British Coffee House*, Yale.

Chapter 2. A historiographical review of historical literacy.

Critical review of traditions within historical literacy studies

The following is an historiographical exploration of a number of key themes that have shaped studies of historical literacy. The purpose of this chapter is twofold. Firstly, to consider as a whole, the historical writing which has made use of the signatures by brides and grooms in parish marriage registers, as a source of evidence for literacy. The historiography has been taken further back in time than has previously been done in order to anchor the discussion in the period when the monitorial system was becoming widespread and institutionalized and when the first grants in aid for school buildings were forthcoming from the Treasury. Secondly, there is a discussion of the origins of literacy as a concept through exploring its emergence as a term in the English language; its modern origins within the highly structured schooling practices for the children of the poor; the way the term itself has been used by leading historians of literacy and the link that existed between orality and literacy. These historiographical contexts are necessary backdrops for the thesis as a whole and explain how the research took the form that it has.

Using parish marriage registers

As both the potential and limitations of parish marriage registers have been widely discussed beforehand, it may be asked, why rehearse a topic that has been covered in considerable detail elsewhere?¹ The purpose of such a review is to historicize those previous commentaries and then, from the resulting discussion, suggest a broader context within which discussions of historical literacy and the use of signatures might take place. This will help the reader to see how the present study differs from what has gone before and contribute towards clarifying why the present study has been undertaken. The writings are grouped into two 'schools', the first running from 1838 through to 1867 and the second spanning the period 1968 through to 1989. It is shown how both 'schools' reflect educational imperatives of their own times when they use parish marriage register signatures to discuss the development of the ability to read and write within the population of England. During the first period of use of parish marriage registers for research into people's ability to read and write, the term 'literacy' was not in currency. By examining early commentators we can show the extent to

which their enquiries had been shaped by contemporaneous social and educational concerns and thus raise questions about their reliability as primary sources for discussing historical educational trends some two centuries ago. This discussion is restricted to a consideration of English registers.² Discussion of signature evidence in relation to literacy in the second half of the eighteenth century has been limited. Although the period is signposted in works such as that by David Vincent (1989) - 1750-1914 – and by W.B. Stephens (1999) – 1750-1914 – the authors spend very little time actually examining practices and developments for the eighteenth century.³ Attention to the potential value of parish records as indices of the ability to read and write first appears in 1838.

Some eighty years after the Marriage Act (1754), in the aftermath of the debate about the Privy Council grants in aid for school building (1833), we find an anonymous author writing in *The Penny Magazine* from Crowle in Lincolnshire – *On the Proportion of Persons in England Capable of Reading and Writing*.⁴ *The Penny Magazine* had been published since 1833 for the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge by Charles Knight and its target readership were prosperous skilled labourers and artisans, although the reach of the publication was certainly wider in both directions of the social hierarchy. As Altick highlights, publications such as this were catering for that relatively new social phenomenon; the working class family allocating reading time at weekends as one way of defining their sense of respectability and of engendering a self-improving spirit.⁵ Publications like these by the SDUK also, explicitly offered themselves as alternatives to a current of popular radical publications which were similarly targeted towards this buffer group between the middle classes and the labouring working class mass. The Crowle article, running across the two Saturday editions on August 18th and 25th 1838, highlights the presence of handwritten signatures within parish marriage registers. Its author has secured the co-operation of the Vicar at Crowle who has trawled through the signatures from his parish from 1754 to 1838 – a period of 84 years. The findings are presented in the form of a table which is sub-divided by irregular intervals of years, the number of marriages, those who “could write”, those who “could not write” and finally, a percentage figure for the period.

The Crowle author (possibly the vicar himself) identifies a steady improvement in the percentages of signers within the parish up to the year of 1818 and then a sudden regression almost back to the levels of mark making rather than signing of the 1760s. These localized findings immediately raise questions about the tabulated findings cited earlier from Stephens (1987). The author’s explanation of the downturn mentions a lack of schools but also highlights the massive impact of ‘inclosure’, population drift and increase, geographical

isolation, changing demands within manufacturing and the rise in demand for child labour within agriculture arising from the drift of adult males away from such work. From this early example of the use of parish marriage register signatures to inform educational discussion, several things are evident.

First, the article is not disinterested research – for example the product of antiquarian curiosity. Instead it declares a viewpoint which is readily identifiable within the currents of debate at the time concerning annual renewals and extensions of the building grants for schools. The author is attributing the sudden decline in incidences of signing, to a combination of causes without fully explaining local circumstances such as the closure of the only endowed school for the poor in the parish in 1818. Yet by 1833 there were nine day schools seven of which had commenced since 1818 at which 386 children (206 boys and 180 girls) were taught. Additionally there was a Sunday school, attended by 100 children (45 boys and 55 girls).⁶

Second, literacy, or the supposed lack of it, is linked to social and economic factors and not to moral or pedagogic concerns. Although the author does not spell out the circumstances in detail, the reason why the only endowed school in the parish closed in 1818 was that the trustees had enclosed several acres of lands and, in order to defray the costs of this work (both legal and building), had diverted the funds for the schoolmaster and school towards these costs leaving nothing remaining for the running of the school.⁷

Third, there is a clear sense that in order to understand something, one needs to be able to measure it and assess outputs. There is for example a detailed concern with changing rates of signing over periods of time even though his periodized categories are inconsistent.

Fourth, the article focuses upon the supposed abilities of adults at the point of marrying rather than upon those of children at the point when they leave school. It therefore draws attention to a contemporary concern about subsequent social consequences for the future of not educating children.

Fifth, the article is produced independently and locally by a writer who is not working within an institutional framework such as a University, independent of any tier of local or national government and published in an emerging form – the popular weekly magazine – which has a vested interest in the spread and practice of literacy. This ‘gentleman scholar’ approach to the study reflects private investigation by antiquarians who pioneered interest in local traces and legacies.⁸ The study by the Crowle author, published in *The Penny Magazine*, is tailor-made in terms of its subject matter, for a readership, many of whom would have been householders and therefore able to vote following the 1832 Reform Act.

And sixth, the form of the article is interesting in itself as it is a response to actual local circumstances at the time of writing. It suggests that such issues are of importance beyond the parish or county and by implication suggests that a solution to local failure may lie in central support and intervention. The author sums up his purposes as follows:

Undoubtedly the intelligence of the people has much increased, and newspapers and other periodicals, which are instruments of popular knowledge, are more abundantly distributed, and rendered more attractive, but as to mere reading and writing only, what is the amount of progress actually made within the last half century?⁹

What he writes about ‘reading and writing’ here is worth closer examination as much of the common usage he employs has shifted in meaning in the intervening 170 years. By ‘intelligence’ the author refers to the amount that people either know or can know, rather than to the later use of the word to refer to some innate or inherent mental capacity.¹⁰ Significantly he applies an idea of quantity to the use of ‘intelligence’ - ‘much increased’. The notion that ‘newspapers and other periodicals’ have become the ‘instruments of popular knowledge’, illustrates the sea change in outlook that had taken place in a single generation, as for most of the previous decades the very idea of a ‘popular’ press was anathema to those in establishment circles. Even so restrictions upon reading through the imposition of duties failed to prevent the steady spread of reading through all levels of society. Ironically enough, the promotion of political publishing by government through the secret vote of Treasury funds, acted to stimulate wider reading. Feather summarizes the broad trend across the eighteenth century thus:

During most of the eighteenth century publishers operated in a free market and in an intellectual and political atmosphere which generally favoured freedom of expression.¹¹

The rise of mass volume printing from the 1810s onwards, linked to progressive improvements in transport and communications systems, helped to bring into being new realities which rendered previously held views obsolete within the space of a couple of decades. Here we see an author alive to the practical possibilities that had opened up for all adults to be part of the literate majority, through regular contact with cheap and improving

reading matter. Schooling appears to serve the purpose of providing at an early age the ‘mere’ means for participation by adults in this growing public sphere of intelligence and knowledge. The term ‘mere’ equates to our current use of the term ‘basic’ in conjunction with words such as ‘skills’ and ‘literacy’. The author appears to separate this growing world of free circulation of ‘intelligence’ and ‘knowledge’ from the acquisition of ‘mere reading and writing’. The passage concludes with the dominant theme within the liberal social discourse of the times – that of ‘progress’ in all things, a shift of significance from the conservative traditionalism that remained so dominant across gentry, aristocratic and clerical circles, right into the late Georgian and early Victorian periods. The second part of the article, which appeared a week later, runs through other available official sources of statistical data to use alongside that of parish marriage registers. His argument is that there is a wealth of information produced by the authorities themselves which proves that within the establishment there has for decades been an active concern about the ability of adults to read and write. This line of argument was then used by social reformers to counter conservative and reactionary arguments opposing government grants for school buildings.

A discussion about this earliest of examples of the use of parish marriage register signatures which considered literacy rates and levels, shows that it can be better understood when historicized and placed within the political, geographical, social and cultural contexts of its production. Many of the characteristics within *The Penny Magazine* article can be compared with the writings of others who followed soon after and these were to shape how future historians were to view literacy.

The call by the author of the *Penny Magazine* article in 1838 for people from within the Royal Statistical Society to commission further and similar analyses of observable changes was not long in being answered. When the author states that such publications are ‘rendered more attractive’, he is referring to the use of modern newsprint paper, the insertion of illustrative elements to support the text and the cheap prices. As there was no ‘news’, the prohibitive 4d. duty imposed upon newspapers did not apply (news publications passed this on to readers). Additionally, prices could be kept down further by the lack of advertisements which attracted a huge 1s 6d per advertisement duty until they were abolished in 1855.¹² Yet articles such as this trod a fine line within the publishing regimes of the 1830s. The use of materials drawn from parish registers to draw attention to current and recent trends as they existed in clearly identified locations, came as close as it was possible to the boundaries between news and ‘useful knowledge’. In publishing terms therefore this article (anonymous) would have been seen by many as being more radical than its content might at first suggest.

The following year, Richard Edmonds writing in the *Journal of the Statistical Society of London* in July produced an expanded version of the approach that the Crowle author had provided the year before but focusing instead upon his own parish of Penzance in Cornwall.¹³ As the approach is completely consistent with that of the earlier piece it is safe to assume that both authors were in contact with each other, or at least that Edmonds was writing in order to rise to the previous challenge. There is a descriptive account of the marriage registers in order to show the changes in the way they had been kept between the 1750s and the 1830s and there are tables showing totals for marriages. His over-riding statistical concerns are complemented by quasi-ethnographic observations such as the following:

....it is stated by a person who frequents the public houses in Penzance, that no periodical publications are taken in there exclusively for the labouring classes, and that the newspapers which are to be found in them are the provincial journals, and such of the London papers as are generally read by all classes of society.¹⁴

Edmonds presents detailed breakdowns of figures for Sunday schooling in the parish. For metropolitan and establishment readers this table would have been highly controversial as it reveals the complete monopoly of schooling for the young by various non-conformist and dissenting groups.¹⁵ The issue of literacy and schooling for children is thus being placed into upper-class political circles (the readership of the JSSL) in the context of competing claims for government funding for schools by Church of England and Methodist interests. And Edmonds is provocatively choosing to highlight a parish where to all intents and purposes the Anglican interest has become extinguished. Yet he returns to his statistical theme after presenting a descriptive account of the evidence from marriage signatures:

With reference to the portion of the adult population which is able to read and write, the following information, which is worthy of notice, as pointing out a simple and easily available test of the extent of instruction in any part of the country, is of much interest. It appeared that the parish marriage registers, in which the parties who are married, both male and female, are obliged to write their names, or subscribe their marks, would afford a means of shewing, not only the proportion of adults able to write at the present time, but the comparative progress of instruction in writing among the same class at more distant periods, distinguishing the sexes.¹⁶

Edmonds remains critically cautious about claims beyond the ability of the source to inform us or incidences of writing and appears to be careful not to conflate reading with writing. What he does notice however is that the sample he is drawing from is of “the same class” meaning that in socially homogenous districts like Penzance one may trace consistent trends. The interest in reading and writing is extended into a detailed consideration of the influence of local libraries and other public institutions and he notes the tendency for local religious bodies to place a strong emphasis upon adults being able to read. For Edmonds, the ability to read and write in a district is as linked to other local institutions, as it is to schools. As with the 1838 *Penny Magazine* author there is an express interest in “progress” of instruction over a measurable span of years. One added point of interest about this study is that Penzance lies at the western tip of England, at the time one of the most isolated districts of the country, yet by this account, it is pretty much assimilated into the national culture as far as reading materials are concerned.

The appearance of Edmonds’ piece in the *Journal of the London Statistical Society* placed the parish marriage registers at the heart of professional attention. This was followed in 1841 by Charles Barham who was physician to the Cornwall Infirmary and the secretary to the Royal Institution of Cornwall.¹⁷ His article focuses upon the parish registers of Tavistock in Devon and he comments that the registers had only recently been resorted to by social commentators and researchers who were interested in the “application of the statistical method to the facts of social life”. From Barham’s examination of the burial records he concludes that:

It is clear that only from the records of a long period of time on the one hand, and from those derived from localities, in various circumstances and conditions, on the other, can inferences, worthy of confidence as general truths, be deduced.....The requisites belong to the Parish registers, and, as regards the department of enquiry, to no other documents extant in this country.

Barham makes explicit his concern to develop a method of analysis in order to provide credible, factual grounding for policy. Barham believed that social enquiry was capable of meeting the same standards of proof as that of other empirical scientific fields, and that social policy debate ought to be reduced to matters of irrefutable fact. The 1840s were to be pivotal years for various types of social reform and such debates assumed urgency with the latter

phase of Chartism and other forms of radical dissent.¹⁸ Barham’s professional training in medicine and surgery perhaps influenced his way of thinking in relation to social questions.

The issues that were raised by Barham and Edmonds caused sufficient interest for Richard Parkinson to take the discussion further in 1842.¹⁹ He highlights basic problems with using the registers as authoritative sources citing for example the absence of thousands of immigrant Irish Catholic families from the registers in Manchester thus making them incomplete records, especially for those sections of the population to which much social policy debate is addressed. Yet his choice of Manchester implies a political stance, such as when he presents a tabulated summary for the years 1761-1800.

MANCHESTER PARISH REGISTERS: TOTALS

20 year period	Baptisms	Marriages	Burials
1761 - 1780	19,750	8,436	13,806
1781 - 1800	42,995	20,888	24,738

The figures for Manchester reveal the massive scale of population change within a district made famous for the previous five decades by its call for Parliamentary representation and the political strength of its liberal, merchant civic leaders. As with earlier commentators there is an explicit concern with social policy and the presentation of the topic and choice of focus are knowingly controversial.

The earliest ‘sources’ that one finds referred to by subsequent historians of education and literacy is the published paper that W.L. Sargant read before the Royal Statistical Society in 1867, *On The Progress of Elementary Education*.²⁰ This substantial treatment of the link between provision of elementary schooling and levels of literacy relies heavily upon his extrapolations from data found within the registers. Although Sargant uses the register signatures as the basis for his paper, he is cautious when saying that the signature rates are “not indeed the means of determining exactly how many young persons can write, but only what is the comparative number at one time and another, and in one place and another”.²¹ This allows him to pursue his central theme – that of improvement and progress, as the ability to use the data from the registers to measure change over time and variation from place to place, is not hindered by other limitations. Sargant considers the making of a mark to indicate a lack of “instruction” – or, in our early twenty-first century terms, evidence of formal schooling.

The principal thesis advanced by Sargant is that the most noticeable improvement in the ability to read and write took place where inspected instruction of children was taking place. He contrasts the average amount spent on schooling per head of the child population in America with that spent in England, and continues with an account based upon a detailed enumeration of schools in London, concluding that the better literacy rates there arise because of the larger numbers of labourers' children who regularly attend school.²² Sargant makes a number of observations which one may infer to be established practices elsewhere. He describes those who can read for pleasure but cannot write, and those who have learned to merely sign their names but are unable to read. He says that in some churches the clerk signs for all of the witnesses²³ and he describes the custom of the bride or groom holding the feather end of the quill whilst another writes his or her name into the register. Another observation by Sargant is that many can certainly sign "in cooler moments" but fail to do so because of nervousness. He also describes the "widespread" tendency for people to resort to marks rather than signatures and states that he has taken "great pains to ascertain the truth in this matter" and has "consulted many clergymen familiar with different parts of the Kingdom". Another weakness of the registers identified by Sargant is the fact that a great many marriages and unions are simply not recorded in them. After an extensive account of literacy rates based upon signature samples drawn from Halifax, Bristol, Lynn and rural parishes in Yorkshire, Derbyshire and Northamptonshire, he concludes that:

England during the 77 years, had become a great manufacturing country, and the towns had far outgrown the means of instruction, that the educational efforts made had effected no improvement; but in the country, the conversion of the clergy to the cause of popular education, and the increased pastoral care arising from the gradual extinction of pluralities, had resulted in a great extension of instruction.

Sargant's intervention in the period prior to the Forster Act is one of many arguing that a lack of education leads to workmen and their families who cannot read, having less of a tendency to attend church and instead indulge in "sensuality" on their day of rest. For Sargant, learning to read is a first and necessary step towards moral progress amongst the degenerate poor living in the large towns. He uses the registers to bolster an uncompromising advocacy for increased and uniform government spending on schooling. Though his paper is carefully researched and displays considerable awareness of the finer points about the limitations of his principal source, it is not produced in an academic historical context but rather within a

private, and somewhat elite, research society whose activities were closely linked to influencing social and political policy. Another key feature of Sargant's paper is his use of previous papers on the theme for reference, in order to lend weight to what he is saying.

This early 'school' of commentators, achieved their aim of government funded provision of elementary schooling for all children when the 1870 Act was passed by Parliament, and with that success, the main driving force behind their investigations – the cry for progress in instruction – seemed to have gone. At that point there is no further, sustained enquiry into the registers as sources for a history of literacy within formal historical studies, nor within the emerging sub-discipline of the History of Education which developed during the early twentieth century.²⁴ Exceptions to this are local studies such as that by W.P. Baker in 1961 whose work became the sole quantitative source for discussions of literacy rates in Lawson and Silver's influential *A Social History of Education in England* published in 1973, a text mainly read as part of teacher training history of education courses.²⁵ Apart from such isolated and localized studies, the use of the registers in discussions of literacy seemed to vanish, although interest in the registers themselves did not.

The massive task of transferring all of the data from all of the registers into publishable form was undertaken by the Phillimore Society from the 1890s through to completion by the early 1950s.²⁶ The transferred information included printed versions of names and indications of where a mark had been made. This meant quantitative work using the registers could take place, in a way that had never been possible before. Additionally, local and county government re-organizations meant that many registers passed from the inheritor bodies of the parish councils (the old rural and district councils) and into the safe keeping of larger metropolitan collections or amalgamated and enlarged County library services. This consolidation of the original sources meant access to otherwise dispersed registers was made much easier. A further development arose with the transfer of photographic facsimiles of the registers onto microfiche from the late 1970s onwards. The post-war period therefore was one in which there was a transformation of the original sources for use by historians in terms of access and initial recording. Yet initially, during the post-war period, the dominant strand in historical interest in literacy studies came through a variety of qualitative approaches rather than quantitative ones. R.K. Webb's pioneering study of working class readers (1955²⁷) leant heavily upon bibliographical descriptive traditions. He dismisses the systematic use of parish register signatures thus:

..they are faulty indices....a number of objections can be brought against equating ability to read with ability to write, not the least of which is the disparity in the facilities for learning and using the two skills.²⁸

Webb prefers to rely instead upon:

Reports of inspectors, testimony in Parliamentary investigations, and enquiries by the new Statistical Societies provide better guides, though samples are small and common denominators non-existent.²⁹

This 'qualitative' approach is to be found again in the works of Richard Altick (1957) and Victor Neuberg (1971), two historians who exemplify an essentially bibliographic approach characterized by a primary concern with physical qualities of the sources and the circumstances of their publication. A typical passage in such a work would include several detailed descriptions of sources (books) placed one after the other, followed by little if any comment. Neuberg's (1971) account of Chapbooks for example, follows this pattern. The citations are linked thematically or associatively so that the groups of similar types of document cohere in generic terms, rather than within the framework of a developing historical argument. This approach persists such as within the work of David Vincent (1989) who produces narratives in which thematically connected sources, often decades apart in provenance and regionally separated are placed into a sequence when historically they could have had little or no actual link.³⁰ Vincent does however combine critical examination of registers with his main autobiographical sources. For example, he examines the impact of growing literacy (based upon signature evidence) upon family authority and cohesion in the three generations prior to the beginning of the twentieth century, adopting a longitudinal approach to the figures. Vincent, very much building upon the work of Stephens' regionalized survey, produced a thematic contextualization of the cumulative knowledge about literacy rates that had previously been derived from the parish registers. In the same way that Stephens' work reflected important contemporary concerns within education, so too with Vincent, whose chapter headings read like a list of issues that were being debated between government, the educational establishment, employers, cultural commentators and others such as the trades unions. Vincent explores the meanings of literacy for employed workers, the requirements of employers within developing and changing industrial and commercial realities, the extent to which transference of literacy was something achieved through formal schooling agencies or through direct experience of

training at work, the role of the family and domestic settings for forming attitudes towards learning and literacy, and the effect of the mass media upon general cultural levels.

At the heart of all of these debates from conservatively minded thinkers in the 1980s, was the notion that falling standards were the product of progressivist liberal ideas and practices of teachers and other educationists, which had been responsible for all manner of social ills. Conservative ideologues such as Geoffrey Bantock and Rhodes Boyson who were grouped around the *Black Papers*, argued for a return to traditional literacy and numeracy practices as presumed to have existed in their idealized post-Victorian world. They felt that a number of social benefits would arise if there was a return to past orthodoxies. Vincent's socio-historical examination of the social and historical development of literacy practices stands as a major riposte to such ideas, as he shows the complexity and subtleties of impact and influence over time.³¹

A different critical edge to this 'qualitative' tradition arrived with the work of Raymond Williams whose *Culture and Society* and *The Long Revolution* identified the growth of popular literacy and the emergence of a mass reading public as an agency for change rather than as something which merely reflected change.³² Williams' work developed a critical framework in which historical literacy studies could be considered. Therefore by the early 1960s there was a rich and varied field of historically oriented studies of literacy and related fields such as communication, writing, reading, publishing and their significance at different points in time. Yet it was at this juncture that a second 'school' of quantitatively oriented historians of literacy emerged whose work relied heavily upon their use of parish marriage register evidence.

An important shift in direction within the field arose in 1964 with the use once more, after many years absence, of local registers in a major paper by Lawrence Stone noteworthy for being the first since Sargant's 1868 article to base his argument upon statistics derived from the registers.³³ Stone's concern was to identify whether there were discernable leaps in literacy at key points during the early modern period. His use of quantitative evidence to underpin his argument set the scene for others to follow and his intervention marked the arrival of social and economic historians who mounted a distinct methodological challenge to the post-war 'qualitative' current that had been triggered by the documentary based work of R.K. Webb, Nicolas Hans and Brian Simon.³⁴ This shift was not merely to be one of preferred methodology, but also one of critical and academic orientation, as the new school of quantitative empiricists reflected the major policy concerns of governments of the time. Stone is concerned with trends, developments,

changes over time, causes, the impacts of schooling and teaching, degrees of retention of learning and the influence of religion upon education. He seeks to describe such things through measurement. R.S. Schofield who worked from the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure extended Stone's initiative in 1968. His title reflected the methodological and critical orientation of this new school – "The Measurement of Literacy in Pre-Industrial England". For Schofield there is a need to identify a *direct* measure rather than sources which essentially record people's opinions. Despite his ambitions towards statistical precision Schofield recognizes that signatures in being :

..a measure based on the ability to sign probably overestimates the number able to write, underestimates the number able to read at an elementary level, and gives a fair indication of the number able to read fluently.³⁵

One of the active concerns of the Cambridge HPSS group which Schofield carried into his work was whether there was a link between social and cultural factors and economic growth. This is made explicit in his 1973 paper on 'Dimensions of Illiteracy 1750-1850'. But Schofield's conclusions are controversial, as he argues that the reduction in illiteracy in the nineteenth century was more a reflection of cultural change brought about by economic growth, than as one of the causes of economic growth. Yet he still ascribes a powerful indirect effect upon the whole society of declining illiteracy.³⁶ Such concerns, raised within an historical discourse reflect those of educationists and politicians about the direct and indirect benefits of schooling in the period following the raising of the school leaving age to 16 from 1972, when questions were being asked about whether extending compulsory schooling brought any direct educational benefits. Schofield identifies himself as a sceptic in this matter. One critical difficulty which Schofield faces is the lack of differentiated samples within the data he is using. So, for example, he cannot estimate growth figures for the numbers of specialized technicians and engineers and so is in no position to assess whether certain *types* and *levels* of literacy exerted more or less influence upon wider social trends. Despite the important and influential critical contributions of key figures like Williams into the debate, quantitatively oriented, economic historians persisted in conceptualizing literacy as a somewhat unproblematic phenomenon, preferring instead to use a simplistic definition which enabled them to remain within a paradigm that took little account of changing ideas of what literacy was.³⁷

The work of Michael Sanderson (1972) examined several critical issues and was presented as a response to Lawrence Stone's earlier work in particular. Sanderson's principal contention was that early industrialization (in the Lancashire textile industry) required less literacy and consequently acted as a force to reduce average literacy levels. His conclusion, using the register signature evidence, that the eventual rise in average literacy rates is recorded in the 1830s registers because of the earlier growth of effective Sunday Schools across the county and then the growth of influence of the British Society Schools, suggests that economic forces alone do not act as determinants of cultural change. With Stone, Sanderson and Schofield the critical issues concerning the use of the parish registers which had led others in the post-war period to either dismiss or ignore them, were given less importance because, as a source they offered certain uniquely useful qualities. They were direct evidence, uniformly obtained and maintained, and were available (almost) across an entire population. They were also cumulative, thus allowing for studies over time. Additionally, the records improved at certain points (such as in 1754 and 1837) making them progressively more reliable. Broad trends could be identified by correlating information across decades and these could be used alongside other information such as the introduction of the Revised Code in 1862 or the advent of compulsory elementary schooling in 1880.³⁸ Sanderson, for example, combines the use of signature evidence with several other types of source such as the Lancaster Charity School registers from 1770 to 1816 for his discussion of the link between education and social mobility.³⁹

Sanderson's challenging conclusions regarding social mobility might ostensibly be focussed upon the early industrial context within a county of England (Lancashire), but they are inescapably at the same time, directed towards the wider public debate about the extent to which investment in education leads towards the realization of greater social mobility. This theme was a central political and policy issue at the time that Sanderson was writing, especially for the Labour Party and its governments of the period.⁴⁰ Labour justified expanding spending on schooling and further and higher education on the premise that widening educational opportunities created a level playing field for social mobility. Sanderson's section IV, suggests that the stable networks of social interaction within traditional economies are better suited for effective upward social mobility, than are rapidly expanding and changing social networks characteristic of industrializing economies.⁴¹ The use of 'direct' sources and the objectivist style adopted by an historian like Sanderson does little to obscure the way in which his work remained rooted within the educational discourses which surrounded him at the time of writing.

A major feature of this quantitative economic historical writing was the way it positioned itself as 'social science', as economic history, factually based and subject to verification. It claimed a degree of authority and thus established a critical relationship to the documentary-based tradition. As such not only the findings, but the research style assumed ascendancy within historical literacy studies. The epitome of this research style and method came in 1987 with the publication of W.B. Stephens comprehensive survey of the complete registers (surviving ones ⁴²), in a definitive analysis of literacy trends between the 1830s and the 1870s – the period from the first Grants in Aid via the Treasury, to the passing of the Elementary Education Act which established elected School Boards in England and Wales. But Stephens was building upon earlier critical forays into the field by historians such as R.S. Schofield who identified literacy as being a key cultural component in social and economic development by drawing attention to the correlation between the rise in literacy (based upon signature evidence) and economic growth.⁴³ The breakthrough in Stephens' work came with the quality of local detail he incorporated into his account of the trends found within the data. His movement from the national to regional and local, taking into account sub-areas within officially designated parish boundaries, opened the door for much more differentiated and subtle readings of the figures. One example of how he added to the basic statistics gleaned from registers was with the inclusion of discussions about the characteristics of local trades and skills. On page 221⁴⁴ for example Stephens considers the impact of changes in the lace industry from the 1840s to 1860s on children's ability to take advantage of schooling. The work of Stephens viewed from a distance of nearly a quarter of a century, raises a number of issues.

Is he arguing implicitly that targeted educational interventions in locations of most need, is what is required? His overall conclusions would support this as he says local variations and circumstances often over-ride attempts of a national character to effect general change. Such a view, although argued through the medium of comparative local history, ties in closely with contemporaneous debates within government about creating a statistically rigorous mechanism for identifying locally failing schools and then establishing a legal framework to enable direct intervention to achieve change when it was deemed necessary. Some five years later in 1992, the Education (Schools) Act established the Office of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools in England, also known as the Office for Standards in Education whose chief purpose could be seen to be to redress the very problems that Stephens identified within an historical period. Stephens remains critically cautious though about the generalizability of findings derived from purely statistical sources. It is worth quoting at length from his conclusion:⁴⁵

...what is now required is further investigation into the more subtle implications of literacy in the past. How significant was reading literacy as opposed to writing literacy? Why was literacy sought? What use was it actually put to – in work and in other aspects of life? How did it affect social, political, gender and family relationships? Was it related to family structures, to social or spatial mobility? As far as informal learning is concerned, how exactly was it transmitted? How was it affected by different teaching styles, school organization or curricular content? How important were different degrees of literacy? And in all these aspects to what extent and why were there geographical, chronological, class or occupational differences?

Despite basing the bulk of his study upon the register evidence Stephens clearly and explicitly makes no claim to having produced complete or definitive accounts. He almost positions himself in the Lockean position of being the philosophical under-labourer providing a solid platform for future qualitative work to commence.⁴⁶

The significance of the work by Stephens is that it shows that there is no necessary opposition between quantitatively-based and qualitative approaches. His argument that one approach may lay the basis for other approaches is persuasive. In the quantitative tradition, both nineteenth and twentieth century representatives are notable for the extent to which their apparent searching for objective facts to describe literacy trends, were actually informed by a range of contemporary social concerns. The existence of online versions of the Phillimore materials, plus their increasing accessibility in local libraries in microfiche form, now makes detailed local studies of some aspects of literacy possible in a way that could not be achieved before. Additionally, digitized reproductions of original register pages offer opportunities for textual examination of these sources.

Future historical research will need to take account of the altered critical landscape which has exploded conceptions of 'literacy' described by Raymond Williams as appearing "in its contemporary use, so simple," or when it appears in tandem with another concept such as the term 'basic'.⁴⁷ Future work will need to reorient itself towards a conception of literacy as being socially and historically situated, multifaceted and concerned with communicative practices. These practices will need to be viewed alongside other and varied uses and forms of the spoken language. How did the main historians working within the quantitative tradition conceptualize the term literacy itself as they sought to identify trends across decades?

Beginning with papers by R.S. Schofield and Lawrence Stone in 1968, the debate sought to understand what social, political, economic and cultural forces contributed towards the emergence of mass and eventually, universal literacy. Schofield, whose early paper appeared in a primarily anthropological rather than historical collection, speaks of a “diffusion of literary skills” and equates literacy with ‘reading’. He describes “levels” of literacy. Although Schofield reveals an awareness of the imprecision that exists in his use of the term literacy, nowhere does he follow these concerns through. The concept therefore is presented by Schofield as obvious and taken for granted, not requiring discussion, which is surprising, as the concept itself was then (1968) still a relatively new one. Within Schofield’s writing there is an ambiguity between the terms ‘literary’ and ‘literacy’. All that Schofield describes of literacy are unspecified skill levels and he omits to mention other characteristics. There is no consideration of what literacy might have meant or have referred to during the historical periods he is covering. It is an ahistorical category.

Lawrence Stone is more precise than Schofield, offering the reader an idea of “basic literacy” (p.69) and explicitly limiting himself to consideration of “the most basic forms of literacy” (p.70) which he describes as being “the capacity to read a little and to sign one’s name, which was the most that the poor could aspire to” (p.70).⁴⁸ Yet, elsewhere, Stone broadens out his understanding by including ideas of literacy being an attribute as well as a skill – “even literacy was often technically non-functional, for it was not of much practical use to the eighteenth and early nineteenth century farm labourer. But it...conferred status” (p.97). Almost as if he is aware that he is straying into more complex territory, Stone switches back to his original limited focus to inform the reader, “Throughout this paper the word ‘literacy’ should be understood to mean the capacity to sign one’s name, which, for periods before the nineteenth century is nearly all we know or indeed are ever likely to know in the future” (p.98). Here Stone excludes the activity or skill of reading from his operative definition and, as if to mirror his shrinking of the possible scope of the concept, makes what for an historian, is a remarkable statement about future possibilities for historical enquiry. Possibly sensing the difficulties he has found himself in, Stone attempts a differentiation between “the capacity to sign one’s name – ‘alphabetism’ - and true literacy, that is the ability to use the written word as a means of communication” (p. 98). Reading as a skill, capacity, activity, inclination, practice or attribute is once more excluded from the operative definition.

What emerges from a close inspection of the way that Schofield and Stone use the term, is that neither is comfortable with a culturally or philosophically framed discussion about their lead concept. When reading their work we remain firmly within the restricted Lancastrian

sense of basic elements. The significance of this is that such a constricted use of the concept means that their focus is equally limited to that which can be measured using available signature evidence. As we can only presume that this was their intention, we can see here an example of the proverbial sources tail wagging the researcher dog, rather than the other way round. This explains how it was possible for Stone, during what can be described as his quantitative turn, to come to perceive the possibilities for future discovery and understanding in such narrow terms.

The debate that these two triggered in 1968 was continued in 1972, by Michael Sanderson, another key economic historian with an interest in assessing the impact of schooling upon the wider society.⁴⁹ Although Sanderson does not actually offer a definition of his key term there are the beginnings of an exploration of wider possibilities as (from p. 93) he differentiates between ‘social’ and ‘productive’ levels of investment in literacy. The ‘productive’ investment arises essentially from the development of usable skills when undertaking certain types of work. The notion of ‘social’ investment implies a sense of literacy as pertaining to a state of mind or social and psychological orientation. Literacy is cast as something which can exert a formative influence upon personal behaviour. Regrettably, this suggestive exploration is not pursued as Sanderson proceeds to re-focus upon quantitative data sets relating to occupational (and hence social) mobility.

Thomas Laqueur’s biting attack against Sanderson’s 1972 paper may have raised a few eyebrows from the tone of its commentary, but it added nothing to an historical understanding of the meaning of the concept of literacy.⁵⁰ However, in another paper published in 1976, Laqueur echoes the ambiguity of Schofield by interchangeable uses of ‘literary’ and ‘literacy’ but corrects the somewhat artificial limitations of Stone’s definition, by defining literacy as “an ability to read but to a lesser extent to write”.⁵¹ Laqueur conceives of literacy as a form of social technology arguing that there exists a sort of cultural force which increasingly touches people in all areas of their lives. Literacy is cast as being a varied set of skills which enable effective functioning in a variety of social contexts. Here, Laqueur reveals signs of having absorbed influences from the perspectives of cultural historians such as Raymond Williams and Richard Hoggart who explored literacy in political and social terms. A key development within Laqueur’s work lies in the way he argues that literacy arises from and is therefore affected by developments within certain social and cultural settings. Laqueur also begins a discussion about the interaction between these settings. Literacy ceases to be seen as something which is essentially simple and unproblematic but rather as something which exists in relation to other social and cultural phenomena (p. 261).

The monumental study by W.B. Stephens published in 1987 limited itself to an operative definition of literacy that was consistent with the source base he was using throughout, namely the parish marriage registers.⁵² For Stephens therefore 'literacy' meant the ability to sign one's own name. He is nevertheless acutely aware of the limitations of such a narrowing of definition and stresses in his conclusion that there remain many other dimensions and aspects of literacy to be explored.⁵³ We can therefore see that during the twenty year span of quantitatively focussed historical research about literacy rates, there was at best some confusion about meaning and at worst, a tendency to uncritically oversimplify a phenomenon for the sake of methodological consistency. With the exception of Thomas Laqueur, there is an uncritical acceptance of the simplified understanding which draws from the discourse traditions sparked by Joseph Lancaster and which is reinforced through the almost exclusive concentration upon the 3Rs in thousands of schools that were established during the first four decades of the nineteenth century. These economic historians uncritically adopt the late-nineteenth century definition of the term which, by the middle of the twentieth century had become just one amongst a range of possible meanings that were current and in popular use. These economic historians operating within a quantitative research paradigm and using signature evidence by and large do not historicise literacy even though it is the key concept and focal point for their research. The consequence of this was that historical literacy studies in Britain developed a narrower focus than they might have done.

Even the cross-national scope of Harvey Graff's research does not prevent his work from operating within the same paradigm of defining 'literacy' in terms of limited basic skills and seeking to identify its presence through quantifiable and measurable data sets.⁵⁴ To an extent, literacy studies became trapped within an economic paradigm, operating as a sub-theme within social history. One of the most complex features of human activities and cultural formations – literacy - become reduced instead to 'simple basic skills' and the elementary ability to read and write. But the most curious feature of all about this trend which created and occupied a significant cultural space during the 1960s to 1980s, was that it happened during a period when commonly accepted ideas about what literacy actually was fragmented.

One major influencing factor upon this was the impact of mass electronic means of communication and another, the emergence of new information technologies. A further influence was the emergence of various strands of historicised critical theory which in different ways fused aspects of political, linguistic and cultural thought. The Lancastrian sense of literacy which had become established in English common sense usage from the 1880s onwards began to be problematized and questioned much earlier than 1968 when

Schofield provoked what was to become a sustained tradition of quantitative enquiry. When placed against the backdrop of educational and political events in 1968, the Schofield/Stone debate seems curiously behind the times. Although this discussion has identified and traced two important traditions of using parish registers as evidence for literacy studies and considered the move towards a linguistic and cultural approach to historical literacy studies, a detailed etymological investigation into the origins and growth of literacy as a concept remains to be undertaken. What follows is an initial step in that direction. This is important within the present thesis because it will show how such a taken-for-granted concept itself has a varied and contested history.

The emergence of 'literacy' as a concept

We now move forward to examine in detail how '*literacy*' as a term in English emerged and entered the language. The term 'literacy' does not occur in eighteenth century dictionaries for the very simple reason that as a word, it had not yet been coined. This might seem strange to modern readers for whom the twin pillars of literacy and numeracy have appeared to occupy a central position within discourses centred around schooling. Strange as it may seem, the term as used nowadays, did not enter common usage until the 1880s and then it was in the USA rather than in Britain.⁵⁵ This is a slightly earlier date than that advanced by Maxine Burton (2003) who identifies early twentieth century occurrences of the term in dictionaries.⁵⁶ Despite Burton's extensive search through public and literary documents she concludes that, " 'Literate' and 'literacy' were not in use in the nineteenth century and there are certainly no instances of these terms in my data".⁵⁷ When confronted with such a situation, cultural and linguistic historians often resort to discovering whether an equivalent concept and formulation existed to describe something, which to modern generations seems to be so fundamental, common, necessary, and taken for granted within our educational discourses. The principal way of doing this is to examine cognate terms to see if past usage offers a key to unlocking how such a central concept within educational discourse today was spoken about in the absence of the defining concept itself. The terms 'literate' and 'illiterate' will be a useful place to begin.⁵⁸ These terms, and particularly 'literate', contrary to Burton's assertion, exist in Thomas Dyche's 1735, *A New General English Dictionary* which was to go through eighteen editions up to 1794. Despite Dyche's name being attached, the work was more than likely undertaken by Thomas Pardon who wanted to profit from the immense reputation

attached to Dyche's name. This arose from his previous 1702, *Guide to the English Tongue*, which had offered correct pronunciation rather than definitions of so called 'hard words'. The Dyche/Pardon definitions are as follows:

Illiterate (A) ignorant, unlearned, unskilful

(p. 412. 1740 3rd Ed.)

Literate (A) learned, or well-skilled in learning, especially languages

(p. 479. 1740)

Literature (S) Learning or skill in sciences, especially languages

(p. 479. 1740)

The first thing to strike a modern reader is the differences in meanings from the early eighteenth century to those accepted in more recent times. Specific references to technical aspects of the skills of reading and writing are missing altogether. There is however a hint of later usage in the notion of a literate person being someone who was well-read. The languages referred to are Latin and Greek with possibly Hebrew. They do not refer to modern vernaculars such as German, French, Spanish, Italian or indeed English. To be illiterate therefore is to have not acquired classical learning, whereas its opposite was to have acquired a degree of learning as well as skill. This suggests that within contemporaneous usage, notions of being literate were also linked to being able to demonstrate one's learning.

Prior to the Dyche/Pardon dictionary, Nathaniel Bailey published his *Universal Etymological Dictionary* in 1721. This was to be substantially updated in 1731 with the addition of hundreds of illustrative woodblocks. Bailey's outsold and contained 10,000 more headwords than Johnson's Dictionary. Not only was it the most comprehensive, but it also included in later editions, historical sources alongside definitions for words to keep pace with Johnson. In keeping with the times, a considerable number of entries were taken directly from Chamber's *Cyclopaedia, Or, An Universal Dictionary of the Arts and Sciences* which was first published in 1728. Bailey has the following:

Illiterate (Illiteratus, L) which has little or no knowledge of letters, unlearned,

(p. 449. 1724 1st. ed)

Illiterateness (of illiteratus, L) unlearnedness.

(p. 449. 1724)

Literate (Literatus, L) learned, skilled in letters (p. 518. 1724)

The idea that was to be taken up later during the nineteenth century of someone not knowing their letters, is present here. But before this could happen, a shift of meaning and use of the term *letters* was necessary, stripped of its associations with classical scholarship. Only then could the modern usage emerge. Bailey's and Dyche's dictionaries are worth examining in edition series as the term 'literacy' does not appear in successive editions, such as the Bailey edited by James Buchanan in 1760 which consciously sought to upstage the more recent Johnson and which borrowed liberally from it. It is unlikely therefore that the term 'literacy' was in general use but was somehow missed by competing lexicographers.

If we switch attention to a lexicographer who was attuned consciously to wider reading publics and to the spread of personal reading, might we find a different emphasis in definition and usage? John Wesley's 1753, *The Complete English Dictionary* is far from comprehensive, containing just 144 pages, but it has historic importance being the first 'pocket' dictionary with entries (generally) selected for plainness and ordinariness. Wesley offers the following:

Illiterate,	unlearned	p. 67 (1753 ed.)
Literate,	learned	p. 82 (1753 ed.)
Literature,	learning	p. 82 (1753 ed.)

Interestingly Wesley fails to include definitions for the words 'Read' or 'Reading' where they might have appeared (p. 112, 1753 ed.) Despite these limitations, Wesley in typically immodest fashion, felt able to recommend his work in the following terms: "The Author assures you, he thinks this is the best English dictionary in the World".⁵⁹

Dictionary definitions are of course quite limited when searching for historical usage as they have a tendency to reflect expressions and meanings that have become established some time earlier, rather than reflecting emerging and more recent usage. Therefore it is well to identify examples of actual uses of key terms if we wish to track shifting meanings across time. In 1757 James Buchanan wrote:⁶⁰

The manner of accenting, 'tis true, is pretty uniform amongst the learned and polite part of the nation; but the pronunciation of a great many, and especially of the illiterate, is in most parts woefully grating and discordant, and differs so much from the pure and proper idiom of English pronunciation, that the greatest part of it cannot be represented in writing...

Buchanan splices Dyche/Pardon and Bailey in his definition of illiterate – *unlearned, ignorant of letters* – (p. 210. 1757). Of note also is his definition of the term Idiot as *an Illiterate person* - (p. 209. 1757). The most intriguing feature of Buchanan’s specific use is the way that it reveals a pejorative rather than purely descriptive usage in currency by mid-century. His use also reflects the degree to which such terms are inextricably linked to ideas of social status and manners. Even more noteworthy is the way that Buchanan reflects the idea of English as having ‘a pure and proper’ form which needs teaching and standardising. This was a widespread concern as mutual intelligibility was an issue because Britain’s economy was becoming more integrated and provincial isolation was weakening.⁶¹ Allied to this concern was that with accent and pronunciation, something that will be returned to later when considering Thomas Spence’s contribution in this field

An early use of the modern sense of literate is to be found in Thomas Sheridan’s preface to his *A Complete Dictionary of the English Language*, where he writes:

The source of these abuses may be farther traced, by attentively weighing the following observation – That no illiterate man ever uses false emphases, tones or stops, in speaking; it is only the literate, those that have learned to read, that can fall into errors of that sort.⁶²

By the end of the century a distinctively new use was emerging, linking ideas of literacy to the *ability to read* rather than to notions of *being read in the classics* – such as with the expression of being a *learned person*. The social shift that underpins such a lexical shift was the emergence of hundreds of thousands of urban readers of all classes, many of whom were dissenters leading morally exemplary lives, and often being prosperous, self-educated business people, who could not easily fall into the earlier prejudicial notions as exemplified by Buchanan’s definition of some three decades earlier. Another revealing aspect of Sheridan’s use is the implication that authentic English is to be found within common speech rather than within certain artificial and arcane uses prevailing amongst over-educated elites. Although Sheridan uses the term ‘literate’ as cited here, in his preface, he does not include it as a headword within the main body of the dictionary. He does however include ‘illiterate’ as meaning *Unlettered, untaught, unlearned*.⁶³ The notion of literacy being linked to having been taught is emerging with the notion of being ‘learned’ in a classical sense now being offered as one sense only amongst other meanings. The importance of Sheridan’s dictionary was that it

was revised and became the first substantial dictionary to be published in America (1806) becoming established before Webster, and thus exerting a major influence in the second largest English speaking community in the world.

It would be perverse not to include a reference to Johnson within this brief survey of the shift of meaning of one of the central concepts of this study during the eighteenth century. In Johnson's Preface to his famous *Dictionary* (1755) he writes of the way that words have a habit of following changing uses with both the written (published) and spoken language exerting influence:

The tropes of poetry will make hourly encroachments, and the metaphorical will become the current sense: pronunciation will be varied by levity or ignorance, and the pen must at length comply with the tongue; illiterate writers will at one time or other, by publick infatuation, rise into renown, who, not knowing the original import of words, will use them with colloquial licentiousness, confound distinction and forget propriety.⁶⁴

Here we see the increasingly influential commentator on linguistic values using the distinct sense of the original word precisely without any pun intended – '*illiterate writers*'. Within two generations of Johnson's death the phrase '*illiterate writers*' would have jarred to the eye of a reader as the sense of what literateness was, began to change. By the time of the onset of universal primary schooling in the 1870s, it would have been a contradiction in terms presaging the need for a new term to be coined to encapsulate a rising idea.

Yet in the mid 1750s such a phrase made sense. If we jump ahead to the 1860s we can see for example in the Collins' *Illustrated National Pronouncing Dictionary* (1868), which used Webster as its base for headwords, that the definition provided in the early eighteenth century by Dyche and Bailey survived virtually untouched, despite seemingly revolutionary changes in schooling, mass reading and communications technology in the century following Johnson's *Dictionary*. 'Literacy' is still not included as a headword which indeed remained the case up to the end of the nineteenth century such as in Skeat's *Etymological Dictionary of the English Language* in 1882 which was republished in revised editions well into the twentieth century. In the 1901 edition of Skeat 'Literacy' does not appear.

After initial currency within educational circles on the eastern seaboard of the USA in the 1880s, the term makes an appearance in Britain through the pages of the *Athanaeum* in 1893 in a review about the history of Scottish education. "It was for Mr. Edgar to trace the gradual

progress in Scotland from illiteracy to literacy”.⁶⁵ The antithetical terms are at last used descriptively together in a review piece concerning a social trend.

The term ‘literacy’ first arises to describe the condition of being familiar with the classics and, in particular, certain rhetorical conventions. A literate person was clearly marked out by the nature of *his* speech (the gendered description is intentional) which would imitate and draw upon models from classical writers such as Horace. A literate person was therefore recognised by others who had acquired a similar set of accomplishments enabling them to participate in the social discourse patterns distinctive of the social elite – being a member of the *literati*. The knowledge and skills were acquired during training within a limited number of ‘great schools’ rather than from study within grammar schools where a facility with written Latin was acquired – essentially training for professional functionaries. The term ‘illiteracy’ arises in English dictionaries before that of ‘literacy’. The term ‘literacy’ is coined and filters into use during a period when the school-based activities of reading and writing are subject to external inspection against standards and within a system where the outputs of teachers and pupils were measured for the purposes of determining resource allocations to schools. From the outset therefore, the term carried certain normative loadings.

This brief survey of definitions and uses suggests that Burton was correct when she identified the emergence of the term in the period following the payment-by-results political discourse of the late nineteenth century. However one could take issue with her suggestion that negative, or ‘stigmatic’ senses did not exist until later in the nineteenth century, as we saw with Buchanan as early as 1757 that a pejorative use was in currency. Similarly it appears that the association of the term ‘illiterate’ with simply not being able to read or write did appear earlier than Burton suggests, as evidenced through Thomas Sheridan’s use of the term in the 1780s.⁶⁶ Therefore ahistorical uses of the term within history writing run the risk of imposing modern assumptions onto an earlier period.

The Lancastrian shift

An historic shift in thinking about the nature of reading and writing took place as a direct result of the thought and propaganda of Joseph Lancaster working from his base in south London at Borough Road. Reflecting utilitarian principles and applying the social technologies of early factories to schooling, Lancaster stressed the cost-effectiveness of his ‘invention’ – a monitorial system for the simultaneous teaching of basic and graded reading, writing and ciphering or arithmetic.⁶⁷ Lancaster says of his ‘invention’

By the usual method of teaching to write, the art of writing is totally distinct from reading or spelling. On the new plan, spelling and writing are connected, and equally blended with reading.⁶⁸

For the times, this was a major innovation because within dominant discourses concerning the teaching of the poor, writing was often frowned upon. It is, for example, remarkable how little on the issue is written about by Hannah More or Sarah Trimmer. The bridge that Lancaster used to circumvent religiously and politically motivated concerns about the dangers of teaching the poor to write is to argue in the language of modern utilitarianism, stressing explicitly the cheapness of his methods in terms of materials, management and training costs. Lancaster goes as far as to reassure potential sponsors that his system does not allow space for uncontrolled writing or indeed reading:

The eighth class to be a selection from the best readers in the seventh; they may be admitted to the use of books, for the improvement of their minds, which other classes are not allowed; on this subject more will be said in the sequel.⁶⁹

Lancaster's direct influence was to permanently affect how others viewed the acquisition of reading and writing.⁷⁰ Firstly, he argued and demonstrated how it made sense for both to be taught at the same time. Secondly he stressed the ease with which basic elements of both could be taught effectively from a very young age. Thirdly, he demonstrated that success could be achieved by breaking down the elements of reading with writing into small and manageable basic units. Fourthly, he carefully and systematically graded the lessons which were delivered in tiered class groupings. These tiered groupings defined levels of attainment. By explicitly excluding all other subjects, schooling for the young became synonymous with learning basic elements of literacy and numeracy. As this general approach towards the teaching and learning of reading *with* writing became the universal standard within the monitorial systems adopted within both the British and Foreign and National Society schools, by the mid-century they had acquired an almost universal currency as the country moved in stages towards universal schooling for the young. Through the spread of schooling this essentially utilitarian notion of what reading and writing (and number) were, became embedded as part of the common shared experience of most people when children across the country.

Lancaster's speaking and sponsorship tours were almost Wesleyan in character, sometimes with hundreds in attendance and with a subscription for a new school often being raised at that very meeting, along with a management committee also elected there and then. Amongst the hundreds in attendance would be representatives from local clerical and gentry elites. His speech and writing were cast in exaggeratedly simplified, plain, non-technical and secularised English which was very easy to receive and recall something that reflected his Quaker background. Despite growing concerns about the non-denominational purpose of his plans and practice, Lancaster nevertheless helped to create a distinctly modern way of talking about reading and writing in relation to schooling which receives less attention from scholars than the religious, financial and personal controversies in which he became embroiled.⁷¹ This system and, more importantly, manner of talking about the practicalities of delivering schooling to the children of the poor quickly spread across the Atlantic, through the colonies and into Europe and thus became a major influence upon the schooling systems within which re-defined notions of literacy were to emerge by the end of the nineteenth century. One example of a contemporaneous event which influenced this new critical discourse was the intersecting military, political and educational interests arising from the realisation during the Boer conflict of the poor health and educational levels of British troops. This shift was a specifically nineteenth century phenomenon and the newly coined term 'literacy' arises within a reshaped educational discourse which spread across national boundaries, often responding to shared global trends.

Therefore considerable care needs to be taken when attempting to produce an account of an educational and cultural developments during the eighteenth century and uncritically adopting a late nineteenth century term, which was profoundly influenced by the legacy of utilitarian notions of schooling and learning. When the term 'literacy' first came into wide use it referred to something that did not exist in the same form and social/educational contexts before the advent of Lancastrian, utilitarian schooling, yet despite this most historians of literacy have used the term anachronistically.

New directions in literacy studies

The turning point historically for the use of the term 'literacy' within British educational and cultural discourse came with the 1957 publication of Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy*, which was subtitled *Aspects of working-class life with special reference to publications and entertainments*. He examines in great detail (often in an essentially literary and autobiographical manner) the meanings that lie behind patterns of consumption of popular magazines, novels and music. For Hoggart, working class life is richly textured, changing and contested, and far from being barren in terms of active consumption of reading materials. Nevertheless the picture he draws of the working class is almost devoid of establishment concepts of the literacy consumption that was then prevalent amongst the middle and upper classes. Literacy is firmly re-rooted in a cultural world virtually unknown to those who socially exist outside of its boundaries.

The key effect of Hoggart's book was to draw attention to the significance of working class literacy practices however poor he may have felt were the cultural products being consumed. Although Hoggart focussed especially upon popular publications he stressed several times that his critique "would apply also to the tendencies encouraged by the cinema, sound broadcasting and television (particularly when these are commercially sponsored), and large-scale advertising".⁷² Despite his negative and normative evaluation of mass working-class literacy practices and products, Hoggart nevertheless implied that the concept of literacy can apply to activities other than the reading of printed texts. The bridging concept he introduced is that of 'consumption'. Since this critical breakthrough it became easier to think in terms of literacy as describing a spectrum of skills and activities including the practices of reading and writing, but not exclusively so.⁷³ This approach had been prefigured, to some extent by R.K. Webb's 1955 *The English Working Class Reader* which placed reading, literacy and schooling within political and industrial contexts and indeed argues the case that such cultural activity contributed towards the emergence of class consciousness.⁷⁴ Literacy is seen not as a set of fixed skills but instead, as a socially located practice although not in so many words. Part of my purpose here is to place significant British writers on this topic into a broader tradition of concern and enquiry which as I have shown, stretches back to at least the beginnings of the eighteenth century.

From the foregoing survey of how literacy as a concept was used by economic historians, we can see that for them it was essentially a non-problematic category – a simply identifiable set of specific skills which can be acquired through elementary forms of repetitive schooling.⁷⁵ Hoggart showed that 'literacy' was being appropriated and turned towards various forms of personal recreation and self-gratification. Hoggart also revealed how such

patterns of the use of literacy had character-defining consequences as people identified who they were by the very nature of the radio programmes, television shows, magazines and newspapers they consumed. The implication of this critical breakthrough was that one now had to consider various types of literacy. This insight was given critical depth when Raymond Williams moved beyond the canon of English literary and dramatic figures and spoke about origins and developments of ‘popular’ culture exposing varying uses and understandings of literacy, some of which stretched far beyond the intentions and limited scope offered through schooling experiences. Williams detected a need to shift from literary studies towards literacy studies especially through a re-evaluation of the importance of understanding the reading public with a focus upon “The complex interaction of oral and written and written-for-oral forms which run through our cultural history...”⁷⁶

During the same period in France, Roland Barthes was consolidating and publishing a collection of earlier magazine articles as ‘Mythologies’, first published as a book in 1955, in which social action was rendered as textuality. This critical stance ushered in the possibility of discussing *readings* (plural) and placed literacy as merely one mode of communicative social action. Subsequent educational, sociological, linguistic, psychological and cultural discourse about literacy has emphasised complexity and diversity and for many decades has rejected the received notions of literacy as being mostly just about a set of simple basic skills. However, such notions remain consensually understood and attempts by British governments in the two decades spanning the twentieth and twenty first centuries have sought to retain – against all odds – the vestiges of an approach which is based upon breaking down various elements of reading and writing and seeking to measure performance of children as young as five years old. This reaction occurs during a period when new literacies and communicative competencies are required around web-based and interactive online forms of communication.

Orality and literacy

Having discussed in depth the history of the term literacy and how it has been used within historical studies we now consider the key question of the relationship between oracy and literacy which in the modern era have been perceived by many as a binary rather than being aspects of complex communicative practices. Clanchy (1979) has shown that culture in Britain, although conveyed predominantly through oral communicative practices for the bulk of the population, has been shaped by the literate practices of ruling elites for centuries.⁷⁷ Despite the class and political dominance of literate forms of practice throughout the society,

the orate traditions remained remarkably strong and persisted especially amongst layers of the population who were not individually or personally literate in the mechanistic sense of the term discussed above. Within literate practices the imprint of orate traditions was strongly in evidence such as in the way the grammar curriculum was delivered through recitation, repetition and disputation. The process of acquiring literacy, which in the early eighteenth century meant becoming versed in Latin and possibly Greek, focussed mainly upon gaining knowledge of rhetoric, another form of the orate/literate inter-relationship. In earlier oral/literate cultures in which literacy was confined to powerful elites and where oral practices remained dominant such as in pre-Norman Britain, one finds that the written record required verification through a recognised oral source as this source was considered real and genuine in distinction to the artificial and disembodied written source.⁷⁸ By the eighteenth century the situation had virtually reversed with the power and authority of print becoming firmly established. There will be a fuller discussion of the use of the power of print in Chapter 6 when consideration is given to how royal proclamations became transmitted and diffused throughout the wider society. The point is that the inter-relationship of orate and literate form of communication and exchange has been one of the formative agencies of social and cultural life and different periods within a time frame are often characterised by differences in the nature of the configuration between the two.

Within this study, the period being examined is characterised as being at the end of a long phase in British cultural history in which notions of literate communicative competences were still conditioned by the orate. The advent of mass printing, cheap paper, stable inks, the penny post, railways, road networks and mass schooling, transformed the society into one in which literate forms assumed a predominance that was unprecedented. Yet at the same time orate forms and practices remained surprisingly rich and re-invigorated. One of the interesting features of English eighteenth century contexts for study is the opportunities they present for examining how traditional orate social resources (or 'technologies' as Ong describes them) come into play to shape literate practices and the subsequent acquisition of a range of communicative competences by individuals. This is particularly pronounced when the social resources for literacy acquisition that modern generations have come to take for granted, such as teachers, curricula, text-books and schools, were generally only available to those with a degree of surplus income. Economic and social class considerations are therefore an essential aspect of any historicised account of literacy practices.

Walter Ong has argued, along with others such as Eisenstein that the acquisition of literacy has profound psycho-social consequences for individuals.⁷⁹ He cites the twentieth

century research findings of figures such as Luria, one of Vygotsky's collaborators, into the changes that occur once reading is acquired.⁸⁰ The impact upon an individual of being and becoming a reader appears to have been understood centuries ago, hence the proscription against the poor reading English vernacular Bibles by Henry VIII (1543) and the earlier censoring all books in English (1538). We also have evidence of the ingrained suspicion amongst land-owning gentry against labourers and peasants becoming literate stretching back to the fourteenth century Lollard movement.⁸¹ Those officially cited within the 1543 legislation were as follows:

Artificers, journeymen, serving-men under the rank of yeoman, husbandmen, labourers, and all women other than those of noble or gentle rank.⁸²

From the above we can also see that legislation in relation to literacy practices as long ago as the mid sixteenth century was intimately connected to ideas of social class and status. Attempts by successive governments in Britain and elsewhere over the centuries, to constrain, control and restrict reading and book ownership attest to the persistent awareness (at least by those who are in positions of power) of the fundamental and transformational impact that reading can have upon people. Raymond Williams' view on this aspect of the subject reflects a majority perspective within the field:

different authorities have at certain periods openly exerted their power to prevent or limit the growth of reading, or to prevent or limit the education from which it naturally follows. No issue is more central in the history of our culture, for the argument about quality and the argument about democracy are here so deeply intertwined as to appear inseparable....⁸³

Street (1995) offers a cautionary critique of this view, citing examples of the way that recent oral-based societies reveal ways of thinking and communicating in distanced and rational ways without first having had the benefits of literacy. This view, which is heavily influenced by the author's desire to respect and dignify oppressed post-colonial societies, leads Street to highlight an example drawn from research materials in the Melanesian region of the Pacific, where he shows how literacy can act to subordinate and reduce perceptions rather than expand and liberate. He makes the point that what may apply in general and across centuries within

European contexts may not be universally applicable. For Ong who cites English language authors only, the spread of literacy and the consequent modification of ‘natural’ orate practices and traditions is one of the most important events in human history, yet until the work of Sternberg, Eisenstein and McLuhan this was not as fully recognised or understood as it might have been. A major underlying assumption behind the present research project is that for centuries, people of all sorts – kings to knaves - have perceived that the acquisition of degrees of literacy produces an effect that is both important and significant. In many instances state apparatuses have operated to systematically suppress literacy amongst the poor whilst individuals have been prepared to risk burning at the stake for the sake of teaching others how to read *their* Bibles.⁸⁴ One thing Ong and subsequently others, highlight is the way that literate practices such as monopolising the recording of financial transactions, possessing the only written codex of a religious text or controlling access to family property deeds, confer power and influence over others.⁸⁵

Another key feature of Ong’s critique is his approach towards the concept of illiteracy. His contention is that non-literate societies nevertheless had communicative technologies which were highly articulated and sophisticated, enabling them to function effectively across millennia. The notion of non-literate societies being seen as ‘savage’ or ‘primitive’ he argues, completely misses the inherent qualities of communicative resources that exist. (Street seems to miss this emphasis within Ong). At no point in the present research project is it argued that somehow literate practices superseded orate ones – rather the opposite, as it is shown how the literate and orate inter-related, mutually modifying the other and then recurring in new forms. This study shows how elements of the dynamic that existed between orate and literate features of the broader culture produced quite distinctive contexts which hitherto appear not to have been fully explored within History of Education studies.

An example of the recurrence of the orate from within a predominantly literate culture was the way that the telephone enabled direct vocal communication across distances in a way that for centuries had been the primary and distinctive feature of the written as against the spoken. At a stroke the relationship between the literate and orate changed irreversibly. The remarkable universalisation of moving pictures from very early exhibitions in the 1890s to the presence of a cinema in virtually every locality by the second decade of the twentieth century, created a powerful recreational focus for rapid and concentrated reading. This arose due to the insertion of projected text between each scene to explain aspects of what was being shown. This essentially literate and visual format (albeit one that was musically accompanied) was overturned by 1927 with the exhibition of Al Jolson performing as the

Jazz Singer in Warner Brothers' vitaphoned 'talkie'. Since then, the cinema and subsequently television became as much an oral/aural, as it was a visual medium of communication exchange. Similarly, from tentative, early beginnings in the first decade of the twentieth century "broadcasting" became very widespread with the BBC being formed in Britain by 1922, and NBC (1926) and CBS (1927) in the U.S.A.⁸⁶ asserting a private corporate dominance over much earlier small-scale transmission. The orate form of radio offered a remarkable reverse in the relationship between the nineteenth century dominance of print-based forms of cultural transmission. Within the framing of the present study it is this *relationship* between the orate and the literate as it existed in specific contexts, that forms one of the principal focuses. This is viewed critically as something that has changed almost continuously over the past three centuries, rather than as some sort of broad and inevitable series of stages from the orate to the orate/literate and thence towards the literate orate and finally concluding with the triumph of the literate within which there are merely residual traces of earlier orate practices. A clearer and historically more credible way of thinking about broad historical relationships of this sort is to view both orate and literate practices operating in a continually evolving inter-relationship which thereby structures much of the communicative practices which take place within the society.

This study therefore does not seek to isolate literacy from its historically necessary inter-relationship with oracy. The combined notion of *communicative practices* is used throughout to describe instances where both (or indeed other) modes occur.

As historical communicative practices which occurred before the advent of recording of voices, cannot be heard but only read through transcripts of certain oral exchanges and through an examination of the changing forms of certain genres of writing, the present study faced a number of challenges relating to sources. Additionally, a vast majority of the incidental, day-to-day, written production of commoners was not collected or preserved so we are left with an unrepresentative sample derived in the main from elite written production.

In this chapter there has been a detailed discussion about two schools of research which were based upon the use of parish marriage registers. Both schools have exerted considerable influence upon how literacy has been perceived. For the earlier school the study takes the historiography further back than previously thus breaking new ground in historical literacy studies. The work of the second, later school is contrasted with other research trends which reflected culturally and socially informed views of literacy. The bulk of writers within this tradition were located outside of the formal discipline of history of education. This was followed by addressing some strands of research into the relationship between oracy and

literacy in order to establish that they need to be re-integrated and perceived of as essential aspects of communicative practices. It has been shown that both co-exist and that the forms in which the relationship exist produce the distinctive cultural forms of a period. Finally, this historiographical review concludes with a long-overdue etymological presentation of the origin and evolution of the term literacy itself which demonstrated that the term and its cognates have a shifting and contested history which has been affected over decades and centuries by changing social and institutional contexts of use. By highlighting what has been explored before, the chapter also throws into relief potential areas for fresh investigation. The following chapter considers some of the methodological challenges that such a new approach towards literacy studies in the eighteenth century present.

¹ The summation of the field by Richard Aldrich, writing in 1978, suggested that even then, the topic had been covered comprehensively. Aldrich identifies academic interest in historical literacy and illiteracy back to J.W. Adamson's work in 1946 on learning in Anglo Saxon times. Aldrich, R (1978) 'Literacy, Illiteracy, Semi-Literacy and Marriage Registers', *History of Education Society Bulletin*, No. 22. Historical perspectives and debates have expanded considerably since then, partly due to this contribution from Aldrich.

² For a wide-ranging survey of official records and their use in research about historical literacy rates see. Graff, H. (1987) *The Legacies of Literacy*, Indiana University Press. Chapter 6. pp. 173-260 Towards Enlightenment/Towards Modernity. The chapter assembles existing empirically based research findings for major European countries and the USA. It spends less time examining in detail the issues of modernity and enlightenment and the way that different literacies shaped both. The section on Britain (pp 230-248) relies substantially upon Roger Schofield's work with parish marriage registers.

³ Vincent, David. (1989) *Literacy and Popular Culture: England 1750-1914*, Cambridge University Press. Although Vincent's principal sources are 'literary' he nevertheless argues for a mixed methodological approach to the subject of historical literacy, and makes detailed references to earlier statistical work using the marriage registers as sources. Stephens, W.B. (1999) *Education in Britain 1750-1914*, Macmillan, London. There is less focus than one would have liked to see on the second half of the eighteenth century. The scope for a systematic examination of the registers from 1754 to 1800 and what they may tell us about literacy remains to be done. In Stephens' major work, cited below (1987), the focus really begins in the 1830s.

⁴ Contributors to *The Penny Magazine* were anonymous. On the inside of the front page were published the names of the national, regional and local committees.

⁵ Altick, R. D. (1957) *The English Common Reader. A Social History of the Mass Reading Public*. Chapter 14 Periodicals and Newspapers: 1800-1850. pp 318-437. Altick claims that a combination of cheap magazines which could escape the 4d stamp duty and the radical fervour around the Reform Act in the 1830 "turned hundreds of thousands of Englishmen into readers". (p.322). One aim of this study is to argue for an earlier date for the take-off of what Altick describes as "mass literacy". The weekly publication of Charles Dickens, *Household Words*, was hugely popular but it targeted a different social base; the lower middle class. With the arrival into the public arena of such publications we see the emergence of socially differentiated literacy practices, or in economic terms, the creation of reading markets structured according to the perceived purchasing preferences of social groups. *Victorian Sensation* by James Secord (2000, Chicago University Press) elaborates upon the way that a single work can become diffused into the society by layers of readership. The chapter *Grub Street Science* (pp. 437-70), shows how the varied forms of reproduction and reception of a single work, enabled certain ideas to become embedded into the national awareness. This thesis shows that this phenomenon was not something which arose in the nineteenth century but was present from the early eighteenth century with the publication of magazines, journals and newspapers.

⁶ Anonymous author from Cornwall *Penny Magazine*. August 1838.

⁷ *Penny Magazine*, August 1838

⁸ See Sweet, R (2004) *Antiquaries: The discovery of the past in eighteenth century Britain*. Hambledon. Ch. 3. Antiquarian Societies. pp 81-118.

⁹ *Penny Magazine*, (1838) p. 320 August 18th.

- ¹⁰ The author's entry on Intelligence in McCulloch, G. & Crook, D. (2008) *International Encyclopaedia of Education*, pp 317/8, Routledge.
- ¹¹ Ibid. Feather, J (1988) *A History of British Publishing*, Routledge. p.99.
- ¹² Black, J (2001) *The English Press: 1621 – 1861*, Sutton, Gloucestershire. pp 165-6, 178-79, 187-87.
- ¹³ Edmonds, Richard (1839) JSSL. Vol.2. No 4. pp. 198-233.
- ¹⁴ Ibid. JSSL. p. 218.
- ¹⁵ By the term 'establishment readers' is meant for those working within government departments, local authority structures, the established Anglican church, politicians and the circles of enquiring bourgeois and gentry readers who shared an interest in the social order remaining as it was.
- ¹⁶ Ibid. JSSL. (1839)
- ¹⁷ Barham, Charles (1841) JSSL. Vol. 4. No.1. pp. 34-49.
- ¹⁸ Briggs, Asa (1979) *The Age of Improvement*, Ch. 6. *Social Cleavage*. pp 286-343. Evans, E.J. (1996) *The Forging of the Modern State*, Ch. 26. 'The Condition of England Question; 2 Factory reform, education and public health'. pp 239-247.
- ¹⁹ Parkinson, Richard (1842) JSSL. Vol 5, No. 3. pp. 256-63
- ²⁰ Sargant, W.L. March (1867) *The Progress of Elementary Education*, Vol. 30 No.1 *Journal of the Statistical Society of London*. pp. 80-137.
- ²¹ Page 86, Sargant, op. cit.
- ²² Page 82, Sargant, op. cit. The Times. The cited article from The times, found in Vol XXIV of the Journal of the Statistical Society of London, p 208 is about the effect of schooling amongst the labouring classes. Sargant cites this as evidence of broad acceptance of his viewpoint, given the status by that time of *The Times*. The 'letter' by one O.S.G. is 3,262 words in length and argues that much of what a child is taught at school is forgotten soon after leaving because of the way knowledge is artificially crammed into unwilling brains.
- ²³ There is ample evidence of this practice across the decade within the Ealing registers.
- ²⁴ Three examples are Adamson J.W. (1930) *English Education 1789 – 1902*, Cambridge University Press; Barnard, H.C (1947) *A Short History of English Education 1700 – 1944*, University of London Press; Curtis, S. & Boulwood, M (1960) *An Introductory History of English Education since 1800*, University Tutorial Press, London. None of these focuses upon issues of literacy or cognate sub aspects of the topic such as 'reading' or 'writing and reading' as a distinct theme. A rebirth in popular and academic awareness of the historical importance of literacy within social and cultural studies came with the publication of Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* in 1957, but its effect took time to infiltrate mainstream History of Education studies via historians such as E.P. Thompson and Brian Simon and cultural historians such as Raymond Williams. See also, McCulloch, G (2011), *The Struggle for the History of Education*, Ch. 2 pp. 11-25.
- ²⁵ Baker, W.P. (1961) *Parish Registers and Illiteracy in East Yorkshire*. *East Yorkshire Local History Society*. See also, Birtwhistle, Claude, (1951), M.A. thesis, (unpublished) University of London, *A History of the Education of Children in the Blackburn Hundred to 1870*. See pp. 95- 207 which uses signature evidence extensively, to show the relative decline in literacy rates towards the end of the eighteenth century and beginning of the nineteenth in six Lancashire Parishes. Sanderson (1972) builds upon the initial work of Birtwhistle. Lawson, J & Silver, H (1973) *A Social History of Education in England*, Methuen. London.
- ²⁶ The Phillimore Society carries the name of W.P.W. Phillimore who worked from Chancery Lane, London from the 1880's and was the first to systematically transcribe and publish local registers, mainly to assist private and amateur researchers interested in the new field of genealogy. The project consolidated around the Society, whose member/subscribers were a network of local and county historical societies, eventually reaching completion in the period immediately after the second world war. Local volumes of the Society's publications are present in county and borough local history libraries. See for example, the *Middlesex Parish Marriage Registers*, issued between 1909–1938 of the Parish Register Series or, those for Cambridgeshire; *Parish Registers, Marriages*, issued in 8 volumes from 1907 – 1927. (BL.9905 p.16) Phillimore and Co., London.
- ²⁷ Webb, R.K (1955) *The British Working Class Reader*, Allen & Unwin, London. It is interesting to note that the 1971 reprint was under the sub heading of "Re-prints from economic classics." Also, Webb, R.K. (1950) 'Working Class Readers in Early Victorian England', *English Historical Review*, IXV pp 333-51
- ²⁸ Ibid. Webb (1955) p 21.
- ²⁹ Ibid. Webb.
- ³⁰ Vincent, David (1989) Appendix A in this book is a statistical presentation of the incidences of signings of brides, grooms and witnesses from 1839-1914. Vincent has used the Poor Law Union Registration District rather than the Parish as his unit of analysis thus recognising the structural changes that occurred within Parishes arising from massive urban and population growths. These districts were brought into being as registration units through the Act which established the Registrar for Births, Deaths and Marriages in 1838. He also examines signatories by the stated occupations as recorded in the Registrar's returns. See pp 280-1 for a discussion about the sampling that Vincent uses.

³¹ Vincent, D (1989) A particularly good example of this is Vincent's examination of the impact of the growth of the postal services, pp. 32-49. He shows how the literacy gains were the indirect product of transportation and administrative changes combined with changing commercial realities, rather than of any specifically educational movement.

³² Williams, Raymond (1958) *Culture and Society*, Chatto and Windus, London. Williams treated concepts such as 'culture', 'art' and 'industry' in an ideological manner, thus opening up readers' imaginations to the political and social origins of ideas and words. Williams, Raymond. (1961) *The Long Revolution*, Chatto and Windus, London. Specifically, this book highlighted the immense influence of 'non-literary' publishing and reading in the transformation of British culture over two centuries. Williams traces the contestation around the reception and appropriation of popular newspapers right through to (for him) contemporary television, radio and cinema. His work is aligned with that of Richard Hoggart cited earlier (note 34). The fact that Williams was primarily a literary academic made his emphases all the more striking at the time.

³³ Stone, Lawrence (1964) 'The Educational Revolution in England, 1560 – 1640', *Past and Present*, 28. Vol. 1, 1964. This was followed five years later in 1969 by 'Literacy and Education in England, 1640-1900', *Past and Present*, No. 42. pp. 57-51.

³⁴ Hans, Nicholas (1951) op. cit. Hans's work remains to this day, the most detailed study of institutionalised schooling for the bourgeois and gentry classes in Britain during the period. He is particularly strong on University and Academy provision. He does not however, deal with separate aspects of education such as literacy. As the index reveals, Hans's main concerns are with those individuals who played a prominent part in the life and development of the institutions where they worked.

³⁵ Schofield, R.S. (1968) 'The Measurement of Literacy in Pre-Industrial England', pp. 311-325 in Goody, Jack (Ed) *Literacy In Traditional Societies*, CUP. pp 311-325.

³⁶ p. 348. *Dimensions*, 1973.

³⁷ In the early 1960s, a socially oriented linguistics began to penetrate cultural discourses which had, at its core, notions of multiple registers and varied communicative competencies and by implication, varied literacies. This re-conceptualization of language within education and learning, challenged an earlier institutionalized notion of normatively defined 'Literacy', something which was itself the historic product of the nineteenth century school system. In Britain a key figure in this movement was Basil Bernstein whose, 'A Socio-Linguistic Approach to Social Learning' (1965) in Gould, J.(ed) *Social Science Survey*, Pelican, argued that "differential access" to forms of speech and communication structured the perception of that person within institutions. By implication forms of literate practice which were embedded within certain modes of discourse (codes) were inherently discriminatory. For an earlier formulation, see Bernstein, B. (1962) *Social Class, Linguistic Codes and Grammatical Elements*, in *Language and Speech*, Vol. 5. Pt.4.

³⁸ The Elementary Education Act made it compulsory for children to attend school between the ages of five to ten. It should therefore be possible to identify an effect within the marriage registers some time in the mid to late 1890's when the first post-Act cohorts were getting married. One difficulty with such features brought about by temporal delay, is that they may not take into account concurrent social or cultural developments such as the growth in the 1880's and '90's of organized Labour in urban and industrial centres.

³⁹ Sanderson, Michael. 1972. 'Literacy and Social Mobility in the Industrial Revolution in England', *Past and Present*, LV1.pp 75-104.

⁴⁰ For example, from Chapter 4 of the 1970 Labour Party election manifesto, when discussing equality the following is said. "The widening and extension of education is the best preparation that we can make for our people and our country, for the world of tomorrow. Investment in people is also the best way of developing a society based on tolerance, co-operation and greater social equality....The education system itself must not perpetuate educational and social inequalities; that is one reason why full integration of secondary education is essential".

⁴¹ pp. 95-102.

⁴² Many registers were damaged in urban areas by bombing during the Second World War.

⁴³ Schofield, R.S (1968) 'The Measurement of Literacy in Pre-Industrial England', pp. 311-325 in Goody, Jack (Ed) *Literacy In Traditional Societies*, CUP. Schofield argues for the use of register evidence because it is susceptible to being broken down regionally, socially and occupationally thus establishing a basis for comparative measures. In a later and influential study (1973), Schofield argues for a link between economic growth and rising literacy levels. *Dimensions of Illiteracy, 1750-1850, Explorations in Economic History*, pp.437-454.

⁴⁴ Stephens (1987).

⁴⁵ Stephens (1987). pp 264 -268.

⁴⁶ Locke, John (1689) *An Essay On Human Understanding*. This was a seminal statement concerning empiricist epistemology, according primacy to scepticism and a trust in what one can individually verify.

⁴⁷ Williams, R. 1983. *Keywords*. Fontana. p 183.

- ⁴⁸ Stone, L (1968) 'Literacy and Education in England 1640-1900.' *Past & Present* 42. pp 42-61
- ⁴⁹ Sanderson, M (1972) 'Literacy and Social Mobility in the Industrial Revolution in England', *Past and Present*, 56. pp. 75-104
- ⁵⁰ Laqueur, T (1974) *Past and Present* 1974
- ⁵¹ Laqueur, T (1976) 'The Cultural Origins of Popular Literacy in England 1500-1850'. *Oxford Review of Education*. Vol. 2, No. 3. pp 255-275.
- ⁵² Stephens, W.B (1987) *Education, Literacy and Society, 1830-70*, Manchester University Press.
- ⁵³ *Ibid.* p 268.
- ⁵⁴ Graff, Harvey (Ed) (1981) *Literacy and Social Development in the West*. Cambridge.
- ⁵⁵ The OED cites an 1883 use from the *New English Journal*. *Education* XV11 as follows; "Massachusetts is the first state in the Union in literacy in its native population." A second, later usage is recorded by the OED from December 1888, the *New Princeton Review*. p. 336. "Education is more general, our literacy greatly increased, our habits and tastes more refined." An earlier date for common usage has been suggested because there is a tendency for dictionaries to lag some years behind as they record the first written or published source rather than actual usage.
- ⁵⁶ Burton, Maxine (2003) *Signs of Stigma*. Unpublished Ed.D.Thesis. Sheffield.
- ⁵⁷ Burton (2003) p 92. Burton's originality lies in examining the contrasting documentary sources of government reports on education and contemporary fiction. Here Burton uses public to refer to official government documents.
- ⁵⁸ Burton indeed spends much of her study enquiring into 'illiteracy' rather than 'literacy' because the term occurs in places (albeit infrequently). See page 52.
- ⁵⁹ John Wesley. John (1753) *The Complete English Dictionary*.
- ⁶⁰ Buchanan, James (1757) *Linguae Britannicæ or New English Dictionary*, p xii preface.
- ⁶¹ The erosion of parochial dialects during the period is best illustrated by the rapid decline of Kemowek (Cornish) whose last monoglot speaker, Chester Marchant, died in 1676 and whose last habitual speaker Dolly Pentreath, died in 1771. Pentreath's reputed dying words "Me ne vidn cewsel sawznek" (I don't want to speak English) stands as testimony to the growth, spread and dominance of the new metropolitan standard during this period.
- ⁶² Sheridan (1789) *A Complete Dictionary of the English Language*, p. xlii.
- ⁶³ Sheridan (1789) p 323.
- ⁶⁴ Johnson. Preface to Dictionary. (1755)
- ⁶⁵ *Athanaeum*, August 19th. Page 255, Column 3. Anonymous Reviewer of *Early Scottish Education* by John Edgar. See Appendix 1.
- ⁶⁶ Burton (2003) p. 49.
- ⁶⁷ Lancaster, Joseph (1808) *Improvements in Education, Abridged. Containing a Complete Epitome of the System of education Invented and Practiced by the Author*. Pub. Free School, Borough Road.
- ⁶⁸ *Ibid.* 1808. p.5
- ⁶⁹ *Ibid.*
- ⁷⁰ Bartle, George (1991) 'The Relationship Between the Followers of Bentham and the BFSS During the Early Years of Popular Education.' *Utilitas*. Vol. 3. No. 2. 275-288. Open University.
- ⁷¹ Wall, E (1966) *Joseph Lancaster and the Origins of the British and Foreign School Society*. Ph.D. thesis, Columbia University, Ann Arbor, Michigan. Chapter 8, pp 309-343, outlines the nature of Anglican opposition, highlighting the role of Sarah Trimmer (p 325). Wall outlines hostility towards the teaching of writing pp 337/38.
- ⁷² Hoggart, Richard (1958) (2nd ed.) *The Uses of Literacy*, Pelican Books. pp. 274/275.
- ⁷³ For a fuller appreciation of Hoggart's personal standpoint on these and other issues see pp 264-287, op cit (1958). The emphasis upon Hoggart's distinctive contribution is not to suggest that equally significant critical developments were not taking place elsewhere such as in France with the work of Roland Barthes whose re-conceptualisation of 'textuality' led to a radical shift in critical approaches towards literacy studies.
- ⁷⁴ Webb, R.K (1955) *The English Working Class Reader 1790-1848*. Allen & Unwin..
- ⁷⁵ Here I am referring to Schofield, Sanderson, Lacqueur, Stone and Stephens.
- ⁷⁶ Williams, R (1983) *Writing in Society*, Verso. p. 216. 'Beyond Cambridge English', pp 212-226
- ⁷⁷ Clanchy, Michael (1979) *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066-1307* Arnold, London.
- ⁷⁸ Clanchy. *Ibid.*
- ⁷⁹ Eisenstein, Elizabeth (1979) *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early-Modern Europe*. C.U.P.
- ⁸⁰ Luria, A.R (1976) *Cognitive Development: Its cultural and Social Foundations*. Harvard University Press. In Chapter 2, pp 20-47, Luria presents data from controlled research settings which show the variation in perception between literate and illiterate respondents. His findings supported the view that historical (or social) influences did as much to shape perception as cognitive ones.

⁸¹ See Williams, R (1961) *The Long Revolution*, p. 180. Rex, Richard (2002) *The Lollards*. Palgrave. Lollardy began as a clerical movement achieving a certain reach through patronage from elements of the nobility. Rex suggests that its survival was never as some formal movement but through family networks which were difficult for the State to detect, break-through and repress. (p.81) Rex also highlights the central role of preaching and preachers in early Lollardy as against the spread of written documents for personal devotional use.

⁸² Cited in Williams, R (1961) *The Long Revolution*.

⁸³ Ibid. p. 179. The citation is from the chapter entitled 'The Growth of the Reading Public', in *The Long Revolution*, (1961) pp. 177-194.

⁸⁴ Bobrick, B (2003) *The Making of the English Bible*, Ch. 2. pp. 73-134. Phoenix

⁸⁵ Robinson, A (1995) *The Story of Writing*. Thames and Hudson, pp. 7-20. For an account of how writing was inter-woven within a range of aspects of life within the Roman Empire; Jackson, Donald (1981) *The Story of Writing*, Studio vista. pp. 38-49. For the significance of literate elites see, Gaur, Albertine (1984) *A History of Writing*. British Library. pp. 150-164.

⁸⁶ Broadcasting was a term coined by Charles Herrold in 1909 to describe his radio activity from San Jose, California.

Chapter 3. New sources for the study of eighteenth century literacy.

The first two chapters have presented the argument of why and how there is scope for a widening out of research into historical literacy in the eighteenth century. Through a detailed examination of the historiography of the field it was explained that an anachronistic notion of the term 'literacy' had tended to be used uncritically by historians. Additionally, it was shown that there was a major gap within published studies focussing upon literacy and education more generally during the eighteenth century. This chapter outlines the methodological challenges that had to be faced when beginning to redress such absences and deficits in the field. The chapter also argues the case for there being a richness and diversity of sources for historians of literacy to draw upon.

New Sources for the Study of Eighteenth-century literacy & education.

The somewhat eclectic approach towards the use of sources adopted in the different chapters of this study arises from a widening of focus away from schooling and training within formal institutional frameworks and towards focussing instead, upon social and cultural developments within an expanding and emerging public space. McCulloch and Richardson draw attention to the recent and growing trend to consider 'educational settings' beyond the somewhat restricted confines of 'institutionalized, bureaucratic and age-specific' contexts.¹ They suggest that such a broadening of focus is itself reflective of major shifts in contemporary educational thinking and practice as ideas of 'lifelong learning' and the 'learning society' have become current in both government and educational circles.² Two major influences for this methodological approach which has been adopted throughout this research project, have been Lawrence Cremin and Bernard Bailyn who show how an understanding of educational developments within early American society requires the historian to explore sources both inside and outside of those derived from schooling experiences.³ Bailyn, commenting upon one strand of mainstream history of education, argues that:

The willingness to restrict the history of education to formal instruction reflects not merely the professional concerns of the writers but also certain assumptions about the nature of history itself. To these writers the past was simply the present writ small. It differed from the present in the magnitudes and arrangement of its elements, not in

their character. The ingredients of past and present were the same; and they took their task to be the tracing of the careers of the institutions, ideas, or practices they knew so well. They had no capacity for surprise. They lacked the historian's instinct, that the elements of their world might not have existed at all for others, might in fact have been inconceivable to them, and that the real task is to describe the dawning of ideas and the creation of forms – surprising, strange and awkward then, however familiar they have become since – in response to the changing demands of circumstance.⁴

And then later, Bailyn comments about a dominant type of 'whiggish' historians whose historical concerns reflected their professional locations, careers and imperatives:

Restricting their inquiry to the problems and institutions they knew, they did not recognize they had no way of understanding, the first, and in some ways the most important, transformation that has overtaken education in America. The fundamental change, completed before the end of the colonial period and underlying the entire subsequent history of American education, may be seen only when the premises and concerns of the turn-of-the-century educators are laid aside and when one assumes a broader definition of education and a different notion of historical relevance.^{5 6}

Implicit in such statements are radically different ideas about where the historian should look for materials with which to construct accounts of the past as well as about self-critical processes concerning the positioning of historians in relation to their work. Lawrence Cremin, working in the same critical and methodological vein as Bailyn, commented in the preface to the first volume of his *Leviathan History of American Education*:

My queries...proceeded insisting upon a much broader investigation into the nature and uses of education during different periods of American history. I asked what agencies, formal and informal, have shaped American thought, character, and sensibility over the years and what have been the relationships between these agencies and the society that sustained them. It seemed to me that to ask these questions would project us beyond the schools to a host of other institutions that educate; families, churches, libraries, museums, publishers, benevolent societies, youth groups, agricultural fairs, radio networks, military organizations and research institutes. It would permit us to describe such phenomena as the rise of newspapers in the eighteenth century...and would provide us with a context within which to assess the changing role and influence of schools and colleges...Most important, perhaps, it would enable us to avoid what Herbert Butterfield has called "the abridgement of history", the tendency to over simplify the past by viewing it strictly in terms of the problems that beset the present.⁷

Although the context for both statements is drawn from American history of education they focus upon the period that concerns the present study most during this study, that which

precedes the development of state-funded schooling. Cremin's thematic explorations of ideals of religious conduct (piety), patterns of public behaviour (civility) and changing ideas about knowledge and education (learning) provide a broad historical context in which developments within the institutions of family, church, school, college and community can be examined. Schooling experiences are therefore placed within their wider social, religious and economic setting rather than being separated from them and treated in isolation. The critical shift that is explicit from this perspective is from an over-riding concern with notions of measurable progress and development, often of a linear character, towards a richer concern with the quality of the lived experiences of individuals, groups and communities. This theme has already been considered at some length in the discussion in the previous chapter, which examined features of the quantitative tradition that focussed upon literacy rates. This was then contrasted to the broader qualitative tradition in which the lived experience of people become the focus of historians' concerns. One consequence of this critical and methodological shift is to direct the historian towards a revised evaluation of surviving artefacts drawn from those settings and times, in order to achieve a rebalancing in relation to the use of sources which can be used to measure trends.

The next chapter begins with an exploration of coffee-house culture as a force for literacy in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century using literary and visual sources drawn from the period. The following chapter moves on to incorporate materials drawn from auto/biographical sources combined with print-based sources, and the final main chapter draws upon institutional and state sources drawn largely from the National Archives. This variety of sources allows one to incorporate a range of insights which originate from individuals as well as institutions. Following Bailyn and Cremin's call to adopt a "broader view of education", the present study aims to do the same thing with respect to literacy, searching out evidence of public communicative practices beyond the usual sources of school-books and school records. Through foregrounding artefacts from the period within the commentary which are often survivals from personal lives as well as reflecting broader social and institutional practices, we have an opportunity to engage with familiar and unfamiliar facets of the literacy experiences and practices of the people and period under consideration. This is a key point because historians often work exclusively with sources drawn from official and institutionalised deposits rather than from documents and artefacts drawn from individuals which for one reason or another have survived. The differing provenances affect how historians both perceive and use their sources.

The most comprehensive review of historical sources in relation to the study of historical literacy is that produced by Harvey Graff, although he restricts himself to European and North American modern cultures drawing a direct and continuous link with classical literacies in ancient Greece and Rome.⁸ His work stands as an example of a 'Whig' approach, underpinned as it is by a belief in the continuous and linear expansion of the subject he is studying. Methodologically this raises important issues as forms of literacy developed at earlier periods in China, Mesopotamia and elsewhere, with autonomous practices and cultures emerging from earlier legacies in places such as Central America.⁹ However, Graff's taxonomy for measures of literacy is worth examining critically, as much of the methodological approach employed throughout this study is a response in another direction but using some of the source-map that he lays out.¹⁰ What follows in the next section is a critical response and elaboration of the source-map developed by Graff.

Graff places census records first in his taxonomy but, apart from a few isolated Nineteenth-century surveys in the U.S.A. and Canada which included items concerning literacy, a census relying upon self-reporting by respondents to direct questions is inevitably open to limitations. Census returns may offer *indirect* evidence of *types* of literacy practices and engagements through their descriptions of things like occupation and economic status. Wills offer another source but this may often be limited to signature evidence, as a factor or clerk would usually have handwritten the document. Book historians have examined wills in some detail for evidence of bequests of books and have shown how, as a source, they should not necessarily be limited for the historian of literacy to looking for mere signature evidence as seems to be indicated in Graff's taxonomy.¹¹ A similar criticism can be levelled against limiting the use of deeds only to what can be observed from signatures and marks. Within deeds, there are often details of land and buildings as well as of economic activities taking place in the property and or business that is being sold, acquired or bequeathed. These details can reveal information of communicative practices that were embedded in the places referred to, such as managing people engaged in certain types and levels of domestic, trade, agricultural or manufacturing activities, some of which of which may indicate degrees of involvement in literacy practices. Additionally, as Graff correctly identifies, such sources can help to provide us insight into the literacy practices of those who are engaged in such legal work. Below is an example of writing drawn from the deposition papers about a contested deed in which an infant orphan is being dispossessed by an unscrupulous uncle and an unconnected solicitor is challenging the case apparently for moral purposes only.¹² The writing contained within the lengthy document offers the historian of literacy insights into

orthography, change of lexical registers, how disputation over deeds took place, as well as much about the precarious predicament infant orphans faced in Eighteenth-century England. It also provides us with an insight into the sort of document and type of written record which, at the time, was produced with the intention of being kept for permanent reference.

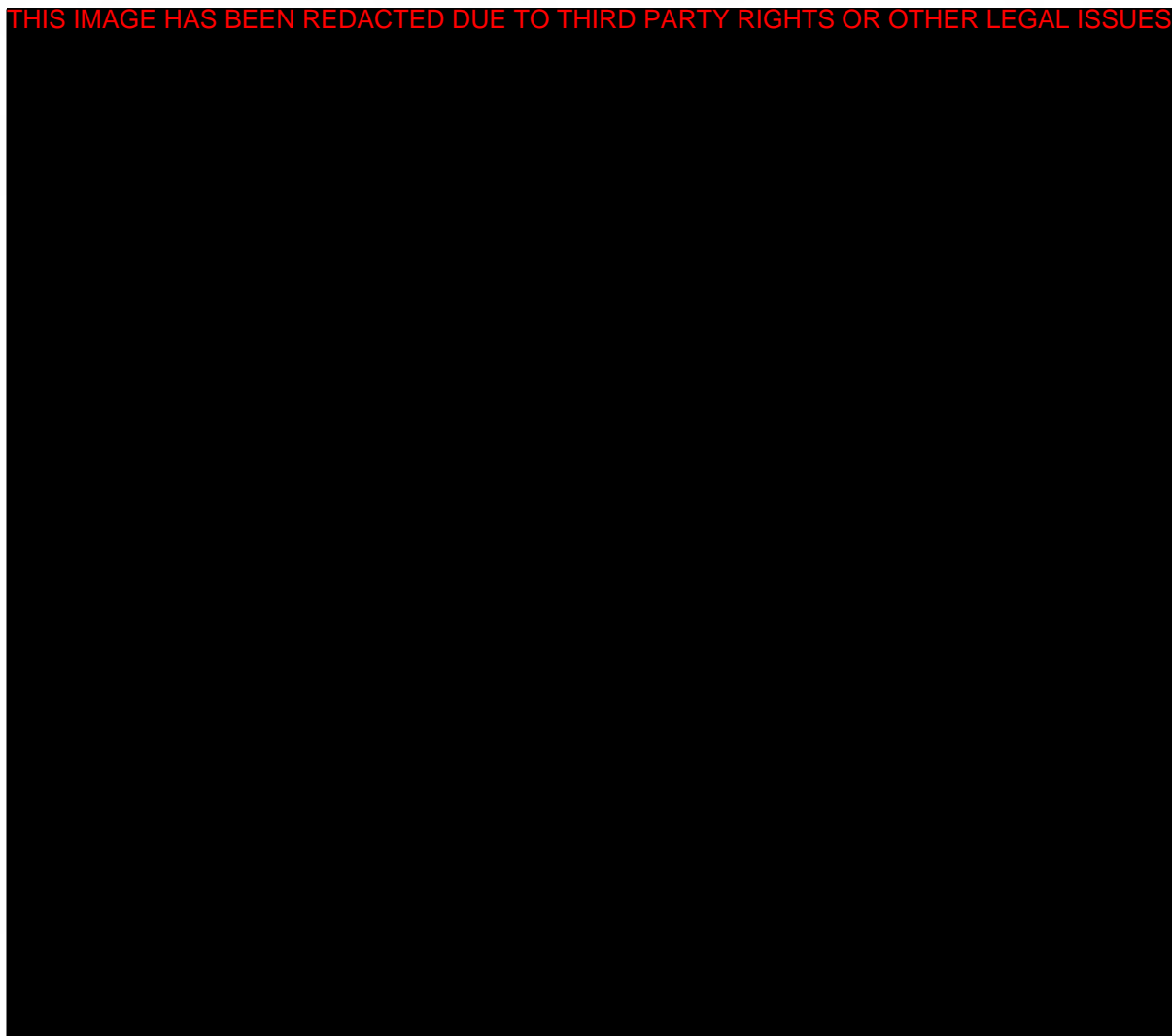


Fig. 5. Page from Huntingdon Assizes Case.¹³

From the page reproduced above (Fig. 5), it is evident that an extensive document such as this can be used as a source for discussion about types of professional literacies, practices and uses of literacy within occupational and institutional spheres such as administration, accounting, archiving, law, finance, insurance and estates management, each of which require different specialisms within the broader pool of communicative affordances. Here we see the legal clerk's italicized script accompanied by the Counsel's handwritten notes for use during the

Assize hearing in front of a 'special Jury'. The concern here lies with the limited use that Graff suggests for such legal documents for constructing accounts of historical literacy. If one's initial approach is to investigate qualities rather than to extract elements in order to process them statistically, the source can become far richer.

The use of inventories offers an obvious and rich source for studying certain types of literacy amongst book owners. Equally, the absence of books from domestic inventories reveals much about the place and purpose of reading at any given time.¹⁴ Such sources provide an as-yet untapped source within formal history of education studies, where there is an overlap between the boundaries of book history and historical literacy studies.¹⁵

A major exponent of this approach is Robert Darnton who applies sharp focus upon the materiality and historical specificity of his chosen materials, exhuming social practices which had hitherto been lost or ignored.¹⁶ For Darnton, unlike Graff, the history of literacy lies in the social and cultural uses of communicative tools. Therefore he is able to make a much richer use of similar sources than historians who limit their perspectives by adopting a narrow definition of what literacy entails. The French *Annales* historiographical movement acted as a launch-pad for this approach with figures such as Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre exploring the material, geographical and economic dimensions of books, publishing and reading.¹⁷ Inventories can lead a researcher to surviving copies of books or manuscripts and within these surviving items one can sometimes find extensive marginalia – real evidence of the owner's or other users' actual writing. Graff's concern with 'measures' for historical literacy indicates very strongly that his dominant concerns lie with quantifiable trends in literacy rather than with discoverable experiences and practices. The contention here therefore is that studies in the history of literacy have much to learn from borrowing insights and methodological practices from what has become consolidated as a sub-field of bibliographical and cultural studies under the title of Book History. Some of the critical and methodological issues concerned with apprehending actual readers and the communities of practice they embody are considered by Christine Pawley in her 2002 study 'Seeking Significance'.¹⁸ Following Roger Chartier's critical lead, Pawley calls for an approach which identifies distinctive features and qualities of communities of readers, their reading traditions and their practices.¹⁹ The succeeding chapters attempt to exemplify, methodologically, this critical perspective, such as when in chapter 6 using Home Office correspondence records, there is an account of the way that government spies were particularly interested in the uses to which reading was put by members and associates of the Corresponding Societies. This leads us to a radical re-interpretation of the government's repressive legislation of the 1790s, as a sustained attack

upon an uncontrollable and expanding community of readers. The point therefore, is that shifts in methodological approaches can open up research in ways that lead to shifts in theoretical perspectives.

An example of this general approach can be illustrated below (Fig. 6) where we can see the words “Token of Love” addressed to an Esther Maud, handwritten onto the title page of a Wesleyan published version of Thomas a Kempis’s *Imitation of Christ*.²⁰ The writing, however incidental, reveals a number of aspects about literacy practices within dissenting communities at the end of the eighteenth century. Graff does not, however, include such sources within his extensive taxonomy, presumably because they cannot be measured.

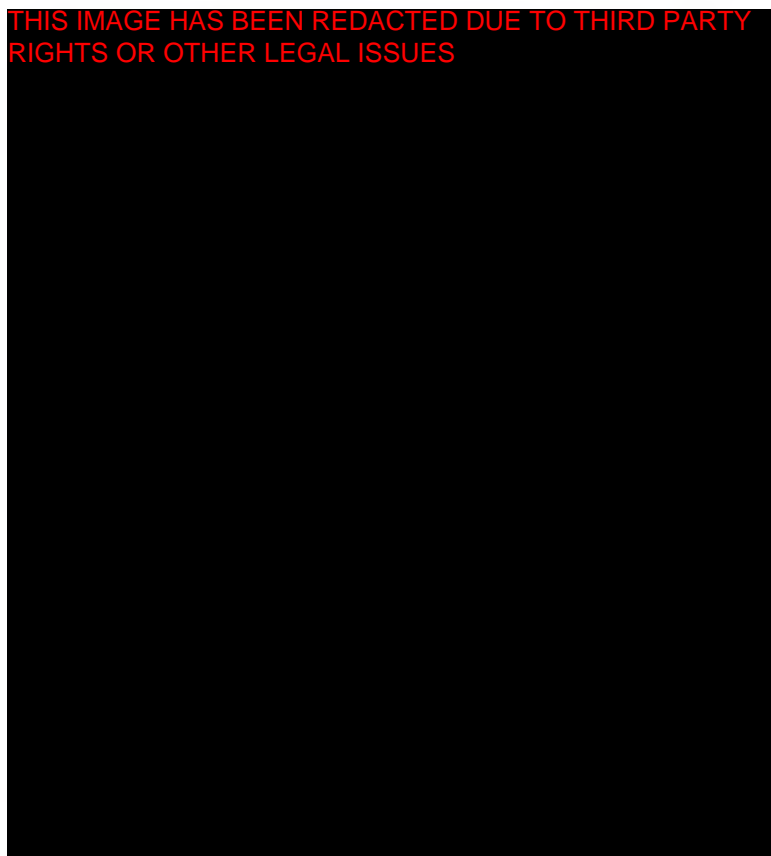


Fig. 6. 1791 Wesleyan printed edition of Thomas a’Kempis’ *Imitation of Christ*.

We might for example note that the book is leather-bound; that it has survived; it has been given as a ‘token’ of something else and so on. All of these suggest a context for the book which, if explored further, would lead to insights about reading literacy practices.

Court records survive in abundance and depositions can often be found in the plaintiff’s own handwriting. Graff mentions this as another possible source for signature evidence rather than recognising more fully their potential as sources for qualitative interpretation. This

limitation of view in relation to certain orders of sources such as parish marriage registers has been discussed in the previous chapter and is briefly referred to again towards the end of the present chapter, in order to stress the tendency to view these sources simply for certain *information* that they may contain, rather than for *qualities* that they may possess.

Stephen Colclough's (2000) study of borrowing and book distribution in the Sheffield of the 1790s is an example of the use of library lending and private institute records.²¹ Whilst these sources may be limited in geographical reach, they may nevertheless offer detailed insights into communities of reading, indicating preferences and ranges of interest amongst readers. A key feature of Colclough's study is the way that he situates the life of the lending library within the emerging artisan milieu of Sheffield, thus adding a further dimension to the interpretive value of his original source materials. Business records are mentioned by Graff, but once again simply for the purposes of highlighting the possibilities of signature evidence and, as we can see from the following two documents, such material offers far greater possibilities for historians of literacy.

The document below (Fig. 7) is a letter from the famous London based book-seller Thomas Caddell to a well-known Edinburgh book-seller.²² We see the use of personally-written letters as markers of personal trust in a business world where physical loss and damage of goods was quite common and payment chains could extend to months at a time. The letter would have arrived quicker than the goods and intentionally been shipped independently of them. Here writing and reading practices are at the centre of commercial and cultural exchanges binding people together into skeins of mutual obligation. A document such as this can reveal what was being bought and sold in a major regional cultural centre, and the amount of financial commitment between parties within the book trade, as well as how trade was conducted. The history of literacy practices must incorporate such dimensions as they too were part of the culture around reading, publishing, reception and exchange of ideas.

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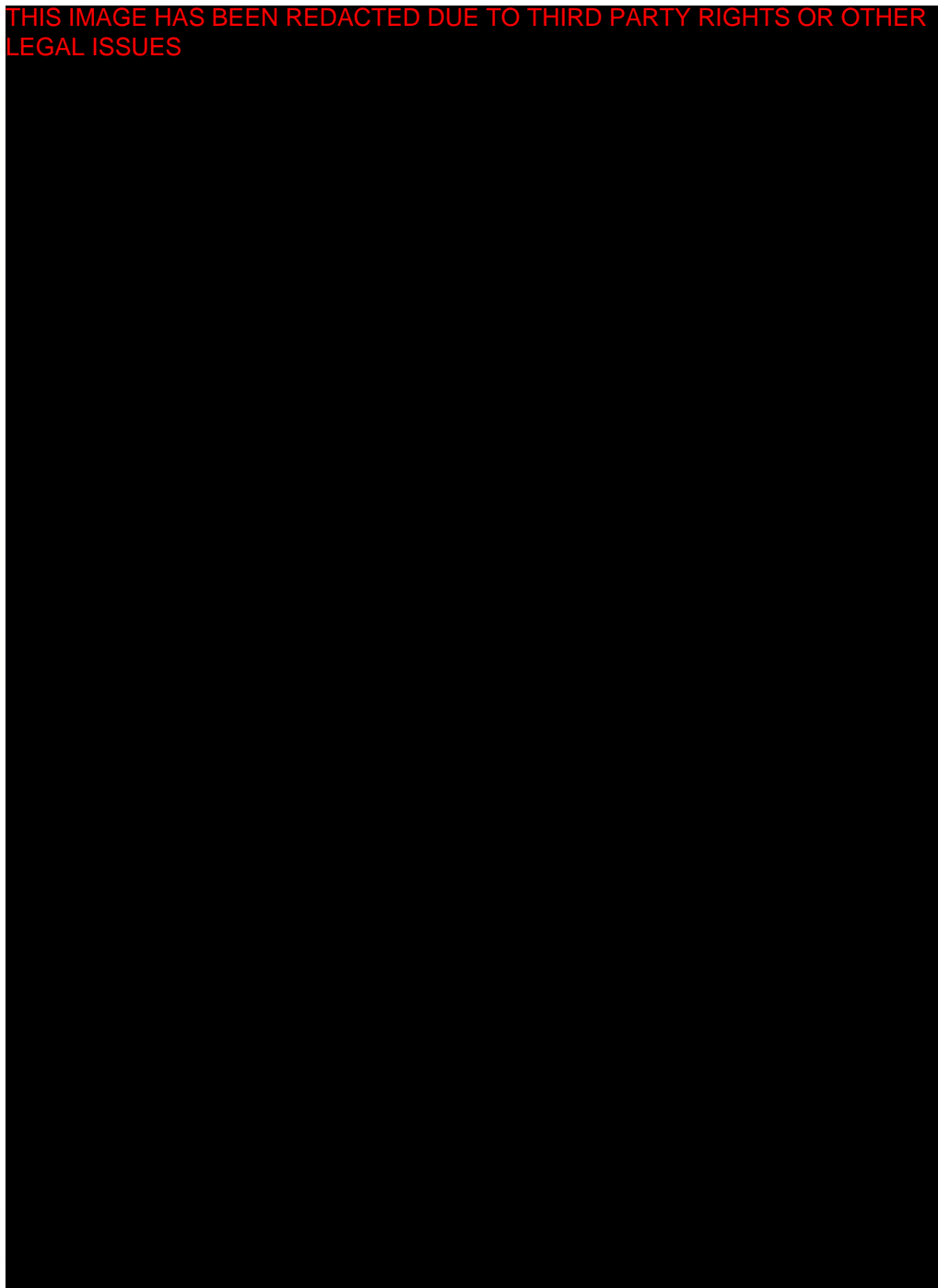


Fig. 7. Letter from Thomas Caddell to R. Bell bookseller in Edinburgh.

Not to foreground such sources is to run the risk of losing sight of the personal, purposive and characteristic qualities of the uses of literacy during an age in which the schooling records of England indicate only a small minority benefiting from sustained and completed courses of study in schools and colleges.²³ Correspondence such as this is not included by Graff despite being the single most abundant source of evidence available to researchers. The problem lies

in the extent of dispersal of such sources and the damage that has often been done to them by philatelists whose concerns are all too often exclusively to do with postal history.

With the second letter (Fig. 8), we can learn much about self-acquired literacy through its orthographic form.

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Fig. 8. Letter from a Mrs. Hay near Aberdeen to J. Mitchie in Craven Street, London, sent in May 1789 concerning the education of her daughter.

One example is the repeated use of the italicised ‘f’ representing the word ending where a double ‘ss’ was present. This typographical convention, which persisted into the late eighteenth century, was to be imitated by self-educated readers and tutors and incorporated into their personal hand scripts. The conventional contraction of ‘yr’ for ‘your’, also suggests a writer who is imitating a printer’s convention that has been absorbed through reading. The uneven pressure of the quill throughout and the thick ink on the loops indicate someone for

whom writing is not a frequent activity, or maybe an instance of hasty writing to meet a postal deadline. Further evidence of this can be seen in the unevenness of the script along each line, suggesting a writer who composes by the word and then pauses before writing the next word entirely and after pausing again, produces the next word and so on. The insertion in the second to last line reinforces the view that this was hastily written rather than mentally composed and then written out.

Noteworthy also is that this letter is written by a mother concerning arrangements for her daughter's education by tutors. The flourishes suggest someone who learned italicised handwriting yet as a business letter, there appears to be less need to spend the time than would be necessary to making the orthography elegant in appearance. The correspondence concerning the releasing of monies is carried on between Aberdeen and London and through such items we can see the extent to which literacy practices played a major role in sustaining connections which traversed the entire length and breadth of the Kingdom of Great Britain.²⁴ Whilst most of the above is essentially interpretive and thus open to discussion, it nevertheless illustrates the potential that exists within a single, incidental source for the historian of literacy. Such sources have not, hitherto, been used in published accounts of the history of education in the eighteenth century despite their evident qualities as examples of people's performances within a form of literacy practice – the products of their learning and education.

The page from the notebook, estimated to be from about the 1740s (Fig. 9), also reveals a great deal about literacy practices in an era when possession of a specialist and printed book on scientific topics was something reserved for the well-off. To reach an understanding of this item as a document requires us to ask questions about its provenance (origins and use) such as why was it produced? In what circumstances was it created? Why does the manuscript assume the form that it has? What do features of the orthography reveal to us about writing and other communicative practices during the time? Does the physical form of the document reveal anything about how it was used and prepared? From the structure of the notebook it is apparent that this is a transcription from a lecture series. Such lecture series were a common feature of the time. The cramming of the last word on the line indicates the writer's aversion to hyphenating split words between two lines. There are very few errors throughout the 45 page notebook which suggests someone who was a confident user of the quill. Either the book is based upon a copy original or, more speculatively, but not unreasonably, it may have been written up very shortly after attendance at the lectures from memory and brief mnemonic annotations.²⁵ What it does show is someone using writing in order to retain elementary principles of an emerging scientific discipline – Mechanics – possibly in order to support a

personal involvement in engineering. The clarity of the copy-work suggests a continuing use for the purposes of reference and is quite unlike the semi-legible personal scribbles which became so characteristic of the later period when paper costs plummeted and modern graphite pencils became accessible.

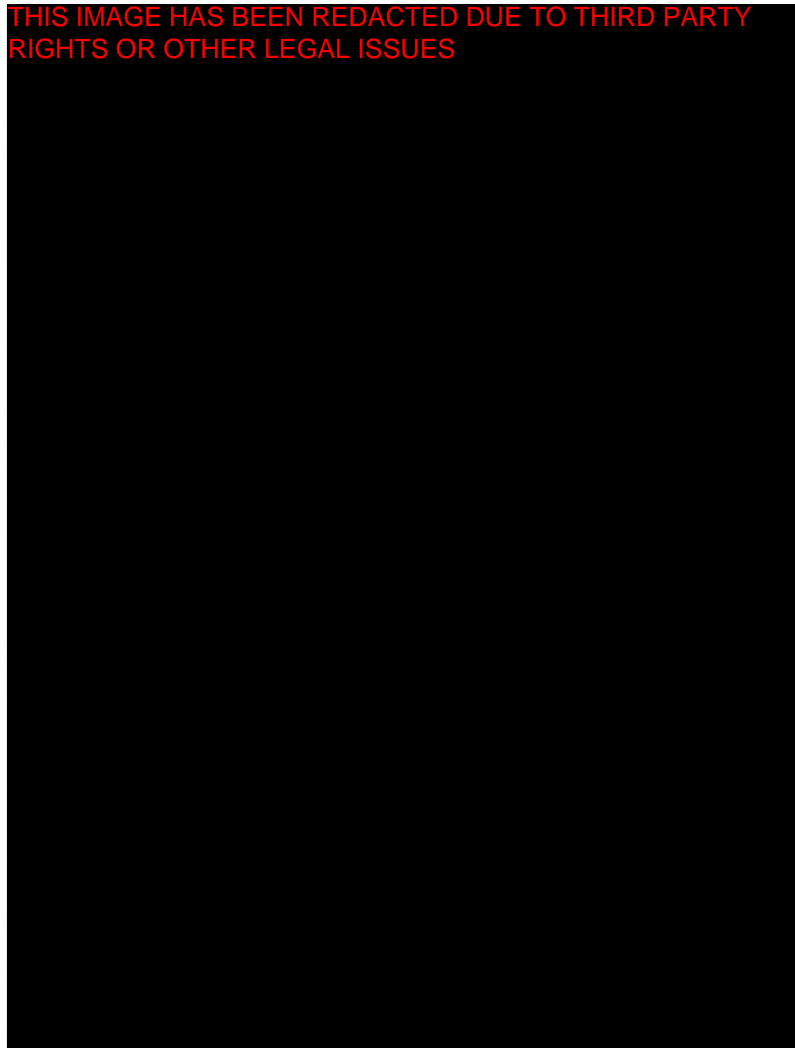


Fig. 9. Page from a lecture note book of a mechanic. Estimated 1740s.²⁶
The carefully-drawn diagrams suggest a degree of leisure in the note-making.
The squeezing of the final word along each line suggests copying from an original source.

Thus we can see, however speculative and conditional our interpretations may be, that a critical examination of physical and provenance features of a document such as this, offers the researcher entry into appreciations of uses and forms of literacy practices. We can also see that the lofty associations that often accompany use of the term 'Enlightenment', often serve to obscure the much more mundane personal experiences of ordinary individuals as they strive to acquire certain types and degrees of education in a society in which there is little

institutional support for such learning. The life and career of James Brindley is a case in point. Having spent his childhood and early teens in local farming activities he began an apprenticeship aged seventeen during which time he learned to make wheels. Later, through repair-work on mills, he acquired an extensive knowledge of the craft of previous generations of wheel and mill-wrights. By the age of forty-nine in 1765 when he married nineteen-year-old Anne Henshall, daughter of a land surveyor, Brindley still could not write, so she assumed an important role in relation to his work. Thus, one of the great contributors to engineering during the 'Enlightenment' period was, in modern terms, semi-literate. Yet to use such a descriptor completely misunderstands the intellectual ability and range of learning that a person such as Brindley possessed. Within his own society he was anything but 'illiterate' because of the remarkable level of analytical and communicative ability that he did possess. Brindley relied substantially upon trained memory and recall, rather than upon externalised reference points produced through written calculations.²⁷ He also utilised available skilled resources to hand, such as a literate wife, accountants, surveyors and draughtsmen. One possibility for the notebook presented above was that it was written out as an aid to memorisation of the entire contents and then passed on to someone else for similar purposes.

The intention in the discussion above has not been to question the importance or value of the approach adopted by Graff but rather to point out, through citing and reproducing varied examples, that the quest for an account of the character of historical literacy can and should also incorporate a wider range of primary sources. We now move on to consider another major source-base for the study of historical literacy which hitherto has not been as used as it might have been: public and state archives.

Public and state archives.

Within the Home Office and the Treasury Solicitor's papers at the National Archives in Kew, there are ministerial correspondence files and collections of sedition trial papers. These boxes contain collections of publications that had been circulating in the 1790s amongst working-class communities around Britain, and which had been sent in to the Home Secretary's or Treasury Solicitor's office by correspondents and agents from across the entire country. It was immediately apparent that such material was potentially of immense value for educational studies, as well as for the more conventional reference to which the material has hitherto been used within economic and political history. This was so because there were accounts of meetings, book sales, speeches, printers and publishers. There were accounts of

distribution networks and above all, of the range of ideas that were at that time animating the political imaginations of a generation of free-thinking radicals, many of whom hailed from humble social origins.

The author's interest in these papers began in part as a way of trying to understand something of the origins of reading patterns amongst proletarian Chartists and Owenites. In order to do this it seemed worthwhile to examine state records from the generation before. The two sets of records from the Home Office correspondence and Treasury Solicitor's archives, revealed a detailed and active concern at the very highest levels of government with the reading habits of radicals and the growth of non-commercial publishing, printing and distribution networks. A key methodological issue was how to use both sets of files from different state departments.

As the research began to connect disparate items found within the H.O. and T.S. boxes, narratives began to emerge, characters appeared and social trends became apparent. There were reports from spies, letters sent to Home Secretary Dundas from political supporters, copies of publications that were circulating, reports of disturbances, meetings, rallies, burnings and arrests.²⁸ Most compelling of all was the material sent to state prosecutors via the appointed Treasury solicitors operating in para-legal ways.

The whole correspondence of the London Corresponding Society was seized by the state in raids on the premises of Thomas Hardy, so we can see how the L.C.S. operated and most especially how members were involved.²⁹ Even a cursory examination of such materials reveals the degree of involvement which included people from all social backgrounds. Although numbers of active participants are hard to calculate there were probably tens of thousands who felt a sense of direct belonging to a movement, even though at the time the prospects of ever being able to have exercised a formal right to participate in the political life of the country would be reserved for the realms of fantasy. Due to this gap between aspiration and political possibilities, the 'movement' (and such a term is entirely appropriate) emerges as being one that is importantly about self-education through independent association, rather than being political in the sense we understand when examining the later Chartists in the 1840s whose activities were focussed around a clear programmatic platform. The Chartists of a generation later operated with a programme of specific reformist demands, whereas their forebears of the 1790s more often than not appealed to the force of reason as an agency of change, and attempted as best as they were able to personally embody this ideal.

This educational and hence social aspect of the later Eighteenth-century radical formation was understood by Brian Simon, although he focuses upon a selection of key leaders, only

some of whom were commoners themselves.³⁰ This approach is taken further by Edward Thompson who begins to explain the link between learning within work-based cultures and learning through political activism for successive generations of working-class people. Thompson stresses the link between the economic realities and personal educational opportunities such as when he describes a ‘typical’ attitude of a 1790s field labourer. The image he draws is a grim one:³¹

It was easier to emigrate than to resist; for reinforcing the exploitative relationship was that of political repression. Illiteracy, exhaustion, the emigration from the village of the ambitious, the sharp-witted and the young, the shadow of the squire and parson, the savage punishment of enclosure or bread rioters and of poachers – all combined to induce fatalism and to inhibit the articulation of grievances.³²

But nowhere within what might be described as orthodox histories of education of the period is there a full recognition of the essentially educational character of the material and economic realities that people confronted on a daily basis throughout their lives. People learn through experiences, and when the times they are living through are transformational this will affect the intellectual horizons of individuals. To an extent, this thesis questions the fatalism evinced in the above quotation from Thompson, although fully recognising that for hundreds of thousands of people real, grinding hardship was a feature at times in their lives. Additionally in previous attempts at dealing with the period, there is a lack of attention to those who did manage to overcome socio-economic limitations and hardships, and who came to form the base of later radical movements. A recent exception has been Clare Brant’s inclusion of letters drawn from across the entire social spectrum.³³ Possibly the most important characteristic of such a movement was the way it crossed social classes. As soon as this research began to examine *who* was being written about in relation to the history of education in the eighteenth century, it became apparent that within the archive of the Treasury Solicitor and Home Office, there was a wealth of material describing a much wider range of readers and writers than one encounters within more traditional and conventional treatments of the education of the period. There was indeed a history of common readers to be exhumed.

A number of methodological issues presented themselves from the outset. Were the documents being used, such as the L.C.S. correspondence files, to be considered as ‘public’ documents because they rested within the state departmental papers at the National Archives? In terms of their provenance they would have to be considered as public documents because they now belong within the state sedition trials papers. They were also used by state

prosecutors as the evidence-base for trials of L.C.S. members. Additionally, access to the documents is framed by the regulations of the National Archives. Yet at the same time they are evidently private and personal records written by certain people to others.³⁴ They may also be viewed as papers emanating from a broadly ‘public’ institution, the L.C.S., so a simple categorisation will not suffice. Therefore the important methodological lesson to be learned is that documents such as these can be several things concurrently and as such they present a range of affordances for the researcher. If we examine the classification structure that Scott (1990) has devised to assist researchers with their initial assessments of what type of documents they are working with, we can see that many of the sources being used within the present study are not quite as simple to understand as suggested above.

		<u>Authorship</u>		
		<u>Personal</u>	<u>Private</u>	<u>Official</u>
<u>State</u>				
	<i>Closed</i>	1	5	9
	<i>Restricted</i>	2	6	10
Access	<i>Open Archival</i>	3	7	11
	<i>Open-published</i>	4	8	12

Fig. 10. Classifying documentary sources.³⁵

Scott’s classification is valuable because immediately it draws attention to the fact that a document can be more than one thing or type concurrently. Therefore the researcher must be sensitive to and receptive to the possibility of the single document presenting the viewer with more than a single set of meanings or interpretations. In the case of the Treasury Solicitor’s papers for the 1790s considered in chapter 6, we will for example discover items which would once clearly have been located within category ‘1’ within Scott’s classifications such as private correspondence restricted only to the view of a select group of ministers, senior law officers and highly trusted clerks. Such documents are ‘private’ in the sense that they are

individually authored and express a personal opinion in response to events which the author has witnessed. Yet under disclosure and access rules such items have since become '3', open archival. The same items, often written by people with official positions such as that of magistrate and intended for another, more senior state officer can be interpreted as falling originally into category '9' as they were officially received and processed, and in many cases we can see in the same archive deposit, what actions followed.

Equally complex for the modern researcher are the published documents that were obtained by government spies in the 1790s and sent to ministers as part of the process of collecting materials for possible future prosecutions. Items such as posters, newspapers, pamphlets, occasionally books, exist within the archive, often annotated by a minister or law officer for use in court of during questioning. Documents such as these will usually be viewed and interpreted as falling under category '8', but those deposited within the state archives assume a different character because of their provenance which Scott does not adequately account for. Similarly, the L.C.S. correspondence, which was seized by armed law officers, now needs to be seen as crossing between the private/state and personal/official boundaries. If one fails to recognise such issues about the basic characteristics of a document one immediately closes off possibilities for interpretation and understanding, not only of the documents themselves but also of the historical circumstances in which they circulated. More detailed discussion of examples drawn from this source will take place in chapter 6 which focuses upon readers within the Corresponding Societies.

Source-bases within histories of education and literacy in the eighteenth century

When undertaking an expansive programme of research such the present one, the researcher often accumulates references to sources from forerunners in the field, returns to those sources and then possibly (hopefully) discovers fresh sources to augment those already used elsewhere. As we saw in chapter 2, quantitative historians working in the latter half of the twentieth century spent little time examining the experience and practice of literacy but instead were more concerned to measure literacy rates over time. One difficulty which was identified was the tendency to suggest that entire social groups were more or less illiterate with the accompanying implication that they were also poorly educated. This would be true if one's definition of 'being educated' were limited to schooling. But, as will be shown in the following three chapters, many managed to become 'educated' through a mix of occupational and cultural involvements. In other words a deficit theory of the period is presented. One of

the greatest strengths of Stephens' work lay in the way that he sought to include the full range of social and occupational groups even though he often viewed their abilities from a deficit model.³⁶ Stephens' interests however lay with the 1830s onwards so there is little if any focus upon eighteenth-century circumstances. In contrast to this approach, Nicolas Hans realised that biographies and biographical data provided a potentially rich source from which the educational historian could draw.³⁷ Not untypically, for the period in which Hans was writing, his preoccupation was with the link that existed between specific types of schooling experiences and opportunities and subsequent life-outcomes. The difficulty he encountered was that the record-base that he used was heavily biased towards people who were either part of the social establishment, or, even more selectively, have been deemed worthy of memorialisation in an establishment publication – the *Dictionary of National Biography*. Hans's study therefore had little option but to focus upon the aristocracy and gentry classes, figures within the military, clergy and legal professions and for a substantial portion of his study, the scientists and mathematicians who worked within the social milieu of elite circles. Despite there being sections in Hans's study about, for example, private academies which begin to include a few representatives from tradesmen's families, there is virtually no inclusion of the educational experiences of commoners.³⁸ Thus, a seemingly innovative use of a fresh source-base to extend our knowledge of the historical period, actually serves to expand and consolidate the focus upon the educational experiences of the elite.

Rosemary O'Day develops something similar to that which Brian Simon achieved, namely, laying out possible areas for future extended study and providing a few suggestive glimpses into the proposed field.³⁹ Rather than deal with the eighteenth century, O'Day adds a little towards the end of each chapter in the second section of her book about post 1700 developments. Chapter 10 of O'Day illustrates the limitations of the coverage in terms of sources. From this chapter entitled 'The Education of Girls and Women in Society' (pp 179-194) there is just a single paragraph on the eighteenth century. In this the author cites,

- 1) A 'Periodical'(sic) – The Ladies' Diary
- 2) Collection of essays, The Ladies' Library published by Richard Steel addressed to women readers,
- 3) Samuel Richardson's Pamela and Clarissa,
- 4) Attributed statement to Thomas Sheridan from a secondary source.

Three of the sources are openly authored by men each of whom occupied a very prominent position within the literary and public life of the social elite. The first of these sources is condescendingly written in a recognisably male voice (J. Tipper) directed to women readers. It is not in fact a diary or periodical as O'Day states but instead an annual almanac.⁴⁰ Yet the source she does mention offers a wide range of affordances for a history of literacy and education as can be seen below in the discussion of Fig. 11.

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Fig. 11. J. Tipper, 1706, *The Ladies Diary*.

This example drawn from O'Day, whose writing is mainly focussed on the earlier period, is just one example of a seeming reluctance to develop a sustained account of educational developments in the eighteenth-century. It is therefore not surprising that as there is such a deficit in coverage of the eighteenth century education, there is a commensurate absence of detailed consideration about literacy practices. We await an account of the broad educational experiences of the bulk of the population during the eighteenth century. This gap in the historiography is partly explained by the tendency to anachronistically associate 'education' with 'schooling'. Therefore, during a period when most education happened outside of formal schooling processes, histories of education were in effect, ignoring their principal subject.

Despite the publication being addressed to women readers, Tipper's advertisement for his projected boarding school is for 'young men'. The curriculum on offer is a decidedly modern one for the period, seemingly designed to prepare a boarder for apprenticeship with a civil engineer. This curriculum may reflect the sorts of topics discussed in *The Angel in Coventry*, either a Tavern or a coffee house which are discussed at length in chapter 4. The introduction declares the substantial sales of his work; "several thousand printed" by his account. Eventually copyright passed to the Stationer's company who continued to make substantial profits from one of the country's best-selling titles. Between 1704 and 1800 there were at least 35 editions, undergoing various degrees of transformation as the years rolled by. So popular was the title that by the 1780s 'Supplements' and 'Companions' to the work were published, usually biennially. The sheer numbers of copies suggests a readership far beyond the middle- and upper-class readers, many of whom indeed may not have felt such a book inappropriate for their station and cultural aspirations. Such books also were frowned upon by the overtly religious because of the astrological elements they contained. Some of the content implies a practical usefulness such as an ability to calculate and converse, suggesting a target readership of wives and daughters of tradesmen and artisans. The contents and form of the publication imply a non-gentry readership, whilst the publishing history suggests a very wide circulation, especially when one remembers the tendency for possessions such as books to be retained across generations. Incorporating detailed examination of such sources therefore offers historians of literacy considerable opportunities rather than extracting one item of content from within their pages.

When one establishes a backdrop of rising literacy and ever-growing, active engagement with literate print culture by hundreds of thousands of commoners during the eighteenth century, the discourses amongst 'educators' of the poor such as Hannah More, Sarah Trimmer and Joseph Lancaster assume new inflections.⁴¹ Their concerns with the extent, style and

methods of teaching of the poor were a response to an actually-existing cultural and educational shift that had already taken place independently of the state and parochial authorities. Large numbers of commoners who increasingly came to be described as ‘the poor’ were entering the public sphere via self-education, using as their texts publications such as *The Ladies Diary* which they read intensively. As chapter 5 on Doubting Thomases will show, acquiring certain degrees of formal literacy to enable a person to break out of and away from their family’s parochial social position was something that was increasingly possible and also increasingly exploited.

Within orthodox accounts of the history of education more space is sometimes allocated to the history of the ‘great schools’ than to all of the education of the bulk of the population across a century. This was partly to do with the availability of sources, but equally a reflection of the extent to which academic history had become confined within boxes of its own creation. Additionally such a distorted and unbalanced treatment reflected the social and educational origins of many practising historians themselves emanating from and working professionally within elite institutions. The strand of enquiry which was concerned with the state and education begins somewhere within the 1830s, whereas the strand of educational studies that is concerned primarily with pedagogy begins roughly with the monitorial system in the first decade of the nineteenth century. The present study has shown that economic concerns about the relationship between state spending on schooling and measurable outcomes also begins in the 1830s. This has meant that aspects of the earlier period did not fit into these different strands which have made educational history such a rich tapestry. By and large therefore, they have failed to appear in general accounts, unlike in the U.S.A. where the eighteenth century is perceived as a pivotal period within social and political traditions.

When ‘qualitative’ and thematic studies have been attempted they invariably focus upon the post 1830s period. As indicated in chapter 2, there have been incidental attempts at reclamation and reconstruction of reading experiences for earlier periods such as the republishing of key works by Neuberg and the use of documents concerning reading experiences by Altick.⁴² However, the eighteenth century has generally been bypassed within mainstream academic history of education. What sources then are available for a would-be historian of literacy practices and experiences in the eighteenth century? In order to answer such a broad question one would need to identify social and historical contexts in which communicative practices were central features of the particular social formation and this would include utilizing material artefacts connected to writing and reading practices.

The critical value of the artefact.

Critical examination of physical artefacts only rarely takes place within studies of historical literacy. We may encounter an illustrative image of a horn book in a more general work.⁴³ From other disciplines we find specialist books focussing upon embroidered samplers which are used later in this chapter in relation to the literacy practices of girls and women.⁴⁴

By using certain artefacts we can begin to address the contested question of levels of female literacy amongst commoner women and girls through an examination of certain products of literate practices – artefacts arising from domestic occupations. This issue is important because much of the present study is consciously gendered around men in the public sphere. When using signature evidence a routine conclusion is that women and girls present a deficit in literacy because of the consistently higher incidence of their making a mark rather than signing their name. Yet would the same conclusion be reached if instead, the historian focussed upon another order of sources? Although women participated in many occupations, corporate and guild restrictions often prevented them acquiring the full status associated with the trade.⁴⁵ One area where women predominated (although not necessarily within formal hierarchies) was that of domestic labour within service. Within this economic field occupations were highly differentiated with most requiring quite specific degrees of skill such as cooks, parlour maids, linen maids, seamstresses, house-keepers, child carers and so on. The idea that women's work was less skilled is largely a patriarchal myth arising from the notion that a trade required certain knowledge and technical ability but the proper execution required initiation into the 'mystery' or skill of the craft from which women were excluded. Occupational mobility was possible, usually implying increased supervisory responsibility in relation to other staff but also direct contact in relation to employers and their families.

If one took for example work with a needle and the social contexts within which such work took place, it would become apparent that such work required not only certain levels of skill but also attitudes and outlooks. In smaller bourgeois and urban homes several roles might be undertaken simultaneously by a smaller number of servants, implying a broader range of competencies. If one examines artefacts from within such a milieu it might be possible to infer things about the types of skill and knowledge that were necessary. One such artefact which is relatively common as a survival and would have been ubiquitous in the eighteenth century is a typical sampler. When looking at it (Fig. 13) one will see immediately that it involves reproducing words, letters and numbers in coherent arrangements alongside traditional patterns and images. To date no educational historian has actively considered these

as a potential source for their study of either education or literacy. The production of such a sampler, usually by a pre-pubescent girl prior to entry into employment, involved the acquisition of considerable technical skill with a needle. The sampler was a display piece designed to confirm the level of her attainment – literally a sample from her repertoire. One view is that such objects cannot be considered as anything but copy-pieces and that therefore they have no value for any discussion about educational and/or literacy attainments. This tradition of copying is traced by Humphreys to the widespread circulation of editions of plagiarised German pattern books in the late-fifteenth to seventeenth centuries with a derivative publication such as John Taylor’s *The Needles Excellency* published by John Boler going through at least twelve editions within a decade of its first appearance in 1631.⁴⁶

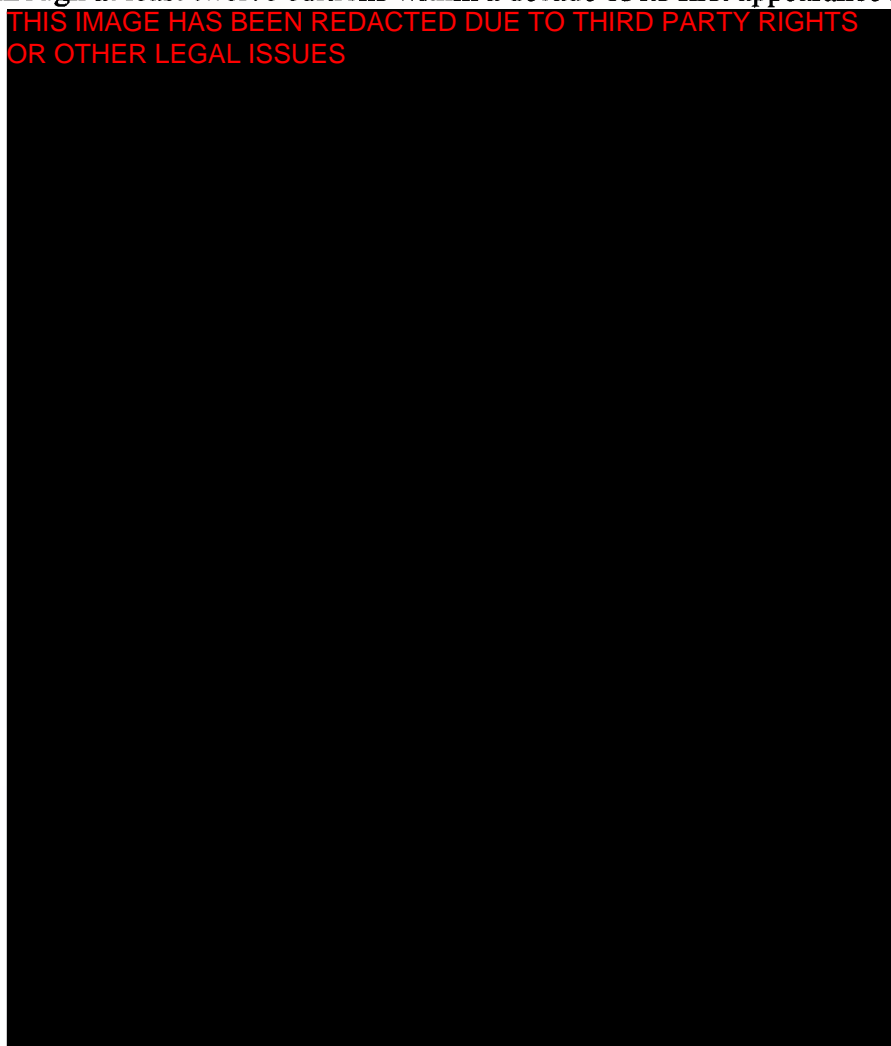


Fig. 12. Ann Jordan’s sampler 1794.

A contrasting view might point to the infrequency of copies surviving and the tendency for each sample to display striking individual characteristics whilst retaining strong conventional formats. The second view, if accepted, would suggest a degree of choice and selection in the

production of the sampler by either the girl or their supervisor or both. If the latter it suggests a degree of critical exchange between the mentor and pupil. For middle-class girls such an object would have been a personal piece for domestic display. For girls from commoner backgrounds such pieces would be for showing to potential employers and might be the centre-piece for an interview with a would-be mistress.

One could therefore argue that products such as these, produced with a needle by girls, rather than penned artefacts produced by boys during an apprenticeship, can and should also be used as evidence for literacy during the period. The production of such samplers is one example of the process of the domestic transmission of skills and knowledge in which literate elements are embedded within other elements relating to performances within the domestic economy. The least a seamstress would be expected to be able to do was to stitch someone's name into a garment, be able to visit the haberdasher's shop and accurately purchase and price necessary items, to follow a repair list for the day produced by the housekeeper and so forth. It is unlikely that much of the basic literacy necessary to undertake such tasks, would have been acquired through formal schooling but rather during exchanges with older girls and women during domestic apprenticeships in childhood. This example has been presented in order to show how it is possible to introduce evidence from the sphere of domestic economy into a discussion of literacy during a certain period, most especially since such products are invariably dated.

A counter-argument to the one expressed above is that the almost ubiquitous presence of basic errors in such samplers confirms that these are copy-work and little else, produced by girls for whom the symbols they reproduce have little connotative meaning, being drawn from pattern books. In the example displayed in Fig. 12 one can see that Ann Jordan in 1794, when aged twelve, was capable of reproducing numbers and the alphabet in correct sequence. Her words show use of capitals but with an error for the final 's' of the word 'Years'. Yet the lower case 'g' in the word 'Aged' is clearly drawn not from hand script but a type font found in contemporary printing such as Caslon (Fig. 13).⁴⁷

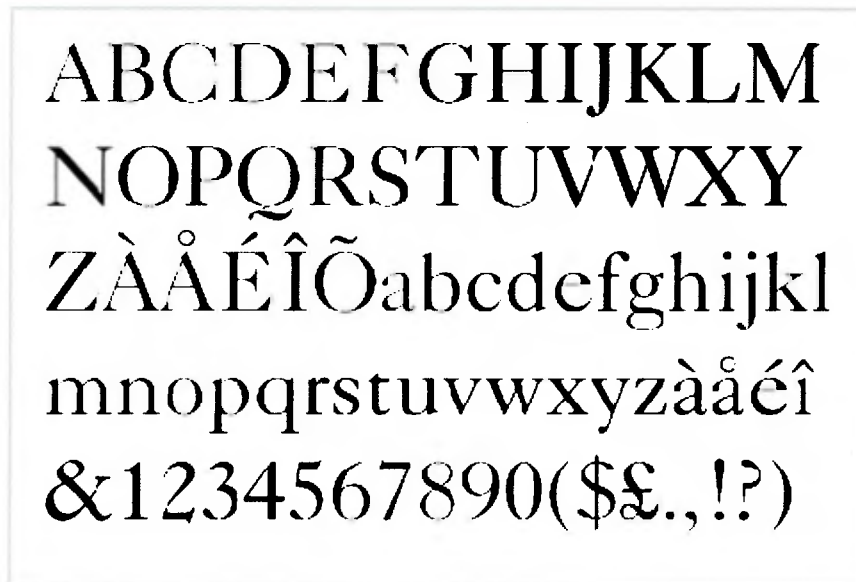


Fig. 13. Caslon typeface from Linotype. Note the conventional adoption by Ann Jordan of a common form of lettering in her times, suggesting some reading. The form used by Jordan is unlike contemporary orthographies.

Carolyn Lyle has suggested that the errors that one indubitably finds in even the most accomplished examples of embroidered samplers are by design and not error.⁴⁸ Far from indicating slack copying, they are intentional. The idea, according to Lyle, is to avoid perfection in the belief that only God can achieve such a state. A majority of surviving samplers contain biblical homilies although this example by Anne Jordan does not. The errors would be understood not as slipshod work but as conventional expressions of humility and pious recognition of the deity. An appropriately historicised reading of the artefact's errors would therefore suggest a degree of personal involvement within a distinct tradition of literacy practices, rather than indicating a deficit arising from poor basic literacy.

With the Jordan sampler we can see clearly that she can frame the space, sub-divide it, allocate discrete elements within the sub-divisions, reproduce sequences accurately, and marshal different modes such as abstract and representational designs and numerical and alphabetical signs. Additionally she can reproduce personal statements and place these features within an overall design. Someone who can perform at this level and with the graphic sophistication revealed here has the perceptual and technical abilities to both write and read; in other words a range of communicative competencies.

The Quaker sampler by Hannah Grant (Fig. 14) made in 1795, is different in this respect and is an extreme example of high literacy proficiency being displayed modestly and plainly. It is clear from the artefact that this girl had attained an acute dexterity in terms of work with a

needle and had mastered a range of typographical styles. The attention to stylistic detail is remarkable such as with the serifs on Capitalised 'T' and 'Y' in the central panel. The homily follows Quaker convention and is drawn from a secular rather than biblical source, in this case the example for Rule XV from Lindley Murray's famous school Grammar. Murray had retired to Holdgate near York, and here we see evidence of a child using his volume in the very year of its first publication as Murray was involved with the York School. He wrote the book with the girls at the York School in mind after a specific request to him by three of the young teachers at the school.⁴⁹ The second part of the homily is drawn from later in the same book as Murray illustrates correct use of the semi-colon.⁵⁰ The original unified sentences are from Addison's essay on Gentleness, a copy of which may well have been used at the school.

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Fig. 14. Sampler by Hannah Grant, 1795. The exclusive use of text, eschewing conventional decorative and design elements makes this example quite striking for its period. The play with typographical features however, reflects a popular approach towards the teaching of handwriting.

Hannah Grant's sampler, and maybe to a lesser extent that of Ann Jordan, highlight the fact that girls would become habituated to needlework and might achieve levels of dexterity

virtually forgotten in more recent times. Although we know that writing was given an important place in Quaker schools, this was less so for a majority of girls undergoing their 'education'.

If we wish to approach the issue of girls' literacy it is necessary to use gender-appropriate sources such as these samplers, rather than the writing evidences produced using a quill and paper which, in the educational context of the times was a distinctly gendered activity related to the perceived utility of the skill into adulthood. Artefacts like these can and ought to be incorporated into accounts of education and literacy for the period as they are able to cast fresh light upon the subjects in ways that studies which rely exclusively upon written and printed documentary sources cannot. The placing of material artefacts alongside written and published documentary sources from the same period often serves to highlight important questions about the conduct and experience of education which may otherwise go unnoticed. In the cases cited above we see examples of girls, possibly at two ends of the ability spectrum, 'writing' with their needles.⁵¹

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Fig. 15. Two books that may have been read by, or to Hannah Grant, whilst she attended the York School. Both contain the source for the homily used in her sampler.⁵²

Recent critical theory in linguistics and semiotics has highlighted the polysemic character of the apparently individual and single 'text'.⁵³ In a multi-modal and multi-mediated cultural

world we are increasingly habituated to drawing meanings from a variety of sources, so we 'read' advertising billboards, understand 'fashion statements', appropriate significances according to private and personal perspectives. It is now commonplace, as discussed in the first chapter, to think in terms of 'literacies' rather than a single, relatively simple and basic set of competences. One effect of this has been to draw attention to the potentialities of a variety of 'texts' such as the samplers which contain semiotic materials operating within a number of distinct modalities. We can view such artefacts as being rich in meaning for a study of literacy rather than simply seeing them as belonging to a single minority pigeon-hole of crafts practice – embroidery.

Literary sources.

In the discussion in chapter 4 about the sub-culture surrounding the coffee houses literary sources from the period have been used alongside some examples of artefacts from the same milieu. These sources reveal the active awareness throughout this period of the way that the affordances within such places for public reading helped to consolidate what came to be known as 'public opinion'. It is not surprising therefore that the materials used in such social sites as reading matter such as newspapers and journals became known as guardians of this somewhat diffuse notion of 'public opinion'. Other sources of reading materials connected to more mundane aspects of everyday life have virtually disappeared from view, so historians have often drawn from a small and unrepresentative literary canon. Wider sources have been used within literary and cultural studies but less extensively within educational history, even though it is well established that literacy became a marker of a certain type of person for the urban-based bourgeois and artisan classes and enabled social mobility irrespective of social origins, as was the case for David Garrick and Samuel Richardson.⁵⁴ One way to appreciate this is through the types of sources that are used to support the discussion in chapter 5.

Recently, Pickering and Chatto have published substantial collections of thematically-ordered literary sources which make possible the type of study envisaged here. Whilst such sources can be individually accessed easily and rapidly via large databases such as ECCO, the edited sequencing of thematically-grouped literary sources provokes important new readings and approaches to the materials and the social settings from which they come. Collections by Barrell and Mee on the *Treason and Sedition Trials, 1792-94*, Michael T. Davis on the *London Corresponding Society, 1793-99*, and Alys Levine, on *The Poor in Eighteenth Century Britain* have substantially extended the range of literary documentary sources that are

readily available and which hitherto were accessible only to the specialist researcher.⁵⁵ Such publications will, in time, contribute towards a shift away from reliance upon source-bases which record in great detail the lives and activities of the social and political elites. As a result of such publishing it is no longer conceivable that a history of the education of the period could or indeed should be written solely with reference to formal schooling provision. The sequence of whore biographies edited by Julie Peakman raises the issue of a sub-literature which persisted throughout the century predominantly written by women.⁵⁶ The fact that this literature spans the entire range of forms and genres challenges notions of the limited familiarity of commoner women with the literary and cultural world. Additionally, this body of writing illustrates the existence of different layers of literary circulation differentiated by social factors, serving quite distinct purposes. Literacy practice therefore occurs in a wide variety of ways carrying differing purposes and meanings depending upon the social and temporal contexts within which it takes place. Hence, the use of the plural term ‘literacies’, rather than aiming to describe and account for a single unified practice. This critical shift is partly the product of the greater availability of a range of diverse sources.

The shift towards a focus upon ‘literacies’ and ‘communicative practices’ has had the added effect of changing the value historians place upon artefacts such as ballads, song-sheets, oral traditions and other ephemera which were produced incidentally and were not intended to be kept as a record.⁵⁷ Conventional ‘canonical’ literary sources should not be overlooked simply because they come from within ‘fictional’ or ‘poetic’ settings. Very often accounts within ‘fiction’ of early-years experiences are based upon the author’s own experiences. A powerful example of this is the novel *Roderick Random* where the relationship between the schoolmaster and the patron – Roderick’s benefactor – reveals the social as well as commercial influences shaping teaching and learning in the early eighteenth century. The collection of studies edited by Krishnamurthy (2009) relies principally upon literary sources drawn from writers like Stephen Duck, Ann Yearsley and Robert Burns and reveals the evidence within the poetry of prior reading.⁵⁸ Mixed approaches combining information drawn from periodicals and engraved prints of the period, provide the source base for Anja Muller’s study of the way children were represented during the eighteenth century.⁵⁹ This serves to remind us that printed texts co-exist and interact with other cultural products. A further type of source from which historians of public literacy and education can draw is that of biographies and autobiographies.

Biographical and autobiographical sources

In chapter 5 there is a shift to using a mix of bio/autobiographical sources spanning an intersecting timeline drawn from the eighteenth century. The links between the educational experiences and trajectories of the people who feature, are supported by additional visual and secondary references. The use of such sources on a large scale and in a systematic way for studies of aspects of literacy across succeeding decades can be seen in the work of Vincent and Rose. Jonathan Rose acknowledges the important bibliographical work undertaken by Vincent, Mayall and Burnett who listed up to 2,000 biographical documents emanating from working-class subjects and sources.⁶⁰ This however covered the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Nothing of similar depth has been undertaken for educational and literacy studies for the eighteenth-century period. So chapter 5, tracing the emergence of self-taught individuals, suggests a possibility for such an approach located in eighteenth-century 'memoirs' as autobiographical accounts would have then been styled. The life-courses of the doubting Thomases that are presented also suggest that the advent of the commoner reader who had a variety of intellectual interests, was a strong feature of eighteenth-century social and cultural life, and was not something which developed within the nineteenth century.

Exclusive reliance upon bio/autobiographical sources is problematic because of the inevitable personal focus lying behind the writing.⁶¹ Autobiographies are self-serving and carefully selective, presenting self-censored versions of a life. The context within which they were written needs examining along with the events that are being written about in retrospect. They strive to make sense of a past and often construct artificial coherences when the reality of the life was more haphazard, formless and random. Even more complex is the emphasis provided by the biographer who may be commissioned by the subject or his/her family and friends, or who may be written about for political or purely commercial interests. The issue of biography as a generic form became a matter of fierce public debate with the publication of Johnson's *Lives of the Poets*, which, with characteristic hauteur, proclaims the subjective judgements of their author and swats away earlier authors with a literary flick of the hand:⁶²

The Life of Cowley, notwithstanding the penury of English biography, has been written by Dr. Sprat, an author whose pregnancy of imagination and elegance of language have deservedly set him high in the ranks of literature, but his zeal of friendship or ambition of eloquence, has produced a funeral oration rather than a history; he has given the character, not the life of Cowley; for he writes with so

little detail, that scarcely any thing is distinctly known, but all is shown confused and enlarged through the mist of panegyric.⁶³

Apart from the characteristic wit which can often be cruel, Johnson highlights the problem with delineating lives rather than characters, suggesting to readers that there is a reality accessible through ordered facts. The biography as a genre became a vehicle designed to inform as much as to offer 'panegyric' and this tension has always existed in relation to the value that such sources can have for access to 'the history' as Johnson says. In chapter 5 this discussion about auto/biographical sources is placed in the context of five lives of self-educated individuals who sprang from commoner families. Where Johnson rhetorically falsifies, is in declaiming that English biography was in a state of 'penury', when throughout his lifetime the genre had become one of the staples of the publishing industry and had such prestige that early novelists would structure their fictions around a supposed memoir such as *Robinson Crusoe* or *Roderick Random*.⁶⁴ A search under the heading '*memoirs*' within ECCO, produces over 2,300 entries. Similarly, under the heading '*history*' a great number of fictional and fictionalized narratives will appear. So the genre offers a potentially rich seam of materials about education, literacy and learning for historians to explore, following the groundbreaking use of such sources within nineteenth-century studies by historians like Vincent and Rose.

Roberts sees the roots of autobiography emanating from an extension into the secular sphere of Protestant spiritual introspection.⁶⁵ He places the rise of the biography and autobiography firmly within the Enlightenment milieu of the retrospective confessional, taking the realised self as the terrain for detailed investigation. Subjective interest indubitably led to an idealisation of the self, something that was recognised fully by the early novelists whose picaresque narratives purported to present the 'adventures' of their hero or heroine.

A major theme in the fiction of the times is the way that a person is able to break away from pre-determined positions, or conversely, how they become the prisoners of circumstance. The beginning of Holcroft's 'Jacobin' novel, *Anna St. Ives* begins with a journey by its hero away from the rural homestead and into the great London wen. An extreme version of this theme, almost its apotheosis, is William Godwin's eponymous hero *Caleb Williams* who experiences an unbearable catalogue of calamities on his journeys away from home. The epistolary structure of a novel such as *Anna St. Ives* by Holcroft, reflects a society where increasing numbers of people write about themselves to others and sustain narratives across multiple exchanges of letters. It was during the eighteenth century that writing about oneself

in the expectation that another (or others) would wish to know about you, became one of the most frequent uses of writing. This writing often reflects borrowed or absorbed facets of the literary styles used within popular narrative fiction. A critical use by the historian not only of biographical sources but also of fictionalised biographies (often picaresque in structure) is therefore one way of entering into an important part of the eighteenth-century cultural jigsaw. If, as with Holcroft, much of the material for his novels is rendered quite closely from events in his own life, it may be worthwhile to incorporate such material into our accounts of things like literacy practices and education.

Visual sources as cultural products

Throughout the study there is a strong use of supporting visual sources. These are not included for purely illustrative purposes but are instead integral to the methodological approach of this study. The extent to which literacy and literate forms are imbued with certain cultural values finds expression in the virtually exclusive use of written and published sources for the reconstruction of accounts of the past. Written sources have become imbued with higher status than other sources. This tendency which is still dominant, runs counter to the historical shift in communicative practices that has become so prominent in a communicative space increasingly dominated by the electronic media and cyberspace, accelerating especially with the universalization of radio and television broadcasting and the internet. Visual forms have been dominant within this broad movement, incorporating and transforming the verbal elements within their modalities. For example literate participants understand the presence of a disembodied voiceover accompanying a panning shot of a scene and spliced with a piece of music. Words have been re-connected with other modalities such as image and sound. This broad historical movement has re-sensitised us to the importance of the visual for the understanding of historical contexts. The images throughout this study are presented as evidence rather than simply as illustrative items.

Peter Burke's study (2001) elaborates upon the range of thematic approaches that is possible in relation to using the visual as a primary historical source. Burke considers the limitations of an iconographic approach, which follows in the tradition of Panofsky's work on art history and opposes it to a 'structuralist' approach.⁶⁶ What is less developed throughout Burke's study is the importance of placing the image or object upon which the image appears, into its social and historical contexts.⁶⁷ These contexts can include modes of reception and appropriation, production, exchange, design and intention, transformation and so on. The

image (or artefact) is viewed not as something taken out of its setting but rather understood within a particular or a series of multi-layered and concurrent contexts. This allows for a grounded, rather than endlessly relativised, interpretive approach – one of the strongest criticisms directed against certain ‘post-modernist’ critical approaches. Here it is hoped to avoid the syndrome which is expressed by Ivan Gaskell when discussing interpretations of the visual,

Perhaps we can only ever know the art of the present, some of which is what survives from the past, providing only the most tenuous and untrustworthy access to that past. The meaning of visual material changes; interpretations differ across chronological and cultural boundaries; those which we know can only ever be the ones we generate ourselves.⁶⁸

The extended discussion of a single document in chapter 6 – the *Royal Proclamation* of May 1792 – is an exercise in placing a single document with powerful textual and visual elements into a series of social and historical contexts in order to show how a single document meant different things to different people.⁶⁹ Thus reaching any understanding of that document or event, requires us not simply to identify dominant, intended or most coherent meanings but possibly, to identify confusion and incoherence in responses. The dominant reality at that time may well have been one of confusion, misunderstanding and contradictory appropriations. Thus it makes little sense to attempt, over two hundred years later, to fabricate a coherent account by adopting just one of these appropriations.

Original sources or collected reproductions.

Chapter 6 which focuses upon the London Corresponding Society, draws from a unified deposit which has an intriguing history as its survival is the result of its confiscation during police raids during the dark period of repression and reaction in the 1790s. As a result we have a very full idea about how the LCS operated and involved its members and associates. The recent publication of the materials relating to this archive and the subsequent treason trials of all of the leading members of the LCS provide us with an accessible and extensive source-base. One of the strengths of the Barrell collection or the Ellis collection on coffee-house culture is its facsimile format rather than printed and re-set transcriptions.⁷⁰ This allows the reader to return to the original sources and thereby to ‘read’ the documents *qua* documents rather than simply for the content.

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ISSUES

Fig. 16. Front page of *The Gentleman's Magazine* for May 1793.

The discussion in chapter 1 about historicising the concept of literacy and viewing it in relation to influential oral modes of communicative practices, largely rests upon returning to *original* documentary sources, rather than relying upon transformed versions of those sources, made ready for re-publication in a uniform modern format. It was pointed out that the source-base for many of the quantitative historians of literacy rates used the Phillimore transcriptions rather than original or facsimile versions of the registers. This is important because the physical form of original documents often reveals much about the way they would be circulated and used. One example of this can be seen in chapter 4 on coffee houses where an original copy of a *Spectator* is used which creates an entirely different sense of what it was compared to any transcribed and collected versions of the text alone. By examining the original we see how portable, cheap, accessible and easy to distribute and circulate the publication actually was. Its pink colour also made it stand out from amongst the rest. We can also see how suited it would have been for a lead reader holding it in his or her hand, to share

aloud with an assembled company in a bourgeois drawing room, just as much as in a tavern, used by a range of social classes including commoners. Throughout the study many examples of actual writing have been used incorporating as wide a variety of reading matter as seemed appropriate, in order to make the point that literacy practices exist in many more forms than the relatively limited range encountered with documents drawn from formal schooling processes.

One of the characteristics of the historical period covered by this study was the way that eclecticism was embraced, something which can be seen in publications such as *The Gentleman's Magazine*, a front page of which is reproduced above for May 1793 (Fig. 16).⁷¹

In this edition (weekly) one reader might be especially interested in meteorological information and advice on “the growth of turnips, potatoes and cabbages”, while another reader might take a special interest in prices of stocks or reports on proceedings of the National Convention in France. Copies of this and many other similar *magazines* survive in abundance in bound form, indicating that they were collected and used for later reference and sustained circulation.⁷² The contents became reference-points for communities of readers who might be focussed around a meeting house, a library club, a philosophical society or a coffee house. They often served a clientele of self-motivated, autonomous readers who might immerse themselves in poetry, mechanics, economics, religion and history, whilst another became absorbed in phonetics, numismatics, land reform and pugilism. But such readers diverse as their interests appear to be, sought to achieve a personal synthesis. This led to a culture of individualism and difference, of personal exploration and discovery, where education and learning worked to break down orthodoxies and open up new possibilities. The way such a source can be used for a history of literacy and education is partly by examining content to find out what people were actually reading about. Also, when that content is placed in context we can reconstruct some idea of how it was seen in relation to other types of information and knowledge. As the date indicates such publications continued to be issued in various forms from their inception three generations earlier and, despite the name – *The Gentleman's Magazine* – readerships would have extended across the social spectrum as copies circulated privately, were re-sold in bound form, borrowed by servants, borrowed from circulating libraries or possibly bought cheaply, second-hand in a household clearance.⁷³

Private and extensive reading about a vast range of secularised topics had become embedded in public culture, creating, reinforcing and responding to demand. It was in relation to this emergent and dominant culture that many self-styled ‘educators’ sought to respond by redefining education in narrower, more orthodox terms. Their concerns were often focussed

upon the ability of commoners to engage actively within this cultural movement and acquire knowledge independently of any 'official' sources. The cultural and educational shift, as we shall see when considering the coffee houses in the early eighteenth century, was overwhelmingly secular and concerned itself with the personal acquisition of new knowledge rather than acquiring an understanding of established truths. This activity was not only something which registered within the individual but an expanded public sphere was created which became, most particularly in Britain, almost an institutionalised opposition to the state.

When we appreciate this dimension we are able to appreciate the significance of the generous letters pages contained in publications such as *The Gentleman's Magazine* which, to modern readers might appear at first glance to be tedious and nit-picking. But they represented a degree of freedom to express personal opinions within a public sphere and created a possibility for an otherwise anonymous individual to have their viewpoint read and debated, quite literally across the entire Kingdom. They become, albeit momentarily, identifiable contributors to a supra-geographic discourse world. The recording of the name of the author along with where they lived helped to anchor the reception, especially if the place of domicile of the correspondent was near to where a reader lived. Elements of the form of the text reveal how communities of readership were brought into being. Such things can really only be apprehended through a direct engagement with the original artefact. Following Cremin and Bailyn, the present study is an attempt to illustrate the potential that such varied sources may have. Bailyn argues in the second section of his book, that not dissimilar developments to those being described here in Britain, took place across the Atlantic, in what was to become, to use Tom Paine's phrase, 'The United States of America'.⁷⁴ Bailyn calls for comparative studies to assess the interaction between the English and American dimensions on education as the level of contact was sustained and intense even during and after the Revolution. In order to describe this massive and sustained cultural shift which took hold during the eighteenth century one needs to investigate sources that arose within this milieu and which survive. Only then will the historian gain insights into how the basis for self-improvement and mass literacy was established before the advent of state supported elementary schooling. The eclecticism shown above in relation to the range of sources reflects the diversity of real contexts of learning and literacy that developed during the eighteenth century.

Parish registers.

The debates about historical literacy rates have centred on issues and interpretations of the value of parish registers as a measure. The contention within chapter 2 was that this source has yet to be used significantly for a study of literacy practices but has instead, only been used in extrapolated form for longitudinal analyses of ‘rates’ of literacy.

When considering the earliest examples of the use of parish marriage registers in discussions of literacy it is worthwhile making a number of observations about the registers themselves.⁷⁵ The 1754 ‘Hardwicke’ Marriage Act made it compulsory for all marriages, births and deaths to be registered in a book by the local parish officers in a standardized format (There were exceptions for Jews and Quakers who maintained separate registers). This brought into being a comprehensive national social record. Although registrations took place before 1754 they were undertaken with varying accuracy and assiduity. The key clause in the 1754 Act was that these records were at all times to be available for inspection by the Registrar General. The records indicate that compliance with the requirements of the Act was virtually universal. For historians these registers - especially the marriages – have been seen to provide systematic and comprehensive evidence of the literacy levels of the population at the point of marriage because for the first time the brides and grooms were required to sign the register. From the beginning of the twentieth century the Phillimore Society steadily transcribed all extant parish records and progressively published their work so that by the 1950s it was possible for researchers to attempt large-scale and broadly-spread surveys of this mass of localised materials.⁷⁶ It was this preparatory work that enabled a new wave of historians to apply a systematic review of Register sources from the 1960s onwards (Stone,⁷⁷ Schofield,⁷⁸ Sanderson,⁷⁹ Stephens⁸⁰).

Additionally such researches stimulated critical studies of records from the pre-Hardwicke period which nevertheless took on board some of the methodological assumptions of the quantitative economic historians. An example of this was David Cressy whose specialism lay with the early-modern period rather than the eighteenth century and who, like Margaret Spufford made extensive use of the 1642 Protestation returns to assess literacy rates.⁸¹ Spufford’s conclusion is that male and female literacy rates were higher than the estimates advanced by Cressy. She points out that writing was specifically excluded from the schooling and training of girls and this perception underpins the approach adopted here for the later period, where ‘literacy’ is presented as a series of practices in which the connections between reading and listening were paramount, in distinction to the nineteenth-century

notions where reading with writing came to define the meaning of 'literacy'. The problems that a historian of literacy during the eighteenth century will encounter are highlighted by Stephens in a table he reproduces showing the percentages of brides and grooms making marks in various towns between 1754 and 1837 (Fig. 17). It shows a general trend of decline in signing when comparing the 1754-62 period with the 1799-1804 period, suggesting that illiteracy rates were rising towards the end of the eighteenth century.

Yet such a conclusion contradicts other forms of evidence from the period which suggest rising numbers of participants in social and cultural settings, which presuppose engagement in activities in which literacy practices were central. The extent of the involvement of commoners with the radical press in a town like Nottingham during the 1790s would indicate a growing engagement with literate practices rather than a decline. The figure for the 1831-37 date for Nottingham masks the fact that a greater total number of the population would have been readers and writers if not a larger percentage. Also, it masks the historic fact that the place called Nottingham in 1754 was not the same place socially, as it had become by the 1830s so the comparison is rendered false because the same geographic location had been transformed. It is important to stress that although parish records were produced and kept locally, they were nevertheless brought into existence by legislation requiring that they be kept in a prescribed format to ensure uniformity and easy reference. They are therefore, despite their seeming local characteristics, official state records. Most now lie within County Record Offices although some remain with their original parishes such as at Greenford in Middlesex (now part of the London Borough of Ealing). The registers often fail to record marriages of Catholics who in many places grew significantly in number and proportion of the local populations towards the end of the eighteenth century. Illicit marriages were also unlikely to have been recorded.

The aggregated statistics drawn from the figures of different parishes within a district require localized interpretation to explain apparently contradictory movements as shown in Dudley and Worcester, both in the west midlands. The key to understanding such movements, as Stephens demonstrates, lies in social and economic changes, or the lack of them in relation to wider cultural shifts such as with Worcester.

THIS IMAGE HAS BEEN REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES

Fig. 17. Tabulated extracts from Stephens' presentation (1.1.) p. 6. In cases like Dudley, Worcester and Nottingham, the percentages of those signing actually rise. Total numbers of those signing increases also as population sets grow.

Summary

In this chapter the value of different types of source materials for the study of literacy during the eighteenth century has been discussed. This widening out of the source-base reflects a critical shift towards viewing 'literacy' as encompassing a range of communicative practices rather than the performance of reading with writing alone. The chapter argues also for the need of educational historians to adopt critical perspectives which place a value upon original documents and artefacts from the times being studied. By placing such sources within various critical contexts such as how and where and by whom a particular type of publication was read, it is possible to appreciate a number of features about literacy practices which need to be incorporated into accounts of literacy and more generally education. The incorporation into this chapter of a wide range of such sources (albeit in reproduced form) is intended to demonstrate the potential they can have for research into educational history. chapters four, five and six are, in part, an exposition of the deployment of one or other of the types of source materials discussed in this chapter.

¹ McCulloch, G. & Richardson, W. (2000) *Historical Research in Educational Settings*. pp 5-7. OUP.

² Ibid, p6.

³ Bailyn, Bernard, (1960) *Education in the Forming of American Society*, The North Library, W.Norton, New York. Cremin, Lawrence. (1970) *American Education : The Colonial Experience, 1607-1783*, Harper & Row, New York. The introductory essay by Bailyn in particular is a tour-de-force, showing the nexus that existed between religious/ideological norms and shifting developments within families as social sites for transmission of occupational practices and values. Cremin's studies of earlier American education show how the rise of schooling was partly in response to particular breakdowns in the patriarchal and religiously-framed social structure. Despite the essentially social and cultural focus both studies nevertheless remain firmly about 'education'.

⁴ Bailyn, (1960) pp 9-10.

⁵ Bailyn is referring to professional historians of education working in the 1890s and 1900s. The second section of the book covers this historiographical tradition, Bailyn (1960) pp. 54 – 114.

⁶ Bailyn, (1960) pp 13 – 14.

⁷ Cremin, (1970) preface, p. xi.

⁸ Graff, Harvey, (1987a) *The Legacies of Literacy*, Indiana Univ. Press. And, (1987b) *The Labyrinths of Literacy*, Falmer. See Graff's attempt to define 'literacy' 'On literacy in the Renaissance: review and reflections'. pp 51-52 of *The Routledge Falmer Reader in History of Education*, ed. Gary McCulloch. (2005).

⁹ Crystal, D, (1987) *The Cambridge Encyclopaedia of Language*, C.U.P. Earlier sections cover what has come to be described as 'proto-writing' a transitional mode falling between recorded numeration and symbolic scribal practices. Also Schmandt-Besserat, D. (1996) *How Writing Came About*, University of Texas Press, in which she uses dated and sequenced archaeological evidence to argue that writing developed from counting practices and that for literate practices to develop there must have been some intermediary stage from which it could evolve. Literacy practices are therefore firmly situated within historical and cultural specificities. For a discussion of autonomy versus inheritance see Roger Fischer, (2005) Rev. Ed. *A History of Writing*, Reaktion, pp 211-236.

¹⁰ The taxonomy is included in his (1987b) *The Labyrinths of Literacy* pp. 20-22, pub. Falmer Press, and again in his (1987a) *Legacies of Literacy*, pp 6 - 7. pub. Indiana University Press.

¹¹ See the paper on John Dee 1527–1608 pp. 78-92, from the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* Vol. 213, ed. Baker, W. and Womack, K., Gale Group, Detroit.

¹² In the possession of the owner. The case was heard in the Huntingdon assizes in 1791.

¹³ Note the Clerk's script and Barrister's written comments and under-scorings.

¹⁴ See the comparative analysis of two seventeenth-century private libraries by Andrea Finklestein, (2000) Gerard de Malynes and Edward Misselden : 'The Learned Library of the Seventeenth Century Merchant', pp 1 – 20, *Book History*, Vol 2, Penn State University. The article examines the intellectual relationship between the two men (often controversial) and the relationship of their general intellectual interests to their professional and economic writings..

¹⁵ Historians, naturally, are absorbed about the things that are present within surviving documents and other sources. This also allows for a critical consideration of what is absent from those same records and sources.

¹⁶ Three titles by Robert Darnton worth reading, not only for their historical value but as considerable works of literature are a collection of shorter studies, *The Great Cat Massacre*, (1984) Viking; *The Kiss of Lamourette : Reflections in Cultural History*, (1990) W. W. Norton; *The Forbidden Best-Sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France*, (1996) Harper Collins. Darnton typically adopts a who-dun-it style of narration infusing his handling of documentary sources with a detective-style narration.

¹⁷ Bloch and Febvre jointly produced an influential review called the *Annales d'histoire économique et sociale* between 1930- 19. They argued for wider recognition of the importance of economic forces in shaping cultural history. Bloch was murdered by the Nazis during his imprisonment under the occupation. Henri-Jean Martin was essentially a pupil of Febvre's, completing the seminal *The Coming of the Book* (1958) in the mid-fifties in collaboration with Febvre. Throughout I have used the 1976 edition. Chapter 8 is of special interest for the present study as it challenges the almost universal view that the advent of the printing press was a positive thing. Martin, however, does ascribe to the Press, the determining influence on the rise of vernacular and hence, popular literacy.

¹⁸ *Book History*, Vol. 5. (2002) pp 143 – 160.

¹⁹ An accessible re-statement of Chartier's principal thesis can be found in Cavallo, G. & Chartier, R. (1999) *A History of Reading in the West*. Univ. Mass. Press.

²⁰ It is unlikely that this is the same Esther Maud who married William Tuke and established the Quaker school in York. Tuke's second wife, Esther Maud, died in 1794.

²¹ Colclough, Stephen. (2000) 'Procuring Books and Consuming Texts : The Reading Experience of a Sheffield Apprentice, 1789', *Book History*, Vol 3.

²² Sher, Richard B. (1998) 'The Edinburgh Booksellers' Society in Comparative Perspective', pp 32-98 *Book History*, Vol 1. This offers a view of the social and business context in which someone like the Edinburgh bookseller Bell operated. Bell was the recipient of the letter and invoice and books from Caddell operated.

²³ Literacy rates in Scotland were the highest in the world in the eighteenth century, the specific legacy of the schooling system, which, despite its weaknesses complemented a powerful tradition of family-based bible reading. It is necessary therefore throughout this study to differentiate between England and Scotland. One of the most important aspects of the growth of literacy within the artisan class in English towns was the arrival amongst their number of Scots émigrés; labourers and artisans who were literate. One example of this trend which will be discussed more fully was the family of Thomas Spence (chapter 5). See the estimates in Nicholas Hans, op. cit.

²⁴ The Acts of Union joined England with Scotland in 1707, forming the Kingdom of Great Britain. It was not until 1801, that the Act of Union between Great Britain and Ireland created the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland (UK), which became the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in 1922, following partition of Ireland and creation of the Irish Free State.

²⁵ Modern 'rough' note-taking was not a feature of literacy practices prior to the invention of the modern pencil and cheap smooth paper during the 1820s-30s. The changing nature of the materials for writing transformed literacy practices. Before this date memorisation and the intense focussed attention to a speaker that was characteristic of predominantly oral traditions, persisted. The author has made presentations on this theme to several conferences and to several groups of post-graduate students.

²⁶ Estimated dating courtesy of Alan Cole, director of the Museum of Writing.

²⁷ The earliest attempt at a biography was by Samuel Smiles whose *Lives of the Engineers*, Vol. 1. was published by Murray in 1862. More recently, Nick Corble, (2005) *The First Canal Builder*, Tempus, London, and Christine Richardson, (2004) *Canal Pioneer, Waterways World*, have offered re-evaluations.

²⁸ For a recent study of the Paine Burnings, see Frank O'Gorman, (2006) 'The Paine burnings of 1792-1794', *Past and Present*, Vol. 193. pp 111-155. O'Gorman relies heavily and almost exclusively upon contemporary Newspaper accounts of such events. He suggests a degree of local spontaneity to the event but such a view is qualified when one realises the extent of direct communication between London-based Government figures and the Loyalist associations who lay behind the burnings.

²⁹ Thomas Hardy, Secretary to the LCS He figures as one of the 'Doubting Thomases' in chapter six of this study because of his rise from humble apprentice to national prominence.

³⁰ Simon, Brian. (1974) *The Two Nations and the Educational Structure, 1780-1870*. Lawrence and Wishart. Chapter IV focuses upon 'The Workers' Movement and Education – 1790-1832' pp 177-222. There is little about specifically eighteenth-century developments but Simon does briefly include highly suggestive accounts of reading practices within and around the Corresponding Societies.

³¹ Thompson, (1968ed) *The Making of the English Working Class*, citation from pages 248-49, Pelican Books, London.

³² Ibid. pp 248-49.

³³ Brant, C. (2006) *Eighteenth Century Letters and British Culture*. Palgrave. See especially the primary sources bibliography, pp 405-17.

³⁴ For a discussion about critical boundaries between public and private documents and its impact upon historical research see McCulloch, G. (2004) *Documentary Research in Education, History and the Social Sciences*. RoutledgeFalmer. Chapter 4 'Behind the Scenes' explores the boundaries between institutional and private sources. pp 51-73

³⁵ Scott, J. (1990) *A Matter of Record*. Polity Press p 14.

³⁶ Stephens, W. B. (1987) *Education, Literacy and Society, 1830-1870 : the geography of diversity in provincial England*, Manchester University Press.

³⁷ See page 5.

³⁸ Hans, pp 63-81.

³⁹ O'Day, R. (1982) *Education and Society, 1500-1800*, Longman. These comments relate to pages 177 -278, the conclusion of the book.

⁴⁰ Chapter 13 of O'Day 'Education and the Problem of Poverty', pp 238-259, however, opens up a discussion about the social purpose of much of the non-elite schooling and uses a wide range of contemporary sources albeit with a dominant focus upon formal schooling contexts.

⁴¹ Towards the end of the century, under the impact of mass migrations into urban centres, rising poverty, mass dislocations from the countryside and continuous emigration to America and rapid growth in population, measurable literacy rates declined in some places. This masks the fact that total numbers of literates continually rose during the period. It is therefore an error to state that literacy declined towards the end of the century.

⁴² Neuberg, Victor, E. (1971) *Popular Education in Eighteenth Century England*, Chicago Univ. Press. Neuberg's principal focus is upon the production, circulation and reception of Chap Books. Although Harvey Graff is somewhat dismissive of the credibility of Neuberg's central proposition, which is that the substantial

growth of Chapbook publishing indicates a growth in the reading public, Neuberg was one of the first to appreciate fully the potential of foregrounding such sources in histories of eighteenth century literacy. Altick, R. (1957) *The English Common Reader: a social history of the mass reading public 1800-1900*. Pioneering collection of extracts demonstrating the potential of producing a 'history from below'. It is worth placing this alongside the work by Hoggart and Williams both contemporaries, as discussed in the Literature Review.

⁴³ There are specialist monographs often with limited, 'vanity' publishers. e.g. Folmsbee, B. (1942) *A Little History of the Horn Book*. The Horn Book Inc. Boston. This has been re-published in 1965 and 1972.

⁴⁴ Humphrey, C (1997) *Samplers*. Cambridge University Press.

⁴⁵ Simonton, D. (1998) 'Gendering Work in Eighteenth-Century Towns'. Chapter 2. p.30. *Working Out Gender*, Ed. Margaret Walsh (1999). Ashgate.

⁴⁶ Humphrey, pp 3-5. Taylor's book contains just two pages of text followed by thirty pages of patterns. Taylor, J. *The Needles Excellency*, John Boler. London. This book drew liberally from Johann Sibermacher's, *Schon Neues Modelbuc*, (1597), Nuremburg. Humphrey erroneously ascribes authorship to the publisher.

⁴⁷ William Caslon, 1692-1766. Talbot Baines Reed, *A History of The Old English Letter Foundaries*, revised Ed. A.F. Johnson (1952) Chapter 11, pp 229-256. Faber.

⁴⁸ Personal correspondence in 2006 arising from a presentation made by the author at the Annual Conference of BSECS in St. Hugh's College, Oxford. Carolyn Lyle publishes as Carolyn D. Williams. e.g. (1993) *Pope, Homer and Manliness*, Routledge. Lyle works at Reading University.

⁴⁹ Boyce, Anne Ogden (1889) *Records of a Quaker Family: The Richardsons of Cleveland*, Harris, London. p 31.

⁵⁰ A brief life of Murray full of anecdotal reminiscences of his time at Holdgate is to be found in Chapter XV pp. 138-154, of Boyce, *ibid*.

⁵¹ In order to appreciate the complexity of skill required for a girl to master traditional embroidery and needlework, see *Samplers and Stitches*, by Mrs. Archibald Christie (Grace), (1934) (3rd ed) Batsford, London. The levels of dexterity required with a needle far surpassed anything required for manipulation of a quill for writing. In addition to the acquisition of skill there would be the absorption over years of knowledge of a range of stitches, patterns and techniques, leading to an ability to design intuitively.

⁵² Accessed from the web data-base ECCO. Eighteenth Century Catalogue Online. All of the texts from the eighteenth century that are cited in this study can be accessed from this remarkably comprehensive source-base. Most texts used within the study however, are also drawn from the author's personal collection.

⁵³ A foundation text for this shift in perspective in social and cultural studies was that of Roland Barthes, whose *Mythologies* analyses a range of cultural practices and activities as 'texts' which were susceptible to reading from the significations of their constituting elements. A more recent example of a social semiotic approach to documents is to be found in the studies collected by Carey Jewitt and Gunther Kress, (2003) *Multimodal Literacies*, Peter Lang, New York.

⁵⁴ Samuel Richardson trained as a printer. There is a debate concerning the type of schooling he received whilst at Christ's school. Garrick, whose father was an army recruiting officer stationed in Gibraltar for many years, managed parts of a Grammar School education.

⁵⁵ Barrell, John & Mee, Jon (2007) *Trials for Treason and Sedition, 1792-94* 8 Vols. Pickering and Chatto. These volumes collect the papers from the prosecution and defendant's sides and also reproduce contemporaneous published reactions. Davis, Michael T (2002) *London Corresponding Society, 1793-99*. 6 Vols., Pickering and Chatto. This brings together internal correspondence with published political writings from figures such as Hardy, Cartwright, Thelwall, Cooper. Levine, Alysa (2006) *Narratives of the Poor in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, 5 Vols. Pickering and Chatto. This brings together a range of transcripts, statements, letters, records of the poor in hospitals and refuges.

⁵⁶ Peakman, Julie (2006) *Whore Biographies*, 8 Vols. Pickering and Chatto.

⁵⁷ Street, B. & Lefstein, A (2007) *Literacy an Advanced Resource Book*. Routledge. pp 142 – 150.

⁵⁸ Krishnamurthy, A (Ed) (2009) *The Working-Class Intellectual in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Britain*. Ashgate.

⁵⁹ Muller, Anja (2009) *Framing Childhood in Eighteenth Century English Periodicals and Prints*, Ashgate.

⁶⁰ Rose, J (2002) *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes*, Yale University Press. pp 1-2. Burnett, J, Vincent, D, Mayall, D Eds, (1984-89) *The Autobiography of the Working Class: An Annotated. Critical Bibliography*, 3 Vols. New York University Press.

⁶¹ For an extended consideration of the potential and limitations of the use of biographical sources for wider social science research see, Robert, Brian, (2002) *Biographical Research*, O.U.P.

⁶² Johnson, S. (1779-81) *Lives of the English Poets*, published by Messrs. Whitestone, Williams, [et al], Dublin, 1779-81. 3 Vols.

⁶³ *Ibid*. p.3. (1779) Edition, *The Lives of the English Poets*.

⁶⁴ Smollett, Tobias. (1748) *The Adventures of Roderick Random*. The book is also noteworthy for the brutally frank portrayal of 'Rory's' teacher.

⁶⁵ Robert, Brian, op. cit.. p 4.

⁶⁶ Ibid. Chapter 10, pp 169-217. This is cited because Panofsky's critical mode seeks to identify interlinking graphical and symbolic elements and show how they operate within the two dimensional space. This leads to an authoritative interpretation and hence, understanding of the meaning of the image. The focus of the criticism tends to be upon supposed authorial intentionality which pre-supposes the existence of such an authorised meaning. The approach is therefore essentially structuralist and ought not to be counter-posed, as Burke does, with the critical approaches of Levi-Strauss and Barthes.

⁶⁷ Burke. Chapter 3, pp 46-58, dealing with The Sacred and the Supernatural, touches upon the importance of context such as pp 51-2 describing the coloured statues placed in the Sacro Monte of Varallo.

⁶⁸ Gaskell, Ivan. Chapter 8. pp 168-179, 'History of Images', in Burke, P, (1991) *New Perspectives on historical Writing*. Polity Press.

⁶⁹ Cowan, Steven (2004) 'Introducing New Sources of Evidence into the History of Reading'. *Educate*, pp 80-85. Vol. 4, No.2.

⁷⁰ Barrell (2007).

⁷¹ From the author's personal collection.

⁷² The term derives in English from the French and Italian appropriations from the Arabic *makhzan*, meaning storehouse. Originally therefore, within publications – a storehouse of information or knowledge.

⁷³ For an insight into circulating libraries of the eighteenth century see Jacobs, Edward, 2003, 'Eighteenth Century British circulating libraries and culture', pp 1 -22, *Book History*, Vol. 6.

⁷⁴ Bailyn (1960) op cit pp 73-75.

⁷⁵ These registers are usually held at County Record Offices. Local micro-fiche copies are usually available in District and Borough Council local history libraries. In some cases the original registers remain with the parish such as Greenford in Middlesex, now part of the L.B. Ealing. These sources are remarkably preserved with the exception of those lost during bombing and incidental losses incurred by fire or flood.

⁷⁶ W.P.W. Phillimore and F. Johnson of Chancery Lane, London started systematic collection and publication of transcribed registers in the 1880s. The work was usually undertaken by a parish officer working in tandem with locally based members of historical and genealogy societies. Phillimore authored and published the influential *How to Write the History of a Family*, in 1887 in two volumes making substantial use of the parish registers. This led to J. Charle Cox's *How to Write the History of a Parish* in 1895. The published county collections are now available on CDROM.

⁷⁷ Stone, Lawrence (1969) 'Literacy and Education in England, 1640-1900', *Past and Present*, 42, pp 69-139

⁷⁸ Schofield, R.S (1968) 'The Measurement of Literacy in Pre-Industrial England', in Goody, J. ed., *Literacy in Traditional Societies*, Cambridge Univ. Press. pp. 311-325.

⁷⁹ Sanderson, Michael, (1972) 'Literacy and Social Mobility in the Industrial Revolution', *Past and Present*, 56, No. 1, pp 108-12.

⁸⁰ Stephens, W.B (1987) *Education, Literacy and Society, 1830-70: The Geography of Diversity in Provincial England*, Manchester Univ. Press.

⁸¹ Cressy (1977) 'Levels of Literacy in England', *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 20, No.1. pp 1-23. Spufford (1981) p. 22/23.

Chapter 4.

Habitual reading. Educational experience in the coffee house

Introduction

It has been argued that one of the reasons literacy rates rose during the period from the Civil War to the industrial revolution was the stimulus provided by an expanding printing and publishing industry for whom a literate market was a necessity.¹ It can sometimes be forgotten that printing and publishing is an industry conducted on commercial lines with the producers having a vested interest in securing wider markets for what they produce. For those working and investing capital in this industry there was a vested interest in expanding the numbers who became active readers and listeners of their products. For this to take place it presupposed a movement away from the private domestic setting where, for example, light would not be freely available from dusk to dawn, thus making reading difficult. For an expanding reading public to become a reality, social sites and suitable locations were needed where communicative exchanges which focussed around print was possible. One such location for this was the town, and the site which exemplified this emerging sphere was the coffee house possibly more than any other.² This was more than simply a place where one went to drink coffee, tea or chocolate and take a break from inclement weather. Coffee houses became places where learning, or to use a contemporary term ‘intelligence’, was circulated and exchanged. They were the centres of education for a majority of literate men in Britain from just after the Civil War right through the eighteenth century, and we find examples of such businesses being established across Britain during the 1650s through to the 1770s.³ The following chapter examines some aspects of the educative role of these social spaces. Although coffee houses persisted throughout the eighteenth century, this chapter concentrates upon their heyday as social and educational centres during the period from the Civil War up to the mid-eighteenth century. This lays a basis for succeeding chapters which focus more upon the middle and later part of the century.

This chapter argues against the view presented by Cowan (2005), who believes that the essence of coffee-house culture was a unique combination of a genteel virtuoso “culture of curiosity” and a rapidly growing commercial world centered in London.⁴ Instead, the present study argues that the main social characteristic of the coffee house was the degree to which they fostered socially promiscuous gatherings, breaking down social class barriers. Cowan

seeks to emphasize the role of an urbanized elite who he argues, were always a small minority amongst habitués of coffee houses. Consequently, he downplays the presence and impact of the vast majority of non-elite patrons. This much is openly acknowledged by Cowan when he says, “I have placed great emphasis upon the disproportionate influence of the virtuosi, a small subculture within England’s social elite...”.⁵ In relation to the role of humanistic intellectuals in the early modern period, who Cowan refers to as ‘*virtuosi*’, they had been discussed much earlier by Habermas as *Corregiano* when he describes the development of public discourse and behaviour at the very beginning of his book.⁶ The present chapter prefers to argue along with Downie (1979) that there were broader social and political influences which ignited the passion for reading and debate in public places.⁷

It was Habermas who first identified the political/ideological significance of the growth of these social sites as marking a radical departure from previous forms of public association, although such a view is implicit in the work of Aytoun Ellis writing a little earlier than Habermas in the mid 1950s.⁸ Habermas identifies the coffee house as the foundational social setting in which a new sense of the ‘public’ emerges which in essence was a development and manifestation of bourgeois interests.⁹ The phrase ‘Penny Universities’ was coined by Aytoun Ellis to describe the coffee houses for his 1956 book which traced the origins and development of these institutions. Yet apart from a section on the early coffee houses of Oxford and the extent to which students and academics patronised them, there was little development by Ellis of the idea that these places became centres of learning and education except through inference.

This chapter seeks to make explicit the educational importance of the coffee house from the period of their inception in 1652 to the period of differentiation and specialisation of clientele in the later part of the eighteenth century. Ellis’s use of ‘penny’ refers to the requirement of leaving the coin at the desk upon entry into a coffee house. Some coffee houses issued their own tokens which could be bought in bulk.¹⁰ The issuing of such tokens implies a secure and regular clientele paying in advance for anticipated use of the premises and facilities. The tokens also imply a sort of ‘membership’ of the establishment which distinguishes it from being merely a place where one enters simply to buy something as a customer (Fig18). Using a particular coffee house came to confer upon the client a sense of who he was and where he belonged, something that was needed in a large, city environment where little would be known about the people one met or passed in the street in contrast to the familiarities and intimacies of the village or town.

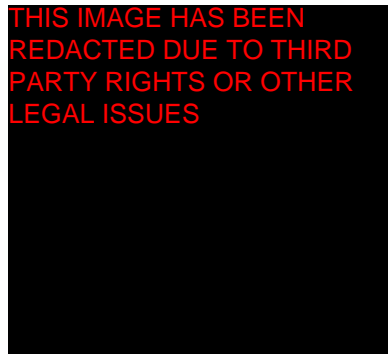


Fig. 18. Coffee-house token showing the 'Turk's Head'.
These advertised the business and could be used as general tender.¹¹

For a small cost it was possible to spend time in the company of others, listening to what was being said and discussing any number of topics. It was also possible to read the papers that the proprietor subscribed to, take a paper of tobacco in a pipe and drink a range of beverages that had been imported from abroad. Many contemporary issues were the subject of continuous and extended debate among the clients of the coffee houses, so repeated visits would mean someone becoming engaged in the niceties of an issue to a degree almost unequalled elsewhere - hence the use by Ellis of the term 'Universities' - whose pedagogy combined the practice of intensive reading with open disputation.¹² From the outset the coffee houses were markers for the growth of an urban culture, something which happened across Britain sooner and at a faster rate than anywhere else during the eighteenth century as is shown with the population in Birmingham rising from 7,000 in 1700, to 23,000 by mid-century and passing 71,000 in the year of the first census in 1801. Manchester during the same intervals grew from 8,000 to 18,000 and then passing 89,000.¹³

Coffee houses were distinctively urban sites existing in large numbers in London and the port towns and they are a part of the story of how Britain was the first nation to have a majority of its population residing in modern, urban, rather than traditional, rural areas. At first, the largest centres were Liverpool, Edinburgh, Norwich, Exeter, Newcastle and Bristol, to be joined with several to be surpassed later in the century, by expanding industrial conurbations in places like Birmingham, Sheffield, Glasgow, Manchester and Leeds.¹⁴ W.B. Stephens makes the comment that much of the migrating population coming from the English regions into the towns were those who had ambition, initiative and some literacy, and that this reinforced the literate cultures that grew within the cities.¹⁵ His analyses of late-eighteenth-century literacy figures for parishes as close to London as Hertfordshire show the stark effects of such 'selective' migrations as this county emerges as one with amongst the lowest measurable literacy rates using parish register evidence in England. The coffee houses

grew in response to the growing presence amongst the urban population of tens of thousands of incomers seeking their fortunes or at least an improved quality of life. In London this influx was more pronounced during the 'season' when Parliament sat and when several hundred of the coffee houses became centres of fervid social, cultural and political debate.

Coffee house culture and London's growth.

Unlike in county towns and villages where an individual could expect to be recognized and known, within the city anonymity was the norm. Outside of the immediate neighbourhood of work or domicile, recognition came through external features such as one's dress, but that was something that could in any event be manufactured.¹⁶ The experience of living, working, visiting and growing up in the city was, for most people who were incomers from rural areas, a transformative one and this impact became a staple theme for drama and prose throughout the eighteenth century.¹⁷ The airs and behaviours acquired as a result of living in the metropolis appeared to affect all social classes. Pastor Wendeborn noted that:

..the rich so frequently and expeditiously...go into the most distant parts of the kingdom with their servants and attendants, who carry the follies and vices of the capital, so successfully among the people who live remote from it.¹⁸

What one learned in the city as well as the way one learned it, was held in contrast to the more traditional set of educational experiences and expectations of the rural setting. The play *The Country Wife* by Wycherly presents the naivety of a country woman to the sophisticated urban audience who then see a satirised reflection of themselves in the behaviour of the other characters towards her.¹⁹ By 1700 London had become quite unique as an urban centre because of its geographical spread and for the enormous scale of its population, port and economy. At the time it would be referred to as the cities of London and Westminster and these were surrounded by satellite villages which were themselves growing at a rapid pace. One example was Brentford to the west of Westminster in which Sarah Trimmer reported a growing number of children of the poor living semi-vagrant existences along the canal and around the boat-repair yards.²⁰ The only comparison to London was the precedent of Rome during classical times.²¹ This was something people were aware of making them feel that their country and city was becoming bigger and better than any other. London's continuous growth was sustained despite a prolonged period of Civil War in the 1640s, a severe plague in 1665

and the Great Fire of 1666. If anything these gave a new lease of life to the city which had to be rebuilt from the ashes.

Although the rebuilding after the fire was piecemeal, for a while at least, London was clean and new, compared to what it had been like previously. Buildings had new and larger rooms which could be let for a variety of purposes. They were brick-built and better aired and appointed than the decaying spaces within the ancient timber-framed edifices of the Tudor city. In one property for example there were two entirely separate and well known coffee houses and a bookshop. Next door was a famous waxworks museum. Nearby there were clerks and printers and stationers because the place was close to the area where lawyers frequented and worked. A post inn stood opposite this row. In these buildings, rooms were available to let and most houses had lodgers. These were often single men living separately from kin and many were newly arrived or temporary residents. Robert Dodsley, a publisher who escaped from an apprenticeship to a stocking-maker and served as a footman, brought a love of reading derived from his teacher father in Nottingham, and used this literacy as a sort of social capital amidst the swirl of contacts and exchanges that he established in London.²² Thomas Paine had a rented room whilst living in London or Paris and would spend most of his time in socially companionable settings, rather than the rented domestic space where he simply slept and kept a few personal belongings.

Mirroring this presence of male incomers residing in single, rented rooms, was the presence of thousands of women providing services for male clients.²³ Boswell, who delighted in his extended stays in London, visited a prostitute as often as he could and, in this type of behaviour, was different from his circle of acquaintances only by degree. The illicit genre of whore biographies was by no means an uncommon feature of the publishing world, with success for such semi-fictionalised novels often depending upon the accuracy and thus recognisability of the accounts contained within the narrative.²⁴ The picture of generally-illiterate prostitutes must be re-examined as some of their appeal arose from their ability to discourse upon a range of subjects with their clients. Harris's list provides an account of the interchangeability between prostitution and being a schoolmistress.²⁵

The city was a place where for many, traditional patriarchal and parochial social structures had more or less disintegrated amongst the urban commoners and, as Cruikshank has shown, many amongst the merchant and gentry classes lived split lives advocating Anglican righteousness back in their country seats whilst living in debauchery while domiciled in London.²⁶ It was not unusual to see female relatives engaged together within prostitution entirely separate from control or direction from male kin. Also, as indicated in the

pages of Harris's list, many 'working women' were virtually indentured to matrons who offered them protection. These matrons in their turn worked alongside pimps like Jack Harrison, head waiter of the Shakespeare's Head in Covent Garden, who were able to operate successfully with the women precisely because of the lack of personal ties. Almost as if to create a form or pattern to the new city existence, social spaces and institutions assumed highly gendered characteristics.²⁷ There were however, public sites where gender separation did not operate such as at The Rotunda in Ranelagh Gardens, pictured below (Fig. 19) in 1751 by Canaletto where concerts were performed daily.

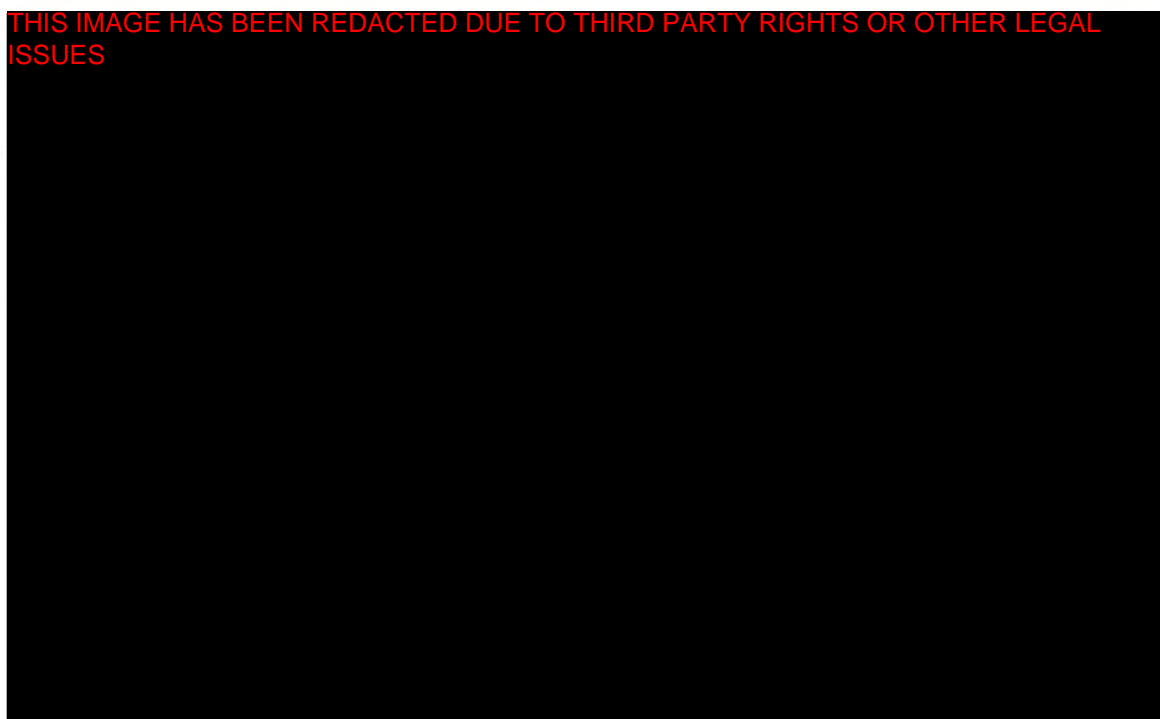


Fig. 19. Canaletto. The Rotunda. Ranelegh Gardens. 1751

The city acted as a magnet for those with wealth and to service their spending, huge numbers of servants and tradesmen were required. Thousands of small workshops provided manufactured goods of every imaginable kind for purchase by those with disposable income and London had become the world's busiest port. In some cities specialisation occurred. Small metal manufacturing in Birmingham and the west Midlands for example and trade between cities became of major importance. As business and communications grew so too did the need for basic materials to aid the process such as tens of thousands of goose quills each month. So these would have to be walked from Norfolk to London in groups sometimes numbering thousands of birds.²⁸

As London attracted a growing number of people its connections with the rest of the country actually increased as each person brought with them past associations and continuing links with the place from where they had come.²⁹ As the city grew, its economy expanded, creating a need for services and supplies from surrounding areas which benefited from their proximity to the urban sprawl. The flow of people engaged in business of one sort or another created the new phenomenon of continuous traffic leading to the expansion of a network of posting inns offering board and stabling.

Whole villages were being swallowed up as the fringes of the city expanded. Hackney, Chelsea, Stepney and even Brentford to the west became effectively part of London.³⁰ It was within this unique urban space that several thousand small resting places, dispensing non-alcoholic beverages and opening throughout the day and evening, came into being. They became 'home' bases for this shifting population of men, somewhere to return to on a regular basis where a person might be welcomed and recognised. They offered a different setting to the tavern, inn or ale-house and within them a unique sub-culture developed that was to help shape the lives of the hundreds of thousands of clients who used them. This sub-culture was profoundly educational.

The physical and social location of an institution and the way it interacts with the flow of public movement is also of significance. The example of the famous Garraways coffee house situated in Change Alley just off Lombard Street helps to illustrate the point (Fig. 20). Thomas Garraway was the first person to sell tea in England in 1657. Within a decade the drink was considered fashionable and was taken at Court. Garraway established a thriving business and became a prosperous merchant providing wholesale tea, coffee and chocolate. As the premises were built over an old medieval cellar, the business also imported high quality hogsheads of wine from the continent which could be stored in the cellar. These were sold by 'candle' auction, a process where the auctioneer would begin the sale by lighting a candle and the last bidder before it went out was the winner. Sotheby's also began auctioning within Garraways. So apart from the coffee-house clientele, and those doing business, there would have been sudden influxes of people for each auction. The alley was a hive of activity with other establishments close by.

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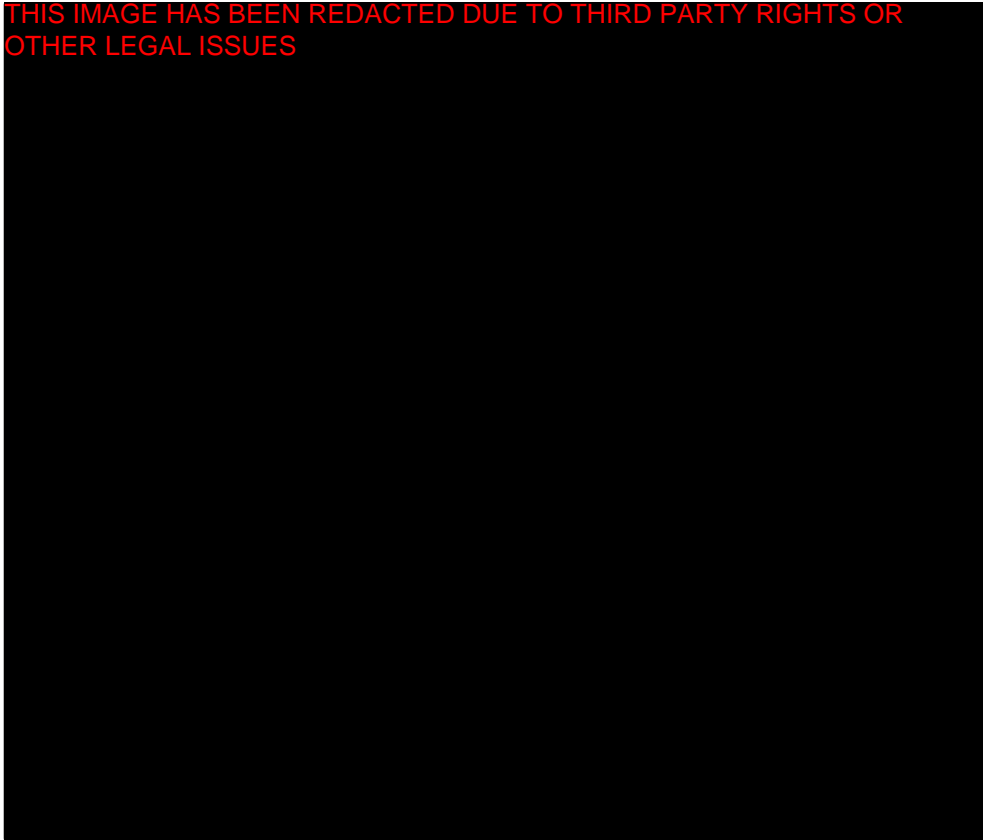


Fig. 20. Built after the fire in 1746 which swept away the 'new' buildings erected after the 1666 fire. Also lost in the fire of 1746 were The Swan Tavern, Johnathan's and the Jerusalem coffee-houses.³¹

As we can see from the Roque's map below (Fig. 21), Exchange Alley connects Cornhill and Lombard Street and lies just south of the Royal Exchange. As the location was near to the main business district (Lombard Street) it would be frequented by city business people throughout the day and evening. Its location on a very busy corner gave Garraways a prominence as a landmark. Inside its doors, a series of regular clients would spend time conducting business either with the proprietor or amongst themselves, and it became a natural place for those engaged in the import and sale of tea, coffee and chocolate to gravitate towards. Its fame also emanated from the fact that Garraways coffee house along with Johnathan's was the epicentre of the South Sea Bubble trading mania which began in 1711 and ended in 1721. Not surprisingly, Garraways became famous and thus part of the modern folklore of London. It became a place to visit and is mentioned in several journals written by visitors to London. Such places provided a forum for the expression of what today might today be described as life-style consumerism. A person acquired a certain cachet from being a frequenter of such a place with its varied associations with fine wines and the auctioning of rare and valuable items. The coffee house became the centre of a nexus of business activities, each attracting particular groups and its presence in a particular place contributed towards a

tradition so the name becomes synonymous with the history of the area. It is part of the middle class and business class making its mark, not just in terms of ideas and social practices but also upon the structure of the city.³²

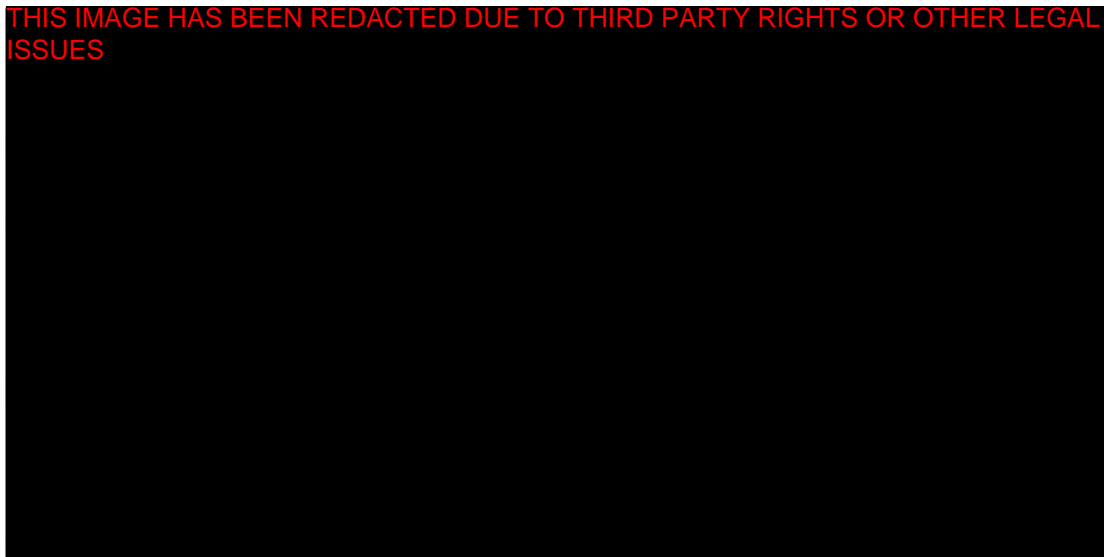


Fig. 21. Detail From John Roque's map showing the Royal Exchange between Cornhill and Threadneedle Street. 1741

Of course Garraway's was very special and few other coffee houses operated at so many levels of business. However, in their own ways, in countless locations, other coffee houses acted as local centres for the activities of ongoing coteries. It was not the coffee house per se that created the 'public' space but rather the way that it acted as the hub of a series of interlocking exchanges, transactions and practices.

Not all coffee houses were open, egalitarian spaces, but most appear to have been. However the notion of such places being there for free discussion was nevertheless present as an ideal in the minds of the clientele.³³ This notion would have been present because of the botched attempt by Charles II to proscribe the coffee houses in 1675 for the very reason that they were becoming seen as places where social deference was being challenged and undermined. Memories would have survived down the years of the way that opposition to the threatened closure spread amongst the 'public' and that this opinion was all the stronger for crossing social boundaries. Eventually the King withdrew opposition on pragmatic grounds recognising that the original purpose for closing the coffee houses which was to limit the involvement of such a wide social spectrum in open criticism of government, was simply not possible to enforce. The climb-down represented a major turning point in the history of freedom of expression in Britain. Ever since, it has been an accepted part of political, educational and cultural life that any government is subject to continuous examination and

comment. Since their inception the rule within coffee houses was that one sat at the next available space on a bench or seat. Talking politely and about whatever came up in conversation to strangers became the rule.³⁴ It is worth citing Paul Greenwood's poem of 1674 which conveys some of the atmosphere, albeit in a doggerel:

First Gentry, Tradesmen, all are welcome hither,
And may without Affront sit down Together:
Pre-eminence of place, none here should mind,
But take the next fit seat that he can find:
Nor need any, if finer persons come,
Rise up for to assigne to them his Room;
To limit Mens Expence, we think not fair,
But let him forfeit Twelve-Pence shall Swear:
He that shall any Quarrel here begin,
Shall give each Man a dish t'atone the sin;
And so shall He, whose Complements extend
So far to drink in COFFEE to his friend;
Let noise of loud disputes be quite forborn,
No Maudlin Lovers here in Corners Mourn,
But all be Brisk, and talk, but not too much
On sacred things...³⁵

Greenwood's poem appears on a piece of promotional advertising written in verse in which the greatest virtue it is suggested lies in coffee's invigorating qualities which will, "Not leave the Ladies reason to complain". The poem reveals the key element in the success of the coffee house as an institution; it brought people (men) together in a way that was socially promiscuous and because of the absence of alcohol, discussion was muted and reasonable. It is worth citing this source because we can see that the key ideas behind Addison and Steele's *Tatler* and *Spectator* were already present and institutionalised three decades earlier. This character is more humorously described in a satire sometimes attributed to the poet Ned Ward which was printed by the Whig publisher Richard Baldwin in 1690, the period immediately before William of Orange finally consolidated his position militarily:

III

The murmuring *Buzz* which through the Room was sent
Did *Bee-hives* noise exactly represent;
And like a *Bee-hive* too 'twas filled, and thick,
All tasting of the *Honey Politick*,
Call'd *News*, which they as greedily suck'd in,
As nurses milk young babes were ever see.
The various *Tones* and different noise of *tongues*,
From lofty sounding *Dutch* and *German* Lungs

Together with the soft melodious Notes
 Of *Spaniards*, *Frenchmen*, and the *Italian* Throats
 Who met in this State-*Conventicle*,
 Composed a kind of *Harmony*
 Which did in Concord disagree;
 Nay even *Babel's* fatal Overthrow,
 More sorts of *Languages* did never know,
 Nor were they half so various, and so fickle.³⁶

Although some allowance must be given for the satirical intention of the verse, the multi-lingual exchanges centred on news and politics is seen by the writer as being extraordinary. The talk is subdued unlike the raucous singing and banter one might encounter in a typical tavern. The poet describes how other forms of social difference seemed to vanish in coffee houses creating curious admixtures of conversations and debates:

IV

The place no manner of distinction knew,
 'Twixt *Christian*, *Heathen*, *Turk*, or *Jew*,
 The *Fool* and the *Philosopher*
 Sate close by one another here
 And Quality no more was understood
 Than *Mathematicks* were before the floud.
 Here sate a *Knight*, by him a *rugged Sailer*;
 Next him a son of *Mars*,
 Adorn'd with honourable scars;
 By them a *Courtier*, and a *Woman's Taylor*:
 A *Tradesman* and a *grave Divine*,
 Sate talking of affairs beyond the *Line*;
 Whilst in a corner of the room
 Sate a fat *Quack*, the famed *Poetick Tom*,
 Pleas'd to hear *Advertisements* read,
 Where 'mongst lost dogs, and other fav'rite Breed
 His famous *Pills* were chronicled:
The half-box eighteen Pills for eighteen Pence,
Though 'tis too cheep in any man's own sense.
Lawyers and *clients*, *sharppers* and their *Cullies*,
Quakers, *Pimps*, *Atheists*, *Mountebanks* and *Bullies*
 Clean or unclean, if here they call,
 The place, like *Noah's Ark*, receives 'em all³⁷

But why was it that these small privately-run salons dispensing tea, coffee and chocolate and tobacco could be the sites for such an effective challenge to government when ale houses, for example, which were three or four more times more numerous and

dispensed alcoholic drink, were not perceived to be such a threat? The answer lay in the traditions, comically represented in the extracts above that had consolidated around the coffee house of open debate and intensive and extensive reading. The reach of the coffee houses had become much wider than the immediate or even the collective effect they could have upon coteries of customers or upon the neighbourhoods where they were located. The public opinion that they represented became embodied in print on a regular (weekly, twice, thrice, daily) basis in journals and newspapers and after the removal of Licensing in 1775 there was effectively a free press. The coffee houses were located inside urban communities whereas a majority of Inns stretched along thoroughfares and catered to passing trade. Hence the relationship between an Inn and its clientele was critically different to that of the coffee house.

In addition to newspapers there was a large production of single sheet advertisements or single issue statements so print appeared to be everywhere. The coffee house and the Press grew during the same period and evolved in a symbiosis with the customers providing a public forum for the circulation of 'intelligence' of various kinds which would then be placed into print and then sold to proprietors of coffee houses who would attract custom on the basis of the titles they subscribed to. To be part of the coffee-house scene therefore one would self-consciously be part of the polity – a sort of Fourth Estate – hence the ubiquity of political discourse within coffee houses even though most of the participants could never exercise any *direct* influence over political events.

Coffee houses in essence took to themselves discussion about issues of 'public concern' and thus challenged and to a certain extent, displaced the previous monopoly over such matters by the Church and the Government. In so doing they in effect wrested away the monopoly of wisdom and of pronouncement from these institutions of the state and placed them instead into a social site where urban gentry/bourgeois discourse became dominant. The instance of Lloyds in which an argot for trading purposes developed and a specialised language about shipping and insurance came to be widely used, meant that specialist interlocutors became necessary between government and this area of the public sphere, thus placing those who controlled the trade and exchange in a certain position of power and control.

The view of the coffee houses as sites for the expansion of liberal, democratic sentiment and experience appears vividly in the testimony of Von Archenholz, a German visitor who ascribes a similar but contemporary importance to the coffee house.

Archenholz in the late 1780s, commenting from a German perspective, was astonished to witness the six hundred members of Lloyds at their business which centred on their own publication of lists of departures, arrivals and cargoes. Lloyds became some decades earlier an unrivalled centre for what Archenholz calls 'authentic intelligence', something which he noted placed London at the heart of world shipping and trading. He also notes with some prescience that this information is very often passed onto the government providing them with superior knowledge of shipping literally around the globe. He mentions the 'immense correspondence' with all countries in Europe establishing an internationalized insurance business:

The English live in a very remarkable manner. They rise late, and spend most of the morning, either in walking about town or sitting in the coffee-houses. There they not only read the newspapers, but transact business. Associations, insurances, bets, the trade in foreign bills; all these things are not only talked of, but executed in these public places. They there form connections, conclude bargains, talk of the intrigues and the cabals of the court, criticise works of genius and art, and enter in patriotic resolutions concerning the good of the state. Each profession has its own particular coffee-house; such as lawyers, the military men, the learned and men of wit. There are several dozens of these around the Royal Exchange, where more business is transacted than in the Exchange itself. That of Lloyd's in a particular manner deserves to be noticed; I do not think that there is another equal to it in all the world. Those merchants who speculate in insurances, and who in 1778 amounted to six hundred, assemble there. They subscribe ten guineas a piece per annum, and, by means of that sum, carry on an immense foreign correspondence with all the countries in Europe. The society accordingly receives the earliest and most authentic intelligence, respecting the politics or the commerce of all the nations inhabiting the four quarters of the globe. They often inform government of circumstances that they would not know till long after from their ministers and their agents; and which, perhaps, they would never otherwise hear of.³⁸

The production on a daily basis of Lloyds List provided Government with an authoritative source not from within its own resources but from a source that was established with self-conscious independence from the state. Instead of knowledge and intelligence being the preserve of a few occupying positions of power, magazines and newspapers disseminated a melange of information into the public domain of which they were important progenitors. Editors and publishers began to acquire an importance hitherto unknown in forming and shaping public discourse. An example of this curious, and at the time, very novel situation, is with the edition of the *British Gazette* of December 3rd, 1688 in which James II, rather late in

the day, desperately attempts to regain some credibility.³⁹ The *Gazette*, which was the first government newspaper, recognises the power of the independent readerships located in hundreds of coffee houses. Once distributed to these places, a secondary circulation of news would take effect within workshops, offices and homes immediately, and then a tertiary effect would happen as letters and copies of the paper were sent by coach in all directions around the kingdom. The key change to be noted here is that the means of distribution are controlled by independent rather than government sources and in this instance the desperate and crumbling government has come to rely upon the very networks they had previously tried to suppress.

When Habermas described the emergence of a bourgeois public sphere he was describing something with structure and form and which is apparent to all in the society and not just an abstract concept. It was embodied in the transformed communications networks which incorporated huge and combined resources – stables, horses, inns, coaches, drivers, posts, maintained roads, presses (legal and illicit) all in a predictable and reliable network, none of which was either owned or directed by the state.⁴⁰ This network delivered the intellectual outlook which emanated from the coffee house to the rest of the country, including across the Atlantic to the growing colonies. This outlook was essentially bourgeois and business-like rather than aristocratic.

The de-facto creation of this locus for ‘intelligence’ and opinion established a sphere of contestation which the state in turns had to either accept or challenge. It is little wonder therefore that those who participated in this sphere and who could not exercise *direct* influence upon events and decisions, would be aware of their ability through such channels of exerting *indirect* influence as a collective. As will be seen towards the end of this study, this relationship reached a critical point during the long Pitt administration when the informal, indirect character of the politics of the coffee house (and by that time many Taverns) was challenged by a newer form of assembly, the Corresponding Society.⁴¹

Emergence of satire and the commodification of literature

In a cultural climate where influence upon those in control of the state can only be achieved indirectly, it is no surprise that satire emerges as a cruel and effective weapon designed to shame decision-makers into “common-sense”. The age of satire is coterminous with that of the age of the coffee house, something that can be seen by the way that a majority of items reproduced in Markman Ellis’s four volumes of facsimiles, are either straightforward satires or have significant satirical elements within them. This parallel development is of

special interest in a study of literacy, as satire assumes not only a reading but also a simultaneous alternative reading (or indeed more). The satirist accepts from the outset the possibility of alternative understandings of what is written, something that reflects the emergence in the society of a diversity of readership and audience. Pope's *Dunciad* for example, is remarkable for its extensive author's footnotes, mockingly directing readers to various aspects of the subject covered within the verse, often offering caustic and controversial commentary upon figures who were very well known at the time of publication.⁴² Readers often find themselves spending far more time focussing upon these footnotes than upon the nominal work itself. Pope's dislike of this shift in power within the literary and cultural world is echoed by Rowlandson's watercolour *The Author and his Publisher* of 1784 (Fig. 22) where the author, who is drawn in a likeness to Thomas Paine, stands thin and obsequious with his manuscript, besides the portly centrally-placed publisher with the reader in the background seemingly oblivious and unconcerned about the relationship that produces the books he reads.

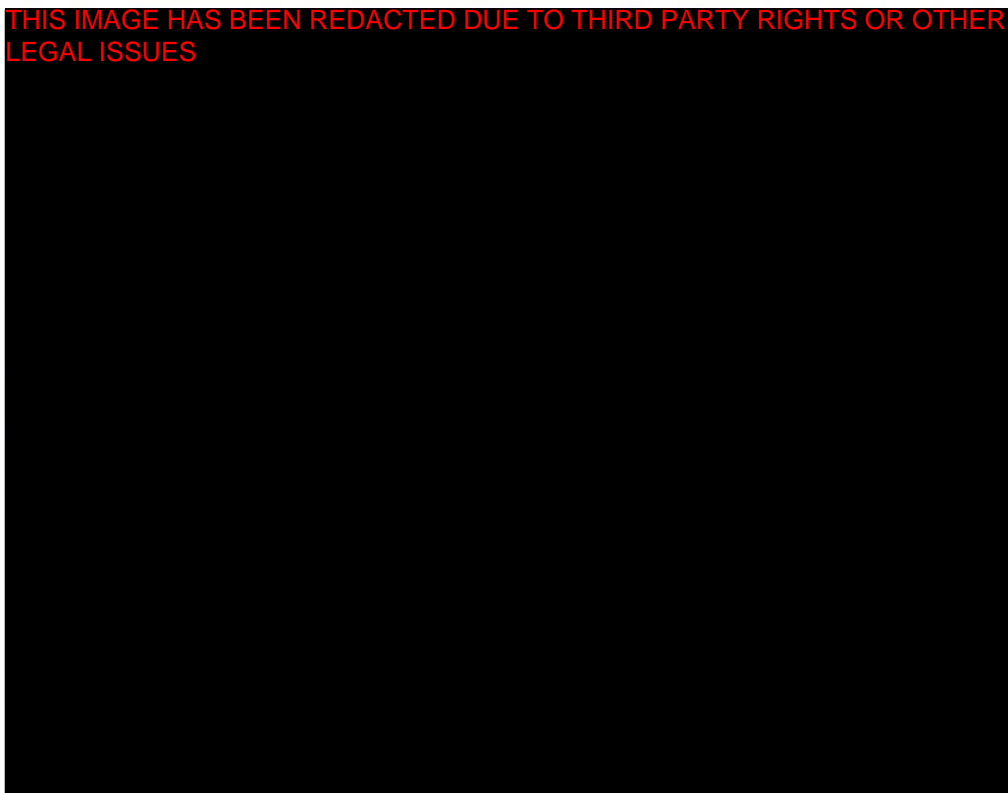


Fig. 22. 1784. Thomas Rowlandson. *The Author and his Publisher*

The ideal of the open public sphere is here shown to be under threat as power to decide upon what was published and thus circulated and read, began to concentrate into fewer hands, often

openly operating within the political arena for payment. Literary production began to shift towards becoming commonly available through a process of turning books into commodities. Written texts begin to be authored and commissioned independently of aristocratic, court, church and gentry patronage.

The social sphere in which literature achieves its status and reputation shifts from aristocratic coteries to the coffee house, famously exemplified by the virtual court of judgement established at Will's coffee house in Russell Street where Dryden was at the centre of a critical circle whose judgements became the standard around 'the town'. Pope and Addison continued the tradition of Will's being a literary hub. These judgements became amplified through publication in magazines and newspapers and from thence became fixed as authoritative assessments. One genre that emerges at the same time as satire from within this milieu is the secularised philosophical work – 'secularised' because they emanate from non-religious sources and were principally directed towards readerships outside of the church. This established a new rationalist, analytical sphere, quite separate from the ideology of the church in which ideas about soul, spirit, mind and consciences became subjects of debate. When placed within this social setting, the reception of Locke for example, assumes fresh light. Booksellers became habitués of, and often had a close relationship between their businesses and certain coffee houses. Once literary and philosophical production becomes an easily and freely available (subject of course to the constraints of price) commodity it could also be owned personally and privately. This fact alone encouraged individual reception and interpretation; opinion becomes individuated and privatised and in the coffee house, essentially private understandings were exchanged, shared and modified, free from any mediating influences from the state. The meaning of reading becomes transformed from a means of absorbing an authorised and legitimated source, into a process of personally selecting and digesting a range of texts for a variety of purposes. The person you might sit next to in a coffee house might be reading the same book as you but for entirely different reasons, hence their entirely different sense of meaning of the work.

The circulating library, the local philosophical society, clubs, periodical and annual digests of publishing, succinct reviews in magazines and newspapers, transformations of texts into differentiated forms made works of varying types almost universally available in a variety of social settings and forms. A public sphere developed in which the act of reading, with others, of what one pleased, becomes almost the hallmark activity of the growing bourgeoisie and artisan class who acted as a bridge between property owners and the range of labouring classes. Entry into this new public culture was secured by learning to read and

much that was available to read originated from a group of subscribers who commissioned a work from an author which they thought would sell well. The motive is essentially one of making profit so the subscribers retain any profits from future sales of the text. Here the text is commodified, produced initially for profit. The author's financial interest ceases upon payment of a lump sum either before writing or upon production of the text.

One of the claims made by such publishers was that they were educating their public. This claim to educating the public assumed a variety of forms including the circulation of 'intelligence', production of regular opinion and commentary, creation of assemblages of information into a sort of depot of knowledge – *magazines* - and the production of specialised works on almost every secular topic imaginable. The culture had become 'literate' in a public sense and that this 'public' was itself constituted by a series of interconnected literate practices. Instead of literature functioning as the social representation of particular vested interests such as a Shakespeare play being printed under a patron's name, it becomes an object of free choice and changing preferences, something that could be individually owned, a possession of all who chose to consume it. This shift in the social character and function of literature produced new forms such as the satire, the novel, the daily newspaper and the engraved print. Earlier we saw how the way that *Pilgrim's Progress* began to appear in every imaginable literary form within the author's own lifetime.

The market for such products existed in places like the coffee house whose very life revolved around discussion and promotion of such literary products, be they printed speeches, tracts, advertisements (puffs), or satires. The social group who inhabited this sphere assumed direction of public opinion and it was a short step for this to become a taking away of the right of the crown, court, church and state to being opinion leaders. Behind this there was an implied and often express educational sense and purpose which can be examined further through one particularly famous example: the project of Addison and Steele and *The Spectator* and *Tatler*.

Addison and Steele.

The most successful publications of the early eighteenth century to emanate from the cultural world of the coffee houses were firstly, Richard Steele's *The Tatler* which ran from 12th April 1709 to 2nd January 1711 and had 271 editions. Secondly, this was followed by Joseph Addison's *The Spectator*, which commenced publication in March 1711 and continued for six days a week for 555 editions until 6th December 1712. *The Tatler* was published thrice

weekly. The impact of these publications can be measured by the self-estimate, which may not be unreasonable, that they sold 3,000 copies per edition and might be seen or heard to within days of publication by up to 60,000 readers and listeners. Another measure of the success of these 'periodicals' was that consolidated republication in book form was underway for example, of *The Tatler*, as early as 1710 with full re-publication achieved before the end of 1711. Each edition consisted of a 'lucubration' ranging from between one to three thousand words. The bulk of *The Tatler* was penned by Steele and *The Spectator* by Addison with each helping the other at times. Apart from a possible few contributions here and there, the publications are the direct product of the two authors' creative energies. As a body of work, produced within such a short space of time and ranging across such a wide range of topics and issues, they stand as a remarkable testament to the literary powers of both men. They met at Oxford and had strong links with the Whig Establishment. Both were established and successful authors with personal links to the previous generation of writers including Dryden. Neither relied upon the money they would have made from the success of the publications so at first it is difficult to comprehend why and how they sustained such an output across so many years. Addison provides a clue:

It was said of Socrates that he brought Philosophy down from Heaven, to inhabit among Men, and I shall be ambitious to have it said of me, that I have brought Philosophy out of the closet and Libraries, Schools and colleges, to dwell in Clubs and Assemblies, at Tea Tables and in Coffee-Houses.⁴³

As mentioned earlier there was a practical need for an accepted social code amongst strangers and the culture of politeness advocated and exemplified in essay after essay in both publications, matched what many were looking for. Additionally, the culture they advocated and amplified had been present in and around the coffee-houses for several decades. What Steele and Addison set out to do was to state these ideals in the form of a serialised manifesto.⁴⁴

The most striking feature of the style adopted was its relaxed conversational tone, even when presented through the fictional character of Isaac Bickerstaff who relates his view from one of four famous coffee houses. The conversational tone stood in contrast to the stiff and formal prose style of much polemic that went beforehand. When satire is used by Steele or Addison, it is mild and designed to instruct, rather than being caustic and designed to condemn. When an important point is to be made, instead of rhetorical flourishes, repetitions, exaggerations, hyperbole, the authors characteristically resort to an everyday homily or a

plainly told episode drawn from an ancient text. There is a strong emphasis upon the idea that 'good' literature is that which expresses noble ideals.

The presence throughout of gentle caricatures of lowly or rough types, recognisable ordinary people, evinces a consistent elitism reflecting the refined social background of both authors. Far from expanding the democratic base of the coffee-house culture one might see Steele and Addison attempting to impose what was even then, a slightly outdated version of the urbane gentlemen, upon the culture of the city. Their vision was essentially that of gentry eyes looking to impose order and form upon an unregulated social swirl. Those to whom they made their principal address, the public school and university educated, the metropolitan literary coteries, clergy, Whig gentry, leading merchants, financiers, property owners, people operating within and around court and government, appear as the very picture of an upper bourgeoisie, a meeting point between rural gentry and urban new money. The authority of the views and style produced by Steele and Addison partly reflected the social position of those who took it to heart the most. The urbane reasonableness, combined with a cultivated literateness advocated by these two authors, became a marker of polite and educated city behaviour and was held in contrast to the rough-edged ways of country dwellers. This contrast became a major staple of the drama and fiction of the century, possibly nowhere more so than in the novels of Fielding. Its key importance was that a new ideal type was created, something to aspire towards, if not practice consistently. The essays challenged the rough and ready crudeness of much of the life they saw around them. They advocated mildness towards children, treating wives with respect, being discriminating in what one read, treating servants well, and sobriety amongst many others. The style and manner of 'argument' mirror perfectly the requirement for the business community to evolve a medium of discourse through which people with essentially antagonistic purposes could nevertheless conduct their affairs.

Another innovation within *The Spectator* and *The Tatler* was their publication of letters from readers which imported into the sheets a sense of an ever-present circle of conversation which was continuous but separated at different locations and by different times. This practice was copied and absorbed into newspaper practice and continues to be a major feature of a range of publications which fall under the general heading of 'the press'. Reading these papers became a way of connecting with the private and personal discourses of the mass in the urban space. Detailed knowledge of the contents of recent and past editions would allow one to enter conversation almost anywhere and would mark one as part of the world that such publications not only described but brought into being. Being a reader became a way of acquiring a social persona and not merely just a way of being informed. An ability to emulate

aspects of the conversational style would further enhance one's standing in social circles. It is likely that these essays were read intensively in their collected editions for their style as much as their content with readers attempting to acquire a facility to coin phrases and describe events in similar ways to Steele and Addison.

A further aspect to these publications was the way that they combined the printed (written) and the spoken. It is highly likely that readers would be appointed in many coffeehouses to deliver the day's *Tatler* or *Spectator* because waiting around to read it when someone else had finished would have been tiresome. Their reception therefore would have been aural as well as through private sight reading. In 1711 people read (or listened) to Addison responding to a letter he had received about the virtues of modesty, which he reprints. He then discourses about the effect of modesty upon speech and action, beginning by a simple praise of this quality:

Modesty is not only an Ornament, but also a guard to Vertue. It is a kind of quick and delicate *feeling* in the Soul., which makes her shrink and withdraw her self from every thing that has Danger in it. It is such an exquisite sensibility, as warns her to shun the first appearance of every thing which is hurtful.⁴⁵

But he typically offers an alternative view somewhere else within the text:

There is another kind of vicious modesty which makes a Man ashamed of his Person, his birth, his Profession, his Poverty, or the like misfortunes, which it is not in Choice to prevent, and is not in his power to rectifie. If a Man appears ridiculous by any of the aforementioned circumstances, he becomes much more so by being out of countenance for them. They should rather give him occasion to exert a noble Spirit, and to use a very witty allusion of an eminent Author, he should imitate *Caesar*, who because his Head was bald, covered that Defect with Laurels.⁴⁶

It is in this critical setting that we can make sense of the emphasis by Addison and Steele in their *Tatler* and *Spectator* or later, of Johnson's *Rambler*, of the literary standard they aspired to codify. In a sense they are policing the boundaries between gentry (classically educated literate) and bourgeois (self-educated innovative) production and thus affecting quite profoundly what people read and what they were to think about what they read. The light touch about personal imperfections, the plain lexicon deployed, the typographical emphases which were not simply printers' conventions but acted as guides to reading, the fearless advocacy of delicate feeling amongst men (males), the idea of balance and shade of opinion in discourse are some of the qualities that are present. It was this register within a modern, urban,

common English that instantly transformed the *Tatler* and *Spectator* into ‘classics’. By this very same number there is an announcement of the forthcoming bound volumes, in gilt, printed by Tonson and notice of the forthcoming third and fourth volumes of *The Tatler*. The plainness of *The Spectator’s* format belies its subtle contents. In the example below (Fig. 23) we read the author’s voice, a reader’s letter, a reply from the author, an exposition about speech production and quality, a Latin reference and a semi-comic classical narrative about Greek women abandoning the habit of collective suicide after an edict was passed that their bodies would be dragged naked through the streets. Several distinct topics are woven together in an apparently seamless manner, offering a variety of threads for subsequent, light discourse amongst associates and/or strangers over the weekend.



Fig 23. *The Spectator*. November 14. 1711.⁴⁷

Whilst the experience of the coffee-house was clearly enjoyable one ought not to ignore the seriousness with which clients participated in this culture of politics, manners and literature.

Archenholz comments that coffee houses are patronised principally “to read the PAPERS”, and adds that this is “a task that is absolutely necessary in that country”.⁴⁸ Nowhere throughout the book does Archenholz adopt a mocking or sardonic tone so the observation can be taken as intended to be read as genuine. By declaring the reading of papers as being “absolutely necessary” he is commenting upon the degree to which there is an almost universal engagement in public affairs through the act of reading and discussing. He contrasts this with the backgammon and billiards tables that were ubiquitous in coffee-houses in Germany. But Archenholtz is writing in the 1780s more than a generation after the project of Addison and Steele commenced. His witness is testimony to the lasting effect of their work.

Debate and reading would appear to be difficult to reconcile in the same, relatively small indoor spaces. This was partly achieved by a habit of speaking in an insistent whisper. Archenholz says, “you do not even hear the least noise; everybody speaks in a low tone, for fear of disturbing the company”. This view is repeated by Charles Leslie, author of *The Rehearsal* a pioneer weekly periodical when writing about competitor publications:

..the greatest part of the people do not read books, most of them cannot read at all. But they will gather together about one that can read, and listen to an *Observer* or *Review* (as I have seen them in the streets) where all the principles of rebellion are instilled into them.⁴⁹

Although there is some debate about when coffee houses reached their peak it is clear that their almost universal presence in every neighbourhood across London was an established feature of the city-scape in the 1790s. Pastor Wendeborn comments upon the avidity with which English customers:

read newspapers, four times as large as ours on the continent, and in very small print, with an attention that excites surprise in a foreigner...some read with great rapidity, and soon throw away a paper....; others seem to spell every word, and make those who wish to dispatch, wait a long while before they have finished.⁵⁰

It is easy for us to interpose an anachronistic idea of how an enterprise like a coffee house might be used because of the clearly established boundaries between a commercial public use and a private public use. During the eighteenth century, in many coffee houses, the distinction between the private/public was less clear as many of the clientele used their coffee house as a base from which to operate, to meet, to send and receive letters, to strike business deals, to relax, to socialise, to network and so on.

For the purposes of this study the key issue here is the way that writing, correspondence, exchanges of information, the reading of letters, twice-daily posts, circulation of a range of publication and other features of literate practices are normal parts of the inner world of the coffee house. The letter below (Fig. 24) addressed to the Rolls Coffee House in Chancery Lane for a Mr. Chester, is an example of how a customer, who is almost a 'member' in the sense of a club, would receive important information about the date when a bill of payment is to be drawn. The degree of trust that existed can be seen when one realises that the coffee-house proprietor would have paid the postage due in order to be able to pass it on to Mr. Chester. In this instance we have an example of private business, of a financial sort, being conducted from within the social, public space. At most coffee houses, along with a paper of tobacco and a fresh pipe, one could call the boy for a standish, paper and quill and in some establishments there would be a post box where letters might be collected twice daily.⁵¹

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Fig 24. Letter sent from the Carlton coffee house in Newark to the Rolls in Chancery Lane, London. Note the slip of the pen which has presumably been corrected by the receiving post office. 1764.⁵²

Such practices emerge from within a milieu in which many men live in domestic isolation and separated by distances from the home base of their kin or conjugal families. In such situations

the roles of house matron and possibly eldest daughter or lead female servant become surrogates for absent female relatives and offer a safe familiarity.

Markman Ellis challenges Habermas' view that the coffee-house "was a kind of social intercourse that, far from pre-supposing equality of status, disregarded status altogether". Instead Ellis asserts that "The coffee-houses' much vaunted egalitarianism is an enduring fiction, local and impermanent, translating hierarchy into new forms".⁵³ Certainly some coffee-houses sought to close their doors and become 'clubs' for an exclusive clientele from the middle of the century, but when this took place they ceased to be coffee houses. Even the most renowned of places such as Garraway's was a site where virtually anyone could walk in if they chose to do so for the purposes of business or leisure. The presence of Garraway's was magnified and transmitted into hundreds of other, smaller establishments through the importance of its business and through the pages of widely circulated newspapers which it sustained through its advertising.

Although some of the culture surrounding the coffee houses was heavily influenced and shaped by representative voices from literary, financial and social elites, the key change is that hundreds of thousands of men from across the social spectrum actively participated in the exchanges on a daily basis including using such places as posting boxes and delivery addresses. Such places extended the social reach of literacy and therefore must be seen not only as part of the rise of egalitarian and democratic sentiment but also as part of the story of the rise of mass literacy cutting across social class divides. The style and pattern of social discourse exemplified thrice-weekly in Addison and Steele's periodicals produced a manner of thinking, reading and speaking which could be learned and acquired. Possession of such traits became part of what marked someone out as a 'gentleman' which ceased to be solely something conferred through birth, status or property. In that sense Habermas was right to emphasise not only the new 'public' character of these institutions but also their public impact upon the society as a whole. The relationship between the coffee houses and the newspapers was the principal means through which this spread occurred.

The coffee houses and the newspapers : a cultural symbiosis.

One way of estimating the growth in newspaper readership and circulation during the eighteenth century is to look at the treasury records for Stamp Duty paid per sheet. The first figure is an estimate arrived at by Snyder based upon earlier work by Sutherland.⁵⁴

1704	2.4 Million
1750	7.3 Million
1760	9.4 Million
1775	12.6 Million
1801	16.4 Million

Such figures conceal important trends such as the rise during this period of the provincial newspaper, the presence within London of readerships of the provincial press, the appearance and disappearance of many titles, the need to place the figures alongside estimates of population growth in order to reach an estimate of whether the density of readership remained more or less stable, and the growth in size and coverage of individual titles. Nevertheless two things are clear.⁵⁵ First, the size of the newspaper industry was much larger and, despite government concern about control, it had enjoyed continuous expansion. Second, these figures are for officially stamped papers and omit those for all titles which were unstamped or which evaded the duty because they were not ‘news’ publications. By the end of the century a majority of stamps were for provincial papers – itself a remarkable evidence of the rise of a new urban identity as they were centred on important regional centres such as Salisbury.

It should be pointed out that these figures, although impressive, need to be seen as merely the foundation for accelerated production and circulation figures in the following half century. London newspaper circulation reached up to 100,000 weekly if one takes into account the unstamped press by mid-century with temporary peaks occurring during periods of particular controversy.⁵⁶

Behind such figures lie readerships, and readerships contain within them quite distinct constituencies and practices. Although personal and private purchasing and reading of newspapers was increasingly commonplace amongst those who could afford the price, one of the characteristics of newspaper reading was its public and social nature. Copies typically were purchased to be read by customers and clients at post houses, inns and coffee houses. As the century progressed, this social purchasing extended into private subscription libraries and local philosophical societies. The papers were read alongside other titles and it is likely that previous copies were retained for the purpose of re-reading for reference. The fact that reading of the same titles was a common activity amongst a relatively fixed clientele meant that it was possible for shared assumptions about what others would know about could be held. This would allow for an ease in conversation, starting from the basis of shared awareness. If a set of provincial or commercial papers were taken it is likely that specialist argots and possibly regional dialects would feature in discussion thus creating a stronger sense of group identity within the readership. If this reading happened more than once each day and was

sustained across many years it became a major feature of the life of the individual and was something he shared with fellow readers.

Many of these papers were destined for the post routes performing the vital purpose of keeping people informed about London, world or provincial events whilst they were at a distance from the events and places. Scots, Irish and Welsh coffee-houses established themselves as did gatherings around religious or literary identities. A range of occupational groups set themselves up in and around particular coffee-houses so they became places which had individual character and qualities determined by the sort of clientele they attracted.

The reasons for reading diversified. For some it was a link with 'home', for others reading was part of keeping informed for professional or business purposes, for others following the affairs of state made them feel part of the political milieu even if they could never be involved in the formal processes of state and governance. For others it became a way of establishing a personal place within the milieu that had grown around the coffee-house. Reading was for relaxation, pleasure, self-improvement and an aid to discussion. It was also a way of connecting oneself with the thoughts of others around the country and thus feeling a part of events as they unfolded. In this respect the nexus of the coffee-house and newspaper produced a mentality that was almost the opposite of the isolated, uninformed, parochial, deferential rural dweller whose principal means of information was through personal conversation focussed around local people and events.

Whilst it is difficult to estimate the gender breakdown of readerships it is reasonable to assume that the vast proportion of regular readers of newspapers were men and that the bulk of the reading took place in shared spaces rather than in the privacy of readers' rented rooms or homes. If one assumes a multiplier of ten readers per copy a figure of one quarter of London's population were reading a newspaper on a daily basis in 1750, although this would appear to be an underestimate if we accept Addison's estimate of at least twenty people per copy of his *Spectator*.⁵⁷ This jumped dramatically to about a third of the population in the 1780s.⁵⁸ Any such estimates need to be qualified by recognition of the likelihood of tens of thousands of readers reading many different titles daily. Nevertheless, the figures suggest something approaching a 'mass' readership and they do not take into account other forms of necessary and habitual reading of messages, letters, pamphlets, books, signs and information in other forms.

Estimates of readership should also take into account what happened to the papers. Unlike our own times, paper was not a disposable commodity but would have been re-used. Before any such re-use, a secondary re-sale of the newspaper would have happened from the

coffee or ale-house to another group. We see evidence of this from Capel Lofft's account of the early life of the poet Robert Bloomfield in the late 1770s of his apprenticeship as a boot-maker, (using the words of Robert Bloomfield's brother George): ⁵⁹

Every day, when the Boy from the Public-house came for the pewter pots, and to hear what porter was wanted, he always brought the yesterday's *Newspapers*. The *reading* of the Paper we had been us'd to take by turns; but after Robert came, he mostly read for us, - because his time was of least value.⁶⁰

Bloomfield worked in a well lit garret at the top of a building in Bell Alley, Coleman Street, where six workmen slept and plied their trade. Such men would not take breaks and wander into the coffee-house as time was money and they would labour whilst daylight lasted. Lofft, breaks off from his biographical narrative and comments upon:

..the effect of *Newspapers*, and other means of popular information; and I now say, I have no doubt that the opportunity of reading them contributed much to form the mind of the author of the *Farmer's Boy*.⁶¹

Here we see how the reading of newspapers spread much wider than usual estimates of multiple readerships either within the coffee or ale-house, society or meeting hall. It makes the same point as Hogarth about the social reach of the Press and supports the view of de Saussure and Wenderborn at either ends of the century, that such reading was somehow characteristic of the English as a whole. It may have been that only George and Robert Bloomfield were fully literate amongst their cobbler workmates but even if that were the case we gain an insight into how even non-literates had daily access to print. Even workmen of this type of commoner social status could with ease maintain a regular connection to the culture that emanated from the public spaces of the coffee and ale-houses.

Hannah Barker (1998)⁶² argues that there is evidence, especially during the later decades of the century, that the social composition of readerships broadened beyond the upper and middle classes. She also highlights that much of the unstamped, illegal press of the later decades was specifically directed toward artisans and others such as common soldiers and sailors and servants. Barker (1998) cites Montesquieu's *Notes sur Angleterre* ... "the very slaters had the newspapers brought to the roofs of the houses on which they were working, that they might read". The socially heterodox character of many (hundreds) of coffee-houses may well have been one of their basic appeals especially for those who wanted to be in touch with broad opinion around town and across social classes. For many 'gentlemen' there was a

frisson of excitement in the act of entering the territory of the lower classes.⁶³ Pastor Wendeborn, who for two decades was a denizen ministering to London based German Calvinists, comments in 1790 in relation to discussion and reading about politics:

that in almost all companies, from the highest to the lowest, this topic is generally the first and last which serves for conversation....very few of the numerous frequenters of coffee-houses have any influence in politics but.. it is a great satisfaction for them to read the speeches in both houses during the session and judge.⁶⁴

Wendeborn is not simply commenting upon the most recent upsurge in political interest following events in France but summing up his broad experience across two decades. His home was in London so he came to know it intimately and the view is far from that of the mystified and astounded stranger which was a conventional form of authorial self-presentation within this genre. This interest and involvement in public politics amongst commoners through engagement with the press is in evidence much earlier than Wendeborn. Hogarth for example, incidentally documents the butchers, brewers and even fishwives using their time to read in the 1750s (Figs. 26 & 27).

The experience of reading a newspaper transformed the way that information was transmitted. Instead of the idea of a linear progression through the pages of a book, information of differing orders would be arranged together. A news item might appear early on the first side of the sheet to be printed (what would become the front and back pages) and further information would appear on the reverse side because the printing would be delayed until the last post or stage would arrive with newer information. Therefore a reader might work from a column to the right of the back page and cross-refer to a column possibly positioned to the left side of the second page. A detailed advertisement with additional recommendations and quotations might appear alongside a report of a foreign military event and below this there might be a court report. When this situation arises it is the reader who ascribes importance and relevance to what is printed. Such variety and inconsistency in material also encouraged a breadth of thinking, with the mind of the reader taking in several distinct areas of knowledge and experience simultaneously. The reader might flit from legal to military to diplomatic to local and then might encounter a pastoral poem on the same page. As the eighteenth century progressed this tendency increased with the routine insertion of things like sports reports, reports on visiting lecturers and preachers, pronouncements of the local

authorities and reports of Parliamentary affairs. All of this would be liberally sprinkled with a range of advertisements, many of which were designed to be of intrinsic interest.

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Fig. 25. Detail from *The Morning Herald*, May 19, 1788.

If we take a single example we can also see the extent to which the newspapers and coffee-house existed in a symbiotic relationship – *The Morning Herald* of Monday 19th May 1788 (Fig. 25). If one looks at the front and back pages they are entirely taken up by advertisements. The back page is dominated by inserts from Garraway's acting as an estate auctioneer with two sales due at the coffee-house on the coming Wednesday and Thursday. Mr. Young, an estate agent based in Chancery Lane, is the only other advertiser competing for space with Garraway's. The properties being sold at the coffee-house are located in all of the Home Counties with one joint sale of properties in Gloucestershire and Somerset. The title survives on the basis of a fixed arrangement between W. Perryman, the *Herald's* proprietor and Garraway's. Given the prestige of Garraway's there would have been a premium on advertising within the *Herald* as it would be known what sort of readers would make a habit of reading it for its estates sales information. Investors realized after the South Sea bubble fiasco that investment in fixed assets was a safer bet, so rich merchants and financiers were keen to invest in substantial properties and estates and Garraway's was one place where people with such interests congregated. In column three of page three, an advertisement appears from a "gentleman born in France who has a literary education". Here we see one instance of the market that had developed for literacy. The author highlights his ability to "write a good hand". Respondents are requested to reply to Mr. A.B. at Mr. James Cailliet's snuff-making shop, at the Black Boy, a coffee-house situated in Little Earl Street, Seven Dials, which was then the centre of chap book production in Britain.

Readers might know the premises, the snuff of Mr. Cailliet, be interested in a native French speaker offering translation services, or they might be impressed to find someone with the forethought of advertising his literacy in such a prestigious city newspaper. Interest would also have been heightened by the same French gentleman advertising for a wife a little further down the same column stressing that his main concerns are that she "be of good character". A double feature like this would have become quite a talking-point in the hundreds of coffee-houses which took the *Herald*. The editor ensured that there was something of interest for their broad readership. In this edition alone there are the following features and mentions.

Royal Household (St. James), Royal duties (Whitehall), defeat of a Turkish fortress by an Austrian-led force (from 19th April), War Office appointments, lists of bankrupts and those due to receive dividends and certificates, seasonal arrangements for the Courts, Parliamentary debates, an overheard conversation between the King and two nobles regarding wishing Drs. Price and Priestly would emigrate to America, a lightning strike on a house in Kings Bench walk, East India Company notice, Stock Exchange prices, domestic and trade news, a verse to

accompany a portrait, and a miscellany of little events and happenings, possibly submitted by readers. This breadth of coverage, on a daily basis, allowed a loyal reader to sustain an interest in a variety of contexts – important and trivial, universal and individual, successes and catastrophes, local and international – all within the space of a single reading session.

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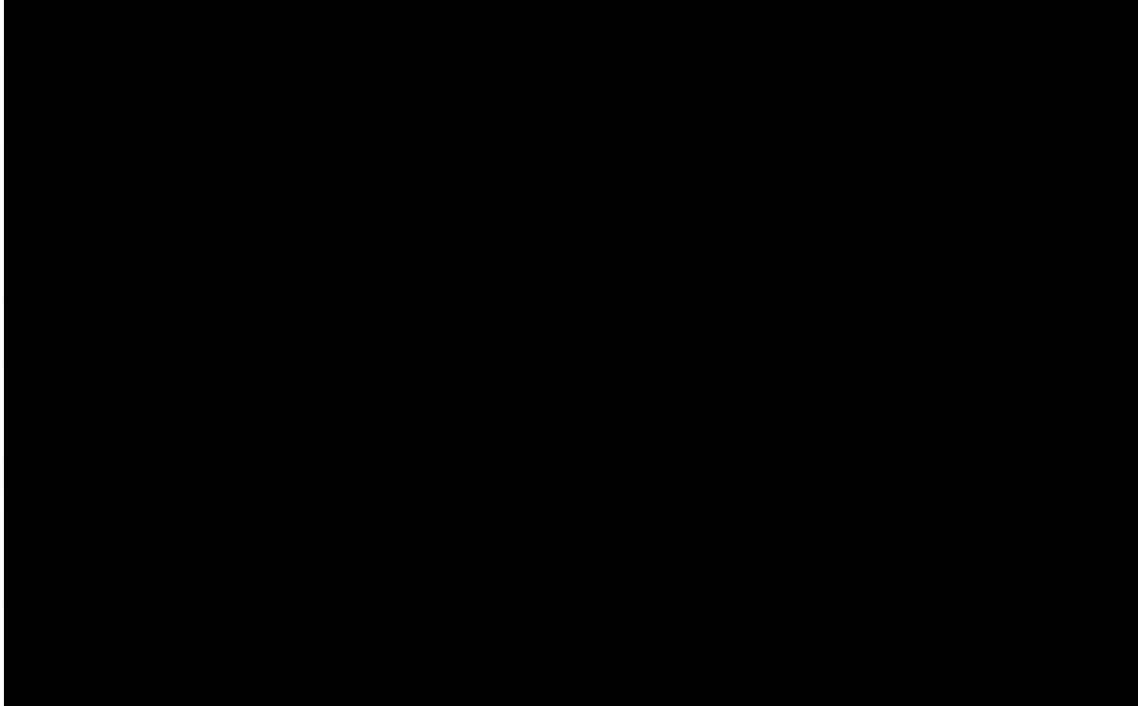


Fig. 26. Detail from Hogarth, Beer Street, 1751. A fish woman is shown reading a ballad as she sits in front of a basket of books which summarize the totality of modern knowledge. The satire is based upon the viewer's recognition that even within the lowest neighbourhoods of the city, reading is ubiquitous.

The format of the newspaper made it conspicuous, the reverse of the small, semi private presence of the book which could fit neatly into a coat pocket. Yet the smallness of the print required a closeness of gaze so typically a reader would disappear behind the paper they were reading. When letters, correspondents, special contributors and second-hand reports were placed alongside each other the reader engaged in a unified act of reading but experienced the absorption of several authors and several voices. The newspapers were explicit about their political and social loyalties so the act of reading became a self-conscious choice. The reader developed an allegiance to a title rather than to an author and in this would have shared something with fellow readers in a sort of informal community which collectively would have sponsored certain opinions. One of the most compelling aspects of the provincial papers would be their references to local people,

especially at times when they become linked to others of a national reputation or to events of national importance. This would give readers a heightened sense of connection and through their personal knowledge provide them with an opportunity of becoming the main interlocutor in a conversation.

We know that there were often several coffee-houses in every neighbourhood with contemporary estimates running to as high as three thousand by the 1790s.⁶⁵ These coffee-houses acted as a counterweight to the ale houses, which outnumbered them by three to one, through their absence of alcoholic drinks – although later in the century this demarcation began to break down. From this it can safely be assumed that they were seen as more fit for a man who sought respectability. But amongst the artisan and working classes consumption of ale throughout the day was not necessarily seen as succumbing to temptation and lowly habits. A majority of ale houses also subscribed to newspapers, reaching much wider readerships than those of the coffee-house as can be seen from the extract of George Bloomfield cited above.

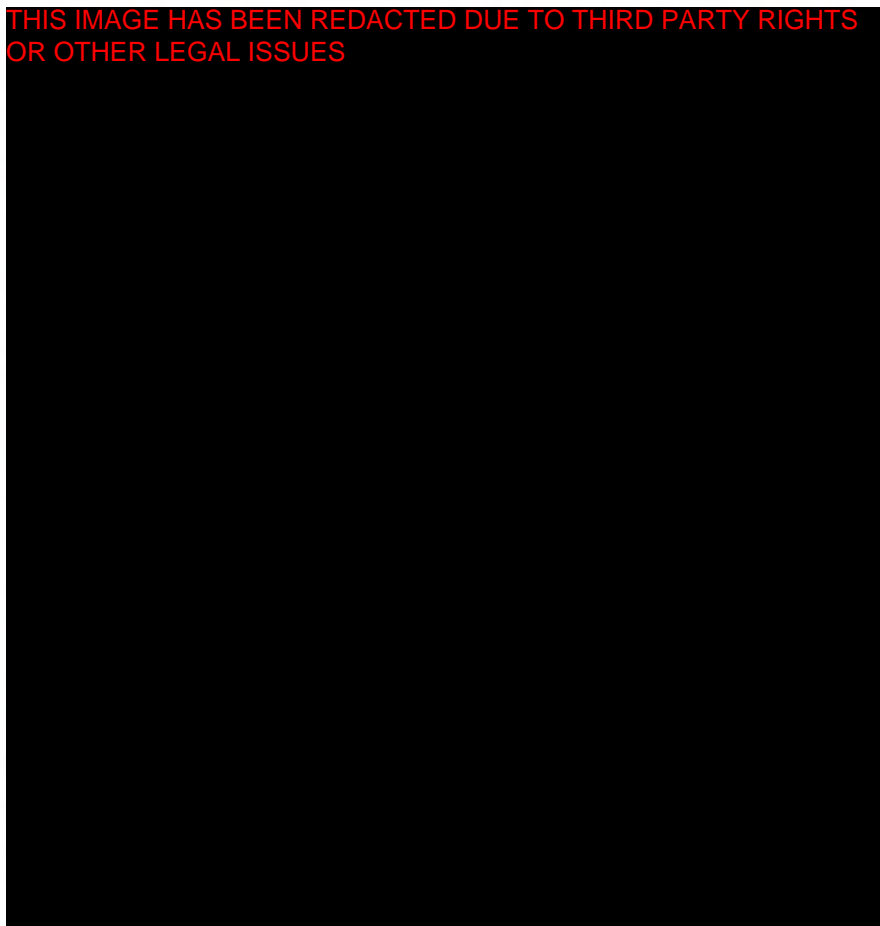


Fig. 27. Detail from Hogarth, *Beer Street*, 1751. A butcher and brewer portrayed enjoying their flagons of beer. On their table lie *The Daily Advertiser* and a copy of the King's speech to Parliament. Of significance here is the incidental nature of

the reading material. It is placed here by Hogarth because it is a normal feature of such a scene implying that learning and politics had become part of the everyday interest of such classes.

The term newspaper encompassed a range of formats including the single topic essay issued once or twice weekly like Johnson's *Rambler*, or the *Tatler* and *Spectator* of Addison and Steele as well as the broadsheet which would have early news and advanced advertisements printed on one side of the sheet (front and back pages, and the later news and reports printed in columns on the other side. The column numbers and widths varied, with an important paper like *The Craftsman* in the early part of the century having two columns. The titles became banners around which loyal readerships coalesced, and it seemed important to be clear about where the publication stood politically. So polemic was built into the very structure of the form. Both Barker and Black highlight the difficulties of sustaining a title beyond that of the working life or personal commitment of its founder, an implicit acknowledgement of the personal allegiance developed between readerships and titles. Jan Fergus has shown how crucial the distribution networks were to the success of a title almost over and above any other single factor.⁶⁶

Conclusion

The educative impact of the experience of the coffee-house arises from several sources. One of these was the cumulative effect upon an individual of repeated visits to establishments and participation in activities there, possibly sustained over an entire adult lifetime. Such frequency and duration can have the effect of moulding character and identity. The intensity of association during memorable times such as the South Sea Bubble, Jacobite invasions from Scotland, the Wilkes controversy or the war with the American colonies would have left permanent marks upon the minds of those who participated in extended, continuous discussions and deliberations. As with all associations key characters would have emerged and indeed in some coffee-houses distinguished clients set up their stall. These social and intellectual experiences which occurred during periods of rest from work, or in many instances, were an extension of work, would have defined what we now refer to as 'leisure' or socialising. They were times when a coffee-house client could for a while, be the person he aspired to be rather than the one that economic fate and circumstances had consigned him into being.⁶⁷ For many, the contacts made in these places and during these times served as routes

to other occupations and new opportunities. For many, daily participation within the exchange of the coffee houses, offered the background against which their self-education took place.

Most of the early coffee-houses were open, public, varied, literate, non-hierarchical, democratic spaces at least in theory. To the extent that they deviated from this ideal it was because they acquired a settled clientele who then established a distinctive feel to the venue which in turn would attract certain people who felt an identity with this core group of clients and, conversely, discouraged others who were less at home. For simple commercial reasons also, these businesses needed to operate as public spaces so had a tendency to welcome and try to retain new custom. This 'character' of the coffee-houses was transmitted to the client-base and helped to form a distinctive yet varied metropolitan orientation. This is why during the foregoing chapter aspects of urban identity are discussed as a necessary part of consideration of the coffee-houses themselves

But possibly the most important feature of the educative impact of these places was the transmission of experiences and values through the generations – either of family allegiances, interest group specialisation, political traditions or business and commercial characteristics. The coffee-house coterie of the 1710s might have older men amongst its company who remembered the Civil War. The same coffee-house twenty years on containing many of the same people, might include people who as young men, lived through the Glorious Revolution and the leaders of the London Corresponding Society in the 1790s who frequented such places, would have experienced first-hand the debate and controversies surrounding the War against the American colonies during the 1770s.⁶⁸ By the later part of the eighteenth century coffee-house culture laid claim to a tradition of its own and this was strengthened by a self-awareness amongst its clientele that these places had been at the heart of a succession of major social and political transformations through the generations. The coffee-house helped form the identity of many men and in return they attracted strong allegiances. Few could claim to have learned as much anywhere else, than they acquired through extensive reading, listening and discussion in the coffee-houses. So in conclusion one must agree with Aytoun Ellis's description of them, as the 'Penny Universities'. They became the nurseries for several generations of self-educated men, some of whom we will encounter in the next chapter.

¹ Spufford, M. (1981) *Small Books and Pleasant Histories*. Methuen. See especially Chapters 3-5 where Spufford discusses market influences in relation to readerships, distributors and publishers.

² The edition of Habermas' *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* that has been used is the translation by Thomas Burger first published by Polity in 1989.

³ There is an important debate concerning the extent to which the coffee-house was a homosocial space. Additionally there is a debate concerning whether one feature of the essentially bourgeois character of the coffee-house meant that it both embodied and promoted patriarchal values. See Eger, Elizabeth & Grant, Charlotte, 2001, *Women and the Public Sphere*, C.U.P. Clery, Emma, (1991) 'Women, Publicity and the Coffee house Myth', *Women: A Cultural Review*, 2.2. pp 168/77.

⁴ Cowan, B. (2005) *The Social Life of Coffee: The Emergence of the British Coffee-House*. Yale Univ. Press

⁵ Ibid. p 262,

⁶ Habermas, J (1992) *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. Polity. pp 8-10.

⁷ Downie, J. (1979) *Robert Harley and the press: Propaganda and public opinion in the age of Swift and Defoe*. Cambridge university Press.

⁸ Ellis, A. (1956) *The Penny Universities; A History of the Coffee-houses*. Secker & Warburg. This almost forgotten book remains a substantial study of its subject, yet it elicits only a single sub-reference from the more recent *The Coffee House : A Cultural History* (2004) by Markman Ellis. Cowan makes a couple of oblique references to this work. There is no indication in the footnotes that Habermas was aware of Aytoun Ellis' book on the subject.

⁹ For a critical evaluation of Habermas' use of the eighteenth century coffee house setting see Philo, C. & Laurier, E. (2005) *A Parcel of Muddling Muckworm*, Glasgow University.

¹⁰ From Dalton, R. & Hamer, H.S. orig (1910) 1967 edition. *The Provincial Token-Coinage of the Eighteenth Century*, Scribner.

¹¹ From the Exeter coffee-house run by Achior Brocas. 1760s. He married Dorothy Palmer two days before Christmas in 1656 in St. Peter's Cathedral, Exeter.

¹² Curtis, S. J (1968) *History of Education in Britain*, University Tutorial Press, pp 135-39. Lawson, J & Silver, H. (1973) *A Social History of Education in England*, pp 209-218

¹³ Figures drawn from larger tabulated presentation, Gregory, J. & Stevenson, J (2000) *Longman Companion to Britain in the Eighteenth Century, 1688-1820*. p 290.

¹⁴ The balance tipped in favour of urban dwelling during the 1810s but some decades before this the hinterlands surrounding expanding cities became, de-facto, integrated into the urban economies. For example, the area from the Thames at Brentford & Isleworth right up to the Hertfordshire border, west Middlesex, produced hay, straw, fruit, vegetables, cider, perry, beer, milk and wheat for the London Market. See Marshall, D (1973) *Industrial England, 1776-1851*, Routledge, London. The size the economy of Bath meant that it was able to sustain a much larger resident population within its hinterland than many other places where population decline took place.

¹⁵ Stephens, W.B (1998) *Education in Britain 1750-1914*. Macmillan

¹⁶ Corfield, Penny (1982) *The Impact of English Towns 1700-1800*, Oxford. Also, for social promiscuity see chapter of Vic Gattrell's, (2006) *City of Laughter*. See Chapter 4 Crossing the Boundaries, pp 110-156 where he considers in detail how different forms of behaviour allowed a hitherto unimaginable intermingling of social classes in the city.

¹⁷ Sweet, R (1997) *The Writing of Urban Histories in Eighteenth Century England*, Clarendon Press. Ch. 6. p 285. Urban Identity and Provinciality.

¹⁸ Wenderborn. p 256

¹⁹ Wycherley, William (1775 *The Country Wife*, London. The play was performed frequently until 1753 when its sexually explicit raciness became too risqué for open public presentation. A bowdlerized version by Garrick replaced Wycherly's text with the original not returning to the stage until 1924.

²⁰ Balfour, C.L (1854) *A Sketch of Sarah Trimmer*, Cash, London. Trimmer, a prolific author, worked to create a model of elementary schooling for the poor which would instill acceptance of Anglican orthodoxy and accompanying social deference. For a positive and sympathetic modern interpretation see Heath, Pauline, 'Mrs. Trimmer's Plan of Appropriate Instruction: a Revisionist View of her Textbooks', *History of Education*. July 2003, Vol. 32. No. 4. pp 385-400.

²¹ de Souligné, (1706) *A Comparison between Old Rome in its Glory, as to the extent and populousness, and London as it is at present*. 8vo. J. Nutt, London. (BL.578.b.42) The second edition of 1709, pub. Stokoe, London, contained "to which is added a comparison between the beauties and advantages of old Rome and London. By a person of Quality." (BL. 291.c.20)

²² Soloman, Harry (1996) *The Rise of Robert Dodsley*, Southern Illinois University Press, Edwardsville.

²³ Derrick, Samuel (1757) *Harris' List*, reprint of the 1793 edition, Rubenhold, H. (ed) pub by Tempus Stroud, Gloucestershire. The author was the poet Samuel Derrick who paid the Head Waiter at the Shakespear's Head, Jack Harrison, to use his name. It is estimated that the first edition was of 8,000 and by the time of the last, revised edition in 1793 it sold 250,000 almost all illicitly. Also by Hallie Rubenhold, (2005) *The Covent Garden Ladies*, Tempus, Gloucestershire. In this book Rubenhold shows the relationship between prostitutes and the managers of coffee houses and inns. The key was to separate the two services thus making the gender separation economically functional. The homosocial character of the coffee-house enabled it to be preserved as a space for deliberative and intellectual activity, with other activities taking place elsewhere.

²⁴ Peakman, Julie, Ed. (2006) *Whore Biographies*, 8 Vols. Pickering and Chatto, London. This contains facsimiles of novels written by women about their working lives with their male clients. The persistence of the genre attests to a sustained market for such titles. Of particular interest is the way that they are a distinct genre of fiction written (presumably) for a male readership. They also imply a degree of literacy and education on the part of the prostitute.

²⁵ Derrick, Ed. Rubenhold, 1757-95 pp 122/28.

²⁶ Cruikshank, D. (2009) *The Secret History of Georgian London*, Random House. The volume and extent of what nowadays would be described as 'the sex industry' is detailed by Cruikshank and raises questions about prevailing moral values within the public and private spheres.

²⁷ Arguments against this perspective would wish to point to the integrated atmosphere of the Theatres and open, public Galleries. The Rotunda for example was open to men and women virtually without discrimination.

²⁸ Nickell, Joe (2000) *Pen, ink, & evidence : a study of writing and writing materials for the penman, collector, and document detective*, Oak Knoll Press, New Castle, Delaware.

²⁹ One example of this was the displacement during the eighteenth century of the traditional commoners London accent – somewhat akin to a mild Australasian voice – and its superseding by a variant of the East Anglian accents especially in the expanding suburbs to the east in modern day Hackney and Tower Hamlets. The extent of the spread eastwards can be seen in Rocque's map of the 1740s, and that by Richard Horwood made in the 1790s. Leith, D (1983) *A Social History of English*. Ch. 5. Pronunciation, pp 112-145, Three Regional Indicators, pp 135-140.

³⁰ See the account of the attempted robbery at the beginning of Thomas Holcroft's *Anna St. Ives* (1792) where upon arrival from the countryside at Brentford the party decide to press on into London rather than wasting any more time. They are attacked at Turnham Green, near to Hammersmith village.

³¹ From an 1866 picture in the *Illustrated London News*, Sept. 8, 1866, featured because the building shown was about to be demolished.

³² Rocque's map was first published in 1746.

³³ Philo and Laurier (Ibid) cite a passage drawn from Richard Steele in which he writes of the various groups of clientele who inhabit the same physical space according to the phases of the day. Their argument being that even within a single establishment there could be a variety of social groups and therefore uses of the space.

³⁴ Sennett, Richard (1974) *The Fall of Public Man*, W. W. Norton. New York. Sennett stresses the importance of these sites for the development of a public rational speech.

³⁵ Greenwood, Paul (1674) *A brief Description of the excellent Vertues of that sober and wholesome Drink, called Coffee*. To be sold at the sign of the Coffee-Mill and Tobacco Roll in Cloath-Fair, near West Smithfield. Reproduced in Vol 1 Ellis, M. (Ed) pp 127/8

³⁶ Ward, N. (attrib.) (1690) Published by Baldwin.

³⁷ A bully was a man who acted as a protector to a prostitute. Their open and known presence was an informal way of preventing violence towards prostitutes. Should a client be violent he might find the 'bully' after him in very short time. Ellis, M (2006) Vol. 1. pp 205-232

³⁸ Archenholz, Johann Wilhelm (1789) *A Picture of England*, Edward Jeffrey, London. Archenholz's work was yet another in the genre of one's own country viewed from the perspective of a foreigner. Archenholz edited the *British Mercury* between 1787 to 1791, an English language weekly distributed from Hamburg.

³⁹ In the possession of the author.

⁴⁰ That is not to say that the state had no involvement or control. Turnpikes required Parliamentary assent. The principal means of exercising state influence was through Licencing.

⁴¹ Pitt's first period as Prime Minister ran from 19 December 1783 to 14 March 1801.

⁴² See for example Popes footnote to Book II, line 315 relating to William Arnall who is criticised harshly as a party hack. Arnall is imaged as a busy crab digging up the sea bottom and creating lots of dust about himself.

⁴³ From *The Spectator*, No. 10. March 12th, 1711

⁴⁴ Klein, L (1994) *The Culture of Politeness*, Cambridge University Press.

⁴⁵ Number 231) of Saturday November 24th 1711.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Note the pink colour which was later to be imitated by the prestigious *Financial Times*.

⁴⁸ Op cit Archenholz.

⁴⁹ Downie J. A (1979) *Robert Harley and the press*. p 6. Leslie, C. (1704- 1709) *The Rehearsal: view of the times, their principles and practices by Philalethes*. A four volume collected edition started publication in 1708 indicating the immediate status of seemingly ephemeral weekly sheets. Loyal readerships were brought into being around titles like this.

⁵⁰ Wenderborne, F (1791) *A View of England*. Sleator, Dublin.

⁵¹ A Standish was a stand usually made of metal or hard wood and held inkpot, quills, snuffer, wick pick and pouncer. Its portability made it ideal for use around a coffee-house.

⁵² Private correspondences have for decades been the preserve of philatelists who all too often have dismembered their materials leaving only those parts which show the post marks. Such letters offer an almost unrivalled source for the study of literacy during the eighteenth century. In the author's possession.

⁵³ Ellis, m Ch. 4. 'The Republic of Letters'. pp 42-55.

⁵⁴ Snyder, Henry, (1969) 'The Circulation of Newspapers in the Reign of Queen Anne', *Library*, 5th series xxiii. Sutherland, J (1934) The circulation of newspapers and literary periodicals 1700-30, *Library*, 4th series, xv

⁵⁵ Hannah Barker (2000) estimates that "newspaper production more than quadrupled in proportion to the number of adults in England." p.35.

⁵⁶ Harris, M (1987) *London Newspapers in the Age of Walpole*, London.

⁵⁷ Addison, J (1711) *The Spectator*, 10

⁵⁸ For publication estimates see Harris, M (1987)

⁵⁹ Bloomfield, R (1801) *The Farmer's Boy*, (10th. edition). London, p viii

⁶⁰ Ibid. p.ix

⁶¹ Bloomfield, R. Ed. Capel Lofft. (1801) (10th ed.). *The Farmer's Boy*. London.

⁶² Barker, Hannah (1998) *Newspapers, Politics and Public Opinion in Late Eighteenth Century England*, Oxford. pp 22-44.

⁶³ Gatrell, V (2006) *City of Laughter*.

⁶⁴ Wendeborn, Frederick, (1791) *A View of England*, printed by William Sleater, Dublin. pp 214/5. The condor of eight people who owned copyright are mentioned after the printer. They are Wogan, Byrne, Moore, Jones, Grueber, Jones, White and Rice. A condor was a group of investor/subscribers who either commissioned or purchased or both, an original work and paid the author for the rights to the work. They would subsequently be the sole beneficiaries of future profits.

⁶⁵ Wenderborn (1791) p 218.

⁶⁶ Ferdinand, C.Y (2006) *Benjamin Collins and the Provincial Newspaper Trade in the Eighteenth Century*. Clarendon Press, Oxford. Focuses upon the network that sustained the *Salisbury Journal*. See especially chapters 2 & 3 which concentrate upon the business management of the paper and the sustaining of a dispersed readership from the 1740s through to the 80s.

⁶⁷ For example, Child's coffee-house in St. Paul's Churchyard was not patronized mainly by publishers and booksellers but by doctors and tradesmen who liked the associations brought by the location. Pottle, F (Ed.) (1974) *Boswell's London Journal*. p 23. Book Club Associates, London.

⁶⁸ Thomas Hardy arrived as a shoemaker in London in 1774, aged 22, just in time to mix amongst the metropolitan fervour surrounding the American war. John Home Tooke, son of a poulterer, (albeit very rich and successful) participated in the events surrounding John Wilkes' election campaign in 1768.

Chapter 5.

Doubting Thomases: The emergence of self-taught commoners in the public sphere

This chapter traces the theme of public literacy and communicative practices throughout the eighteenth century through the lives of five men. It is argued that the advent of the self-taught commoner was something that became an important feature of the social and cultural formation within Britain, much earlier than the nineteenth century period as described and recorded by Jonathan Rose and David Vincent.¹ Although Jonathan Rose in particular acknowledges the deeper historical roots of self-educated commoners in Britain from the Lollards onwards, it is an area largely left unexplored.² The educational pursuits and commitments of such men were not solely for private and personal intellectual sustenance as Rose suggests.³ This is a key distinction, as the drift within the work of Rose is that various forms of literate enculturation were essentially personal pursuits for private educational and spiritual expansion – ‘self-improvement’. Following the discussion in the previous chapter, the argument advanced here is that part of the drive towards acquiring public literacy, or more varied communicative capabilities, was to enhance the capacity of a person to engage and participate within the expanding public and cultural spheres.

This chapter will show how family, schooling, religious life and affiliation, locality, apprenticeship and circumstance combined to generate a distinctive orientation towards knowledge, learning, ‘intelligence’⁴ and understanding. It is also shown how such people continued, throughout their lives to expand their intellectual and educational horizons, something that ought not to surprise us, as people were not framed and bound by the schooling-derived conceptions of starting and finishing education at certain ages and stages of their lives. This aspect of the present theme is covered in some detail during the discussion of the education of Thomas Holcroft. An avowed aim of the chapter is to show how vibrant the educational possibilities were during this century and to challenge the view of that this was a period of relative decline educationally.⁵

Self-taught individuals had to find inner resources to sustain their learning paths, often sacrificing leisure and family time in order to acquire certain skills and knowledge. This pathway necessitated the adoption of a certain disposition towards work, knowledge, and learning and indeed implies a personal sense of wanting to be or become different from what one was. People would enter various social settings and bring not only dispositions

but also certain types of cultural resources that they had cultivated. This is often referred to as cultural capital' arises from this notion, and in what follows the way that forms of cultural capital became of value are traced. This might include gaining recognition from peers through being a zealous follower of theatrical productions where the person's lifestyle embodies a certain notion of being knowledgeable.⁶ On the other hand, a person might be known for the company he kept which attracted high social status through being seen at a particular coffee house regularly, or one might secure membership of a high status society or association and thus be seen by others as possessing important qualities of learning. A person could display refined tastes in art, fashion, music or architecture, or dazzle company by the range of topics upon which one could discourse. The adoption of a different public character was often quite a conscious strategy such as the diary entry from November 21st 1762 from Boswell;

Since I came up (from Edinburgh), I have begun to acquire a composed genteel character very different from a rattling uncultivated one which for some time past I have been fond of. I have discovered that we may be in some degree whatever character we choose. Besides, practice forms a man to anything. I am now happy to find myself cool, easy and serene.⁷

Rather than possessing personal attributes or qualities one might be recognized and gain status through external cultural by owning cultural objects such as works of art, literature and music. John Brewer explores the social significance of the ownership and use of prints, or the possession of music which one could perform using either one's own or a borrowed instrument thus making a demonstration of one's abilities to an audience.⁸ The importance of this category of cultural capital as a marker of social distinction led to extraordinary collections being amassed by the aristocracy as one way of establishing and maintaining their superiority over the rising bourgeoisie. Another type of cultural capital arose from gaining an identity through which lifetime associations were formed, via the status of an institution. An example of this was the imperative of sending a son to a recognised school and university college so that the family name and tradition was linked to a gentry rather than artisan social milieu.. It would also include possession of honoured positions within the army, church or state apparatus, often in the gift of a prestigious (royal) patron.

In the five studies contained within this chapter the tensions between these different layers are explored within individual lives. The experiences of Thomas Spence which are

described later in the chapter, illustrate the consequences for someone of stepping beyond the boundaries (or fields) of the institutionalised forms of cultural capital (i.e. holding a formal position on the committee of the local philosophical society), without regard to one's possession of sufficient embodied, 'symbolic' capital (behaving and speaking in a genteel, cultured manner).

Features of this educational phenomenon are traced through the lives of five men born between 1668 and 1752 who were all named Thomas. To some extent this shared name might be seen as co-incidental, but it was a popular name in an age of questioning and independent thinking, especially amongst dissenters and non-conformists. They are Thomas Coram, Thomas Pellow, Thomas Holcroft, Thomas Spence and Thomas Hardy. Their shared name also relates to the New Testament disciple who questioned Christ's resurrection until he had touched the wounds. The name was popular with dissenters for two further reasons. First, in John, 11.16, it is Thomas who says "Let us go that we might die with him", expressing a determined faith even in the face of being stoned by adversaries. Secondly, within the English tradition, the example of the martyr Thomas Becket, slain in 1170 and seen by popular legend to be steadfast in the face of monarchical authority, carried considerable weight.⁹ Thomas More, another martyr celebrated by Fox, appears in name on copper tokens issued by radicals in the 1790s alongside the names of Paine and Hardy. Other doubting Thomases who had been intended for inclusion were Chatterton, Beddoes,¹⁰ Bewick and Paine but space precluded this. In an age in which Christianity, albeit in many forms, lay at the heart of most ideological positions, naming a child Thomas was not an arbitrary action. Being a Thomas would have carried significant cultural loadings. Each of these Thomases came from relatively obscure and lowly backgrounds, most notably, Thomas Holcroft, but they managed, in their own ways, to make their mark upon the wider society and times in which they lived. Some, like Thomas Hardy were to leave a powerful and enduring legacy which helped to shape thinking and action for decades after they died. These Thomases crossed traditional social, cultural and intellectual boundaries and embodied the core aspirations discussed in the previous chapter, which grew out of the new and expanding public sphere. By the end of the century it was men such as Coram, Pellow, Holcroft, Spence and Hardy who had acquired and adopted dispositions which would lead them to challenge the prevailing common-sense of their times and find ways of offering alternatives. Coram's charitable sensibility was inspired by the writings of Thomas Bray¹¹ which combined an adherence to Anglicanism with a strong sense of independence of mind and action which insisted upon a Christian working for social justice and rights. This is a distinctly modern notion with origins in the social and political

contradictions of the later colonial period in America, so when Coram began to engage with Anglican, gentry and aristocratic circles back in Britain he unwittingly challenged the prevailing dispositions and taken-for-granted ways of thinking about society, unaware that what he was doing anticipated future, more social and charitable sensibilities.

Although social class, position and status were highly formalised during the eighteenth century, the expanding bourgeois public sphere acted as a social site within which embedded learning,¹² personal growth and cultural exchange were possible. This site was a social space for critical discourses into which virtually anyone might venture and contribute, thus connecting learning and education with essentially modern qualities of democratic purpose and outcome. This way of viewing the educational and social space helps us to understand and reconcile apparently contradictory features within biographies such as the reliance upon aristocratic patronage by Coram, in order to secure support for the most vulnerable people in London, the abandoned waifs; or Thomas Spence, the early communist, seeking throughout his life, to teach working class people an essentially bourgeois version of spoken English.

Biographical and autobiographical sources are particularly suited for an enquiry into the embeddedness of learning and, following Vincent and Rose, it is shown how such sources offer a major resource waiting to be used by educational historians of the eighteenth century.¹³ This has been the case with the recovery of middle class women's contributions¹⁴ to education as well as with the life trajectories of upper class men¹⁵ but insufficiently to date for people from the working classes.¹⁶ Another, conscious feature of the present chapter is its gendered focus. The chapter is about men rather than women, although as shall be shown, mothers and wives played formative, rather than incidental roles in the educational trajectories of most of the Thomases highlighted in what follows. This focus upon men grows from the highly articulated gendered social relations that grew up around the coffee house culture, shipyard, dockside and workshop, providing cultural affordances to men that were rarely available in the same way to women. The first example of a self-taught individual is Thomas Coram.

Thomas Coram, Lyme Regis, Dorset, born 1668, died London, 1751.

Thomas Coram is perhaps best known by the orphanage and by the modern educational research institute into childhood and the museum that bears his name. To modern readers Thomas Coram would appear to be a contradictory individual being a staunch Anglican yet acute social critic, coming from a very humble background, yet cherishing his acquired status as a gentleman. His status was always ambivalent as he was generally referred to by other

'gentlemen' as 'Captain Coram'. Coram provided a self-assessment when writing to the Reverend Benjamin Colman in 1724, when he was fifty-six years old,

For my part I am no judge in Learning I understand no Latin nor English nither, well, for though Through Mercy I descended from virtuous good Parentage on both sides as any Body, they were Famelies of Strict hon'r and honesty and always of good reputation amongst the better sort of people, Yet I had no learning, my mother Dying when I was Young, My Father Married again 4 or 5 yeares after at Hackney Near this City. I went to sea, out of my Native place, the Little town of Lyme in the West of England at 11 years and a half old until 5 years after my father sent for me hither and put me apprentice to a Shipwright.¹⁷

Coram's older and younger brothers both died in infancy. His mother followed soon after the death of the third son William, thus leaving Thomas to be brought up by his father, who, judging from this testimony had limited means but a good name and character. Wagner suggests that this established the character of Thomas being "self-reliant and independent".¹⁸ Wagner further suggests that Coram in later life was to display "many of the characteristics of a loner, unable to work long in association with others without friction, a behaviour trait which may have resulted from his solitary childhood".¹⁹ This latter view seems untenable, unless one begins from the assumption that working in a pleasant and accommodating equilibrium with others was some sort of norm from which Coram distinctively broke from. More credible would be a view which recognised that the world of commercial shipbuilding, ocean-freighting and colonial settlement were very tense and fraught sub-cultures in which strong, persistent, dogged and demonstrative personalities would survive and succeed. It is much more likely that Coram learned ways of coping in such a milieu through the years of his apprenticeship and before that, as a boy rigging hand on long voyages at sea. Such an upbringing would more than likely foster a disposition that was combative and uncompromising and this might explain in part the abruptness and lack of gentility that characterised his speech. It is possible that after the death of his mother, the Church in Lyme played some role in his early upbringing which made him into a staunch, if unconventional lifelong adherent to Anglicanism.

It is also probable that at a psychological level, the loss of both brothers and mother and physical estrangement from his father, laid the basis for a powerful commitment to orphans and waifs. Could it be that his consistent adherence to the established Church answered a need to belong to a wider family? But these are speculative possibilities. The only human capital it seems that his father could lay claim to was his "Strict hon'r and honesty" and it may be that this sense of the value of irreproachability in personal conduct was something which made

Thomas Coram appear during the course of his life, somewhat rigid and inflexible. What is certain is that irrespective of the forces ranged against him, Coram would speak his mind and go to remarkable lengths to challenge those who he perceived were acting dishonourably.²⁰

What Coram says about his lack of schooling reveals much about the situation that many would find themselves in; that of possessing degrees of formal literacy rather than fuller competence in the performance of recognised public standards in spoken and written English. Coram's career is testimony to the fact that success did not necessarily depend upon one's 'Learning', a term which today may equate fairly closely with the way we use 'Education' to refer to success in schooling. Coram's learning principally derived from his apprenticeship and subsequent years of business dealings, through which he was able to learn how to build a ship, and possibly, judging from his business activities, how also to manage and finance such an undertaking. We can assume that his ability to deal with figures was at least as assured as his writing, from the fact that when the French Government backed the Jacobite rebellion in Ireland and the Naval Department needed to ship over four thousand horses and nearly thirty thousand armed men over from Liverpool, the twenty three year old Coram was sent to verify the freightage for each vessel. This posting was to ensure that fraud did not take place and only appropriate charges were requested. In such a role, every ship owner and factor would immediately hold him in suspicion because he was there in order to prevent them securing illicit payments for each freightage. His evident success suggests a considerable degree of recognised social ability in the young Coram. Many years later Coram's work in Liverpool was recognised when he was awarded the freedom of the town. This facility with number is hardly surprising as working with the rigging, with loading and unloading cargo, repairing and fitting, costing supplies and payments, meant that since the age of five or six Coram had been involved in daily work which required some kind of arithmetical and computational understanding. Much of this was embedded within daily routines at work and would be assimilated through repeated practice.

Whilst we will never know the extent to which Coram supplemented what he learned on the job with formal book learning, it is likely that at some point he applied himself to basic accounts, using one of the many plain man's guides to practical knowledge that would have been available on the market. The two examples below (Fig. 28) by Thomas Baker and Thomas Tryon illustrate the contrast in views of learning that existed within the market for self-educational manuals, both carefully and consciously pitched towards their respective social clientele.

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Fig. 28. Learning manuals by Thomas Tryon, 1701 and Thomas Baker, 1708.

The first title is Thomas Tryon's *The Merchant, Citizen and Countryman's Instructor* followed by Thomas Baker's *Reflections upon Learning*. This type of literature was widely available and specifically targeted towards people who were self-directed readers and learners who typically would collect scraps of factual knowledge mixed in with bits of practical guidance. Baker for example has an interesting hierarchy of knowledge which is reproduced below in which he mixes elements of the classical curriculum with more 'modern' subjects to appeal to a wider readership. For a shipman such as Coram, geography would have been an essential discipline within the occupational sphere he occupied.

Educational historians will be wary of assuming that the publisher's or author's intentions necessarily structured the circulation of their works. It is just as likely that an inquisitive artisan would come across a copy of Baker as he would that of Tryon and thus be exposed to a heavy dose of orthodox and traditionalist thinking about education, albeit mixed in with newer, more modern subjects. Thomas Tryon styled his book as being "A Necessary Companion for all People." This reflects the socially wide target audience but also the implied use of the book as being something one would carry about oneself and refer to frequently over a span of time – a 'companion'.

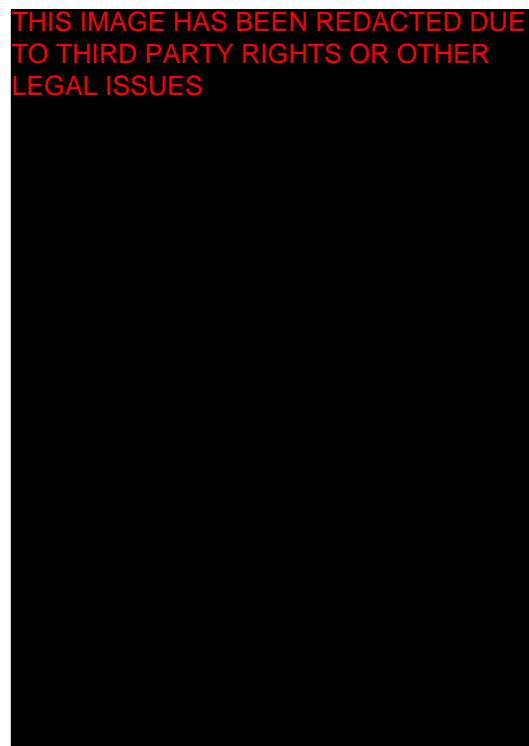


Fig. 29. Contents Page from Baker's Reflection upon Learning.²¹

Coram learned to write later than many, possibly only when in his thirties and the script that survives, such as the marginalia in his copy of Coley's *Starry Messenger*, would appear awkward and unaccomplished. The extract from his writing printed above, veers considerably from the emerging commercial standard, yet would have raised few eyebrows a generation earlier with its use of the letter 'e' in words like 'yeares' and 'married.' His use in writing of colloquialism and dialect forms such as 'nither' reflect someone who has learned phonetically rather than through extensive assimilation of correct spelling forms through reading.

Therefore, not too much should be made of the individuality of Coram's writing especially as it is probably typical of the majority of writers, few of whose scribblings survive. We are so used to reading surviving documents from schooled sections of society that we may forget that Coram's text as we see above was likely to reflect a majority of such communications. His written production would have appeared to most people with whom he worked to be intelligible and adequate. It is only through the hegemonic legacy of elite cultural values which were finally consolidated during the eighteenth century, that communicative practices which veered away from an essentially Latinate standard, have come to be viewed as peculiar or inadequate or illiterate or indeed as signs of being ill educated.²²

What is clear in the life of Coram is that even if many amongst the elite with whom he mixed, looked down upon him because of his unrefined brusqueness, a majority of people with whom he lived and worked would have done the reverse, recognising in him a man of considerable accomplishments. Although he knew and often mixed with people of 'quality' he was not and could never have been one of them. Perhaps this sense of alienation based upon social class exclusivity, was why he never quite lost the yearning to be part of some new settlement in the American colonies. Part of the social cement which bound members of the social elite together were the shared values derived from their exclusive schooling. Clever teachers like Thomas Baker and their publisher were alert to the market potential of catering for such aspiring readerships. His work, typical of many others, offered a chance to acquire the key elements of cultural capital "on the cheap" as it were, without the vast and impossible expenses that an extended schooling would entail. The use of such knowledge and the assumed outlook that came with it, would suggest not only the learning itself, but also that one came from a certain economic and thus social background. Hence the value of distinguishing between financial and human/cultural capital. As we saw in the previous chapter, immersion within the public sphere of coffee houses and lectures, enabled a person to acquire the outward signs of having undergone an education through schooling and thus to appear to be educated.

We saw with the book by Thomas Baker the retention of the traditional basis of the curriculum along with an explicit Anglican gloss. Within his scheme there was still no room for clerical, mathematical, administrative, mechanical and practical subjects. Yet the intellectual and commercial world in which Thomas Coram grew up produced an entirely new set of ideas about the elements that ought to be incorporated into a scheme of schooling – a curriculum - which eventually became available through a variety of secularised publications such as that by Tryon. But transmission of the new curriculum and ‘modern’ knowledge was primarily person-to-person, during the course of one’s working life, rather than through formal scholastic activities set aside and apart from the routines of working life. Additionally elements of this new sense of ‘intelligence’ would be disseminated through insertions into magazines, annual registers and in local lectures. The oral transmission of acquired and applied experience in practical knowledge would be the basis for much of what passed for learning within the shipyard worlds that people like Coram inhabited. Recourse to publications such as that by Tryon arose when particular aspects of a branch of practical knowledge was not readily available to the individual such as Section V11 “Of education : the natural and right way to bring up children”.

A magazine such as the one below (Fig. 30) from 1748 would be purchased and collected by hundreds of establishments and thus be available for reference. Note the use of the word ‘Journal’ to imply that the publication is a record of a continuing debate. The indication of source highlights the place where the debates happened, rather than who the speakers were. The accumulating collection of weekly editions became part of the cultural capital of the coffee house or club.

In this January edition could be read subjects as diverse as the effects of an Indian poison, Shipping captures, State of Tobacco Trade, New Mechanical Practice of Physick, changes in heredity Law in Scotland, modern Kingship and so on, all contained within a single edition. Variety and quantity are highlighted by the publisher. The pages are divided into two vertical columns with paragraphs numbered consecutively. In the space between the columns there is lettering from A to G. These markers act as referencing aids for readers and discussants or for note-takers who would be unlikely to be able to take a private and personal copy away with them.

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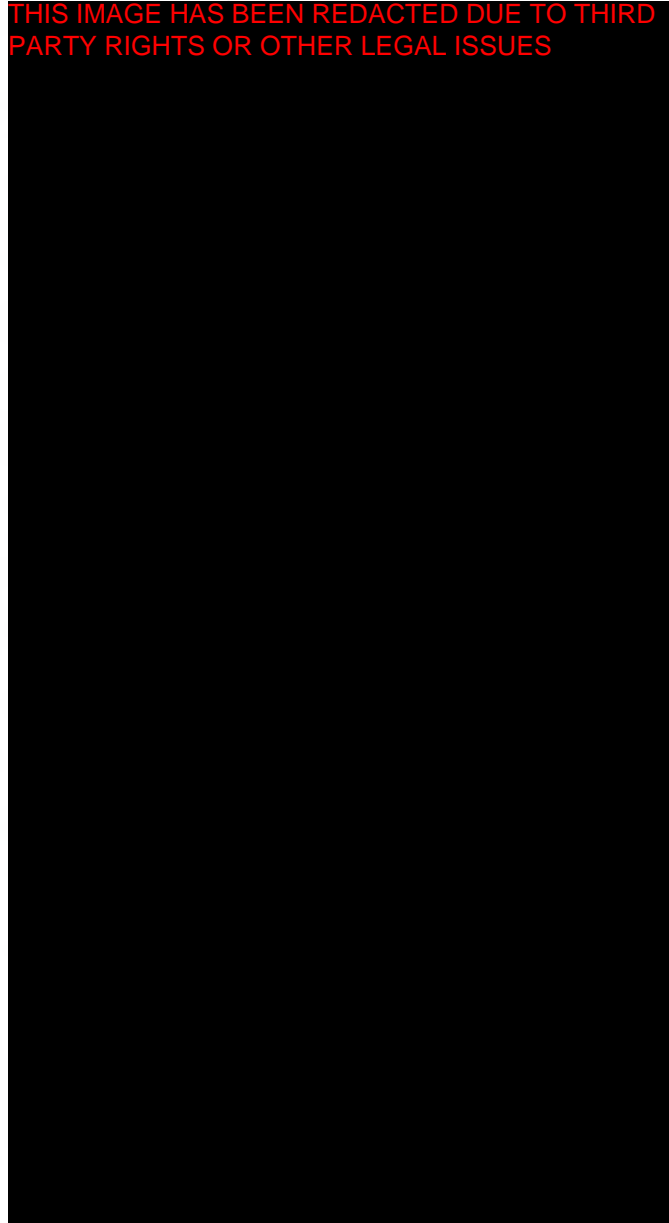


Fig. 30. London Magazine January 1748

It was through reading publications of this type that self-taught readers like Coram, who had limited access to original and full volumes of extensive works, spent a lifetime accumulating a store (magazine) of intelligence, often to such degrees that even government departments came to rely upon people such as he had become. This is an example of the way that the state had ceased to be the source or indeed the owner of intelligence or knowledge.

Intermingling with fellows amongst the ship-building fraternity in a coffee house would be seen as an extension of working life just as much as it could be seen as personal recreational time²³ and this partly explains why so many places like this existed and why they were apparently so well frequented. One of the annually recurring features within *The London Magazine* published every January was the account of captured shipping which, for many

working in docks and quaysides with direct, personal knowledge of such vessels and crews would become the focal point for discussions. Whilst the insurers over at Lloyds might rue losses in capital, fitters and seamen are likely to have personally known some who was lost to the waves.²⁴ The intelligence concerning the tobacco trade would have attracted readers and hearers in a smoke befugged coffee house atmosphere. Coram's prime interest in such matters was upon the shipping aspects of the trade as well as its impact upon new settlements in Virginia²⁵. One example of the cross-over between the socially promiscuous coffee-house culture and higher government circles is Joseph Addison, someone whom Coram came to know well, who was also an Under Secretary State and Member of Parliament. As we saw in the previous chapter, Addison's writings along with those of Richard Steele arguably became the model for gentlemanly discourse within the public sphere. Whether Coram ever aspired to personally replicating such a standard must remain a matter of speculation but it is clear it was something he was never to achieve.

Had Coram not instigated the foundling hospital, he would nevertheless have deserved a place in the history of his times for the part he played in extending shipbuilding in the Boston area, and for campaigning ceaselessly with the Government about settling and developing the area from modern day Maine up to Nova Scotia, and also his significant role in the establishment of the colony of Georgia. Whilst running a shipyard he made substantial amounts of money but refused to conform (dissent) religiously. It was during this period, when he came to be under the influence of Thomas Bray, that Coram became concerned about what was happening to Native Americans who were being displaced and dispossessed of their traditional lands, something that expressed itself in a desire to afford them full rights through bringing them into the Episcopalian fold. Such a viewpoint was not designed to endear him to the majority (established) of dissenting sectarians. Despite Coram's social origins, educational background and social outlook, his religious conformism nevertheless placed him into a relation with the local colonial English elites thus further antagonising the local dissenting majority amongst whom he lived and worked.

In 1700, whilst living in Taunton, Massachusetts, Coram married Eunice Waite, a Congregationalist. We do not know why they never had children. The officiating minister at the wedding was Sam Sewall (1655-1730) who was to be responsible for the first anti-negro slavery document (Fig. 31) and when Coram was involved in the establishment of Georgia he fully supported legislation banning negro slavery within the new state, possibly remembering the words of Sewall from his pamphlet published in the year of his marriage,

It is most certain that all Men, as they are the Sons of *Adam*, are Coheirs; and have equal right unto Liberty, and all other outward comforts of Life. GOD *hath given the Earth* (with all its commodities) *unto the Sons of Adam*, Psal 115.16. *And hath made One blood, all Nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the Earth...*²⁶

We can be fairly confident that this type of biblically based argument – progressive and radical in the colonies of 1700, represents the outlook of Coram who was a very close associate and follower of Sewall. In such documents one sees the source of later intransigence when working for the welfare of illegitimate street waifs and orphans.



Fig. 31. Thomas Sewall's *The Selling of Joseph*.
The first anti-negro slavery treatise published in the American colonies.

We can get some insight into the sort of reading material that a man like Coram would have about his person. For example he carried round with him a 1729 edition of Henry Coley's *Merlinus Anglicus Junior or the Starry Messenger*. It was in this little pocket reference book that he noted down the names of his 'Ladies of Charity' as well as details of his own business expenditure. Coley's was a work of astronomy, a science that was fundamental to a seafarer and it is likely that over a number of years people like Coram had committed to memory substantial sections of the tabulations, using the book for reference purposes. Knowing the

tides and stars on a daily basis even when living and working in a place like London up river, was part of the mental universe of such men. Such manuals were the staple secular reading for self-made artisans and business men and were part of the shared culture. Coley's *Merlinus* was re-printed annually for over half a century suggesting it was almost a necessary item around the person of someone involved in shipping matters. From the sample pages presented here (Fig. 32) we can see that Coram and people like him were habituated to digesting tabulated information, not as an abstract exercise but as part of mastering necessary knowledge; what came to be termed "really useful knowledge".²⁷

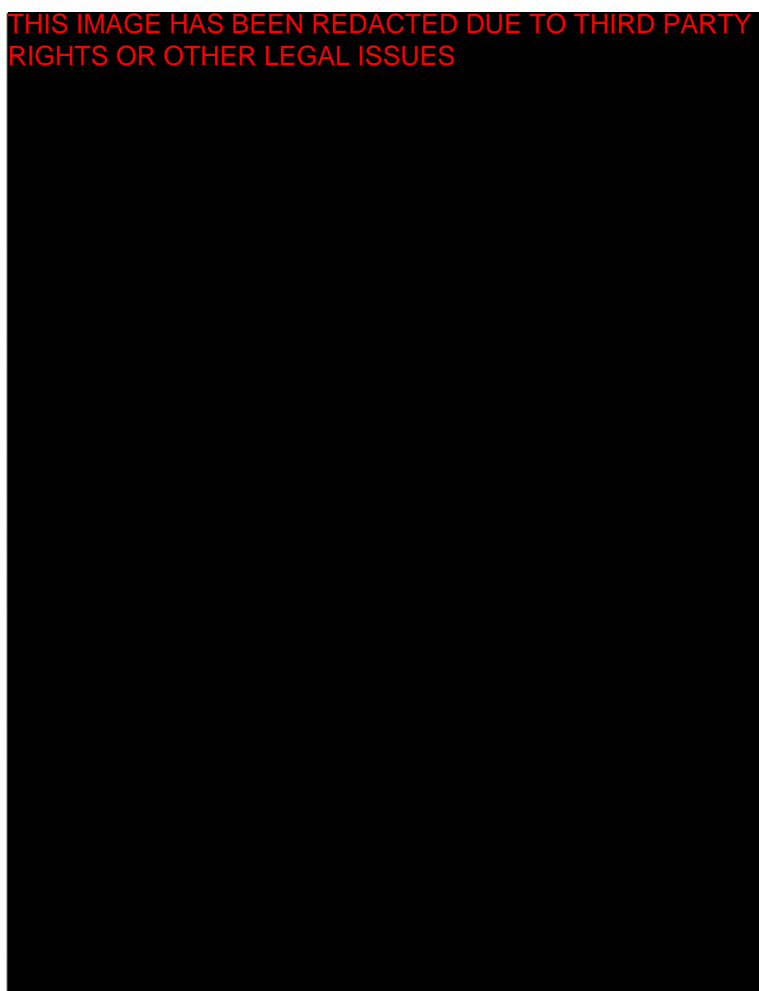


Fig. 32. Sample pages from Coley's *Starry Messenger*.

This form of knowledge gave self-made men like Coram a distinct commercial advantage in their dealings with traditionally educated investors and speculators, despite his never managing quite to become accepted as a 'gentleman'. The term of "really useful knowledge" is equally applicable within the current discussion as it refers to learning that is relevant in both practical and ideological senses to the social class position of the holder. Whilst we can

but speculate on the origins of certain sentiments which were a feature of Coram's personality, it is nevertheless clear that he was passionately committed to women's rights, not only within things like property inheritance and welfare but also in educational opportunities. His attitudes towards what one might describe as the politics of gender was a further reason why this Anglican signally failed to be accepted within the public worlds of the gentleman where adherence to gender positions and roles was essential to perceived ideas of the social order. His public challenge to male ideas of propriety with regard to women's sexuality by pursuing his idea of a foundling hospital, touched upon raw nerves and, as Wagner shows,²⁸ was a particularly sensitive matter in an age when 'gentlemen' more often than not led hypocritical personal lives. Coram stood outside of this formalised world of public stance and private behaviour recorded in such detail by Vic Gatrell.²⁹

Coram is the first doubting Thomas of this chapter because through his life we can see exemplified a person who moves between and across all social classes and in the process becomes someone who even government ministers take notice of. He becomes an accepted authority on American Colonial settlement and upon the economics of military supply and equipment. He becomes a formidable advocate - albeit one who breaks most of the rules of polite, legalistic discourse. He leaves a legacy not only of the foundling hospital that bears his name, but also of the idea that one can talk about social issues and social causes openly and publicly without fear of personal association and shame. The particularities of his education and learning contributed towards certain personal dispositions which allowed him to have the type of impact that he was able to have upon others. To describe such education in terms only of its supposed weaknesses and deficiencies risks missing the qualities that it gave to him as a person.

Thomas Pellow. Penryn, Cornwall. Born 1704. Died (17?? Unknown)

When Thomas Pellow was born in Penryn, Cornwall in 1704, Kernowek was still spoken in fishing villages to the south west, although around the Falmouth area the language had faded in the decades after the Act of Uniformity forced Latin out and English into local churches. The great Glasnay College in Penryn had been plundered and with its demise, indigenous traditions of Cornish learning had disappeared.³⁰ Latin however survived locally and was taught at the aptly named Latin School in Penryn which Thomas Pellow attended. He disliked both the severe discipline and the studies, so set about persuading his parents to let

him accompany his Uncle John Pellow, on a trading voyage taking salted pilchards and tin ore to Genoa and returning with a variety of goods.

There would have been little unusual about an eleven year old boy wanting to take to the sea as Penryn, and the larger Falmouth only four miles down harbour were, even by British standards, important shipping and trading centres. The busy ports and docksides and mule trains formed the backdrop to the imagination of a young child growing up in the area.³¹

It seems as though something was agreed between Thomas Pellow's parents and the uncle because Thomas was taken aboard *The Francis* only to discover that his Uncle, the Captain kept him hard at his "book-learning"³² for virtually the entire journey, and included the boy within the severe ship-board discipline should he slip from his studies. By the time *The Francis* had sailed back through the Gibraltar Straits and past the north-western Iberian coast on the return leg of their journey, Thomas was dreaming of the Latin School in an altogether more positive light.

Latin was associated with rebellion in the western parts of Cornwall. Cranmer and Henry VIII had suppressed an uprising in 1549 and over five thousand Cornishmen were executed for protesting, amongst other things, about the removal of Latin from services. That such a 'grammar' school existed in Penryn was not surprising as the area was home for a larger than usual number of prosperous merchants and propertied families. Defoe, writing in the 1720s³³ describes Penryn as being "pleasant and likeable"³⁴ whose wealth derived from its oyster-beds, trade with Portugal, links with the annual Newfoundland fleet and tin shipments. Defoe makes note of the fact that Penryn offered berths for ships as large as any that could moor in Truro Harbour.

The fact that Thomas Pellow sent his son to the Latin school indicates that the family sought for him a future in commerce, possibly away from the dangers of life at sea. Young Thomas was an only son having two sisters, and in the highly gendered and patriarchal society of eighteenth century Cornwall, investment through schooling in the only son was nothing unusual. There is a tendency to view such Latin schools as places of dry and meaningless rote learning necessarily enforced through a regime of corporal punishment. The curriculum that was taught to a boy in such schools followed the subject that parents or guardians paid for.³⁵ Typically, the master would have drawn his materials from a book such as that by Thomas Baker probably with a daily dose of rote-learned Latin in some form.

What is evident through the brief description that Defoe gives us of the area is that a boy growing up seemingly as far removed from the London metropolis as possible, was nevertheless familiar with foreign sailors, goods and shipping. He would have been aware of

events and personalities from places as wide-spread as the American colonies, the eastern Mediterranean and the west coast of Africa. The towns of Falmouth and Truro were nearby and these could berth the largest of English warships. There was even a local printer in Truro.

Thus when describing the early life and education of someone who appears to be in most respects an ordinary, possibly even 'typical' boy of his times, it is necessary to place the individual within the milieu in which he was growing up and not attempt to locate 'education' within the boundaries of his limited schooling experience. He must have had a degree of self-confidence and intelligence to confront his parents about his desire to leave the Latin school, although he was evidently outwitted with the connivance of Uncle John. We see a picture of a young boy who is active, thinking and working out for himself what he might do. One thing we do not see is a passive recipient of whatever he is given through his contacts with adults. This capacity for thinking on his feet, standing firm, making judgements and enduring seemingly arbitrary hardships was to prove essential to the young Thomas as his life took an unexpected and dramatic turn for the worse.

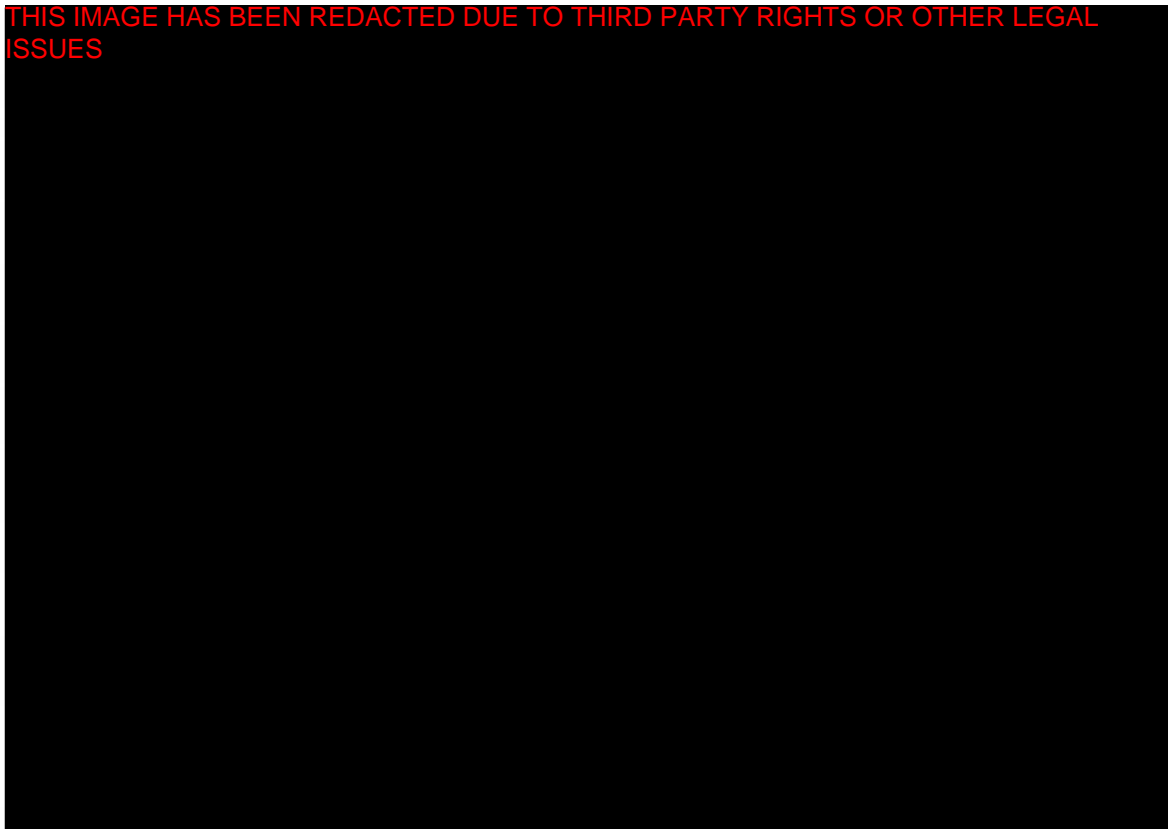


Fig. 33. Title page and first page of Thomas Pellow's *'History'*. Both draw a prospective reader immediately into established publishing and literary genres; the picaresque and the confessional.³⁶

The Francis was attacked and captured by Barbary pirates with all of the crew including the eleven year old Thomas taken into slavery. They were landed at Salle on the Atlantic coast of Morocco and were joined by other British, American, Newfoundland and European slaves. Arab, Muslim, pirates were nothing new to communities living in southern Ireland, Cornwall and Devon and the problem had been increasing throughout the seventeenth century. Every coastal settlement in these areas had its own tale to tell of men taken at sea and even of women, taken in coastal raids on small fishing villages.³⁷

Newly captured and landed slaves were marched to Moulay Ismail's newly established base in Meknes. Before arrival each would have experienced severe beatings, enforced marching, blistering mid-day heat, near-starvation rations and various forms of ritual humiliation.³⁸ The sight of fellow captives being killed or expiring would have been a frequent one. Young Thomas Pellow would have to draw much from the pool of experiences and intellectual resources that he had managed to acquire during his first eleven years simply to survive. He was noticed and was fortunate not to be assigned to a labour gang building the seemingly endless walls of Moulay Ismail's fortress base in Meknes. Instead he went as a servant in the home of one of Ismail's brothers where he quickly realised that a key part of survival was to apostasise and acquire functional Arabic. Although Pellow's autobiography dramatises the supposed tortures he endured as he resisted his employer's urgings for him to become a Muslim, it seems more probable that the lad understood the route where the least trouble would arise.

He was to move on and into direct service with Moulay Ismail, a capricious and powerful tyrant who, according to Pellow, would wear special coloured clothing to indicate in advance of his intention to personally murder someone who might slight him that day. Despite this his government elicited diplomatic respect and recognition from the European powers most especially as his was the western-most outpost of the Ottoman Empire. During his twenty three year stay in slavery in what today is modern Morocco, Pellow learned much about West Africa and its people. He participated as a soldier in punitive raids against Moulay Ismail's opponents, married and had a child. He lived as a trusted Muslim but never went completely native as did many hundreds of Europeans who became trapped in the obligations and circumstances of slavery. The fact that so many apostates chose to 'go native' raises questions about the accuracy of most memoirs which invariably highlight cruelties and hardships, whilst being less fulsome when recounting the pleasures and benefits of life in north western Africa at this time. During his youth and early manhood, Pellow met many Europeans and often acted as translator but was unable to make his escape. This use of Pellow,

by his owners/employers as a translator might explain how he managed to sustain his English competency. Another explanation was the frequent opportunities that arose for speaking with British and Americans within the large slave community of Morocco. The experience of slavery in Morocco was essentially a multi-lingual one with Spanish, French, Portuguese, Dutch, English and Italian mixing with languages such as Bambara, Dioula, Mende³⁹ and Wolof, drawn from as far away as modern Mali, Senegal, Gambia, Guinea and Sierra Leone.

When Pellow did return to England in 1738 his name and fame had spread and his arrival to Penryn was eagerly anticipated. But when he stepped onto the quayside he could not recognise his parents or sister, nor they he. This lack of mutual recognition went deeper than surface appearances as the man Thomas Pellow was no longer the boy who left Penryn twenty three years earlier. His mental universe now encompassed the assumptions about the world which were embedded within north African Islam. This may explain why in his biography there is such an unconvincing and seemingly forced re-affirmation of adherence to Anglican orthodoxy.

The purpose of drawing out Pellow's tale is to show that for many in the early eighteenth century experience of Islam, Africa, Atlantic shipping and trading, the Mediterranean, piracy and slavery was part of living and growing up in the far west of England. Many hundreds of families were affected by lost sons who were known to have fallen into slavery. In due course, because Britain maintained necessary diplomatic relations with local Ottoman rulers, many were ransomed and returned but these were a small minority of cases. By the time that Pellow had been captured the government had become less than zealous in paying ransoms for the king's subjects, and money that was raised for this purpose tended to be generated through Church-based fund-raising campaigns. For the few who returned there were stories of real places and real people and real experiences. Pellow returned with an internationalised knowledge and probably knew as much about contemporary Barbary politics and culture as any other European, having seen from the inside how the Court and military operated. The mass of historical detail within his writings have been confirmed as being more or less accurate and credible through the research of Magali Morsy.⁴⁰ Therefore, when his autobiography was written and published there is every reason to think that it was largely self-written and not wholly ghosted, especially as Pellow mentions an unscrupulous hack who rushed into print a story about his exploits soon after his arrival home but made up nearly all of the details within the narrative. The book is partly designed to set the record straight, but as Morsy identifies, this does not prevent the insertion of plagiarised elements within the text. This may suggest an editorial collaborator working alongside Pellow in order to puff out the

book to boost sales. Pellow's *History*, first published in 1740, just two years after his return, is long, and runs to some 390 pages in the 1751 (Fig. 33) edition published in Bath⁴¹. It is a sustained literary effort, revealing a full awareness and sensibility of contemporary adventure and memoir genres. This sense of genre places his account within well-established publishing forms which straddled the boundaries between fictional narratives and quasi-autobiographical accounts. And yet Pellow quite clearly had limited formal schooling; he could not claim to be 'educated' in the sense of having pursued his schooling beyond an elementary level, although that no doubt would have been his destiny had he returned safely from that fateful journey to Genoa with his Uncle John.

Although Pellow's personal life trajectory was by most standards extraordinary, he embodies something that was becoming quite commonplace during his lifetime – the independent self-taught commoner, someone whose 'intelligence', learning and views were the product of experiences gained away from home often facing new challenges abroad. This was in contrast to a life experience of following the occupational and residential experience of one's parents and grandparents and possibly great grandparents leading to a profoundly parochial consciousness. His disposition was to learn quickly and this enabled him to avoid being killed on several occasions (according to his narrative). One may therefore only assume that this quality of thinking and behaving derived somehow from what he acquired where he grew up. One of the consequences of the Civil War, the period of Pellow's grandparents, was an acceleration of movement from the village to the town and thence to the city. By the early eighteenth century coastal towns and ports like Truro and Penryn were locations of social and geographical variety – even cosmopolitan in character. Whether one worked as a stevedore, cooper, fisherman, carter or carpenter one would learn through listening and talking with others who had novel experiences of their own. So in a sense the boy Pellow would not have found the multi-national and multi-lingual milieu of North Africa quite as strange as one might first suppose.

As we saw in the previous chapter, by this period the coffee house and tavern culture had become universalised especially for men, and access to experience and knowledge was available to anyone who wished to share in the homosocial culture that developed within such places. The exchange between people about their own experiences was increasingly augmented by exchanges between people about the experiences of others mediated through widely available print and this added an entirely new and non-parochial element into everyday discourse. Pellow's story would have been another element within such places and one can imagine his place in the local coffee houses and taverns in the years following his return,

telling and re-telling aspects of his tale. Indeed it is likely that the details and structure of what he came to write and publish arose from repeated telling of parts of his 'adventures', the most sensational of which would have been his proximity to the Moulay's harem and what being a Muslim was like for someone who was really a true Christian. The potentially prurient sexual aspects of his story are quite noticeably absent from his account; maybe out of genuine loss and sadness at the fate of his wife and child. But his over-exaggerated accounts of his spiritual journey suggest a desire to be allowed to live a life free from suspicion and prejudice. Once more we see Pellow adapting to changed circumstances on his return to England, and becoming in public at least, the sort of person that he felt those in positions of authority would wish him to be. Such behaviour is far from hypocrisy. In fact it is more akin to being adaptable, flexible, multi-faceted and socially adept – skills that were invaluable within a society that was still reeling from the social impact of the Civil War just over sixty years before his capture.⁴²

Pellow is an example of someone who from a young age learned how to absorb and make positive use of experience rather than formal learning as the foundation for his knowledge and orientation. However, this view risks being too simplistic as Pellow would have experienced years of formal instruction in the Koran and probably further instruction to enable him to learn to write Arabic. He does not indicate whether he lost his ability to write English and thus had to re-acquire it.

Therefore when we talk about education during this period it is necessary to find ways of incorporating the cultural phenomenon of self-taught individuals such as Pellow, because those characteristics lie at the heart of how many people in the early eighteenth century acquired and made use of their experience and learning. There were of course, other settings such as the domestic and traditional family culture into which a child would be socialised, or later, the formal relations of the apprenticeship or service where a young adult would gradually acquire occupational skills and knowledge across a period of time. But the capacity to be adaptive and flexible, almost to become a different person in the various circumstances one found oneself within, was an increasingly common phenomenon of the period. Part of the reason why Thomas Pellow survived, whereas most of his enslaved contemporaries perished in quite brutal circumstances, was precisely this ability to adapt and modify himself and to be believable when doing so. In other words he had an ability to perform in the public sphere in much the same way as Boswell cited at the beginning of this chapter described. This is not so much of a re-making of the self, as a creating of an expanded self with a range of concurrent identities; a sort of social repertoire which the individual has available for use depending upon

the circumstances. The ability to grow and expand the self in such a manner, presupposes a command of actions, language and mannerisms of a high order.

Linda Colley's supposition about the state of anomie that Pellow must have experienced on his return is an interesting, but essentially creative supposition.⁴³ We do not know what happened to him. His disappearance from the record suggests a departure from the West Country and possibly over the sea for a new beginning in the American colonies, possibly following a settlement scheme of the sort that people like Thomas Coram had sponsored during the period of Pellow's captivity.

Thomas Holcroft, London. Born 1745. Died London, 1809.

When Thomas Holcroft came to write his autobiography he knew he was going to die soon. The work was therefore written in quite particular circumstances which will have affected what he chose to include. By the time Holcroft died not only was his name known to the metropolitan theatre-going and novel-reading bourgeoisie, but he had a second, parallel reputation amongst the artisan and labouring classes as a champion of their democratic rights. Towards the end of his life Holcroft's reputation amongst the literati had waned because of his association with public radicalism. He was no longer 'fashionable' in a social world where cultural preferences and tastes could no longer be disguised in classless terms. Bourgeois audiences stopped laughing at and being intrigued by the lower classes and instead began to fear them in the 1790s. But for others, possibly far greater in number than those who knew him only through his plays and novels, Holcroft's name joined with those of Thelwall, Cartwright, Paine, Hardy, Eaton and Horne-Took in the panoply of heroes of the early working class movement.

Holcroft managed to compose sections of his autobiography up to his 15th year, dictating the text whilst in extreme pain. This forms the first seventeen chapters and it is with this section that I am here concerned. William Hazlitt then undertook to complete the *Memoirs* using "Mr. Holcroft's Letters; from Journals and other papers to which I had access; from conversations with some of his early and most intimate friends; and from passages in his printed works, relating to his own history and adventures, pointed out to me by them". The record of Holcroft's life is therefore problematic as it does not form a consistent whole and apart from his many virtues, Hazlitt was well known for the way he played loose with factual details and relied heavily upon memory.⁴⁴ Another problem with the biographical second section is that our reading inevitably has to be filtered through what we already know about

Hazlitt. Nevertheless, as Hazlitt says in the ‘Advertisement’, “Few lives have been marked with more striking changes”. This section concentrates upon how someone who, as a young child lived as poorly as he did, could have transcended such a lowly social position to become, through his self-education, such a noted literary and cultural figure of his times. Like Coram and Pellow, Holcroft began life somewhere not too far from the bottom of the social ladder.

Thomas Holcroft was concerned to get his family name right as previous generations had used a variety of spellings

From this it appears that our family did not pay much attention to subjects of orthography, or think the manner in which their name was spelt a matter of importance. ⁴⁵

Whilst such an attitude towards one’s own family name might strike more modern readers as strange, it reflects the norm in a society where primacy was still accorded to oral transmission and where authenticity and continuity was assured through local repetition and tradition. Yet, as we saw with Pellow, the migration of the family from one part of Devon to another broke the local connections and a variant spelling in another place within an official record could mask the identity of the person. Holcroft’s earliest experience with schooling was a negative one;

My father one day whipped me very severely for crying to go to a school in the neighbourhood, where children were sent rather to keep them out of the way, than to learn anything. ⁴⁶

A previous apprentice of his father’s gave him his first books – a *History of Parismus and Parismenes* and *Seven Champions of Christendom*;

but his last and Capital gift, too precious to be ever forgotten, consisted of two small books.. They were to me an inestimable treasure, that often brought the rugged, good natured Dick to my remembrance, with no slight sense of obligation...⁴⁷

One widely held view is that books sold by itinerant Chapmen were rather inconsequential, small and basic texts often balancing printed with visual text. An example of this type of book is that shown below by Thomas Boreman from 1741 where there is a striking, albeit crudely produced image to balance the written text on the same page spread (Fig. 34). Boreman and

others such as Benjamin Collins and Mary Cooper pre-dated John Newbery who is often erroneously credited with beginning publishing for children. This type of material, essentially fiction and fable was in wide distribution from the seventeenth century onwards.⁴⁸ Margaret Kinnell⁴⁹ argues that the turning point comes not simply with the appearance of the books but with John Newbery's commercial innovations. He was the first publisher-bookseller to recognise the potential of producing games on a commercial scale, the first to pay real attention to the growing economic importance of children as the social base of the book market widened.⁵⁰

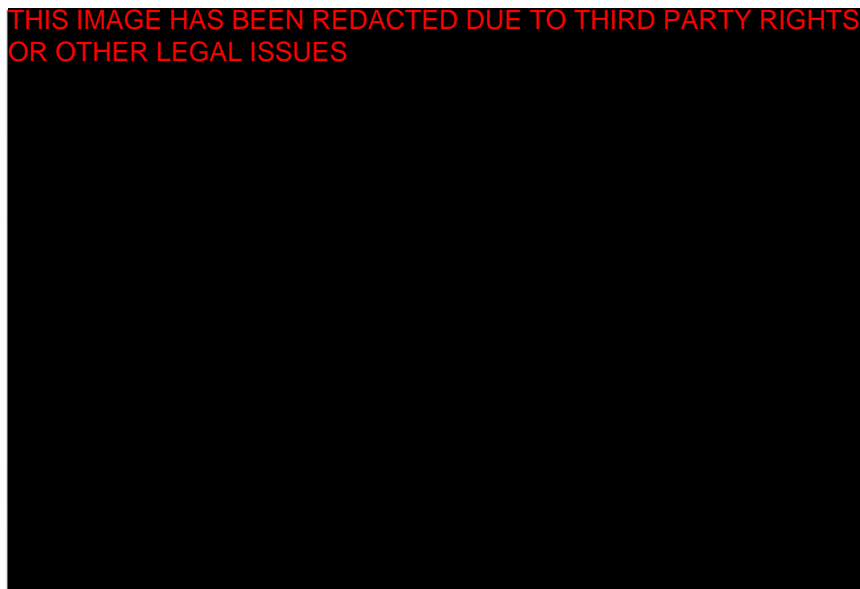


Fig. 34. A souvenir publication from Thomas Boreman's shop near to Guildhall

Such books sold well across social classes and were not simply there for the poor. Nor were they just sold by street hawkers but would be a staple in most bookshops, providing opportunities for relatively cheap gifts for children. One indicator of the volume of sales that this genre achieved was the fact that they were sold wholesale by paper volume measurements rather than printed copies – by the quire of ream.⁵¹ In the mid century world that Holcroft grew up in, the emphasis upon fabulous tales which often mixed reality with fantasy stimulated interest as much then as it has always done. In a sense the Pellow autobiography discussed earlier, was a thematic continuation for adult audiences of adventure stories which revealed strange mysteries and encounters with the unknown that began within genres consumed principally by children.

But as we saw with Pellow, these themes powerfully reflected underlying realities of the lived experiences of large number of people from the working classes; hence their resonance

with generations of readers. In another 1741 production by Boreman, but this time focusing upon the exhibits to be found within the Tower of London we can see a typical page with an animal drawn in its cage (Fig. 35).⁵² The page refers back to a previous entry and attempts to anthropomorphise the animals by giving their names. It is clearly addressed to a child reader and the text captures a sense of wonderment. The small size suggests a child reader holding the book rather than listening to an adult reading the text to the child. It reads well aloud. The text is written in progressive stages with one section building upon another and is intended to be informative as well as diverting. It is the sort of little book that would probably have been on sale outside the Tower or the Guildhall and taken back home by visitors.

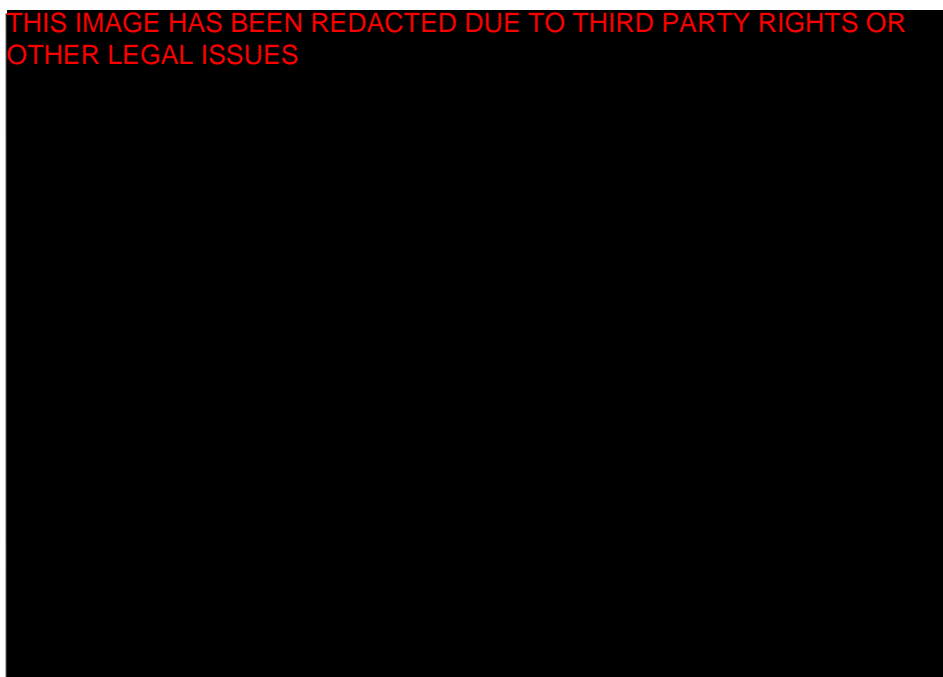


Fig. 35. The Porcupine exhibited at the Tower of London

In similar format are the traditional fables with stock characters such as Goody Two Shoes which were the staple wares of chapmen.⁵³ But small books of this type were by no means all that travelling chapmen would hawk and which Cousin Dick might purchase for young Tom. Below is a reproduction of the title and first page (Fig. 36) from a 1735 publication of one of the books Holcroft so lovingly remembers – *The Famous History of the Seven Champions*.

Contrary to a widely held view, some chapbooks were textually complex and challenging, forerunners of later nineteenth century ‘penny dreadfuls’.⁵⁴ This was one of the two books that Holcroft mentioned as being given to him by the apprentice Dick. It is ninety five pages long, without illustrations and densely printed with well over 750 words

per page in tightly spaced type. The text is interspersed with songs and poems, imagined letters, dialogues and speeches. The character of the text can be derived from the following excerpt from pages 13/14 of the 1735 edition.⁵⁵

Thus sorrow was his Company, and Despair his chief Solicitor, till Hyperion with his golden Coach had thirty Times rested in Thetis's Palace, and Cynthia thirty Times danc'd upon the Chrystall Waves which was the very time that his moans should end, according to the severe and cruel sentence of the Soldan of Persia; but by what extraordinary Means he knew not. So expecting every minute to entertain the wished Messenger of death, he heard afar off the Roaring of two hunger-starved Lions which for the Space of four Days had been restrained from Food and natural Sustenance, only to devour and staunch their hunger starved Bowels with the body of this thrice renowned Champion; which Cry of the Lions so terrified his Mind, that the Hair of his Head grew stiff, and his Brows sweat Water through anguish of his Soul, so extremely he feared the remorseless stroak of Death that by Violence he burst the Chains in sunder wherewith he was bound, and rent the curled tresses of his Head that were of the Colour of amber, the which he wrapped about his Arms against the assault of the Lions, for he greatly suspected them to be the Messengers of his woful Tragedy, which indeed was so appointed; for at the same Instant they descended the dungeon, brought thither by the Janisaries, only to make a full Period of the Champions Life; but such was the invincible Fortitude of *St. George*, and so politick was his Defence, that when the starved Lions came running on him with open jaws he valiantly thrust his sinewe'd Arms in their Throats (being wrapp'd about with the Hair of his Head) whereby they presently choaked, and then he pulled out their Hearts,⁵⁶

The writing style reflects a listenership as much as a readership with its succession of sub-clauses which have the effect of sustaining suspense and building detail into the narrative. The classical references and biblical lexicon are drawn from a deep pool of imaginative references and associations that acted as a common and shared cultural resource which would have been familiar to a great number within the population. The theme of a Christian's adversity in captivity within the Islamic, Ottoman world was by this time a familiar trope as we saw earlier with Thomas Pellow's tale. The tale defines manly virtues through the heroic actions and sufferings of the Knights. Material like this was cheap and readily available, and judging from the revised versions and number of re-editions, was in demand. The reason why the text is so crammed onto each page is to reduce production costs and this also explains the absence

of any wood-block illustrations. To compensate for this absence the literary style is exaggeratedly vivid.

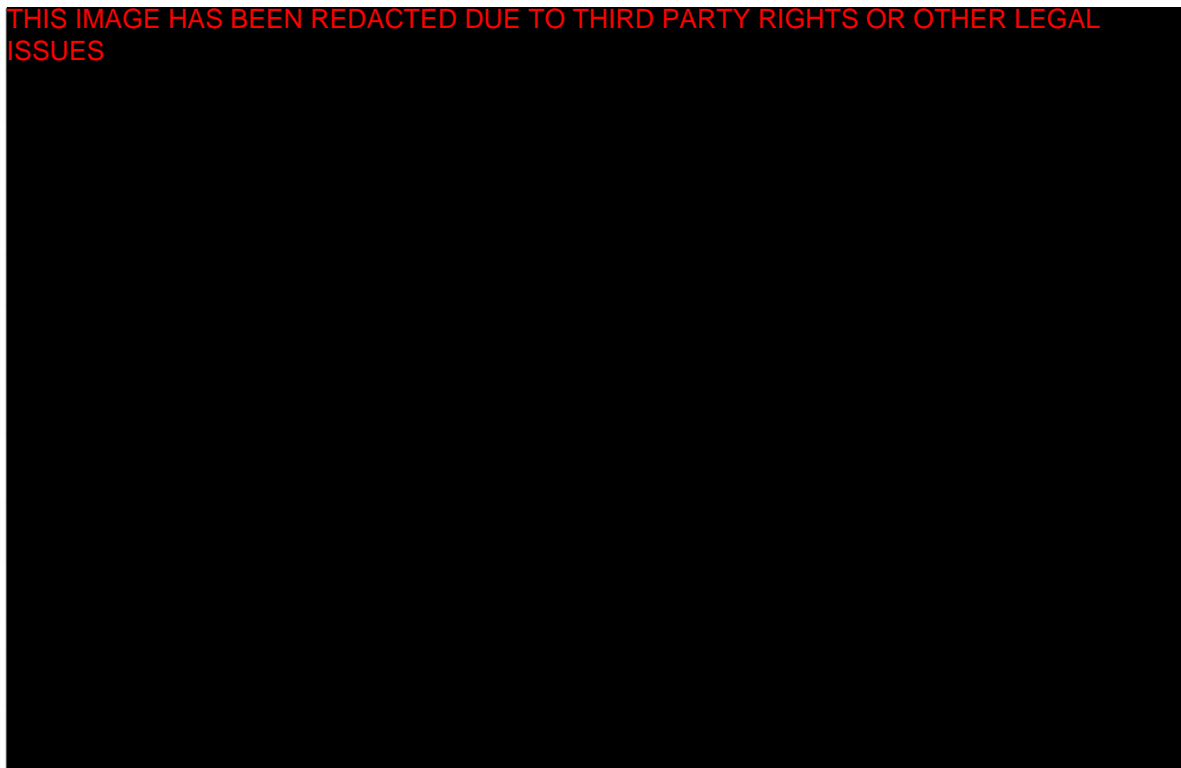


Fig. 36. One of the most popular printed stories throughout the eighteenth century.

Publications like this could become an anchor-point in a person's education partly due to the habit of reading the same text intensively over a number of years rather than the more modern tendency to seek out new reading material and thus engage in extensive reading practices across a wide range of texts.⁵⁷ It is highly likely that much of the text (even though it was ninety-plus pages) was either committed to memory or at least was so familiar that it became a personal resource from which a reader like Holcroft could draw in future expression and communication. Yet it is a far cry from the type of material that one usually associates with 'education' and 'schooling', especially when, using more recently developed ideas of learning and teaching, the historian is seeking out school texts or at least texts that might have been used by boys like Holcroft in school settings.

With tales of choking lions by the throat and ripping out their hearts, it is little wonder that the young Holcroft had his imagination stimulated by such fare. The lexicon is highly elaborate, yet reflective of the self-consciously prosodic register used by preachers.

*..but by what Extraordinary means he knew not...
..he heard afar off the roaring of two hunger-starved lions..
..burst the chains in sunder wherewith he was bound...⁵⁸*

The resolutely Saxon lexicon (with the exception of ‘extraordinary’) of the second and third examples shown above, form part of the class-based character and direction of literature of this type. This is not the colloquial language of the times but rather a formalised version of declamatory English deeply influenced by the rhythms and cadences of the Bible.⁵⁹ The transference of this register onto the printed page would have made reading all the easier because of the aural familiarity with the biblical lexicon and cadences which readers would be able to bring to their reading practice. From another Bowles and Carver print (Fig. 37) sheet we can see typical street hawkers such as a song-book seller, depicted selling songs on hornbooks rather than on printed rolls. There is the stationer with his basket selling prepared quills⁶⁰, and another, selling copies of the King’s speech. A lame man is offering memorandum books indicating a growing market catering to the new habit of making frequent personal notes for future reference. These images show a strong presence within everyday street-scenes of merchandising connected to literacy practices. It was amongst such people, the street sellers, that Holcroft and his father were to belong, when family fortunes took a dive.

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Fig. 37. Cuts from a larger sheet showing street sellers with a connection to literacy practices, printed in London by Bowles and Carver.

This is an important point to stress, as there is a view that people from the ranks of the poor lived in a social world where linguistic impoverishment was a distinctive characteristic. In fact this text would mirror the aural experiences of most people who listened to extended narratives often laced with undisguised moral intention. This was after all the world in which very great numbers of households owned a version of sorts, of Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*

and similarly so with *Robinson Crusoe*.⁶¹ a modern morality tale which became as it were, a national classic overnight. That Holcroft was given such a text implies that he could read it already, which is not surprising as we gather from him that when it came to education, schooling and learning his father ensured that a place for these was part of the family routine.

Pre-reading activities would have included talk and questioning using horn books and pictures which were commonly available and embedded within families who would have within them, traditions of teaching or reading, using such devices. Below (Fig. 38) is a sheet produced by Bowles and Carver⁶² of London, re-issuing in the 1790s, well established traditional themes and images for sale through street hawkers. The figures which so inspired the young Holcroft are more like knights than saints, and are presented as being historical rather than mythical figures. This blurs the boundaries between the imagined and the real, something that was to persist into the twentieth century in early readers for children.⁶³

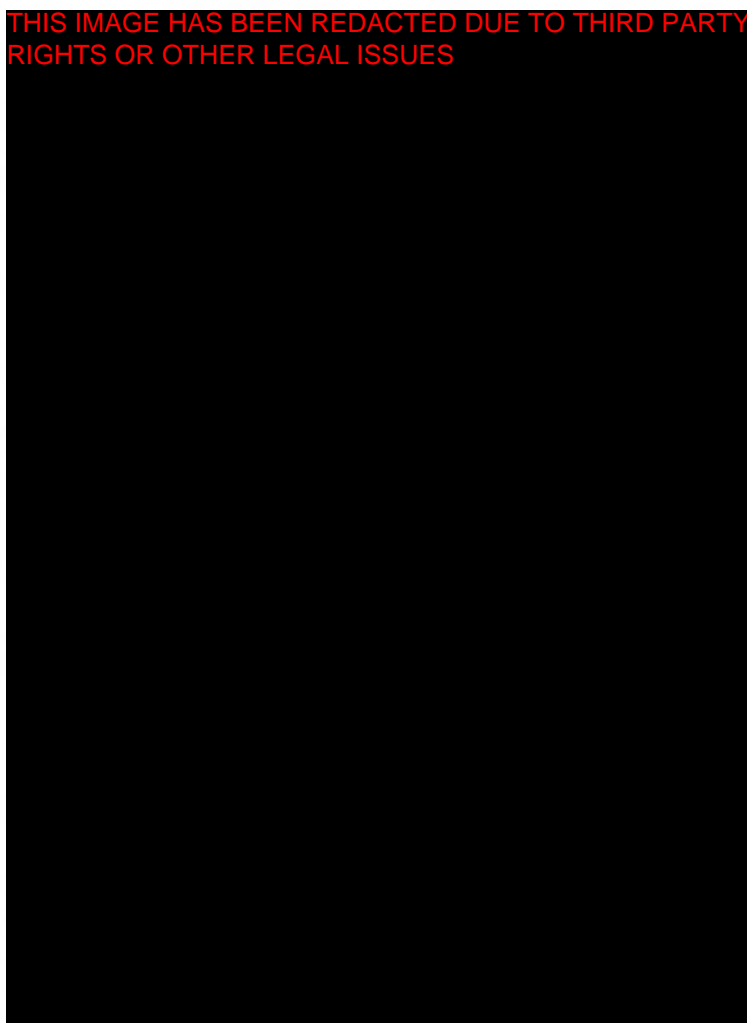


Fig. 38. A popular picture sheet showing St. George and the Seven Champions. The double line borders allow the sheet to be cut into parts and thus to be given to several children.

The public sphere that Habermas describes included both licensed and unlicensed street sellers often living at subsistence levels.⁶⁴ It was through such means that a range of print was made available to places without local printers, bookshops and newspapers. The means for personal learning were readily and cheaply available and relatively unregulated⁶⁵ and, as McKendrick, Brewer and Plumb⁶⁶ point out a certain symbiotic relationship evolved in a rapidly commercialising world whereby producers would need to generate and sustain demand for products and thus create a market for goods related to literate practices. Part of the underpinning ideology within this commercial relationship was fostering of the idea of reading amongst the young as reflecting diligence, obedience and industry, thus appealing to parental desires for their own children to acquire positive qualities (Fig. 39). Publishers such as Bowles and Carver made sure this point was featured prominently in their work.

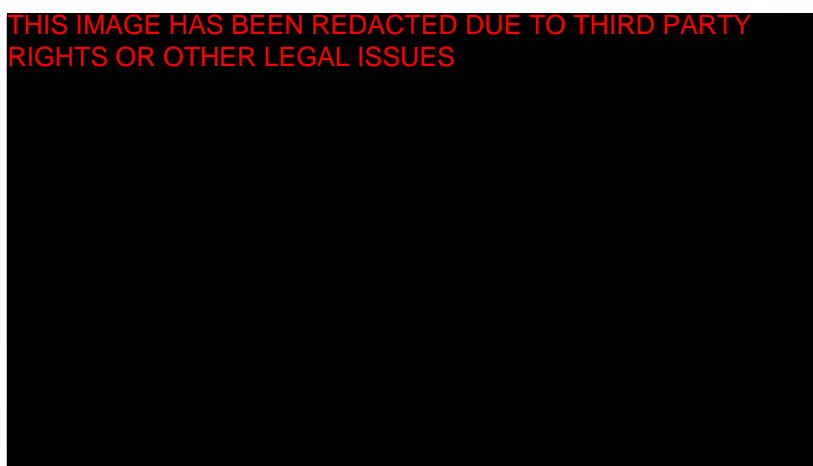


Fig. 39. Images of this sort became a stock-in-trade for publishers who would benefit directly from parents and young adults internalising the message.

It is unclear why Holcroft's father's work as a shoemaker was unsuccessful but the fact that he mentions that his mother at the time sold "greens and oysters" indicates that the work was not sufficient for the family to live from. It may be that Holcroft's father was not very accomplished as he had not passed through the usual apprenticeship but took up the trade after picking up enough knowhow to undertake repairs on the shoes of chairmen.⁶⁷ Despite financial insecurity his father made sure that the young Thomas became familiar with horses and horsemanship and also paid for him to be taught the violin. Thomas was just six years old. The relative comfort of these early years was to end when financial problems set in but despite this, the attention Holcroft's father paid towards his children continued such as was recorded in a memory from when the family moved out to Ascot in Berkshire.⁶⁸

..in this retired spot... my father himself began to teach me to read. The task at first I found difficult, till the idea one day suddenly seized me of catching all the sounds I had been taught from the arrangement of the letters; and my joy at this amazing discovery was so great, that the recollection of it has never been effaced.⁶⁹

Holcroft tells us that “my progress was so rapid, that it astonished my father”. He then recalls how he took to reading the bible aloud regularly, becoming very familiar with entire sections. And then remembering the present that Dick the apprentice had given him Holcroft says

It was scarcely possible for any thing to have been more grateful to me than this present. Parismus and Parismenes, with all the adventures detailed in the Seven Champions of Christendom, were soon as familiar to me as my catechism, or the daily prayers I repeated kneeling before my father.⁷⁰

It is clear that Holcroft underwent continuous practice with reading and much of the text that he read and re-read was lexically and grammatically complex as the extracts from the reproduced section of the text of the Seven Champions shows. Holcroft gives us insight into the personal devotionalism within the family which can be understood in part as active parenting and preparation for adult life.

Holcroft’s father became an itinerant salesman and this meant taking and selling a variety of wares throughout the entire midland region. Consequently Holcroft came to know in some detail the towns and roads of most midland counties including Cambridgeshire and Lincolnshire and as far south as Banbury in Oxfordshire. His main job was to take care of the ass and mule which carried the wares and to act – often alone – as the carrier of money, messages and further supplies to and from the home base in Rugeley. He often went hungry and cold and at times was beaten and abused by his father. It appears that Holcroft spent Sundays reading the prayer book and Bible despite being “pressed by fatigue, hunger, cold, and nakedness” (this during the period of his life between 6-9 years old). With respect to his progress Holcroft says,

At any rate I had not forgotten to read, for while we were at the house in Rugeley, the song of Chevy Chase came into my possession...which I read over with great delight at our fire-side. My father who knew that my memory was tolerably retentive, and saw the great number of stanzas the ballad contained, said to me, “Well Tom, can you get that song by heart?”

Needless to say Holcroft succeeded and was rewarded with a precious halfpenny. In order for us to appreciate the tale and the nature of the task that Holcroft describes it helps to have in view the sort of publication that he was remembering.⁷¹ The ballad sheet (Fig. 40) published from London would have been sold by itinerants and thus would have been available around the country for children such as Holcroft to acquire. As with the earlier *Seven Champions*, the tale is one of knightly courage and blood-stained battle, with the verse written to be sung as much as spoken. But such public literature was sold with a clear market in mind as can be seen from the note that is inserted below the opening historical note.

As the use of these old songs is very great, in respect that many children who never would have learned to read had they not took a delight in poring over Jane Shore or Robin Hood etc. Which has insensibly stole into them a curiosity and degree of reading, other the like stories, till they have improved themselves more in a short time than perhaps they would have done in some years at school.(Fig. 40)

This is addressed not to the child reader but to the purchaser, the parent, as a domestic educational aid. The passage reveals a view about reading acquisition which highlights enjoyment as a key factor in making progress and highlights the differences in outcomes between personally motivated reading for pleasure and the commonly negative experience of working through set lessons under a schoolmaster, the sort of process that set Thomas Pellow's mind onto thoughts of going to sea. Another key phrase in this note, which no doubt connected with both Holcroft and his parents was the idea of self-improvement through reading, something which as we can see was not a phenomenon of the Anglican educational reformers later in the century and into the early nineteenth century. The idea of enjoyable, self-motivated reading of already familiar tales and songs having a distinct educational benefit is expressed as the process having "insensibly stole into them a curiosity and degree of reading..." A further, taken-for-granted aspect of this note is the way it links reading practice to already existing oral and aural experiences and practices; it follows on from existing learning and knowledge rather than seeking to eradicate and suppress what is already there. This approach stands in contrast to the *tabula rasa* conception of the teaching of reading that an educator such as Lancaster was to develop towards the end of the century.

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Fig. 40. Chevy Chase. Ballad Sheet.⁷²

By the age of ten Holcroft had done what many boys did, which was to remain more or less within the orbit of the home, assisting with whatever the parents did to earn a living and inculcating the family's values. But at this age a decision was usually taken to seek an apprenticeship which meant passing one's son over to the care of another, usually with some surety or payment and in return the new master would introduce the youth to the mysteries of the craft or trade. If, as with Holcroft, the boy had certain personal skills and qualities, securing an apprenticeship was easier as the prospective master would seek out references not only about the boy but also about the parents. So when Thomas began working "against my will" as a stocking weaver in Nottingham where his father had once again taken up shoe repairing, problems would have arisen when the arrangement started to unravel. When

Thomas secured a place within a Newmarket stable he not only secured a degree of physical and material comfort compared to the privations he had been used to, but, for the first time in his life, a sense of status. Yet, as was also common, aspects of the earlier life were no longer possible and the new milieu.

Although writing in the first decade of the nineteenth century as an established literary figure, Holcroft reflects back on the period of his early youth and the affordances within his apprenticeship, and Newmarket generally to provide opportunities for reading. He provides a picture that describes a shift in literacy practices within the lower classes.

Books were not then, as they fortunately are now, great or small, on this subject or on that, to be found in almost every house: a book, except for prayers, or of daily religious use, was scarcely to be seen but among the opulent, or in the possession of the studious; and by the opulent they were often disregarded with a degree of neglect which would now be almost disgraceful. Yet in the course of six or seven years, it can hardly be imagined that not a single book fell in my way; or that if it did, I should not eagerly employ such opportunity as I had to know its contents.⁷³

Holcroft here is talking specifically about books rather than the miscellany of publications that circulated as a type of submerged literature which he was so clearly affected by during his early childhood. He states that he had with him his first two books and his Bible but in the above paragraph he is talking about additional sources for learning. Yet he provides a picture of a public presence of printed materials which acted as a counter to the paucity of domestic resources for literacy and the absence of expensive volumes.

Even the walls of cottages and little alehouse would do something; for many of them had old English ballads, such as "Death and the Lady," and "Margaret's Ghost," with lamentable tragedies, or King Charles's golden rules, occasionally pasted on them. These were at that time the learning, and often, no doubt, the delight of the vulgar.⁷⁴

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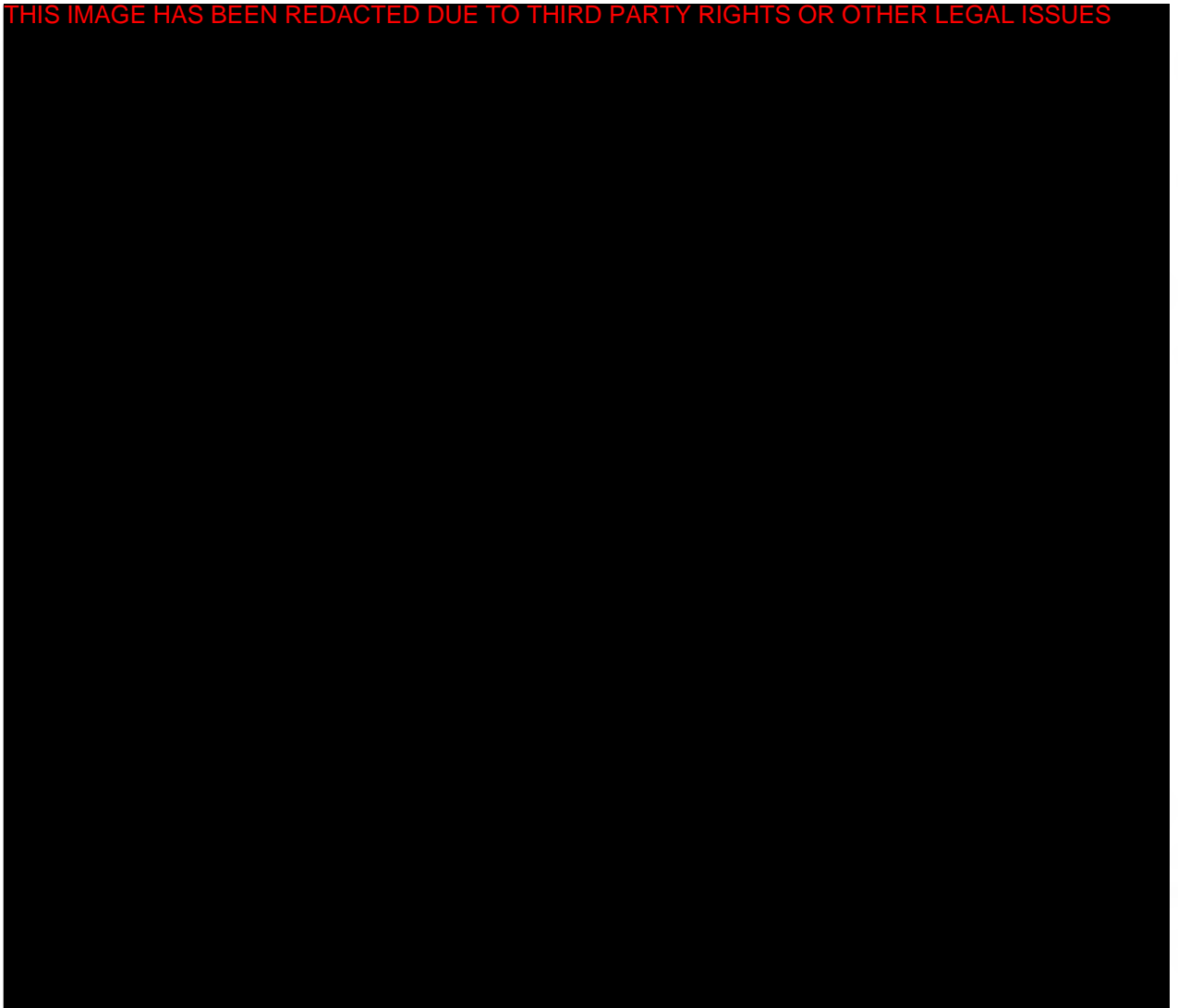


Fig. 41. A ballad sheet of the sort that Holcroft describes, containing explicitly democratic sentiments at the end.⁷⁵

Holcroft's use of the descriptor 'the vulgar' reflects a more neutral use of the term than the pejorative and morally laden usage which emerged in the late eighteenth century. It is highly likely that the entire ballad would have been sung to a popular tune with the performance acting as a point of collective listening for an assembled company in a public house. Holcroft makes plain the connection between 'learning' and 'delight'

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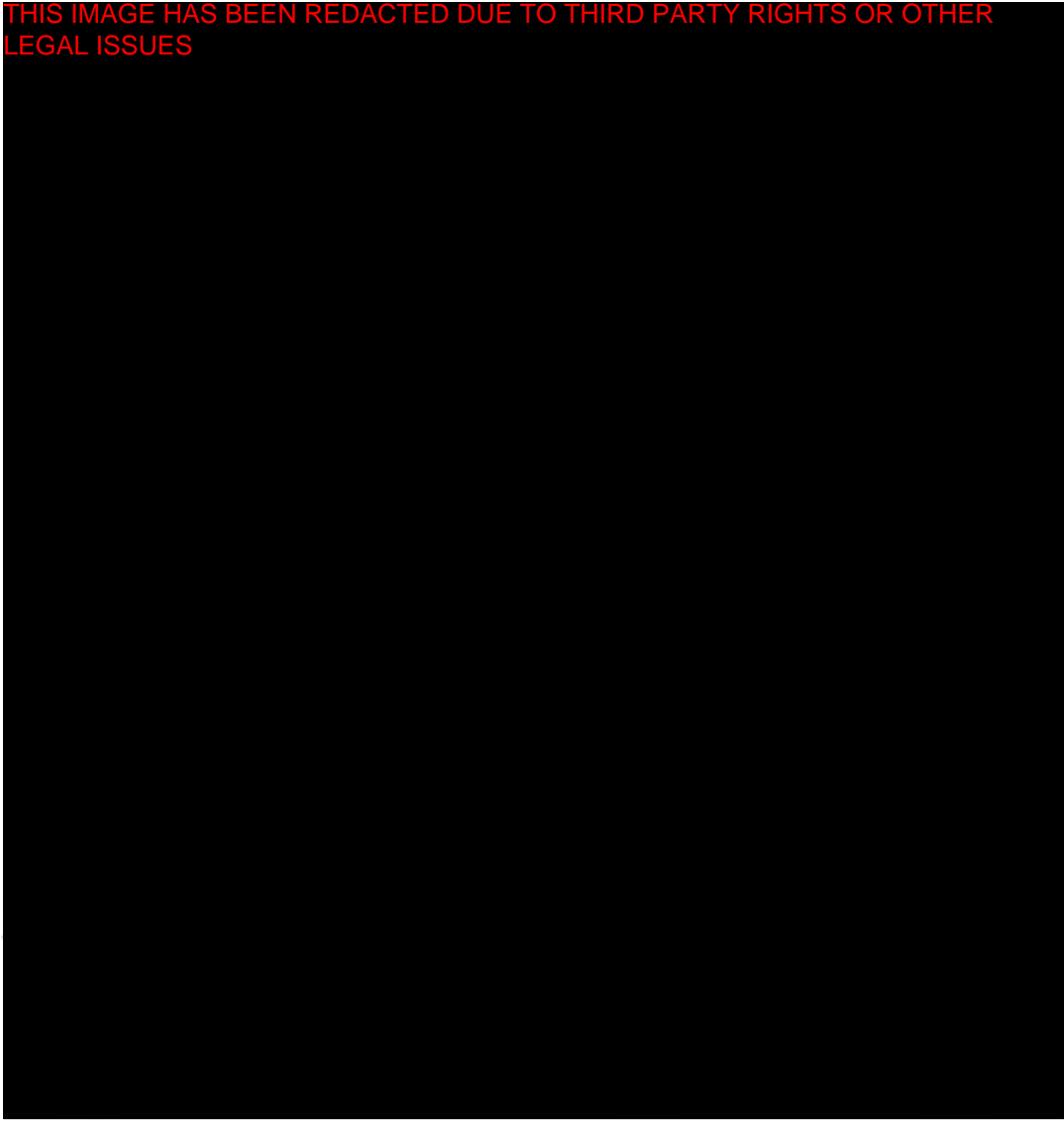


Fig. 42. It is the voice of Death who echoes popular class sentiment directed against the vanities of riches.

Above we can see two versions from the 1760s of ballad sheets for *Death and the Lady* (figs. 41 & 42) which would have been very close to the style and form of those that Holcroft describes as being pasted up on walls. The contents would have been part of the collective memory, a shared stock of traditional lore, often using woodcuts which were much older than the date of the printing of the sheet. What Holcroft indicates is that even during a period when books were rare, such materials were commonplace. Despite being an accomplished and capable reader from quite an early age, Holcroft never learned to master the quill. This is an example of the phenomenon we encountered earlier when discussing problems about the use of parish marriage registers as measures for literacy. He revealingly says,

Whether I had or not begun to scrawl and imitate writing, or whether I was able to convey written intelligence concerning myself to my father for some months after I left him, I cannot say, but we were very careful not to lose sight of each other.⁷⁶

It is likely that he could not write with ease yet he delighted in reading, so was typical of many, including Thomas Coram whose lack of formal schooling left them having to acquire writing separately from reading at a later stage in their lives. After a year in Newmarket his father came to live and work there setting up a cobbler's workshop with others. One of the 'shopmates' got on well with young Thomas and Holcroft recalls that he was extensively read within "the most popular English authors of the day". Holcroft tells us that this shopmate of his father's,

..even lent me books to read; among which were "Gulliver's Travels," and the "Spectator," both of which could not but be to me of the highest importance.⁷⁷

Entries of this type, taken from autobiographies of the period challenge established views that somehow popular fiction was primarily a female phenomenon, or that books were almost exclusively available within middle-class households because of their cost. Whilst Holcroft mentions this person as being of special importance within his own literary lifecourse he does not think to mention that he was in any way unusual. Instead we have an insight, albeit in this case just one particular instance, of recreational literacy practices within a cobbler's workshop in Newmarket. Whilst Swift's novel is predictable as favoured reading material the sense of excitement and pleasure at being able to read Addison's essays is less easy for modern sensibilities to understand. But as we saw in the previous chapter, *The Spectator* was the touchstone of modernity and epitomised the intellectual disposition that many of all social classes aspired towards. The reading of such material would almost certainly have been oral and aural rather than purely silent and visual apprehension. Hence, the activity was social, rather than being a private and individual pursuit, offering the locutor an opportunity to experience speaking the phrases and sentences and ape being the refined gentleman, even if they were in a cobbler's workshop. When one surveys a series of *Spectator* essays in the light of testimony such as this from Holcroft, it becomes apparent that it was not the content or subject that was the main source of their appeal, but the language and style of expression.

Holcroft went on to work within a travelling theatrical troupe, to write for the theatre, to acquire French and German, become a translator and novelist, and, most importantly, to

become one of the leading advocates of the Rights of Man. Much of this became possible because of the peculiarities of his circumstances and his ability to maximise the potential benefits of learning opportunities that came his way such as his detailed study of Arnold's Psalmody⁷⁸ without knowing first the meaning of the technical language, or of briefly attending a school in the afternoons between shifts at the stables with a talented teacher who disgraced himself publicly by going out almost daily in a state of drunkenness, or of being given arithmetic lessons by the master of the local choir who was himself "only a journeyman". It is clear from this biography, taken up to Holcroft's mid-teens, that he was surrounded by opportunities for learning and education and grew up in a society in which the public sphere offered multiple affordances for personal development and learning. These educational aspects of the broader public culture of the times can add to our understanding of how literacy was acquired and developed in contexts where formal schooling provision appeared to be lacking.

Thomas Spence, Newcastle, Northumbria. Born 1750. Died London 1814.

Thomas Spence, like Thomas Pellow and Thomas Coram grew up with a close association with shipping and trade as he lived with his parents and family in poverty on the quayside of the Tyne in Newcastle. Although the most northerly of English cities, the town was busy because the bridge through the town was the main crossing for all of the London to Edinburgh traffic. The Tyne was also the entreport for heavy goods to and from London such as coal destined to go in barges to the Thames. As we saw with Lyme in Dorset and Penryn in Cornwall, somewhere like Newcastle was not an isolated backwater despite, in modern terms being relatively small.⁷⁹ For young Thomas growing up in such a place, there were three distinct, but overlapping spheres of experience; family, town and incomers. In the latter category is to be included the expanded community of the nearby villages and settlements as well as the human and commercial traffic entering into the town by river and road.

Spence's father Jeremiah, was a member of a Scots dissenting Presbyterian sect called the Glassites who had their own local minister based in Newcastle. Thomas was son to Jeremiah's second wife Margaret, who came from Orkney. His mother would have spoken many words in Norn, the Orkney language that was to decline rapidly during the eighteenth century. Despite being one of nineteen children, Thomas would be read to at home and then questioned about the passage being read.

My father used to make my brothers and me read the Bible to him while working in his business, and at the end of every chapter, encouraged us to give our opinions on what we had just read. By these means I acquired an early habit of reflecting on every occurrence which passed before me, as well as on what I read.⁸⁰

As we saw with the experience of Richard Bloomfield in the previous chapter⁸¹ the practice of getting teenage boys and apprentices to read during the working day was part of working culture in many trades, easing the repetitive dullness and assuaging the mental fatigue experienced through labouring for long hours during daylight.⁸² Spence specifically mentions “brothers” but care needs to be taken *not* to assume that the learning of daughters within the occupational companionship of older sisters, nieces, mothers, aunts, co-religionists and grandparents, did not also include a range of communicative practices which became the bedrock of both girls’ and boys’ education. Another pointed detail is the way Spence says his father ‘*encouraged*’ the boys to give their opinions, suggesting a distinct lack of orthodoxy and a valuation of individual thinking and personal response. This was inherent to the proto-communistic Glassite view of the worth of each member within the community and the need for each person to make an equal contribution. Spence also makes the important point that this early activity, possibly occurring over a number of years, taught him to critically examine what he encountered as well as what he read. There was a transfer of habits acquired and learned through reading practices into personal and social dispositions affecting other aspects of interaction.

Spence became a doubter in a different sense to that which we met with Coram and Pellow, which was that he became from an early age a critical sceptic having learned not to take things at their face value, whereas Coram and Pellow acquired their doubting during the course of conflict, personal difficulties and coming to terms with arbitrary social conventions. This cast of mind connected directly to the way he was reared to read, to take a text and subject it to organised and rational questioning. Spence, not unlike hundreds of thousands of others, grew up in an expressly dissenting context, where contesting established and dominant orthodoxies was inherent in the belief system within which he grew up. Such layers within the population were intrinsically primed to be receptive to acquiring degrees of literacy which, unlike many middle class readers, would not be for purely recreational purposes. The Spence family therefore were part of a small and spiritually intense group who supported the idea of congregations having the right to elect their own minister; essentially a commitment to democratic self-management. This is important to raise from the outset because political

treatments of Spence can stress the rationalist, enlightenment influences, or the legacy of early levelling doctrines⁸³ into the mid-eighteenth century rather than the significance of family based ideologies.

It is often assumed that within the very poorest of households, because there is assumed to have been an absence of formal learning and schooling, there is, as a corollary, an absence of ideological outlook. This is partly because so few records survive from such families or, where they do survive, what remains is often incidental. But there is also a sense that the sphere of ideas and learning emanates from metropolitan intellectuals who often have close associations with leading figures in the spheres of arts, finance and politics. For Jeremiah Spence and his large extended family, learning to read and write was a religious obligation, participating in scripturally-based discussion was embedded within home life. Belonging to a politically framed sect was a constitutive part of family identity which gave a clear world view to the children of the family.

From an early age, Thomas would accompany either his mother as she sold socks and stockings, or his father who sold repaired metal goods and recycled seamen's clothing (slops). Spences records how he also repaired nets from the age of ten after his formal schooling appears to have ended. From an early age Spence would have been only too keenly aware of how value could be added to cast-offs through careful mending and repair – in other words how skilled labour directed towards materials, produced value which could be realised in the market.⁸⁴ It is highly likely that community members would send their children for schooling conducted by the local minister and his wife and that instruction would take place in one of the homes of the congregation, however humble.

Through this brief examination of some aspects of Spence's early life we can see how a child combined work with schooling from quite an early age. The link between family, congregation, minister and work appeared seamless because most of it took place within a single neighbourhood, fostering solidarity and forging strong identity. The continuous working relationship with older relatives and those encountered during the course of work, meant that the principal peer group was cross-generational (horizontal), rather than being age cohort (vertical), something which is so taken for granted in a society in which universal institutional schooling is established. When thinking historically about the acquisition of literacy by children, we need to think beyond the boundaries of taken-for-granted social structures of childhood that have been created by the advent of universalised schooling and instead locate their learning within the social-temporal context that the child would actually have experienced. When we do this and become more sensitised to the educative affordances

from within the social setting of a vertical generational grouping, we are better able to appreciate how and why literacy acquisition was possible despite there being only a little formal schooling within the child's life.

Somehow Thomas managed to acquire a clerical competence sufficient for him to be employed as a clerk and to emerge in his late teens as a teacher himself. It is therefore likely that he was specifically taught such skills possibly in lieu of assisting the teacher. Ashraf⁸⁵ is of the view that the most likely explanation was an apprenticeship, possibly in a shipping-related occupation. Whatever it was, Thomas acquired a freemanship from the Master Mariner's company in Newcastle. His father who acquired the same status as well is recorded unusually for such a status as still being a netmaker. The clerical skills that were necessary to be acquired within commercial transactions were taught at some expense as pens, ink, papers and other appurtenances of the activity would have been needed. It is therefore likely, if Ashraf is right, that such an aspect of Spence's training would have been 'out-sourced' to a locally-based handwriting and accounts teacher. Below are reproductions of examples from a non-conformist script book produced in the early nineteenth century but using an approach and materials that were unchanged from the previous two centuries.

Within these sample pages from a boy's writing book⁸⁶ (Fig.43) we have evidence of a level of technical accomplishment which appears to modern eyes, as professionally advanced as that found in the Hannah Grant sampler seen earlier in Fig. 14 (p.111). But such accuracy and style are not untypical of the craft-based standards which lay at the core of apprenticeships. The messages contained in William Bryan's book are moralistic but resolutely secular, indicating a non-conformist training setting. Spence's clerical apprenticeship would have included a 'sample', copy-book of this type, not only to show the level of skill but also to use when approaching a potential employer. The cost of paper, ink and quills was considerable for a poor family; hence the training would be undertaken within an apprenticeship framework. Therefore a very high stress would have been placed upon accuracy and efficiency. One of the by-products of becoming a trained clerk, was that a person would be able work in spare hours as a teacher, usually amongst one's own immediate family and confessional community. Thus one key to understanding the locus of education for a young man such as Spence is to examine the relationships that would have necessarily existed between the requirements of the apprenticeship, the provision and acquisition of specific skill-sets, and the possible subsequent uses of these acquired skills outside of and beyond the boundaries of the trade for which he was being trained. The generic nature of much of the training and the extent of transferability of such skills and

knowledge goes some way to explain both how and why so many seemed to be prepared and able to break the bonds of their parochialized destinies.

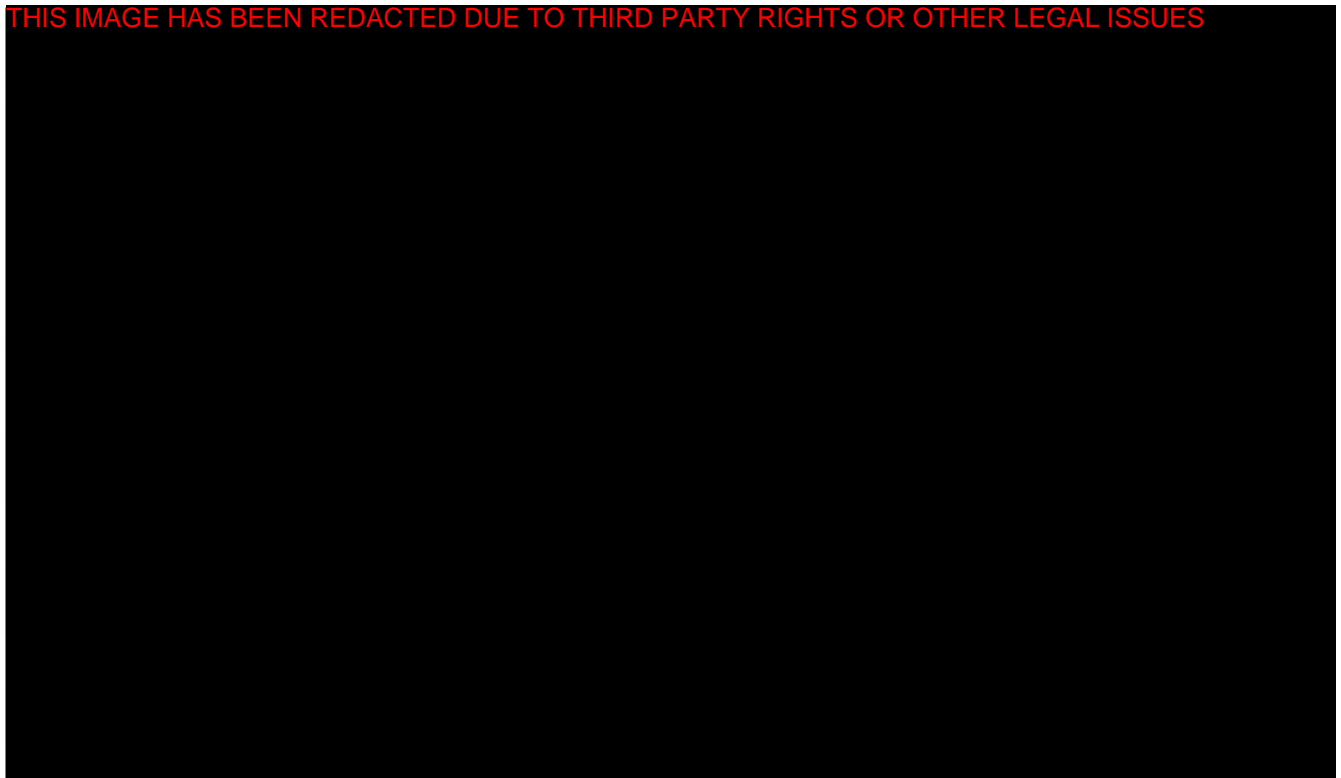


Fig. 43. Pages from the handwriting books of William Bryan. Although written in 1805, the format and underlying pedagogy are characteristic of long-established clerical training.

Despite his emphatically Scots and sectarian Presbyterian upbringing, Spence grew up and became a native of Newcastle and was involved in local intellectual and cultural life. This point is important to stress because one of the characteristics that emerge from considering aspects of the eighteenth century public sphere is the way that people, typically, adopted a variety of identities, or, put another way, they became more able to adapt to different circumstances and social settings.

One example of this was the way that as a teenager he would attend voluntary sessions (classes is too formal a term) in the bookbinding workshop of Gilbert Gray (1709-1794). Gray would read aloud sections from books that had been sent to him for binding to a group of local apprentice boys who were interested in his thinking and ideas. It was here that Spence first met the young Thomas Bewick. Gray was an educator and writer but

refused to abandon his artisanal identity and craft, usually donating any surplus income he had to pay off the debts of imprisoned journeymen. Gray's class identity formed the bedrock of his identity and, almost like a secular missionaries of the 1830s and 40s, set about work as an unpaid teacher within his own community.⁸⁷ Although a commercially successful bookbinder and well-known author, Gray lived very frugally. Talking of Gray, Ashraf says,

There was nothing strikingly original [about Gray's ideas] but one wonders how many such enlighteners there were among the lower ranks who taught libertarian politics and encouraged independent thinking, who brought into the beginnings of the Reform movement, egalitarian attitudes which were not shared by the first leaders.⁸⁸

Seventeen years before Thomas Spence was born, Gray published his *The Complete Fabulist*⁸⁹ which was "designed for the instruction of both sexes as well as the use of English schools". The emphasis upon 'both' sexes is noteworthy as is the targeting of 'English schools' by which he means places where formal English is taught. In 1773, just a year before Spence began full-time as a teacher in the Keyside area of Newcastle, Gray published his *The Pleasing History or Impartial History of England*. He described the book as "useful for youth, at school as well as for those who are desirous of relating what they read to the history of their country." The term 'youth' refers more generally to young people past their infancy rather than to the modern category of 'teenager'. Gray believed in combining instruction with entertainment, hence the stress upon versified, rhyming fables. The advantage of a fable form was that it could be sung, recited, memorised, repeated, explained and discussed. Equally interesting was Thomas Slack, the publisher in Newcastle. After the index of the 2nd. Edition of the *Fables* (1732) there is an advertisement of new titles he is publishing – *The Pleasing Instructor*, *Fisher's Spelling Dictionary* and *The Young Scholar's Delight*. This suggests strongly, that there was a market in the north east for published books written specifically for use by teachers with the young and that the broad and general aim was to make the experience 'delightful' as well as useful. For Gray the fable form "may be properly called the emblems of pure morality and sound policy, expressed in the most engaging and pleasing manner".⁹⁰ The ambition of the publication is worth noting also with over 260 pages carrying 240

individual fables. Equally striking was the low price (unbound no doubt; Gray was Slack's binder) of three shillings for a volume of such a scale.

With Gray, Spence was to encounter yet another role model of a person for whom learning was something to share within the wider community and, more importantly, where education was an end in itself. The idea of a life led through conviction would have been indelibly impressed upon the young Spence and this is something he was unable ever to forget. By the age of twenty four, Spence, the established teacher of English with a school on the Keyside (sic) had secured a weekly publishing deal with local printer Thomas Saint, issuing extracts and commentaries on English and grammar which became his *Grand Repository of the English Language* (1775), issued in weekly parts and for sale from his school room presumably for parents and scholars to purchase and take away as homework.⁹¹ The content tells us much about the local literate culture of mid-century Newcastle as most of the material Spence uses for the English Grammar section is culled directly from Thomas Sheridan who is acknowledged by him as the source.

From this we can see that there was a market for part-works where whole books would be prohibitively expensive and where many would only want to focus upon certain practically useful sections. The advantage of this method of purchase and payment, which was to become the dominant form of print production and distribution in the nineteenth century, was that people could have use of the material while they owned it. There was also no pressure for intensive reading prior to return to a library. In households like the Spences where there were several boys, the investment was justified as the same section could be used and re-used. The bought part section could also be shared with the wider community of families. For the author and printer there was a further benefit as they could profit whilst the work was in production and profit further when the whole could be issued as complete. The presumption underpinning the series is that people could learn either by and for themselves, or within the domestic and family setting.

Most striking within this work, there is the now famous phonetic system of Spence which was designed as a teaching aid for new learners. Spence had grown up in a household with a mother from the Orkneys, father from Aberdeen and neighbours who spoke a strong Northumbrian dialect variant of English whose distinctive characteristics reflected in part the ancient Nordic settlements of the area. Spence as a learner himself and later teacher, would encounter the problem of how to teach reading to someone for whom the alphabet and their conventionalised designations bore little relation to English as spoken in Newcastle and its wider district. The difference between the midland standard that was emerging in the late

seventeenth century and dominant, regional dialects, acted as an impediment to the acquisition of reading, something which few of the historians of literacy discussed earlier, have spent much time analysing. For most people living and working in mid-eighteenth century Newcastle, they would be adept in effect in two variants of English, the local dialect form and the emerging standard, but overlaid with heavy vocal elements from the dialect register. Many would be effective listeners and de-coders of the standardised forms of English⁹² whilst not being confident speakers. There would be little if anything printed which reflected the speech patterns and traditions of their regional variant of English.

Spence wanted to bring the emerging Standard, as exemplified by Sheridan, but which in part at least, amounted to a different language for many, into an orthographic system that people could readily understand. So he devised a new spelling system which was issued as part of *The Grand Repository*. His aims are best summarised by citing in full the typically extended and elaborate title to the complete book

The Grand Repository of the English Language containing besides the excellencies of all other dictionaries and grammars of the English tongue, the peculiarity of having the most proper and agreeable pronunciation of the alphabetical words denoted in the most intelligible manner by a new alphabet, with a copperplate exhibiting the new alphabet both in writing and printing characters, intended for the use of everyone whether native or foreigner that would acquire a complete knowledge of the English language with the least waste of time and expense but especially for those who are but indifferent readers from not having been taught to pronounce properly.⁹³

Here we see how Spence's pedagogy had arisen from direct experience as a learner and teacher in a regional setting. Ideologically his proposal is linked to the communitarian aims that he grew up with. Within his wider political scheme the democratisation of spelling was as significant as other parts of his thinking⁹⁴ such as land reform. Of special interest within this study is the way that Spence identifies the linkage between learning to read and the acquisition of competence in Modern Standard English, a problem identified as a core issue some two hundred years on by Basil Bernstein⁹⁵ when explaining the effect of socially framed linguistic 'codes' upon literacy acquisition in relation to established standard forms of the language. Noteworthy also is the benign description of people who are "but indifferent readers". The book is addressed directly in the *Preface* to the "*laborious part of the people*"

identifying as a distinct class, those amongst the population who work for their living using their labour.

As with the works by Baker and Tryon cited in the earlier section on Coram, here we can see educational texts directed to particular social strata; a socially differentiated market. This is also an early example of a secular educational publication specifically directed towards the labouring classes, produced by someone who is of that social class. His friend, Thomas Bewick designed and cut the punches which were used by printers producing Spence's work.⁹⁶ The picture we derive from this very brief snapshot of educational activity in and around certain circles within Newcastle in the 1770s is a far cry from the image of educational deficit which one customarily reads about in relation to the private 'dame' schools which are often referred to as somehow representative of the era. Instead we can begin to uncover some of the texture of an embedded, indigenous educational culture which is very rich indeed but which does not presume that a young person is separated from work and the need to contribute towards the family income. By the term 'indigenous', reference is made to a series of cultural practices which arise from and are transmitted from within the resources of a particular social group in distinction to a series of practices which are borrowed and mimicked from another social group. One aspect of this indigenous educational practice is the extent to which the child continues to live within close proximity to home, neighbourhood, family work and associates, rather than being taken away from these and placed into a distinctly separate cultural setting. With Coram, Pellow, Holcroft and Spence we can see that if anything, this embedded and indigenous educational culture, meant that even the poorest child from the lowliest of social positions, was able to acquire considerable 'intelligence' as well as a range of communicative abilities especially linked to the connected processes of listening, remembering and discussing.

Spence's expulsion from the Newcastle Philosophical Society in 1775 is legendary and was reported at the time in the local press. The issue was not so much his utterly radical ideas relating to property and succession – going far beyond anything Thomas Coram for example, might have envisaged, but with the fact that he published a paper on the subject without their prior permission (Fig. 44).⁹⁷ This tension exposes an important dynamic that existed in the relationship between the private and public domains. Spence clearly believed that his intellectual property was his to disseminate freely, whereas the Philosophical Society felt that they had rights of control and closure about how they presented themselves beyond their coterie of members. Membership of such a society was becoming an aspect of exclusivity and

distance, a distinct move away from the open free-for-all embodied by the coffee house culture which we encountered in the previous chapter.⁹⁸

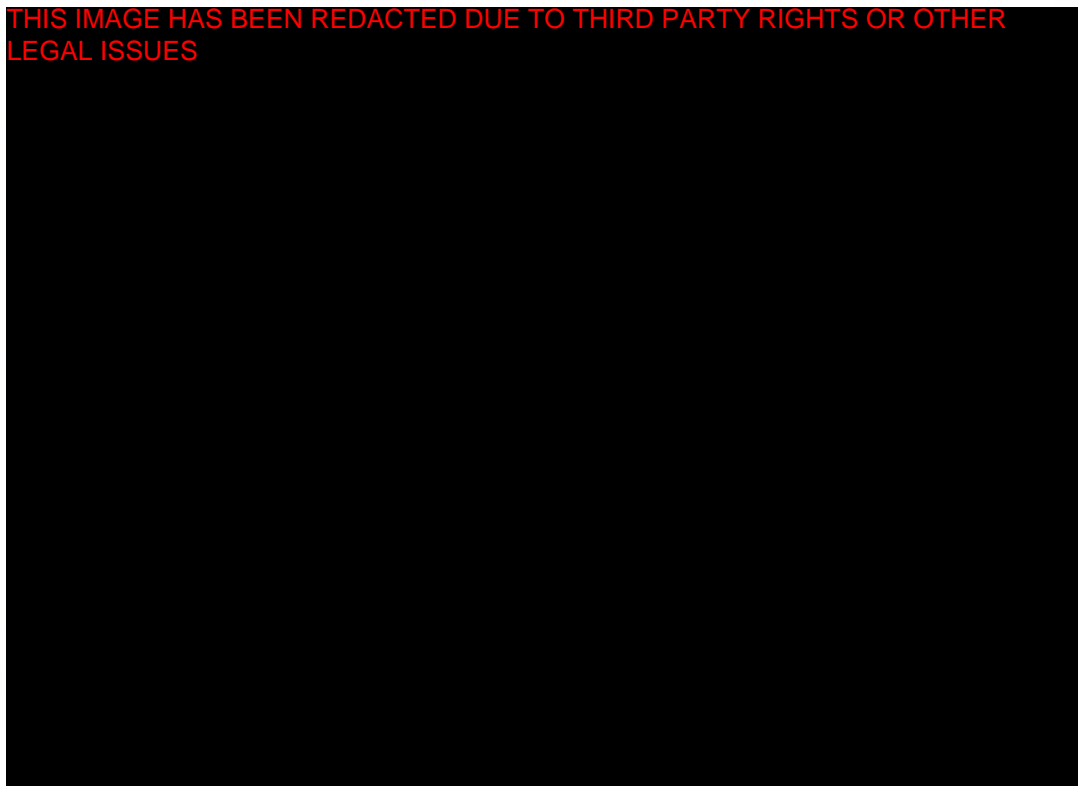


Fig. 44. Thomas Spence Pamphlet. 1775. Newcastle Literary and Philosophical Society

For Spence there was a naturalness in publishing his ideas not only because there would have been a receptive audience who would have been interested in what he was writing and who knew him personally, but also because he was close to people for whom printing and publishing was a matter-of-fact business and not something essentially connected to status and social position. Coming as he did from a communitarian upbringing, the notion of knowledge being something that one used for public status reasons, would have been alien as well as offensive.

In a review of the incident of Spence's expulsion from the *Newcastle Magazine* in 1821 it seems that the real offence was to have made the lecture available for sale through hawkers in the streets, thus offending the sense of cultural dignity that some society members graced themselves with. The name of the Newcastle Philosophical Society would be hawked in the street like a halfpenny ballad and read in taverns!⁹⁹ Spence had already begun, as a young man, his ceaseless agitation amongst the poor and he was aware that certain aspects of public literacy such as the habitual reading in taverns and coffee houses, the need of chapmen to

have a variety of wares, and that many amongst the poor wanted and were able to read, offered him scope to disseminate a politics that was both of and for this social class. The serial format offered chapmen a legitimate reason to re-visit private dwellings when they had a further edition to sell.

This mission was to become the core of his future life as he published radical pamphlets which exposed what he felt was the essentially middle-class orientation of Paine's *Rights of Man* and continued to lecture to crowds of eager working-men. But Spence sought to explore the boundaries between existing modes of direct communication and reaching wider, more diffused audiences. Two such innovations deserve special mention. The first was Spence's organisation of Graffiti squads using chalk to cover the surfaces of public walls with political slogans like 'Spence's Plan Now'. This activity transgressed and exploited the ambivalent character of surfaces which were at once part of the physical fabric of privately owned property, but at the same time were the backdrop to the shared, open public space. In parts of London people waking up would be faced with dozens of slogans suddenly appearing in public view and then seeing them repeated a few yards on. Here, Spence reveals an early awareness of the potential power of breaching the public/private divide by inscribing onto a surface something belonging to a group with no connection to the surface being used. It is a form of anarchical appropriation, transforming the purpose of a physical object like a wall, into something totally different and unintended. The act of inscription also draws attention to the physical boundaries of the public space which are so naturalised that they exert a structuring effect without people realising it. In the process of inscribing slogans Spence's followers were making that surface and the space nearby, their own in relation to the public gaze. The potential of this strategy was later to become fully recognised as visual evidence from the nineteenth century and reveals the omnipresence of commercial advertising on wall-surfaces and vehicles. Habermas describes in detail in the second half of *Structural Transformation* how the public sphere came to be appropriated and denigrated by capitalism.

Spence was one of the first to adopt a placard form of establishing presence within the public space. Groups of supporters would march out at the same time with placards proclaiming their Spencean doctrines in slogan form. These slogans would be short and memorable, even to someone passing quickly, and the sight alone of the placarded proclaimer who might also be calling out the message, would have been something of note. This type of manifestation was seen during particularly controversial elections such as the Middlesex election contested by Wilkes in 1768 and 1774 when the results were nullified repeatedly by the Ministry. But to move from the special situation to making it a practice on any day was a

particularly Spencean adaptation of this form of political manifestation. Another crucial feature of this type of political action is the way that it makes no distinction between potential viewers and presumes an ability on the part of the intended audience to read the message. Additionally it invited spontaneous, unplanned exchange between persons in the street. Politics was brought out into the street alongside the hawkers singing and shouting about their wares. A second example was Spence's use of the token to convey his political messages.¹⁰⁰ Political tokens were nothing new¹⁰¹ but Spence was to break new ground in a number of ways.

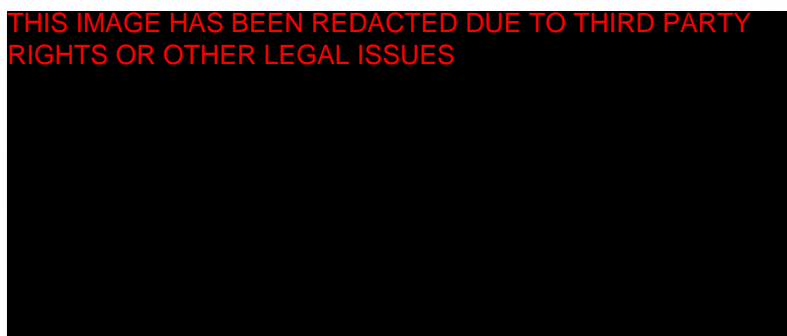


Fig. 45. Two Reverses¹⁰² with different dies advertising Spence's shop in Holborn.

He sold them from an open stall in Holborn to collectors alongside saloop which suggests that his intention was for his stall, which would have been covered by an awning, to be as a place where people could visit, look and discuss rather than just being a site for vending. Saloop was an infusion of ground orchid roots, the powder of which was imported from Turkey, mixed with milk and a sweetener. This used to be sold in coffee-houses earlier in the century because of its medicinal properties especially when sassafras was included within the ingredients. Sassafras was fragrant and traditionally associated as a cure for gonorrhoea, hence its prevalence as a widely available and marketable drink. Spence produced the first known catalogue for coin and token collectors and his conder/medallions were even then, highly collectable.

Sometimes when drunk he would throw a handful of the specie into the street for young lads to pick up and spend. As R.C. Bell points out in the title of his book, these tokens were "simulating tradesmen's tokens" so they entered circulation subversively as a sort of counter-tokenage. Spence's political purpose is clear. Someone would present a copper farthing or halfpenny to a shopkeeper who, not recognising it might ask what it was. The shopkeeper might then weigh it to check its value and would unavoidably see what was being said. A

loyalist, monarchist shopkeeper would probably take offence and refuse to handle or accept such a token and a dialogue inevitably would occur between the purchaser and vendor. Central to the exchange would be contrasting readings (understandings) of the article between them – a copper disc weighing the correct amount for it to be taken in exchange for goods. The token thus becomes yet another means through which Spence managed to spread his core ideas but this time at the very point of commercial exchange.¹⁰³

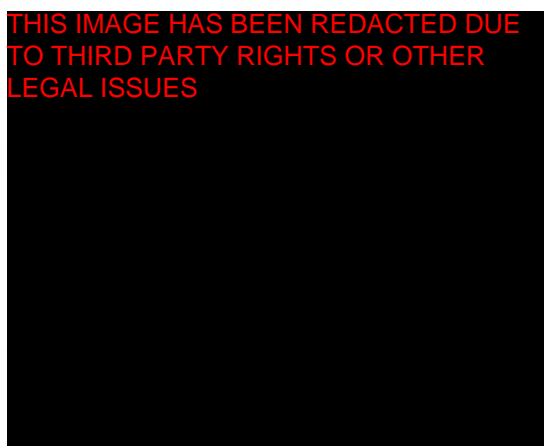


Fig. 46. Obverse of Spence Token/Medallion struck to celebrate Thelwall's acquittal.

Above (Fig. 46) is an image of the bust on the Obverse of the Token designed by James and produced by Spence celebrating the acquittal of John Thelwall in 1795.¹⁰⁴ Such tokens were produced in large numbers and distributed via the London Corresponding Society to supporters around the country. The semiotics are subversive, with Thelwall, a diminutive but a powerful orator, magnified in this representation. The strong modelling by James emphasises determination of character and heroism. With such radical portraiture, widely distributed we begin to see an iconography of working class heroes. Thelwall, controversially and pointedly, is facing in the same direction as the official coinage depicting George III.

The use of emblematic designs combined with concise slogans offers an example of trying to establish ideas through images. This is often successfully realised when Spence appropriates and subverts an image with already established emblematic value and meaning thus triggering a controversial series of connotative associations. We know that his tokens did enter circulation because many surviving examples are worn rather than being well-preserved. For his efforts Spence was attacked by Loyalist Association members, imprisoned and suffered to lose his stock. He was held for treason in 1794 but was discharged after seven months without trial. Upon release he opened a shop which he named The Hive of Liberty.

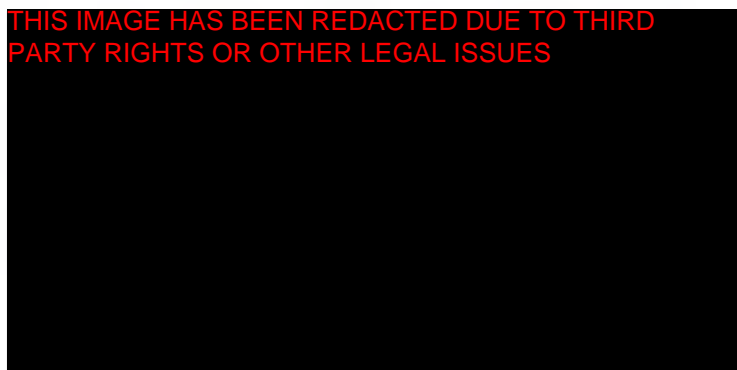


Fig. 47. Spence tokens specifically struck for circulation rather than for collectors.

Spence would sometimes stamp his slogans on halfpenny blanks using die punches. These would be distributed into circulation through local lads who hung around his stall and later shop in Holborn. The fact that many surviving specimens like this one (Fig. 47) are worn indicates some period of time in circulation. The slogan also implies a fairly generalised knowledge of what his Plan was and reveals a characteristically uncompromising attitude towards those who, in Spence's view ought to know better. The idea of spreading one's political programme through such means was quite radical, especially as the target audience were the poor. Such inscribed artefacts offer a glimpse into communicative practices within parts of the public sphere suggesting that there was fairly widespread ability not only to read what was stamped onto the copper disks but also to understand the message.

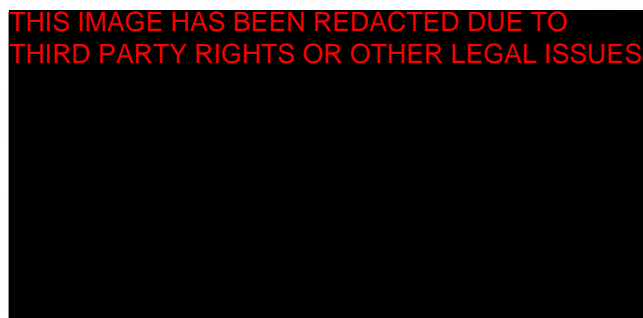


Fig. 48. A new set of non-aristocratic heroes enter circulation via Spence.

Above (fig. 48) we can see the obverse of two Spence tokens (Fig. 48) issued in celebration of the acquittal of James Horne-Tooke and Thomas Hardy.¹⁰⁵ The key feature to note is that both are significantly worn rather than having been kept as collectable medallions. This implies not only a degree of circulation but also of acceptance of the politics which these two men embodied. This is all the more remarkable when one considers the thoroughness of the state

sponsored Loyalist Association campaigns to threaten and punish radical supporters. Spence was therefore at the very centre of the production of the iconography celebrating contemporary radical leaders – a counter movement to the denigratory propaganda churned out most famously by Gillray and other cartoonists.

By the 1790s, the independent, campaigning, educative activities of radical dissenters such as Spence, which caused offence to some fellow members of the Newcastle Philosophical Society, had become seditious and possibly treasonous in the eyes of the government. The relatively parochialized circle around Gray, Murray, Bewick, Spence and their like in Newcastle and their teaching, debating, listening and publishing activities described earlier, had become widespread and firmly established as part of the general educational culture of the working class, strongly imbued with a mix of humanistic Presbyterianism. For Thomas Bewick this education proved to be a sufficient platform from which he could launch a major career in the publishing and printing world. Others like Spence retained the self-denial of their spiritual guides (Gray and Murray) yet managed to lift themselves from complete provincial obscurity to the notice of the Government and highest ranks of the Judiciary. As a postscript we can look at the very last story from Gray's *Fables*, a book that was part of the milieu in which Spence operated. It is called the *Sheep and the Bramble-Bush* and it prefigures some of what Spence was to experience as well as the next doubting Thomas of this chapter, Thomas Hardy.

The Thick-twisted brake, in the time of the storm,
Seem'd kindly to cover a sheep:
So snug, for a while, he lay sheltered and warm,
It quietly sooth'd him to sleep.

The clouds are now scatter'd- the winds are at peace;
The sheep to his pasture inclin'd:
Ah! The fell thicket lays hold of his fleece,
His coat is left forfeit behind.

My friend, who the thicket of law never try'd,
Consider before you get in:
Tho' judgement and sentence are pass'd on your side,
By Jove, you'll be fleeced to the skin.¹⁰⁶

Thomas Hardy. Born Larbert, Stirlingshire, 1752. Died London, 1832.

In 1752 in Larbert, Stirlingshire, a son was born to Mrs Walter Hardy whose husband was a merchant seaman. Larbert lay to the north west of Edinburgh, close to Falkirk and was contiguous with Stenhousemuir. The road through the village connected Falkirk with Sterling at the uppermost end of the Forth River. That very same year a toll gate was erected after the road became a turnpike by Act of Parliament. The Falkirk Tryst, held in Stenhousemuir was, since 1700 the largest cattle market in Scotland. So a boy growing up in Larbert would be used to seeing heavy traffic in the days around the market. The village lay just three miles away from the Forth shoreline and was noted from a distance because it supported three mills due to the fast flow of the river Carron. In 1759 when the lad, Thomas, was seven years old an event occurred that was to change the lives of everyone living in the district. The Carron iron works¹⁰⁷ were opened just over a mile due west from Larbert by the famous Scots chemist and inventor John Roebuck, a Birmingham merchant, Samuel Garbett and ship owner, William Caddell. All were dissenters deeply involved in developing the infrastructure of the industrial revolution and all keenly involved in political issues such as Garbett's lifelong campaigns to secure parliamentary representation for Birmingham and his involvement in 1785 in a manufacturers association established to oppose William Pitt's fiscal policies. Roebuck and Garbett had established interests since 1746 east of Edinburgh in Prestonplas where they ran a sulphuric acid works. The Carron works were on such a scale that Roebuck and Garbett brought furnace men from Coalbrookdale in Shropshire to work alongside local workers. The seven year old Thomas would have known men working on the process of blasting iron using coke rather than charcoal that Abraham Darby had employed decades earlier but on a much smaller scale. Within the neighbourhood where he grew up there were several hundred men working as waged employees on aspects of a large-scale industrial process owned and run by men who were themselves pioneers of scientific manufacturing and dissenters. This locality was one of the springboards in Britain of the industrial revolution, a process ushering in massive expansion of productivity and along with it, a new working class. There can be no sense therefore that the early childhood of Thomas Hardy was in some provincial backwater but rather that his taken-for-granted social world was to be a forerunner of developments that would happen in hundreds of other localities where iron, coal and water existed side by side.¹⁰⁸

Radical traditions ran deep in this district with folklore about nearby Torwood forest being a hiding place of William Wallace. Thomas' father died when he was eight years old

and a double blow was when the appointed trustee of the estate cheated his mother. This meant that the terms within the will making provision for schooling for Thomas were not able to be fulfilled. The intention of Walter Hardy was for Thomas to undergo a schooling that would train him for a clerical profession. Having been denied this opportunity and with his mother unable to support her son, Thomas was taken in by his maternal grandfather who nevertheless, “Put him to school to learn reading, writing and arithmetic.”¹⁰⁹ Hardy mentions that his paternal grandfather had suffered previously as a result of being cheated after acting as an officer in “the German Wars” during the 1730s and that there was therefore a family distrust of foreign military interventions. He mentions that “at this time the price of tuition was no more than a penny a week”, but that “before he left school it rose to three half pence”. Hardy makes no mention of the type of school he attended, nor does he relate any memories of incidents or characters. Although it is unclear from the *Memoirs* it seems likely that Hardy began his apprenticeship as a shoemaker under his Grandfather’s stewardship in 1763 when he was eleven years old. By his late teens he had attempted to secure an apprenticeship with a boot maker in Norfolk, Virginia. But such attempts were frustrated by his family. After this failed attempt at a new life Hardy went to labour at the Carron Works as a bricklayer. He left soon after being injured when scaffolding collapsed, killing one worker and injuring several others. And then, in 1774, not unlike many young men from central Scotland, Hardy resolved to move on, confident in his trade and with letters of recommendation.

The journey from nearby Stirling down the Forth and the German Sea, into the Thames estuary and on into the Port of London, took eleven days. Hardy was twenty two years old, physically large and six feet two inches tall. On arrival in London he brought detailed knowledge of the most modern industry and a personal culture involving suspicion of continental military adventures, a strong dissenting outlook, a frugal and plain set of tastes and a tendency to read widely. He saw himself as “a plain industrious citizen”,¹¹⁰ whose life afforded none of the “light or ludicrous circumstances which compose a great part of the frivolous reading of the present day”. Whilst in London, Hardy says he became acquainted “with many of the middle and lower classes of Dissenters”. He became involved in the internal politics of the chapel to which he belonged, implying that it was in this setting that he first became an organizer and secretary. Significantly, in a dispute about the succession to the ministry of the chapel, Hardy describes both sides to the dispute corresponding to various people as far away as Scotland. Hardy describes the impact upon him on reading Price’s ‘*Treatise on Civil Liberty*’ (sic)¹¹¹ saying that it convinced him of the rightness of

the American colonists claim to political freedom and also for constitutional reform in Britain. This book by Richard Price was a sensational success for the publisher Thomas Caddell, running into eight editions by the end of 1776. The book created a public discourse linking issues of political liberties to the financial policies of the Government and in many ways acted as a forerunner to Paine's *Rights of Man* in terms of the range of issues that were dealt with within a single political treatise. This mixed content synthesized diverse elements and was a development in form to the magazine format which we saw earlier in the chapter.¹¹² As we shall see in the next chapter, the impact of a text such as that by Richard Price arises not solely from the way it affects individual readers but from the effect it has in shaping public political discourse in hundreds of coffee & public houses, workshops, homes, clubs and chapel communities.

The circulation of a book such as *The Observations* needs to be understood not solely in terms of a text to reader to text relationship, but also in terms of how the text stimulates repetition, reading, listening, interpretation, questioning, debate, disagreement, further reading and many other, related aspects of public literacy practices. The volume of sales of Price's book meant that it must have moved beyond the literati, political elites, metropolitan intelligentsia and Whig circles, and was being read by numbers of people with a disposition to support what it was saying based upon their own lived experiences. Those involved in this community of discourse come to recognize and acknowledge others who are participants thus bringing into being social circles which are focussed around particular activities and ideas. It was into this social world that the young shoemaker from Larbert, Stirlingshire found his bearings in London. The public sphere that Hardy belonged to and lived within, existed in a parallel dimension to the social world dominated by the Crown, Court, Aristocracy, Government and Gentry. An entirely separate political consciousness was developing, stimulated by developments in America and later, France but also, as with Samuel Garbett from Birmingham, the owner of the Carron Works, by a sense of being harbingers of a new world of science, manufacturing, finance and possibilities yet not enjoying basic civil and political rights. Although Hardy's direct contact with the new world at Carron was brief and traumatic, his experience nevertheless illustrates that labourers, craftsmen, engineers, skilled mechanics and scientifically inclined businessmen formed associations through the manufacturing process and, as Hardy is precise in pointing out, when he arrived in London he soon became acquainted with dissenters from the "middle and lower classes" many of whom were supporters of the Society for Constitutional Information (SCI).

P. It is an assembly of men, who meet after work every Saturday to be merry and happy for a few hours in the week.

S. Have you no other object but mirth?

P. Yes; we have a box, into which we contribute equally from our monthly or weekly savings, and out of which any members of the club are to be relieved in sickness or poverty; for the parish officers are so cruel and insolent, that it were better to starve than apply to them for relief.

S. Did they, or the 'squire, or the parson, or all together, compel you to form this society?

P. Oh! no—we could not be compelled; we formed it by our own choice.

S. You did right—But have you not some head or president of your club?

P. The master for each night is chosen by all the company present the week before.

S. Does he make laws to bind you in case of ill temper or misbehaviour?

P. He make laws! He bind us! No; we have all agreed to a set of equal rules, which are signed by every new comer, and were written in a strange hand by young *Spelman*, the lawyer's clerk, whose uncle is a member.

S. What should you do, if any one member were to insist on becoming *perpetual* master, and on altering your rules at his arbitrary will and pleasure?

P. We

Fig. 49 An extract from the 1783 S.C. I. publication

Hardy recounts another moment of personal development when a friend who was a member of the society for constitutional information gave him a collection of published tracts dating from between 1779 and 1783 which, he says, he studied carefully. This was during the period after 1791 when he had established his own boot-making shop at No. 9 Piccadilly, an address destined to become famous amongst London Radicals. Below, one can see a page taken from the 1783 S.C.I. publication by William Jones, *The Principles of Government in a dialogue Between a Scholar and a Peasant* (Fig.49). It is clearly directed towards an artisan and working class readership and is typically patronizing in its implied address with the 'peasant' being led toward enlightenment by the whiggish scholar.

Nevertheless publications like the one above transmitted key concepts and ideas and linked these into a series of lines of argument. Their form offered plenty of scope for lively and engaged paired readings at gatherings followed by debate. Equally importantly they were distributed free of charge and reveal part of the S.C.I. political strategy, which was to substantially increase the weight of literate and intellectually engaged working class, artisan and commoner opinion in order to create a larger public exerting pressure against a

corrupt government. The Williams pamphlet contains an account from the ‘peasant’ character of the village club, a proto-co-operative and funeral society (1783) but the scholar persuades him to abandon the politically weak local organization in favour of joining ranks with their broader national campaign as a signatory to a petition. For readers like Hardy such literature must have seemed patronizing in the extreme. There is little recognition from the author that with literacy there came new and different notions of what a person was and, more importantly, what one could become. It was to fall to Hardy to make the decisive break from the followership model of constitutional radicalism and decide, unlike the fictional peasant of the dialogue, to remain with and strengthen one’s own local association.

Hardy drew up the idea for the London Corresponding Society, not an entirely original one as radical clubs were springing up in many places across Britain. What was new however was the thoroughness of the rules of association which defined the roles and responsibilities of members and officers. The L.C.S. began with three friends meeting in the Bell Inn in Exeter Street near the Strand. At the next weekly meeting there were nine members who he describes as “plain, homely citizens” who were all acquainted with each other.

They had finished their daily labour, and met there (The Bell Inn) by appointment. After having had their bread, cheese and porter for supper, as usual, and their pipes afterwards, with some conversation on the hardness of the times and the dearness of all the necessaries of life...¹¹³

Hardy was adopted as Secretary and he “presented a book which he had bought for the purpose that those who became members might put down their names and pay one penny, which was to continue weekly...” Hardy says that at this time he was boarding with his friend Gustava Vassa, who was in the process of writing his own memoirs. But Olaudah Equiano’s book was actually published in 1789. Apart from the obvious limitations that exist with autobiographical accounts conflating dates and periods, this aside provides an insight into the literary character of Hardy’s household in the late 1780s.

The first publication was a series of resolutions outlining what the L.C.S. stood for. This was issued on April 2nd 1792 just four months after the inaugural meeting. So the boy from Larbert, whose mother was cheated out of her husband’s assets and so could not fulfil the terms of his will that his son should pursue an education to qualify him for a clerical life,

found himself at the head of what was to become the first proto-political party and a forerunner, in organizational terms, of future trade unions. He was destined to be tried for high treason in 1794 for publishing and circulating Paine's *Rights of Man* and sensationally acquitted by the jury. This acquittal was celebrated annually into the 1840s by political working class activists as being the turning point in the tide towards democratization of Parliament. The term 'Secretary' coming to designate not a lowly clerical officer but a leader, was one which passed on and into the organizations of the working class that were to grow in the first decades of the following century. Hardy's central role in this political development was to be recognized when in 1832, despite nearly thirty years of non-political life, it was estimated that 20-40,000 people attended his funeral.¹¹⁴ John Nicholson had placed a brief letter into the *Morning Chronicle* on October 13th 1832 calling upon "the old consistent reformers of this great metropolis to attend at Hardy's funeral". The response is testimony not only to the political impact the Hardy had upon the 'movement' but to his most enduring legacy, a highly literate artisan and mechanics movement for whom daily reading of a variety of print was part of their lives.

Conclusion.

Throughout the foregoing chapter the ordinariness and typicality of these Thomases has been stressed. In a dual sense of the term, they really were commoners. Whilst each Thomas who has been selected came to be widely known, there were many others like them stretching from the Tyne in Northumberland to the Fal in Cornwall who left less of a mark upon the history of their times but who nevertheless challenged the social practices and values of the circles in which they lived. The aim here has not been to paint these Thomases as saintly types, but to stress their limitations and inconsistencies, characteristics that arise most specially from the nature of their education. Like everyone, a great deal of their education arose from their interaction with the social and economic circumstances in which they lived, leading a child such as Thomas Spence to reject the speech forms and dialect of his region in favour of an emerging bourgeois standard – a seemingly contradictory stance for one of Britain's earliest communists. Their relative lack of formal schooling meant that they had no choice but to rely upon the cultural resources acquired during the course of travel, apprenticeship, occupation and experience, augmented increasingly by reading and conversational exchange. Biographical sources spring to life when aligned with other sources such as we found in relation to Thomas Holcroft's early reading. The chap-books

and broadsides that he mentions were far from being the simple reading matter that one often associated with these two genres and it becomes apparent when examining these complementary sources that they laid a basis for his later heightened literary sensibilities. Similarly, it is only when one explores the direct connection of a boy such as Thomas Hardy to the Carron Iron Works, that one comes to realize why a rather dour, Scots, provincial, shoemaker could come to London and become *the* central figure in early working class politics. Another facet of this chapter is the attempt to align these lives to show that there is a great deal available to historians of literacy and education which we can elicit from such sources, albeit with a need for critical caution. More extensive use of such sources might help to correct a tendency to focus exclusively upon the impact and lives of the middle and upper classes in the writing of educational history, with commoners portrayed as an undifferentiated amalgam, reduced to the status of passive objects of education from social classes with an interest in containing and disciplining their inferiors.

By examining a theme within a biographical frame, one avoids the tendency to produce a linear narrative and thus an artificial chronology. Each of the lives explored in this chapter reveals the varied ways that individuals could and did interact with the private and public sphere drawing in influences and also making distinctive contributions. The fact that each of these Thomases became literate (and by inference, thousands of others like them) illustrates that although there was little in the way of a recognizably modern education system and virtually no state intervention in the way it came to be understood from the late 1830s onwards, there was nevertheless a rich and complex culture which enabled even children from the poorest backgrounds, to acquire degrees and elements of formal literacy and communicative competences. A further, important reason for using such sources is to offer an account of why and how individuals expended so much time, effort and expense upon their learning and education. We can get a little closer to their reasons and motives by examining the local contexts such as described in Newcastle where luminaries like bookbinder, Gerald Gray and publisher, Thomas Slack were at the heart of a widespread educational culture. This helps us to avoid portraying the poor as being passive recipients of teaching as well as exclusively focusing upon those who sought to provide schooling designed to contain the poor.

The early apprenticeship of Thomas Coram and the astonishing young adulthood of Thomas Pellow bestowed more upon both men than a lifetime of reading and study could have done. In both cases we can see that their lived experiences equipped them to survive in very dangerous and difficult situations. It could even be the case that the relative lack of

formal schooling meant that people like Coram and Pellow developed particular strength of character as to survive and prosper they were continually and consciously trying to extend their 'intelligence'. They lived by their wits as the saying goes. Where institutional forms of schooling existed it was framed explicitly to cater for the tastes and needs of gentry and merchant groups. What is clear from the cases explored here and many others who were similar, is that self-taught commoners were a social phenomenon of the eighteenth century which continued and developed into the nineteenth century, helping to shape what was to become working class identity and consciousness.

In the following chapter the tensions that emerged during the later part of the eighteenth century between proponents of elite and gentry notions of literateness and those who participated in promoting public literacy as a means to achieving freedom and democracy are explored. This chapter has shown that across three generations there was a strong movement of self-educated commoners breaking social boundaries. In what follows we examine how the state attempted to close down the extent of public space that had been created.

¹ Rose, Jonathan (2002). Vincent, David (1989).

² See introductory chapter of Pamela Horn's 1980, *The Rural World*, Hutchinson.

³ Jonathan Rose (2002) briefly identifies early eighteenth century 'mutual improvement' associations in Scotland. There is little sense throughout the chapter on this theme of self-education being part of a series of public practices. Rose does however offer a brief focus upon the London Corresponding Societies which is dealt with at greater length in the next chapter. This perspective arises in part from Rose seeking to focus upon reader responses, or a theory of audiences, so much of their work remains focused around the texts being read.

⁴ The term 'intelligence' tended to be used to describe what today, we would call news, information or knowledge, hence, the frequent use of the word as a title for periodical publications. For a brief history of the term see the entry by Cowan, S. pp 317/18, *The Routledge International Encyclopedia of Education*, ed. McCulloch, G. & Crook, D. 2008.

⁵ Lawson, J. & Silver, H. (1973) *A Social History of Education in England*, Methuen. pp 177-180.

⁶ One of the first priorities of Boswell on his arrival in London in 1762. Pottle, F.A. 1974. *Boswell's London Journal*. Book Club Associates, p. 47.

⁷ Ibid. Pottle, F. 1974. Letter from 1762

⁸ Brewer. J. 1997. *The Pleasures of the Imagination*. Harper Collins, pp. 427-489.

⁹ It is however worth noting that Foxe did not consider Becket to warrant the title of 'martyr' and quibbled with the way that Pope Alexander canonized him. pp. 46/47, Foxes *Book of Martyrs, Actes and Monument*. 1563 Edition. London Corresponding Society tokens and medallions produced by Spence, carried the names of Becket along with that of Paine and Thomas Hardy who features towards the end of this chapter.

¹⁰ Beddoes, grammar school and Oxford educated, is in the list because of his role in popularizing modern medical knowledge and identifying with progressive 'popular' political causes. Bewick's long-term contribution in terms of the look of the modern book is seminal. Chatterton exemplifies to an extraordinary degree the precocity of an autodidact. Paine of course, is one of the defining world figures of the historical period.

¹¹ Thomas Bray was the author of the influential *Catechetical Lectures* (1696) He was appointed to strengthen Anglicanism in Maryland. One of his ideas was to establish public libraries in the American colonies and in every district in Britain, and out of this grew the SPCK which was formally founded in 1699. He spent the last

twenty five years of his life as a Rector of St. Botolphs in Aldgate, London engaged in philanthropical and literary activities. Bray is one of the first to argue for educational rights for African plantation slaves and campaigned also for the rights of displaced Native Americans.

¹² The term 'embedded learning' is used rather than 'informal learning' because the opposition between the two was nowhere near as clear in the eighteenth century as it can sometimes appear to be nowadays in an era when the very term education often seems to be synonymous with school-based learning.

¹³ Dent, K. (1980) 'John Nichols as a Source of Eighteenth Century Educational History'. pp. 3-15 *History of Education Society No 5*. Ed. Lowe, R.

¹⁴ Watts, Ruth, 2002. 'The Use of Biography in the History of Gender and Education : the Case of Mary Somerville', in *The Politics of Gender and Education*, ed. Leonard, D. Institute of Education, London. Also, Hilton, M. & Hirsch, P. 2000. *Practical Visionaries : Women, Education and Social Progress, 1790-1930*. Pearson.

¹⁵ Hans, Nicholas, 1951. *New Trends in Eighteenth Century Education*. R.K.P. pp 11-36.

¹⁶ Martin, Jane. & Goodman, J. *Women and Education 1800-1980: Educational Change and Educational Identities*, Palgrave, Goodman and Martin explore the value and importance of biographical sources across a two hundred year time span.

¹⁷ Wagner, G. (2004) *Thomas Coram, Gent.* Boydell Press. Cited on page 7.

¹⁸ Wagner, p 8.

¹⁹ Ibid p 8

²⁰ Wagner, G. (2004) pp 96-99

²¹ Baker, T. (1708) *Reflection upon Learning*. Bosvile, London.

²² Smith, Olivia. (1984) *The Politics of Language 1791-1819*, Clarendon, Oxford. Smith argues that forms of English use have histories which are essentially social and political and inherently related to issues of social control and power. The form of language use can become something that is used to socially isolate an individual such as Coram.

²³ See Chapter 11 of Ellis (2004) *The Concourse of Merchants*. pp 166-184.

²⁴ Wagner, G (2004), Ch. 5. *A Seed Is Sown*, pp 53-65. An account of the dangers both nautical and financial of the shipping trade.

²⁵ Banbury, P. (1971), *Shipbuilders of the Medway and Thames*, Newton Abbot. See also, Bailyn, Bernard, (1979), *The New England Merchants in the 17th Century*, Cambridge, Mass. It is important to recognize the extent to which those working within the trans-Atlantic trade were part of a shared and common culture which was re-inforced through commonly read publications.

²⁶ Cited in Wagner (2004), *Diary of Samuel Sewall*, ed. Thomas, H. 1973, Boston. *The Selling of Joseph, 1700*. Bartholemew Green and John Allen, Boston. Massachusetts Historical Society.

²⁷ Johnson, Richard. (1976/77.) Vols. 7 & 8. *Radical Education*. Really Useful Knowledge.

²⁸ Wagner, pp 84-90. Here Wagner shows the extent to which the aristocracy lived with the consequences of their adultery. She argues that Coram consciously played upon this in securing the support of twenty aristocratic ladies for his foundling hospital.

²⁹ Gatrell, Vic. (2006) *City of Laughter*, Ch. 4. *Crossing The Boundaries*, pp 110-156

³⁰ Whetter, J. (1988) *The History of Glasnay College*, Tabb House.

³¹ Whetter, J. (2003) *The History of Falmouth*, Lyfrow Trelyspen.

³² Pellow, Thomas. (1753) (3rd Ed.) *The History of the Long Captivity and Adventures of Thomas Pellow*, Goadby, London. p.6. 1st Edition was published in 1751 in Bath.

³³ Davies, Godfrey, 1950, 'Daniel Defoe's A Tour Thro' the Whole Island of Great Britain', *Modern Philology*, Vol. 48, No. 1, August, pp 21-36. Godfrey provides an account of the publishing history.

³⁴ Defoe, D. (ibid) p. 149.

³⁵ Roddis, Rowland J. (1945) *Ancient Grammar Schools Of Penryn, a Short History*. Camborn, Cornwall.

³⁶ Pellow, T. ibid

³⁷ Milton, Giles, (2004) *White Gold*, Hodder and Stoughton. See also Colley, Linda, 2003, *Captives*, Pimlico, Chapters 2 & 3 pp 43-98.

³⁸ Milton, Giles. (2004) Chapter 3. *Seized at Sea*. pp 51-72, provides a vivid account, based largely on Pellow's autobiography, of the fate that awaited slaves on landing at Salle.

³⁹ Krio, spoken today within Sierra Leone, is largely a 19th century amalgam forged from the patois' spoken by returned slaves and indentured workers.

⁴⁰ Morsy, M. (1983) *La Relation de Thomas Pellow*, Editions Recherche sur les Civilizations, Paris.

⁴¹ There was a fourth edition in (1755) indicating a degree of popularity of the book.

⁴² The interpretation of Pellow's life presented here is significantly different from that developed by Linda Colley. (2003) pp. 93-97. Colley's subtle reading of the way such captive 'histories' articulate wider ideological

- themes and realities strongly supports one of the currents running through this thesis, which is that individuals express in their actions and behaviours, aspects of the structural developments of the times they live through.
- ⁴³ Colley, for example says “as it turned out...he was never able to make a satisfactory life for himself on his return to Britain.” (p 96) There is little if any direct evidence to support a view on this issue one way or the other.
- ⁴⁴ In one of Hazlett’s most well known works; *The Spirit of the Age*, virtually all of the quotations are inaccurate personal versions or inventions, rather than citations.
- ⁴⁵ Holcroft, T. (1852) *Memoirs of the Late Thomas Holcroft*. Longman, Brown & Green. Edited and partially rewritten by William Hazlitt. pp 1-2.
- ⁴⁶ *Memoirs*, p 3.
- ⁴⁷ *Memoirs*, pp 3/4
- ⁴⁸ See Spufford, Margaret, (1981) Ch.5. pp 111-128 on distribution networks and chapmen.
- ⁴⁹ Kinnell, M. Ch. 2. *Publishing for Children: 1700-1800*, pp 26-45 of Hunt, P. (ed) (1995) *Children’s Literature, An Illustrated History*. O.U.P.
- ⁵⁰ Kinnell. (1995) p 35.
- ⁵¹ 24 sheets made 1 quire. 20 quires made 1 ream. 2 reams made a bundle and five bundles made a bale.
- ⁵² Porcupines were an alternative, if somewhat esoteric, to goose wing feathers. They therefore have a place, albeit a minor one, in the history of writing practices during this period.
- ⁵³ Darton, Harvey (1932) (Revised by Anderson, Brian) 1999, *Children’s Books in England*, British Library. For a classic expression of traditional attitudes towards eighteenth century lower class reading see page 74 “...the rather muddy mind of humbler England was penetrated throughout the Georgian Era... In that rank mist, as many thought it, the hungry sheep looked up for at least a hundred years..”
- ⁵⁴ See pp 32/3 Whalley, J. I. (1974), *Cobwebs to Catch Flies*, Elek, London. Also, p 74. Darton, F. J. (1982) *Children’s Books in England*. British Library.
- ⁵⁵ Johnson, R (1735) *The Famous History of the Seven Champions of the World*, Dublin.
- ⁵⁶ *Ibid*. pp13/14
- ⁵⁷ For an introductory review of the genre of fables see Avery, G. *The Beginnings of Children’s Reading, Fayed Fables*, pp 12-19, in Hunt (1995) *ibid*.
- ⁵⁸ Johnson, R. pp13/14
- ⁵⁹ For a brief review of the tradition of translation of biblical texts into English see, Hammond, Gerald, (1987) *English Translations of the Bible*, pp 647-666, of Alter, R. & Kermode, F. *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, Fontana. Hammond speaks about the rhetoric of repetition for example which passed from Hebrew prosody into English plain speech. Also, Norman, E.R. (1976) *Church & Society in England 1770-1970*, pp 15-40, ‘Christian Social Teaching at the end of the 18th Century’. Surveys the extent to which Christian and Church teaching permeated all society. The second section dwells at length on schooling initiatives and the use of the Bible.
- ⁶⁰ Nickell, J. (2000) *Pen, Ink, & Evidence*. Oak Knoll, Delaware. Nickell relates the origin of the term ‘stationer’ as someone who would station themselves at a cross-road and offer feathers for sale, prepare or repair used quills and possibly also sell ink. Throughout the day clerks would bring worn quills to the stationer and obtain freshly cut ones. In time this evolved into selling memo books, paper and other items associated with writing.
- ⁶¹ Defoe’s book was first published in 1719. Before the end of that year alone four reprints were needed to meet demand. By the time Holcroft was an active reader the story was universally known. The only other title to reach such phenomenal sales during the eighteenth century was Paine’s *Rights of Man*, which like Robinson Crusoe, was appropriated and transformed into every imaginable form and genre.
- ⁶² Dover, (1970) *Catchpenny Prints*, Dover Publications.
- ⁶³ Ladybird books. English History.
- ⁶⁴ The Licensing Act of 1696 required chapmen to register (Spufford p.116) Many would have mules or donkeys and would carry materials to enable them to establish a stall. They would travel to places for market days and often would have local pitches paid for in advance. Many producers extended credit to such chapmen and used them as the main means for retail sales rather than book-sellers. There was even a special almanac produced for chapmen to provide information about routes and places; *City and Country Chapman’s Almanac*, 1685, cited in Capp, B. (1979) *Astrology and the Popular Press: English Almanacs 1500-1700*, London, p 355.
- ⁶⁵ An extra cost for the travelling hawker was the pack animal license which was renewable annually.
- ⁶⁶ McKendrick, N. Brewer, J. Plumb, J.H. (1982) *The Birth of a Consumer Society: the commercialization of eighteenth century England*. Europa, London.
- ⁶⁷ A common feature of the street scene were covered chair-boxes, held by two long poles lifted and carried by two Chairmen whose walking posture placed strain on one side of the foot so their shoes required special attention.
- ⁶⁸ In the earlier sections of the *Memoirs* Holcroft writes affectionately about his mother but it is the figure of his father who emerges as the dominant force on his upbringing and outlook.
- ⁶⁹ *Ibid*. p. 6.

⁷⁰ Ibid. p. 6.

⁷¹ (1760?) Possibly slightly later than the edition that Holcroft is describing. Source ECCO.

⁷² The note circled above extols the educational value of using such songs for teaching reading.

⁷³ *Memoirs*. p. 52. (1852) ed. Longman, Brown, Green.

⁷⁴ Ibid. p. 53.

⁷⁵ Thus may we see the High and Mighty fall, For cruel Death shews no respect at all, To any one of high or low Degree, Great Men submit to Death as well as we. Tho' they are gay, their lives are but a span, A Lump of Clay, so vile a Creature's Man!

⁷⁶ *Memoirs*, *ibid.* p. 52.

⁷⁷ Ibid. p. 53.

⁷⁸ This incident from his life appears in the novel *Hugh Trevor*, published in 1794.

⁷⁹ Horsley, P.M. (1971) *Eighteenth Century Newcastle*, Oriel Press. Chapter 3, pp 53-76 on *Tyneside Engineering* conveys the social economic and technical dynamics that were at work in this region.

⁸⁰ Spence, Thomas, (1807), (2nd Ed) *The Important Trial of Thomas Spence*, London.

⁸¹ Bloomfield, Richard, (1808) (10th Ed) Edited by Loft, Capel. *A Farmers Boy*, London

⁸² The reference to daylight is significant as working by candlelight and mirror reflection was expensive. Therefore piece workers would have little choice but to work as many hours as possible through the lighter days. Working in small attics served several purposes. Apart from reducing the need for a fire, the tightly knit workshop could share skylight and utilize the same candles if there was a need to meet deadlines after dark. Apprentices would run to the local coffee house to bring warm beverages and newsprint to the workshop.

⁸³ The views of Harrington which were spread so freely in the earliest coffee houses in London in the 1650s persisted into the following century and Spence is seen as the principal carrier of these ideas into the nineteenth century communist movement.

⁸⁴ Spence's communistic ideas, which pre-date Marx's theory of labour, are in great part the product of an understanding of the economic and social character of his own daily working life.

⁸⁵ See page 12, Ashraf, Mary, (1983) *The Life and Times of Thomas Spence*, Frank Graham pub.

⁸⁶ Authors collection.

⁸⁷ See HO 44/33, National Archives. Letter from a supporter of Lord Russell's government describing the work of socialist missionaries in Edinburgh. The Owenites in particular, spread secular socialism amongst the working classes during the 1840s.

⁸⁸ Ashraf. p. 16.

⁸⁹ Gray, Gilbert, (1732) *The Complete Fabulist*. Pub Thomas Slack., Newcastle. There were two editions in 1732 despite the cover price being 3s and the volume being 261 pages. This suggests a popular sale beyond the environs of Newcastle.

⁹⁰ Introduction to *Fables*.

⁹¹ Joan Beal, (1999) *English Pronunciation in the Eighteenth Century*, Oxford, p. 3, identifies the two surviving copies in Boston (Mass) and Newcastle.

⁹² The plural 'forms' are used here because there was no one group socially, regionally or economically who could lay claim to possession of a definitive variant of the standard. Social fractions within class groups developed distinctive argots to reinforce their identities. This is satirized brilliantly by Thomas Holcroft through the character of Harry Goldfinch in his 1792 play *The Road To Ruin*. Everything Goldfinch says is couched in the argot of the Newmarket racing world.

⁹³ Spence, T. (1775) *Grand Repository of the English Language*. Introduction.

⁹⁴ This is the general thesis behind Joan Beal's study of the phonetics of Spence's *Grand Repository*.

⁹⁵ Bernstein, B. (1971) *Class, Codes and Control Vol. 1* London. Paladin.

⁹⁶ Bell, R.C. (1986) *Political and Commemorative Pieces*. Schwver Pub. p. 210.

⁹⁷ The paper Spence delivered was called *Property in Land : Every One's Right*.

⁹⁸ Ellis, M. (2004) Chapter Eleven. 'The Concourse of Merchants'. Markman argues for the view that by the middle of the century coffee houses had lost connection with their Restoration period roots and had instead become sites of special interest groups thus reinforcing ideas of exclusivity. Whilst this was the case with some special cases which became transformed into private members clubs, thousands of smaller venues retained their social promiscuousness.

⁹⁹ *Newcastle Magazine*, 21 March 1821.

¹⁰⁰ Bell, R.C. (1986) *Political and Commemorative Pieces Simulating Tradesmen's Tokens 1770-1802*, Schwer Publications, Suffolk. Part Two, pp 210-284.

¹⁰¹ For a thorough survey of seventeenth and eighteenth century tokens and their social backgrounds, see J. Whiting, (1971) *Trade Tokens : A Social and Economic History*, David and Charles. Ch. 1-3 pp 11-164. This includes reference to political and indeed Spence tokens. Spence would mix and match his dies according to customer's wants, hence the sheer number of varieties amongst surviving examples.

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- ¹⁰² Dalton and Hammer, 1910-1918. *The Provincial Token-Coinage of the 18th Century*. Reprinted (1990) ed. Allan Davison. p.166. Mddx. No. 694 & p167. Mddx. No.706
- ¹⁰³ This was further complicated when Spence sold his dies to Skidmore, another dealer operating from Holborn in 1797. Skidmore did not share the same radical views so mixed some of Spence's die with his own carrying distinctly hostile views. It seems that nothing that Spence did was without controversy. See pp. 46-53, Longman, W. 1916. *Tokens of the Eighteenth Century Connected with Booksellers and Bookmakers*, Longman, Green and Co. London.
- ¹⁰⁴ D&H. p. 167. Mddx. No. 702
- ¹⁰⁵ From 1794. D & H. p.196. no 1044. D&H. p. 196. No. 1045
- ¹⁰⁶ p. 261. *Fables*, Gray, 1732. 2nd Ed.
- ¹⁰⁷ Waters, Brian. (1989) *Where Iron Rusts like Water*, Donald, Edinburgh A history of the Carron Iron Works 1759 – 1982.
- ¹⁰⁸ Uglow, Jenny. (2002) *The Lunar Men*, Farrar, New York. See pp 243-257.
- ¹⁰⁹ Hardy, T. (1832) *Memoirs*, Thos. Ridgeway, London. p. 2. Throughout the narrative Hardy adopts the third person.
- ¹¹⁰ *Memoirs*, p.4.
- ¹¹¹ Price, Richard, (1776) *Observations on the Nature of Civill Liberty, the nature of government, and the justice and policy of the war with America*, Cadell, London.
- ¹¹² *London and Gentleman's Magazine*.
- ¹¹³ Hardy, *Memoirs*. p. 13.
- ¹¹⁴ *Political Examiner*, Issue No. 1290. Sunday, October 21st. 1832.

Chapter 6. Public literacy as sedition in the 1790s.

This chapter highlights some facets of the uses of public literacy by commoners during the last decade of the eighteenth century. It is not the intention here to attempt to describe such a broad topic in its entirety, but instead, to focus upon the interface between personal reading and public politics, especially as it affected many in the rising labouring and artisan classes. The point of doing this is to show that very large numbers of commoners were using their literacy in ways which breached public cultural conventions. Literacy practices are shown emanating from within the labouring and artisan classes, rather than people from such social backgrounds participating in cultural forms and activities initiated by people from the bourgeoisie and gentry. These indigenous literacy practices from within the social worlds of commoners, became a highly contested field of public political culture because reading and intellectual engagement had previously acted as a marker of social distinction and thus acted as an agent for reinforcing social hierarchies. This is a distinct development from the social formation presented within chapter 4 where commoners participated widely, but followed the lead of gentry authors such as Addison and Steele. In the earlier period of the century, commoners contributed towards what came to be called ‘public opinion’ but they did not forge that opinion through asserting the primacy of their own social interests. This chapter shows how a growing culture of artisan and bourgeois democracy involved a subtle and sophisticated understanding of how to sustain discourses within the public sphere through manipulating the relationship between the written and spoken word. The reception, impact and use of Thomas Paine’s *Rights of Man* upon common readers are a major focal point for this chapter.

Something new and different in kind had started to emerge by the end of the century. Separate, class conscious organisations whose activities were centred around public literacy practices, began to emerge, giving voice to the interests and aspirations of people who would soon come to describe themselves and be described as belonging to the ‘working classes’.¹ Whilst there was awareness of the emergence of a new and distinct social reality, there was little clarity in how they were to be described. Terms originating in older social formations and earlier usages such as *rank*, *order*, *estate* and *degree* were still the dominant ones and it is not until writers such as Robert Owen begin to employ the formulation ‘*working class/es*’ within widely read journals in the second decade of the nineteenth century, that the more modern socio/economic usage emerges. In one fictional dialogue of 1792 printed by Longman, the anonymous author describes the people who Paine is seeking to enlighten as “the

laborious classes”.² One stimulus for the development of such class-based, separate organisations was the tendency for many of the earlier coffee houses to transform into semi-private clubs catering for a distinct clientele. These new organisations, which met in taverns and coffee houses were appropriately called corresponding societies, taking advantage of the growing possibilities for national postal exchange which arose due to the regular mail service following the improved highway system.³

Perhaps this new outlook, rooted in a sense of social-class change, is best exemplified by Thomas Paine’s *Rights of Man Part 1*, which was published in 1791 and which was, in many ways just another contribution to a stream of books and pamphlets arguing one or another view about constitutional rights and social participation. A check of the separate titles published between 1770 to 1800 in Britain and America, with the word ‘*constitution*’ brought up over 1,500, whereas the same search using the word ‘*rights*’ drew forth over 980 titles.⁴ Yet, as we saw in the previous chapter, many tens of thousands of people like Thomas Hardy, upon receiving and reading *Rights of Man*, viewed it as being transformational, a landmark, a break with the previous forms of constitutional discourse. This chapter therefore begins with a discussion about the reception and impact of Paine’s book. The discussion examines examples of Paine’s writing and contrasts it with that of his great opponent, Edmund Burke.

Following from Olivia Smith’s (1984) view that Paine’s style enabled him to engage new readers in different ways from previous political writers, it is argued that his authorship *per se* was also a crucial factor in the reception elicited by *Rights of Man*.⁵ Paine embodied many of the characteristics and qualities of the new democrat, someone rising from commoner/artisan roots into national prominence. Not surprisingly, the state had become increasingly concerned about sedition after the calamity of the loss of the colonies and the presence of a regicidal and republican government across the Channel.⁶ As outlined in chapter 1, the term ‘*state*’ has been used in a broader sense than ‘*government*’, to include social institutions and agencies such as the Church of England, the Courts and Magistracy, customs and excise and local vestries. In most localities it was the Church and parochial authorities working with locally resident gentry that formed the backbone of the presence of state authority in the area, so to exclude such institutions within the definition, would be anachronistic. The political consequence of this church/state connection was something that Paine highlighted in *Rights of Man Part 2* in typically vivid style:

By engendering the church with the state, a sort of mule-animal capable only of destroying, and not breeding up, is produced, called *the Church established by Law*.⁷

The role of the local magistracy was also a key one in maintaining class dominance over local districts and aspects of this will be brought out within the chapter. Through tracing documents drawn from a variety of government sources it is shown how local loyalist networks were established and funded which were closely linked to the Government with the express purpose of challenging the circulation and growth of democratic literature and ideas.

As was shown in the previous chapter, learning to read and write, either within a school or under the guidance of a tutor or mentor, took place in somewhat haphazard and unsystematic ways depending upon location, opportunity and circumstances (Spence). For many it was a process that took place with substantial intervals in-between (Hardy). We also saw that the role of child-parent (Holcroft) and youth-workplace relationships (Pellow) were key elements in the fostering and spreading of the ability to read and write, possibly as significant as the efforts of schoolmasters and mistresses. This was particularly the case in relation to the literate poor who would have been less able to pay for tuition.

Expanding the reading public.

There are no accurate records of the publication figures for *Rights of Man Part 1, Part 2* and the jointly published pair. But it is clear that this book joined publications such as *Pilgrim's Progress* and *Robinson Crusoe*, along with various almanacs, as a publishing phenomenon, completely transcending normal expectations of copies and editions printed. The original edition cost three shillings, yet even at that price over fifty thousand copies were sold in 1791, compared to the estimated 30,000 copies of Burke's *Reflections* in its first two years. Subsequent editions are plain and tightly printed. Most importantly, they were cheap – usually six pence but with reductions in price for bulk purchases. As the work acquired 'classic' status within a decade of being published, this changing status was reflected in the style and quality of its production. The cheap original editions stand in contrast to the leather bound editions, reflecting the penetration of the work into all social classes and types of reader. It can be argued that ownership does not necessarily reflect actual reading, or indeed agreement with the text. But the variety and number of reprints and editions in most European languages suggests that from 1791 onwards the work was recognised as being of major significance.⁸ Paine engineered the very high sales by refusing an offer from the government to purchase the copyright and instead gave permission for his book to be published without payment, thus eliminating the double cost of the fee to the author and to the owner of copyright. The original publisher, Johnson, got to the point of printing all of the sheets but

faltered on the eve of publication, realising the danger he would face. Fearing the worst, Paine and friends, including Thomas Holcroft, swiftly borrowed money and a large cart and took the printed sheets to Jordan who managed to get the work out within three weeks. From thence, with democratically committed publishers and print-workers, the copies could be produced as cheaply as would have been possible. The circumstances of the books' publication therefore became highly significant because Paine and his publisher, Jordan inverted the usual relationships which obtained within the industry. Their aim was to maximise numbers of readers, not sales for profit. Whilst the content of the book was always a significant factor in its wide readership, the circumstances of its publication which were well known, were also important. The first edition sold out in three days and within two months Jordan had printed six editions amounting to 50,000 copies.

Paine's success with *Rights of Man* was not a complete surprise as his reputation was already established as the author of *Common Sense*, which at the time of its publication (1776) was credited with having crystallized sentiment against the British government in the American Colonies.⁹ He was seen as one of the seminal figures who made the United States of America; indeed it was he who coined the name.¹⁰ To many he was ever a traitor, and so inevitably would attract greater opprobrium from Church and Crown loyalists than many other authors already publishing within the crowded market of books on constitutional matters. *Common Sense* had also been a publishing phenomenon selling between 120,000 to 150,000 copies in America within the first six months of publication.¹¹ Paine's leading biographer describes the reception of *Common Sense* as follows:

Its effects were not universal, but converts to Common Sense were to be found in all walks of life, among the literate and nonliterate of virtually every village, farm, and town of the thirteen colonies.¹²

A contemporary reviewer, Benjamin Rush, who was to be a major influence upon the development of American government, stated of *Common Sense*:

Its effects were sudden and extensive upon the American mind. It was read by public men, repeated in clubs, spouted in schools, and in one instance, delivered from the pulpit instead of a sermon by a clergyman in Connecticut.¹³

The booklet was reprinted many times within the year in Britain and translated into several languages, establishing Paine as a writer of international repute. In the quotation above, Rush

describes a gradation of literate practices beginning with reading, followed by listening and lastly by oral transmission. It transcended the normal institutional settings for reception of such a work – becoming ‘popular’ in the sense of being widely and cheaply available and securing a large readership who by and large, agreed with what it said. Much of the success of *Common Sense* must be attributed to Paine’s unparalleled ability to sense and express popular sentiment using accessible plain English as his medium. Smith (1984) describes the language of Paine as “intellectual, vernacular prose” produced consciously with the intention of breaking conventional modes of expression in print.¹⁴ The following is an example of the prose style adopted by Paine in *Common Sense* drawn from the second section dealing with monarchy and hereditary succession:

Government by kings was first introduced into the world by the Heathens, from whom the children of Israel copied the custom. It was the most prosperous invention the Devil ever set on foot for the promotion of idolatry. The Heathens paid divine honors to their deceased kings, and the Christian world hath improved on the plan by doing the same to their living ones. How impious is the title of sacred majesty applied to a worm, who in the midst of his splendor is crumbling into dust!¹⁵

The connection of phrases such as “*sacred majesty*” with that of “*a worm*” creates a debunking of the former. The use of *Heathens* and *Christians* as a polarity is designed to elicit reader identification, only for that to be then questioned within the same paragraph. The style is almost conversational, rather than declamatory as was then conventional for this genre. The middle sentence has twenty six words, with only one of them; ‘*Christian*’, having three syllables. When Paine wishes to make a critical attack he shifts register suddenly as if to raise the intensity of what he is writing – “It was the most prosperous invention the Devil ever set on foot for the promotion of idolatry”. Here Paine suddenly strings together four multi-syllabic words set within a series of mono-syllabic phrases – “It was the most”, “set on foot for the”. Paine’s prose is very easy to read aloud because it is consciously written around the rhythms of common speech in order to make it more accessible to listeners:

Government by kings
was first introduced into the world
by the Heathens,
from whom the children of Israel
copied the custom.

Small effects such as the alliteration within the final three words of the sentence, direct the ear of a listener to the meaning. The assonance echoes such as “government by kings” with “children of Israel” help to create a poetic flow and balance. Smith argues that this facility with the vernacular reflects the more relaxed and flexible public literary culture of America, which was less hidebound than Britain by fixed ideas of the relation between style and social class. In order to judge the different note that Paine was striking, one can contrast the following paragraph on the same theme from Burke, published a year before *Rights of Man* which is based upon a highly elaborate Latinate, oratorical style which, despite its origins within the area of study known as Rhetoric, is nevertheless intended principally to be silently and privately read:¹⁶

This doctrine, as applied to the prince now on the British throne, either is nonsense and therefore neither true nor false, or it affirms a most unfounded, dangerous, illegal, and unconstitutional position. According to this spiritual doctor of politics, if his Majesty does not owe his crown to the choice of his people, he is no lawful king. Now nothing can be more untrue than that the crown of this kingdom is so held by his Majesty. Therefore, if you follow their rule, the king of Great Britain, who most certainly does not owe his high office to any form of popular election, is in no respect better than the rest of the gang of usurpers who reign, or rather rob, all over the face of this our miserable world without any sort of right or title to the allegiance of their people. The policy of this general doctrine, so qualified, is evident enough. The propagators of this political gospel are in hopes that their abstract principle (their principle that a popular choice is necessary to the legal existence of the sovereign magistracy) would be overlooked, whilst the king of Great Britain was not affected by it. In the meantime the ears of their congregations would be gradually habituated to it, as if it were a first principle admitted without dispute. For the present it would only operate as a theory, pickled in the preserving juices of pulpit eloquence, and laid by for future use. Condo et compono quae mox depromere possim. By this policy, whilst our government is soothed with a reservation in its favor, to which it has no claim, the security which it has in common with all governments, so far as opinion is security, is taken away.¹⁷

What is cited above is only part of one paragraph and this serves to emphasise two obvious differences between the styles; that of length and verbosity. Whilst Paine tends towards conciseness, Burke, whose style is generally more accessible to common readers than most of his contemporaries, exhibits a tendency towards elaboration. Whereas Paine veers towards creating images within the minds of his listeners, Burke leans towards developing more abstract ideas within the minds of his readers. If one asks the obvious question of who Burke’s implied reader is, it seems clear that it is someone who is a monarchist – “so held by his Majesty”, a literate person, in the then widely understood sense of someone familiar with

the classics in the original - “*Condo et compono quae mox depromere possim*” (from Horace) and someone with the leisure to read such expanded argumentation. Although the preface from which this section is taken is expressly addressed to “a young gentlemen in Paris” it is by association, also addressed to gentlemen in general. The framing of the writing in the form of a letter to a correspondent follows an established genre.¹⁸

Burke is not without his own remarkable literary flourishes - “pickled in the preserving juices of pulpit eloquence, and laid by for future use”; or his infamous quip when describing the poor as “the swinish multitude”, mark him out as being much more than a pedantic mouthpiece for the establishment, but his address is directed towards those who possess power and occupy a constitutional political role, the literate gentry, the clergy and the professionals working for and within government. The statement cited above sets out to justify the right of the elite to whom his writing is addressed, to their ownership of power and he distinguishes these rights from anything that might lay claim to being popular. Yet, despite the conservative thrust of Burke’s writing, he managed to create a popular taste for political and constitutional writing thus broadening the base of active readers. Part of the genius of Paine’s polemic was to explicitly pitch his work against Burke, implying to readers to see for themselves, thus stimulating sales of Burke as well as *Rights of Man*. In this sense, Burke is to be seen as part of a broader movement of creating a greater number of readers who in places could recognise their own voices within the prose.

Paine’s *Rights of Man* shares with Tyndale’s Bible the reputation of being a book which in its time, caused consternation within the state to the extent that all efforts, both legal and paralegal, were deployed to achieve its suppression. Additionally it shares with the Tyndale Bible the distinction that after its time, much of what was printed was incorporated into the succeeding orthodoxy.¹⁹ This counter reaction did not solely rest upon what was contained in the text but rather the potential that existed for the text to be used by readers from the labouring classes to stimulate ‘sedition’ and ‘democracy’. The reaction against *Rights of Man* tacitly recognises widespread and committed literacy as an established feature of the social and educational landscape. The term ‘committed’ literacy, refers to communicative practices that serve purposes other than purely economic or personal leisure needs. This notion of committed literacy refers to the conscious pursuit of knowledge and understanding through reading, listening, corresponding and debating, leading to a heightened sense of self as a citizen and laying claim to political rights. The permanent impact of this moment in British educational experience arose from the fact that this generic sense of who one was in relation to constitutional ideas and practices applied to everyone – both loyalist and radical as both

were participating in the public debate that had been generated. By the end of the century, the religiously informed, dissenting practices which found a safe niche within the coffee house culture, had expanded into workplaces, streets and communities. With Paine, these communities of literacy amongst the commoners had found a voice they could call their own. The next section examines one aspect of the campaign to suppress Paine's book in order to throw light upon the spread of public literacy in the mid 1790s.

State reaction to *Rights of Man*

Ideas of mutual self-help in conditions of shared adversity existed socially and not just as an abstract and intellectual ideal.²⁰ It is important to stress what might appear an obvious point because of the tendency to think that ideas of community solidarity, freedom and mutual interdependence originated with certain political philosophers rather than from within real communities. Common experiences bound people together intuitively if not always in a way that they could fully articulate so when a writer found a way of expressing what for many people was a reflection of their hopes and feelings such a work could exert a particular kind of influence. Listening to a tract being read aloud in a tavern knowing that the text and the activity was disapproved of by people in positions of authority contributed towards consolidating a shared sense of purpose and position. When this extended through a generation or more, such sentiments become part of the cultural tradition of the family, neighbourhood or social group. In Britain by the close of the eighteenth century the independence of the press from government had become such an established part of cultural life that the state seemed no longer to know how to restrain the more radical sections which began to serve the interests of commoners rather than expressing the views of Whig constitutionalists.

By the end of the century this tradition of independent and free readership was at least three generations old and it is this that partially explains the apparently sudden upsurge in responsiveness to *Rights of Man*. As we saw in the previous chapters, a differentiated publishing market had developed and reading was extremely widespread throughout society. Whilst it is debatable whether the audience for such a political tract was already there, or whether the book created a new audience, it is likely that the balance lies somewhere in-between, with seasoned readers interacting with zealous new converts. What started to concern the government was the evident number of radicals including those operating in close range with conscripted seamen and soldiers. The government decided to act and in May 1792

a Royal Proclamation was issued (Fig. 50). Proclamations were not unknown or exceptional as instruments for establishing an explicit presence for the policy of the state within the public domain. The issue of a Proclamation often produced a secondary literature, sometimes sponsored by agencies and supporters of the state or by irrepressible controversialists using it as an opportunity to strike fear into the hearts of their godly readers.²¹

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Fig. 50. A used and worn copy of the Proclamation from the Treasury Solicitor's files for 1792

With events such as those mentioned above, still relatively fresh in the minds of the government in 1792, it was no wonder that there was heightened alarm at what seemed to be an even greater threat with apparently greater numbers amongst the poor participating in public literate practices.²² As we saw earlier the broad sweep of the critique against corrupt and unrepresentative government within *Rights of Man* had shifted the balance of public political discourse away from the pronouncements by representatives of the ruling class. Instead, there was a new centre of gravity within the discourse emanating from a radical and independent source which was self-avowedly hostile to the interests of the establishment. The

grotesque excesses of Fox and fellow Whig constitutionalists stood in increasing contrast to the sober seriousness and self-discipline of the radicals who were becoming the de-facto public opposition to oligarchic rule. One register of this shift was the increasing incidence during the 1790s of radical figures appearing alongside the Whig grandees in caricatures by Gillray. The intensity of purpose behind the 1792 *Proclamation* should not be underestimated. It was intended as a spur to action and not simply as a means of dampening smouldering cinders. Frank Gorman has recently examined the campaign of Paine burnings organised nationally by the Loyalist Associations which culminated in the destruction of Joseph Priestley's property and all of his possessions and writings in Birmingham.²³ These drunken processions focussing upon a ritualised death and sometimes followed by an attack upon the premises of a known local Radical were licensed and organised by local clergy and gentry. Gorman argues that they were an important means of incorporating elements from the local lower classes into a public demonstration of Loyalism.²⁴ What nevertheless happened was that sections from the working classes were being brought into the public political arena rather acting as bystanders. They were being asked to adopt a stance. Mirroring this were the Tracts produced in dialogue form by writers like Hannah More which sought to elicit reader-identification with one character within a simple dialogue.

The Royal Proclamation of May 1792 is a remarkable document for historians of literacy although hitherto it has only been the focus of commentary for its obvious political connections.²⁵ Most of the historical commentary which refers to this *Proclamation* tends to extrapolate from its textual content or its place within the general political programme of the government, rather than examining its form and reception. If we examine the *Proclamation* in terms of its context of reception as well as its physical structure we can gain insight into reading practices. The reproduction above conveys only an approximate sense of what the document is and was like, yet the physical and material quality of the document is as important as the printed words within it for our understanding, especially if one wishes to produce an account of how the state sought to reassert its authority within an expanding public sphere.²⁶ Indeed, as we saw in the chapter on coffee house literacy, there was a sense that the milieu in London was remarkably open and liberal in the sense of being virtually free from censorship. The particular concern within the government and more broadly, the state, which Olivia Smith has highlighted, was the extent to which layers amongst the skilled and labouring poor were actively engaging in political organisation using a range of personal and social communicative practices.²⁷ Since the loss of the American colonies in the 1770s and the revolution in France in the late 1780s it was not in any way surprising that by the 1790s

the ruling classes in Britain were acutely sensitive to the potential of layers within the working classes to become involved in seditious, political activity.²⁸ During the last half of the century, Sheffield for example, had grown from being a series of small settlements numbering no more than twelve thousand residents in 1750, to a bustling town of forty five thousand people in 1800, a majority of whom were either wage labourers or petty artisans and traders.²⁹ Conservative loyalists in Sheffield and elsewhere had a sense of losing control, so the *Proclamation* and the consequent actions flowing from it offer us a view of how a national campaign of persuasion and repression was initiated. The other reason for focussing upon conservative rather than radical presences and interventions within the public sphere is to offer a balance within this study to the preponderance of sources drawn broadly from what might loosely be called 'radical' and dissenting voices.

The *Proclamation* is 14 x 20 inches so is slightly larger than the largest broadsheet newspapers of the time. Therefore it would stand out as being distinctive because of the larger than usual dimensions. The *Proclamation* was printed upon heavy duty wove paper and distributed to every magistrate around the country with an injunction that they post it in as many places as they could. The quality of paper decreases with successive reprints. These sheets would appear pasted onto walls, nailed onto trees and placed into windows, thus ensuring maximum public visibility. Every parish and vestry district would have received several copies of the document. It would also be placed in workplaces, churches, vestry premises and inns managed by government supporters. Additionally commercial premises owned and run by loyalist monarchists would display copies in prominent places. The size and physical qualities of the document establish from the outset a sense of importance. The magistrates were enjoined to report back to the Home Secretary, Henry Dundas, on the progress and success of this venture and many such hand-written responses from the local magistracy and gentry are in the Home Secretary's correspondence boxes at the National Archives.³⁰

It is clear from this correspondence that the project of achieving national coverage and exposure for the *Proclamation* was successful. Behind such an undertaking lay the Loyalist Associations that had sprung up in opposition to the radical corresponding societies.³¹ The *Proclamation* was read aloud 'officially' by magistrates, town criers, local vicars and loyalist supporters. An aspect of its reception which needs to be recognised is that it would have been aural and collective, recreating an old fashioned sense of the 'public' in which the Crown presents itself to an essentially passive audience – the public, who are brought into existence only through the actions of the Crown.³² The presentation is framed solely in terms of a single

and required response leaving little space for discussion, alternatives or challenge – hence ‘proclamation’.³³ Although the political implications and character of the document has been commented upon extensively there is an important aspect to it which is primarily cultural and educational. It was not just the named publications within the document that were of concern to the state, but the *reading* and dissemination of ideas that arose from their circulation. At least 1,500 local branches of the Loyalist Association had been brought into existence by November 1792 and it is arguable that therein lies the origin of modern, locally organised, branch party political organisation, rather than the much later locally-based organisations opposing the Corn Laws. The connection between educational and cultural matters (literacy) with politics has rarely been clearer, although somewhat ironically, the hired bully-boys of the local loyalist associations were notoriously ignorant and illiterate.³⁴ Another layer of irony was that these loyalist associations also acted as locally-based agents for the diffusion of tracts such as those written by Hannah More which set out to teach their readers their place in the greater scheme of things, recognising in the process the presence of a growing number of readers amongst the commoners. More herself was quite explicit about the social class intentions of such tracts:

... as an appetite for reading... had been increasing among the inferior ranks in this country, it was judged expedient, at this critical period, to supply such wholesome aliment as might give a new direction to their taste, and abate their relish for those corrupt and inflammatory publications which the consequences of the French Revolution have been so fatally pouring in on us.³⁵

The Proclamation ordered that everyone should report to their local magistrates or to the government, anyone found to be printing or selling seditious books. Although Paine’s *Rights of Man* is not mentioned by name, it was evident to all that this was the principal target. The strategy therefore was to use extra legal means to curtail the distribution of ‘seditious’ literature using locally organised intimidation and accusation. Prime Minister Pitt’s aim was to establish, through the *Proclamation*, some sort of legal basis for action to be taken against supporters of the French revolution, democracy and social reform.³⁶ The orator/reader of the *Proclamation* (a cryer) was proclaiming/reading aloud the words of the King, hence the highly elaborate and artificial tone. Far from detracting from the meaning, the gross prolixity would have been what hearers would expect as pronouncements from the Majestic fount were necessarily distinct and separate from other forms of common speech. From a radical perspective, this would have been a prime example of the way language was used by the

oppressive state to mask reality. It is worth reproducing a short excerpt from the *Proclamation* to illustrate this point:

And whereas We have also Reason to believe that correspondences have been entered into with sundry persons in foreign Parts, with a view to forward the criminal and wicked Purposes above-mentioned: And Whereas the Wealth, Happiness, and prosperity of this kingdom do, under divine Providence, chiefly depend upon due submission to the Laws, a Just Confidence in the integrity and wisdom of Parliament...

The prolixity is designed to reinforce the authority of the voice of the King. After reading, the sheets would have remained in place allowing groups to assemble around where they were posted and discuss what would happen. Their visibility would have been heightened by the fact that the street scene in small settlements was not one where posters, hoardings, signs and such like were common. It was not until the advent of large rotary printers and cheap paper that urban wall spaces became sites for intensive advertising, hence the radical and innovative nature of physical manifestations upon public walls of the followers of Spence.

Although many of the Proclamations would have been defaced, stolen or damaged due to weather conditions it appears from the varying papers from surviving impressions that re-printings of the sheets were numerous. Many who would describe themselves as moderates, broadly in sympathy with the war against the French and at heart monarchists, would nevertheless have recoiled at the immediate threats to personal safety that radical friends and associates would face as a result of the behaviour of drunken mobs who had been hired by local gentry to frighten serious minded and literate artisans and labourers. In the Home Secretary's correspondence files it is clear that Dundas never intervened to stop the illegal violence.³⁷ Possibly the prime example of this type of state sponsored intimidation and direct violence was the burning of Joseph Priestley's house in Fairhill, Birmingham in July of 1791. The sponsors of this violence lost control of their mob and the King had to be asked to order in troops after three days of attacks against dissenters and their property. It is debatable whether such rioters were in fact readers of the volumes written by the likes of More, who claimed that in the first year of publication, over two million copies of her *Tracts* were sold. Although the figure appears grossly inflated in part because such large numbers defy the printing capacity within the industry as constituted at the time, nevertheless if each loyalist association and their supporters distributed just a thousand copies each purchased at cost price,

it will be seen that the organisational base for such large-scale distribution made such totals entirely possible.

Spying on the readers: monitoring literacy among the poor.

In early December of 1792, solicitors, Chamberlayne and White who acted for the Treasury Solicitor and Attorney General's office sent a standard letter to a range of known and trusted country solicitors asking whether they would act as Government agents collecting information from local sources about radical activity in their areas. This national network was to coincide with the rapidly growing network of Loyalist Associations being established to counter Republican and Painite sentiment, often with these very same solicitors acting as officers of the state sponsored Reeves associations.³⁸

The resulting correspondence file provides a rare insight into attitudes towards reading, publishing and political discussion amongst the "lower classes".³⁹ The principal aim of the network was to gather sufficient information from districts around the country in order to mount prosecutions for Treason against publishers, printers, authors and agitators. In Shrewsbury, for example, solicitors Cumberton and Copland responded by agreeing to act as agents and reported that in the town the week before, a loyalist organisation had been established. They also report that their district is virtually free of radicals.⁴⁰ Holland Watson, solicitor in Stockport, and himself local secretary to the Loyalist Association, however declines to act officially as the government agent. Watson describes a town where radicalised dissenters are in such a majority that they can act collectively to inhibit government supporters. Watson describes the presence in the town of numbers of "Dissenters and Extreme Democrats", identifying in particular a Robert Newton as being a key figure within the local movement. Watson does however offer to operate unofficially and to surreptitiously gather offending publications, but balks at the idea of funding 'spy's' (sic) because of the risk in a close-knit community, of confidences being breached.⁴¹ The town was at the forefront of mechanised cotton and silk textile manufacture with, for example over 2,000 people working within silk mills by the early 1770s. It is clear from Watson's letter that by the 1790s organised dissenting groups and republican agitation had created a local culture amongst the labouring class in which democratic ideas flourished. Such a sub-culture was fed by print, reading, discussion and active participation in a range of socially structured activities, powerfully suggesting not only widespread literacy in the modern sense of the term, but also wider participation within the boundaries of the literate culture that had developed. Economic

depression, partly arising from foreign competition created a slump in the textiles industry in the north-west of England in the 1770s and this would have set the scene for making the link between political rights and economic circumstances across an entire community. When Holland Watson wrote to White and Chamberlayne on 29th December 1792 he revealed that he was aware of the prior refusal of another solicitor to accept the offer of the agency.

Just twenty miles away from Stockport, in Halifax, solicitor A. Marshall received the same invitation at the same time as Watson.⁴² Unlike Watson he accepted the offer to become agent but reveals a very different story, extolling the range of available publications which are in favour of the constitution rather than criticising it. His response to the Attorney General's agents in London describes a scene where the "lower class" is not influenced particularly by radicals. And he contrasts the state within Halifax with that of nearby Leeds and Sheffield, Manchester and Stockport. At first this variation in response from two solicitors in seemingly comparable towns may appear to be inconsistent as both were dominated by the textile industry, but the pattern in Halifax described by Daniel Defoe in his *Tour* in 1724, remained virtually unchanged by the 1790s with domestic weaving and piece-rate work being the prevailing form of employment amongst the labouring class. Defoe's description of the socio-economic character of Halifax is worth citing in contrast to the early industrialisation of Stockport:

The nearer we came to Halifax, we found the houses thicker, and the villages greater. The sides of hills, which were very steep, were spread with houses; for the land being divided into small enclosures, that is to say, from two acres to six or seven acres each, seldom more; every three or four pieces of land had a house belonging to it. Their business is the clothing trade. Each clothier must keep a horse, perhaps two, to fetch and carry for the use of his manufacture, to fetch home his wool and his provisions from the market, to carry his yarn to the spinners, his manufacture to the fulling mill, and, when finished, to the market to be sold. Among the manufacturers' houses are likewise scattered an infinite number of cottages or small dwellings, in which dwell the workmen which are employed, the women and children of whom, are always busy carding, spinning, etc. so that no hands being unemployed all can gain their bread, even from the youngest to the ancient; anyone above four years old works.⁴³

Two important observations arise from this contrast. First, care needs to be taken to take full account of regional and indeed local circumstances when attempting to identify patterns of literacy development amongst the working class populations of Britain.⁴⁴ Aggregated statistics can conceal substantial variations even between places as near to each other as Halifax and Stockport. Second, social and economic factors are central to any understanding

of both how and why literacy develops within communities. It is noteworthy also that Dissent had become dominant within the Stockport area whereas in Halifax a majority still communed with the Anglican Church. Cultural factors therefore must also be taken fully into account when attempting to account for the growth of literacy in certain places at specific junctures. Further south in Ashburton, Nottinghamshire, Robert Abrahamson accepts the offer of agency but is frank about the likely calibre of government supporters in distinction to radical opponents, when he warns “finding clever people to be dependent upon in making discoveries will be no small obstacle”.⁴⁵ Implicit in such a letter is the recognition that certain degrees of intelligence lie with the other side amongst the free-thinking, literate, radicals, albeit from mining villages rather than the obedient and subservient retainers and followers tied by employment and family ties to the local merchants, clergy and gentry.

In Sudbury Suffolk, solicitor, Richard Hodge replied to White and Chamberlayne, on December 9th 1792 painting a graphic picture of a local area where radical activity was taking place within the public sphere. In his reply Hodge asks permission to establish a counter-radical poster campaign offering a reward for information leading to the arrest of suspects. Payment for pro-government support was to be channeled through these local agents. Hodge states:

A great number of seditious and inflammatory words have been written upon the walls, window shutters etc about this town – such as – “God damns the King” – “No Knig (sic) For Me” – “this King is a damn dog” – “we will not have this man to reign over us G.R.” – “Revolution but ‘alas no King” – these are all wrote in the night, so that there is a great difficulty to find out the writer-⁴⁶

What Hodge describes is vividly reminiscent of the propaganda practices being pioneered by the supporters of Thomas Spence which were considered in the previous chapter. Monarchy, in particular, is identified as the main butt of criticism and the republicanism is clear. The invasion of the public space accompanies the distribution both publicly and privately of printed reading matter. Sudbury had suffered hardship for decades with food rioters having being dispersed by soldiers from Colchester in 1744. As a variety of economic forces began to take effect, such as the loss of monopoly trade of Say cloth to Iberia for English weavers and merchants, and the advent of mechanisation, towns like Sudbury had, by the 1790s experienced prolonged hardships. As far back as the 1720s Defoe had commented:

I know nothing for which this town is remarkable, except for being very populous and very poor. They have a great manufacture of say and perpetuanas, and

multitudes of poor people are employed in making them, but the numbers of the poor is almost ready to eat up the rich!⁴⁷

It might therefore be said that social discord arising out of the changing fortunes of the cloth industry, was something that had characterised the Sudbury community for most of the century. Rather than seeing the republican radicalism revealed above in Hodge's letter, as being the product of more recent agitations it is more likely to be the legacy of more embedded Dissenting traditions. In Sudbury, dissenting communities were substantial from the 17th century and bequests, such as those by John Fenn in 1723 ensured that children from the poor were schooled for free "without distinction between churchgoers(sic) and dissenters".⁴⁸ A year later, for example, Susan Girling left a similar bequest upon her death and these accumulated as the century moved forward. Although the Quaker community in Sudbury, who were almost all literate in the modern sense, progressively diminished during the century, the parish annals record a number of instances where a freeman's house is licensed as a non-conformist meeting place, such as the instances of Benjamin Brown, weaver in 1729 and William Holman, mercer in 1731. These small meetings eventually grew and chapels came to be built with large congregations which often appointed a minister/teacher to serve and lead the community. Arising from a bequest, a school was built in 1747 and a year later this advertised for a teacher who was qualified in reading, writing and arithmetic.

Using this example of a middle-sized town on the borders of Essex and Suffolk we can see that the disturbances and political agitation reported to Messrs White and Chamberlayne, in 1792 arose from within a community that had decades of dissenting commitment. Among this dissenting majority in the town many had learned to read and write through charitable provision of schooling for the poor. The local Grammar School was a Two-storey building and this provided for the sons of the local merchants and landholders, which would have included considerable numbers of non-conformists. But schooling provision within this small textile and trading town extended beyond this institution. The nature of these bequests suggests that the schooling on offer for the poor was something other than the 'dame school' type which is often cited as typifying the period.

Social changes were taking place and this can be gauged by tracking the numbers of Quakers who resided in Sudbury from the early part of the century. The town annals register 140 Quakers in 1709, with twenty marriages between the years 1699-1709. These figures would have been drawn from the separate registers which the sect kept because of their refusal to participate in parish-based systems. This is a sizeable community, most of whom

would have been fully literate in the modern sense. Their presence also reflects one strand of the outlook of dissent from the Civil War years, still alive in the memories of many. Yet their numbers declined to 86 ten years later and even further to 33 by 1729, eventually leading to an amalgamation with the Bury St. Edmunds Friends in 1738. Meanwhile, during the same period, practising Presbyterians and later, Methodists grew, with congregations outgrowing existing chapel capacities. One feature of such dissenting congregations was the emphasis upon personal salvation in which Bible reading played a prominent part. The shift from the large Quaker community towards other forms of dissent, registers a move away from the social disengagement and separateness of the former towards the more engaged and proselytising Protestantism which implied in its very existence a criticism of the position of the established Church and the position of the Monarch as its head. The quietism so characteristic of Quakerism, gave way to a more socially active Puritanism attracting many adherents from a wide social range.

When Hodge wrote to the Solicitors acting for the Attorney General and in turn for the Home Secretary, Dundas, he was reporting on a community which had a long and entrenched literate and dissenting tradition, rather than upon a sudden outbreak of radical fervour brought about by recent political and economic circumstances. Hodge's reply asks whether permission would be granted for the loyalists to mount a counter campaign using posters with rewards offered for information. The problem with such a strategy was that it would reveal the source of funding and possibly fuel local hostility towards loyalists.

The established fact of there being a broad layer of literate artisans and labourers is revealed starkly in the response from M. Richards in Chester accepting the offer of acting as agent. Writing on December 10th 1792 he says:

We understand that there are several public houses in this town where persons go to read the most inflammatory parts of Paine's Rights of Man and other seditious publications, and endeavour by those and other means to inflame the lowest kind of the people who frequent such houses for an hours relaxation after their dayly work is over:- Pray would you wish any enquiry to be made after these persons.⁴⁹

Richards speaks of "several" public houses, and highlights the notion of "parts" indicating the common practice of dividing a single copy and allowing it to be circulated in parts. The notion of someone from the "lowest kind" going into a public house for anything other than "relaxation" voluntarily is implicitly not understood and he views them as potential victims of agitators. Although Richards is allusive only about "other means" it may be that he is

referring to the establishment of a local corresponding society which would put these gatherings of working men in contact with others in places like Sudbury. In a follow-up letter, Richards describes the phenomenon of graffiti and provides a description of an agitator called Thomas Bentley who is said to have distributed hundreds of leaflets and left Sudbury in order to influence people in Chester.⁵⁰ Richards also reports a general silence concerning the present whereabouts of this Bentley.

This organized distribution of Paine's work and other authors was probably unprecedented and was aided by the cheapness of the materials and the willingness of supporters and ideologues to spread the word. Such activity undercut the usual barriers of price to reading for the day labourer and piece worker who supported a family. The distribution was national in scope as evidenced by a letter from a solicitor called Lawson based in Morpeth in the north east. Writing on December 27th 1792, Lawson noted:

Thos Paine's works have certainly got into the hands of most of the lower classes of people in this County, altho' I have not read them myself – The Jockey Club I have read, but I believe it has only got into the hands of a few.⁵¹

Richards had been asked to report on the scene within Berwick-upon-Tweed, Alnwick, Hexham and Morpeth, places where miners had a tradition of literacy and where the influence of Scots Presbyterianism was strong. The use of "most" and the plural "classes" emphasises the extent of distribution. His contrast between Paine's more serious political expositions and the urbane, ironic and satirical *Jockey Club* published anonymously and written by Charles Piggott is a telling one, as it suggests a preference for the programmatic writings of Paine rather than the entertaining scurrility of the *Jockey Club* directed against the follies and foibles of the establishment.⁵²

When the *Proclamation* was issued in the spring of 1792, less than a year after the initial publication of *Rights of Man*, it became apparent to all, that the Government was seeking a series of high-profile prosecutions in order to repress something that had spiraled into a social movement. By mid-December of 1792 a rising star at the Bar, just thirty years old, rose to his feet in front of Lord Chief Justice Kenyon, to present the prosecution case on behalf of the Crown for seditious libel. He said, pointing to an annotated copy of Paine's *Rights of Man*:

Gentlemen, to whom are the positions that are contained in this book addressed?
They are addressed, Gentlemen, to the ignorant, to the desperate; to the desperate

all Government is irksome, nothing can be so palpable to their ears as the comfortable doctrine that there is neither law nor government.⁵³

The Barrister was directly addressing a hand-picked jury of “Gentlemen” who, in all likelihood, he had a personal hand in selecting, for this was a state show-trial and the outcome could not be allowed to be in doubt.⁵⁴ The barrister used the word ‘Gentlemen’ pointedly in order to establish in the minds of the jury one of the main lines of attack by the Crown prosecution, that the defendant author addressed his book to the ignorant, the credulous and the desperate. The offence lay not so much in what was said but rather lay in the intention behind the address. The ‘gentlemen’ of the jury are then informed that nothing can be so palpable to the *ears* of such an audience as the ‘comfortable doctrine’. This identifies for the jury the nub of the case to come – the fact that large numbers of people from the lower classes listen to and hear the book. Their seemingly ready agreement with the book is assisted by doctrines which are designed to reflect their own circumstances and experiences.

The barrister was Spencer Perceval, soon to become M.P. for Northampton, youngest son of Lord Egremont and the leading London-based activist on behalf of the Crown and Church loyalists.⁵⁵ Perceval embodied the connection between the aristocratic interest, government, legal system and organised resistance to republicanism. He was destined to become Prime Minister. He was also a prominent evangelical Anglican taking a firm stance against Catholic emancipation. On May 20th 1792, Perceval was leading for the Crown in the trial of Thomas Paine in absentia for seditious libel. He ought to have been in a strong position regarding evidence as the government via the Treasury Solicitors office had established a systematic national network of spies and had managed to intercept and confiscate correspondence between Paine’s supporters who were advocates for *Rights of Man*.

But a problem presented itself to the government. The correspondence revealed the truth about the corresponding societies, generally led by self-denying, moderate reformers seeking democratic reform through persuasion and reason. Leading figures like Thomas Hardy, Thomas Holcroft, John Thelwall and James Horne-Tooke were immensely well-read and passionate believers in the power of reason. Some, like Thelwall and Tooke repeatedly disavowed any resort to violent means for political ends.⁵⁶ The evidence of seditious purposes was not easy to come by. However, the prime concern for the Crown remained - the spread of radical reading matter taking place outside of and beyond normal, licensed, regulated and commercial channels. Perceval pointed out to the jury that provincially-based radicals were purchasing bulk copies and distributing them free! The sort of ‘evidence’ presented remains

amongst the trial papers for such cases lodged in the Treasury solicitor's series within the National Archives. They consist of pamphlets, newspapers, broadsides, printed speeches (addresses) and a variety of books which were circulating.

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Fig. 51. Kings bench Trial. 1808. By Thomas Rowlandson, engraved by J. Buck.

The corresponding societies network was gathering support as evidenced by the growing links between more traditional Whig interests such as D. Adams, Secretary of the Society for Constitutional Information, who on 29th May 1792 sent to Thomas Hardy of the LCS two hundred free copies of their latest 'resolutions' for distribution.⁵⁷ In the same year we see an anonymous author (probably J. Bowles) writing a protest against book societies voting to order copies of *Rights of Man*.⁵⁸ As Perceval spoke in Westminster Hall his meticulously prepared indictment against Paine lasted for over two hours and rarely shifted from the form of words, and lines of argument used in other seditious libel trials directed against authors and publishers. Perceval undertook a similar role in the prosecution of William Bachelor a book and print seller of Birmingham in July the following year and the texts are very alike.⁵⁹ The copy of *Rights of Man Part 2* used by Perceval during the indictment was a sixpenny edition printed by Symonds of Paternoster Row. It was purchased by an agent working through

Chamberlayne and White's Solicitors on November 29th at the shop of a Mr. Cooper who was also a tea merchant.⁶⁰ The volume at T.S. 24/3/10 reveals how flimsily the four signatures of the book were stitched together.⁶¹ This made it all the easier for the parts to be separated so that several readers could share the book at any one time.

Whilst the prosecutions of radical booksellers created a climate of fear and suspicion and therefore restricted the open sales of the book, it may have had the reverse effect of raising the status of the book and thus generating intense demand. We can also infer from the long list of such prosecutions throughout the decade, that there were many who were prepared to take the risks. Other printers and booksellers who faced prosecution and conviction included James Ridgeway, twice in 1793 & 94 at the Kings Bench (see Fig.51 above); Benjamin Bull in 1794 at the Bath Assizes; James Belcher in 1793 in Birmingham at the Warwickshire Assizes; J.S. Jordan twice in 1792 & 94 in Westminster and Middlesex; Joseph Strapham in 1793 in Staffordshire; Richard Patmore in 1793 in Leicestershire and George Robinson in 1793 in Somerset. The trial papers for each follow an almost precise pattern strongly suggesting tight control from the Lord Chancellor's office over the regional prosecutions.

For historians of reading practices the copy of *Rights of Man* which Perceval used during the Paine trial is remarkable, as the marginalia provides evidence of a hostile reader marking key passages.⁶² We therefore have evidence of how it was read from a particular perspective. For example, on page 26, Perceval marks with a triple strike in the margin, the following passage:

...what is called monarchy, always appears to me a silly, contemptible thing. I compare it to something kept behind a curtain, about which there is a great deal of bustle and fuss, and a wonderful air of seeming solemnity; but when, by any accident, the curtain happens to be open, and the company see what it is, they burst into laughter.⁶³

Such a vivid vignette has echoes of political caricature, offering description combined with ridicule and deploying a complex repertoire of images which became a widely understood visual language.⁶⁴ The curtain represents concealment and hypocrisy. Here Paine conveys his meaning through an image rather than through formal, generalised argument. The sentences are cut into short snippets taking the action forward to a conclusion, inviting the reader or listener to identify with those bursting into laughter. A characteristic ploy of Paine is to belittle rather than magnify implying that the reader possesses higher faculties. The reader is invited to observe the events described along with the author, from a position of moral and intellectual superiority. The lack of a conventional upper case 'm' for 'monarchy' only adds

to the effect. Another example of a passage that attracted Perceval and the Lord Chancellor is to be found heavily marked with a double strike on page 35:

Generally speaking we know of no other creatures that inhabit the earth than man and beast; and in all cases, where only two things offer themselves, and one must be admitted, a negation proved on anyone, amounts to an affirmative on the other; and therefore Mr. Burke, by proving against the rights of man, proves in behalf of the beast; and consequently, proves the government is a beast: and as difficult things sometimes explain each other, we now see the origin of keeping wild beasts in the Tower; for they certainly can be no other use than to show the origin of government. They are in place of a situation. O John Bull, what honour thou hast lost by not being a wild beast. Thou mightiest, on Mr. Burke's system, have been in the Tower for life. ⁶⁵

We can capture elements of the vernacular embedded within the prose; “...*for they certainly can be of no other use than to show the origin of government. They are in place of a situation. O John Bull...*” Such inelegant prose elicited the contempt of the literati but created a vernacular style for democratic political discourse reflecting the importation into Britain of freer, more relaxed public discourse norms from America. Here Paine is connecting the reader's imaginations with the idiom of popular caricature which drew upon a common stock of signifiers such as images of human beasts representing venality in public life.

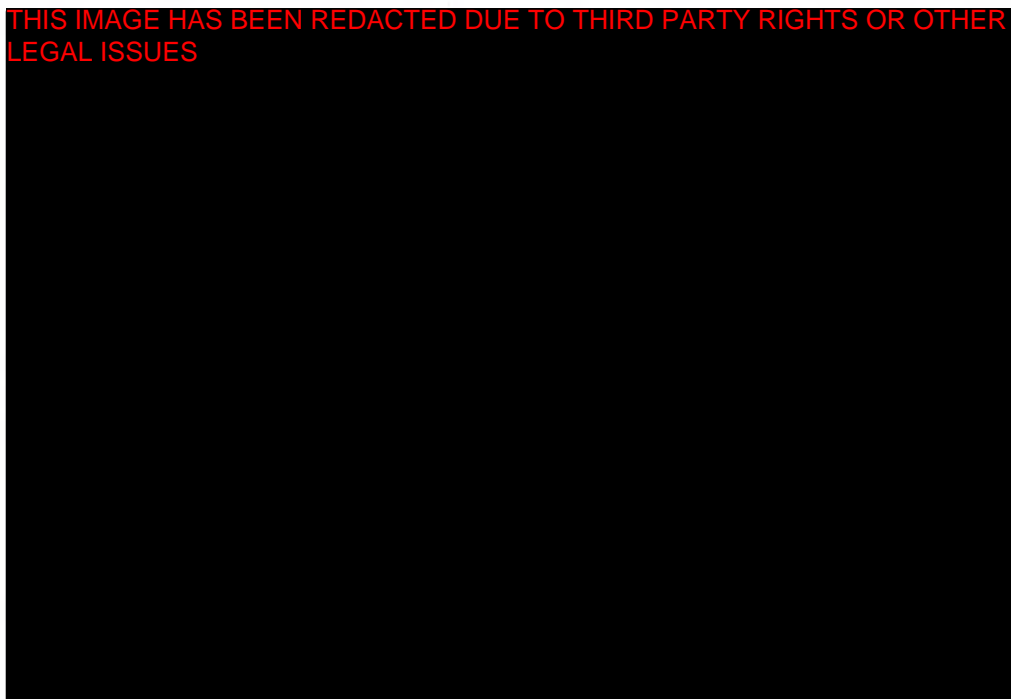


Fig. 52. Market Day, James Gillray. 1788.
Members of the Lords awaiting offers from the highest bidders.

An example of the use of such iconography is Gillray's *Market Day* (Fig. 52) where Members of the House of Lords are shown as cattle at market awaiting offers from bidders. It was this caricaturing and the potential for popularisation that concerned the Crown.

On December 6th 1792, just twelve days before Perceval appeared in the Paine trial, he was one of the leading instigators of a *Declaration of noblemen and gentlemen who assembled at the St. Alban's Tavern*.⁶⁶ They initially issued a single-sided crown folio broadsheet intended for hand-to-hand distribution, pasting up in taverns and meeting rooms, circulating through the post to like-minded associations, reading out in churches and re-publication as reportage in government supporting newspapers. This *Declaration* goes beyond the more common 'address' or 'resolution'. It announces as a public statement of intent to hunt down printers, authors and publishers of seditious publications. Its strength derives from the seniority of the signatories who in effect constitute the Loyalist Association for Westminster. Towards the end of this Declaration they say

.....and particularly, all persons who shall be engaged in any illegal associations or conspiracies for the publication and distribution of such writings, or for the exciting tumult and riot within the said district.⁶⁷

The timing of this broadsheet to coincide with the pending show trial reveals a degree of apprehension concerning the potential for civil riot. These are Pittite Tories coming out in public stating their aim of leading the fight against the new spirit of democratic free-thinking. Given that there was a large majority with radical sympathies within the environs of Westminster amongst the artisan and labouring classes, one can gauge the tension that was generated during this period of war, regicide, economic hardship, social change and political debate. On the other side attempts were made by leaders of the London Corresponding Society to moderate their members' feelings and actions in order not to become victims of the repression. Maurice Margatot, LCS Chairman writing on November 26th 1792 to members urged:

Afterwards let each delegate report to his division the business and let him admit fresh members, communicate fresh intelligence & encourage political discussion or send you such books as may convey the instruction your weaker members may stand in need of but above all ~~Gentlemen~~ be careful to preserve peace and good order among you, let no disputes be carried to excess.⁶⁸

Here we see how the LCS leadership aimed to instil structure into meetings, ideas of delegation and accountability, communication of information and encouragement of "political

discussion” supported by reading. There is a call for “weaker members” to be supported with “instruction”. The strikethrough of ‘*may*’ and ‘*Gentlemen*’ reveal the drafting process that all correspondence went through before being copied by Hardy and sent out to Divisions. The term ‘Gentlemen’ reveals a lack of confidence with use of ‘Citizen’ as a natural form of address. This letter comes from the confiscated correspondence of the LCS and reveals the central educative element within the corresponding societies, very much in contradiction to the publicly stated concerns of the loyalists. Such meetings had the effect of instilling self-worth into members, making them listen to argument, share readings, possibly assist in the instruction of others and learn to speak without carrying arguments to excess. Another key aspect revealed by this letter is the way that corresponding societies sought to establish rational proceedings conducted according to orders and regulations. This is a form of organisationally embodied rationalism standing in contrast to the loosely organised and hierarchically organised loyalist gatherings where followership was what was looked for rather than active participation. Conveniently for the government Margarot, who attended Geneva University, could be portrayed as being a French interloper. He was arrested in 1793 and convicted for treason along with others in Scotland and suffered transportation. His cultured, articulate and educated background represented an ideal within the movement he helped to create and it was such an example that the state was most concerned about.

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Fig. 53. Copenhagen Fields. 1795. By James Gillray. Thelwall speaks to the crowd.

The concern of Pitt's government was not simply that *Rights of Man* had unleashed a spontaneous and widespread following which threatened to tip over into some sort of mass action directed against the State, but that it was seen to mark a further point in consolidating a movement that seemed to have spread beyond the traditional boundaries of constitutional political demands and organisation often caricatured as the eliciting of mob support for a dissenting independent candidate in an election (Fig.53). The active assembly is portrayed for what they were not – a reverse imaging – as a disreputable and low rabble, when the reality was closer to the notion of an attentive and wholly literate audience listening to highly elaborate political deliveries from the lead speakers. The crude defamation would have been apparent to a viewer at the time and would have neutered its political impact, especially as so many amongst the crowd would have been present not because they were members of the LCS or necessarily followers, but simply to witness the proceedings. A sample from Thelwall's speech is worth citing in order to see what the crowd listened to and subsequently read in pamphlet form and then debated in public and private forums:

This alone can satisfy you: nor will you be amused with a sound, and lose the substance. To you less than this is to gain nothing: and without the powerful possession of their rights and the security of this happiness, changes of men and abolition of forms and ceremonies are but changes of tyranny, and transactions of oppression. The essence of liberty is justice and felicity, and without this essence the name is nothing – For what are words? What are sounding syllables?.....It is the substance, then not the word that you are to pursue; and that substance is the happiness, welfare and prosperity of mankind. The universal diffusion of equal rights and equal laws, which smooth the rugged asperities of unequal conditions, and make man, whenever he beholds the form of man, perceive a brother; a friend; - a being, in short, entitled to the same rights with himself, and to the same protection in the enjoyment and maintenance of his opinions.⁶⁹

The change from earlier political parades and gatherings was that the 'mob' started to have books and pamphlets in their pockets and engage in sophisticated debates before assembling. They went of their own volition rather than responding to temptations and bribes. The most chilling aspect of the event for Loyalists, apart from the sheer numbers attending, was the hushed discipline and lack of riotousness. The sense of intent and purpose was palpable. Thelwall's speech typically lasted for a couple of hours. He then repeated it at another station in the field so that more could hear it first-hand. Far from appealing to baser instincts and rabble rousing, Thelwall and other speakers including Thomas Hodgson and John Gale Jones,

were making an appeal to an abstract notion of rights and civil/political involvement. By the date of this speech the presumption is that the audience follow and understand abstract notions because of their background as readers and debaters.

Although grossly caricatured by Gillray, these skilled artisans and labourers were entering into the field of public politics not simply as 'mob' adjuncts to an aristocratic or gentry dissenting voice, such as supporting the Whig candidates in contested bye-elections, but with distinct demands of their own. These demands did not arise solely in response to political controversies and developments but sprung from the experiences of hardship and injustice arising from a changing society.

As we saw earlier, Thomas Spence grew up within a Presbyterian sect in the North East which was imbued with primitive levelling (democratic) ideas. These same levelling ideas were to be an underlying cause of the later split within Methodism (1797) when the New Connection led by Arthur Kilham was established after Wesley's death. Democratic sentiment was not something that was simply intellectual and essentially literary, but was embedded and implicit within various forms of dissent. Central to this was the notion that a person could arrive at a view having made an informed personal choice rather than simply deferring to the viewpoint of whoever he stood in a subordinate relation to, either through employment or through parochial social positioning. It was the coming together of the experience of social injustice and engagement with the autonomous culture of radicalism that triggered transformational commitments to democracy. And herein may lie the reason why Paine rather than, for example, Godwin or Wollstonecraft was to become the representative voice.⁷⁰ Paine ceaselessly interrupts the flow of argument with examples drawn from common experience and common sense, encouraging the hearer or reader to take a view based upon their own understandings. Paine more than anyone had shifted the debate from accusations that the original principles of the 'Glorious Revolution' were being undermined (the classic Whig, constitutionalist position) to one which argued for substantial alterations to that settlement. This is the fault-line dividing Paine from Burke, the Constitutionalists from the Radicals; the Establishment from Dissent.

One example of this shift is with the strike in 1786 of journeymen bookbinders demanding a reduction in hours from fourteen to thirteen per day which was met with imprisonment and suppression of the leaders. But this served only to strengthen personal and family ties and eventually feed into the base support for radical corresponding societies into the 1790s. Had it not been for the active and covert support of many within the printing trades, the substantial output of radical publications would not have been possible, especially when,

in the most extreme circumstances printers and publishers and booksellers had been committed to prison and risked transportation. For this movement to have survived the repression of the 1790s there had to be a layer of loyal operatives, who would subvert the intentions of the magistrates and Lord Chancellor by continuing to print even though their employer was imprisoned and unlikely ever to be able to pay them. In several circumstances the wife simply took over such as in the case of Ridgeway who is shown (Fig.54) sixth from the left wearing a blue jacket in Richard Newton's picture of prisoners.⁷¹ The seeming sociability of the gathering belies the harsh conditions and privations experienced by such men leaving their dependents relying wholly upon charity from well-wishers. Before this print was published the wife of William Holland, Newton's employer, died and soon after an outbreak of gaol fever killed two of the others one of whom was Lord George Gordon shown below centre with long pipe.

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Fig. 54. Richard Newton's 1793 print showing Newgate inmates.

David Worrall⁷² argues that something which can be described as a distinct culture existed at the end of the eighteenth century which was too strong to be broken by legislative and judicial repression. The existence of substantial records of spy reports from around the country

indicates that the Government of Pitt and Dundas was fully aware of this culture even if conservatives found it difficult to understand. Pitt summed up the confusion embedded within establishment and conservative thinking when responding to Parliament on the Report of the Committee of Secrecy in 1794:⁷³

Such language as this, coming from people apparently so contemptible in talents, so mean in their description, and so circumscribed in their power, would, abstractedly considered, be supposed to deserve compassion, as the wildest workings of insanity; but the researches of the committee, would tend to prove, that it had been the result of deep design, matured, moulded into shape, and fit for mischievous effect when opportunity should offer.⁷⁴

The passage reveals the impression that had obviously been made upon ministers by the leading radicals, several of whom had been personally interviewed by the Privy Council meeting in private session. When Pitt talks about “contemptible talents” he is referring to levels of formal education. When referring to people “so mean in their description” he expresses surprise at the low social status of the people who are the objects of government concern. He is frank about the complete lack of influence and importance of such people within the formal, political process. He is struck by their abilities; personal integrity and sense of purpose, but can only view it as the product of conspiracy designed for sedition. Pitt’s opening remark of “Such language as this”, is an implied acknowledgement of the articulacy of the radicals he has encountered personally and read so much about. Worrall asserts that the radicals “preferred speech to writing because the oral mode of textuality was less susceptible to scrutiny by the Government’s surveillance system”.⁷⁵ Whilst agreeing with the obvious point being made about the ease with which written papers could be confiscated and used against the owner or author, the present chapter has shown how this culture of artisan and bourgeois democracy was more complex than this, involving at times a subtle and sophisticated understanding of how to sustain discourses within the public sphere through manipulating the relationship between the written and spoken word. The processes involved in this relation between the written and spoken became highly politicised and leading figures such as Thelwall, Hardy, Eaton, Place, Paine, Spence and many others, despite their meanness of “talents”, were able to sustain the circulation of their ideas during times of extreme government repression made worse by the ‘gagging acts’ of 1795. The Treasonable and Seditious Practices Act included within its definition speaking and writing as proscribable

practices. The bringing of the King or his government into contempt fell under the terms of the Act which remained in place until the Chartist struggles of the late 1840s.

The Seditious Meetings Act, required authorisation by local magistrates of all meetings above fifty persons and local justices were given powers to forcibly disperse any gathering. Some argued that the Act was specifically targeted to halt the highly popular lectures of Thelwall in The Strand as any venues where such talks were to be presented had to be licensed beforehand by magistrates. It became a capital offence to resist any attempt by the authorities to disperse such a gathering. William Pitt's view was clear, anyone who encouraged labourers and artisans "to frequent deliberations on public affairs, who, of all men, by education and habits of life, and means of information, were least capable of exercising a sound judgement on such subjects, and who are most likely to be improved upon by others", were guilty of seditious practices. Education of self-taught commoners by their own teachers was against the law.

In order to illustrate how the radicals managed to maintain their presence within the public sphere under such difficult circumstances there follows a specific instance drawn from a year after Pitt's statement in Parliament cited above, and the passing of the 'gag' Acts.

Surviving repression

On Wednesday January 20th 1796, the London *Morning Chronicle*, number 8,180 (Fig. 55) was delivered to hundreds of taverns, clubs and coffee houses. Additionally hawkers would buy discounted copies for sale in the streets and booksellers might have copies available for sale to private customers. A few amongst the prosperous might even have a personal copy delivered to their door. As was usual, the first and last pages were filled with private advertisements, whilst the news contents were crammed inside. The reason for this arrangement was that advertising deadlines were a day earlier than news deadlines allowing one side of the single sheet to be printed and dried the day before the other side of the Crown sheet – a necessity when printing on rag-based wove paper.⁷⁶ This still relatively new form of communication, had the effect of bringing essentially private issues into the public domain – disembodied from the individuals who had paid for the advertisement. The transference from the private to the public domain was therefore facilitated through a commercial exchange. Through this medium a market was created that was wider than that which could be afforded through immediate proximity and direct appeal. Although such paid advertisements, which also attracted a hefty stamp duty, were for the most part commercial, it became apparent as

the century moved forward, that such a space could be appropriated for other purposes of a personal or political nature. Thus the lines between commercially motivated advertisements and reportage of events became somewhat blurred as the two intersected and overlapped. This combination was typical of political meetings which were often very expensive to organise for the sponsors. Yet the costs were worthwhile because of the way that the event would subsequently be reported and circulated through newsprint.

One example of this intersecting and overlapping of interests lies amidst the notices on the front page of the January 20th edition where there is an announcement from The London Corresponding Society who declared their committee room to be in the Beaufort Buildings on the Strand, the same location as Thelwall's lectures. The LCS notice is headlined 'TO THE BRITISH NATION' and directed to 'FELLOW CITIZENS'. Despite the witch-hunt by the government against radicals and the intense levels of intimidation directed towards advocates of democratic reform, the *Chronicle* appears to be quite happy not only to accept the notice but to place it in the most prominent position at the top of the page in the third column. This was a London newspaper and many of its readers would have been constitutional democrats and radicals. The notice is signed by John Ashley, LCS Secretary and Alex Gallaway the Assistant Secretary. It is worth quoting in full:

We are persuaded that no apology is necessary for calling your attention to the situation of J. Smith, G. Higgins, and P.J. Lemaitre in consequence of the accusations alledged against them, in September, 1794, which accusations have since been generally denominated the POP-GUN PLOT, the Grand Jury of Middlesex, on Thursday last, found a true bill against them for high Treason. In acknowledging our astonishment at this circumstance, we earnestly hope we shall not be understood as insinuating any thing disrespectful of the grand jury; the nature of that institution seldom affords the means of hearing any other evidence than what tends to support accusation. Our chief purpose is to state that, conscious of their innocence, the parties above-mentioned immediately surrendered themselves for trial. We are highly sensible that the present period is so replete with calamity, that few, very few, can with perfect convenience to themselves contribute materially to relieve the distress of others; but when small deductions are made from the income of many, the effect on the wants of a few must be sensibly felt. Of the persons above-mentioned two have Wives and Children dependent on their daily exertions for their support, and the third has relatives equally subject to those distresses which these trying circumstances must produce.

It was in behalf of those innocent and nearly helpless characters, that we solicited and received the assistance of an enlightened and generous public, during the former imprisonment of these men, which was protracted for eight months, and in which their particular sufferings are detailed in two pamphlets sold at the house of John Smith, No. 1, Portsmouth Street, Lincoln's Inn Fields.

Contributions in favour of the families of the above-mentioned, are received by the following persons.

John Ashley, Shoemaker, No. 6. Fisher-Street, Red Lion-Square;
Thomas Hardy. Ditto, Tavistock-Street, Covent Garden;
F. Dowling, Truss-maker, No. 24, New-Street, ditto;
John Thelwall, No. 2, Beaufort Buildings, Strand,
Christopher Cooper, Grocer, No. 67 New Compton-Street, Soho;
J. Powell, Baker, Goodge-Street, Tottenham Court-Road;
J. G. Ballard, Bookseller, No. 4 May's Buildings, Covent-garden;
D. I. Eaton, No. 74, Newgate Street;
Thomas Hartley, Shoemaker, No. 4. Prospect-place, St. George's -fields;
J. P. Phelps, Bookseller, Angel-street, Saint Martin's le grand;
John Philip-franklow, Taylor, No. 6, Pitt-street, Blackfriars-road; and
At the Telegraph Office, No. 159 Fleet-street.⁷⁷

This public declaration serves a number of purposes which are worth examining in detail. By placing the piece so prominently as an advertisement in the *Chronicle*, the LCS committee is ensuring not only that many thousands will read it but that the subject it deals with will be discussed in hundreds of coffee houses and taverns. This strategic placement of politically motivated material which is framed as an advertisement is designed to maximise a sense of public presence with the least amount of effort – a far cry from the mass open-air rallies of the previous year which by 1796 had become impossible to stage because of proscription. The newspaper is here being used as a medium for rapid transmission of a viewpoint whilst also serving at the same time to maintain the presence of the LCS within public discussion.

Many of the readers would be familiar not only with the names of the signatories, but with the persons themselves having encountered them in the flesh at meetings or passing in the street. Their addresses would be recognisable to many readers. One example of this familiarity is the lack of a need to even mention the occupation of Daniel Isaac Eaton, the printer who had endured imprisonment on treason charges only to be released to jubilant acclaim in 1794 although at considerable personal cost. The signatories resided and worked in the central London area in which this newspaper principally circulated and by mentioning their trades they are making a declaration of their social status and position. With the exception of Thelwall, who does not feel the need to mention his trade – that of lecturing – the others are all resolutely artisanal – making and mending and using their tools and hands. The situation described within the notice was a cause celebre within radical circles which, as with other cases of politically motivated arrests and extended detentions, threatened penury and suffering for dependents. Habeas Corpus had been suspended thus allowing the Judiciary to remove someone without charge from their liberties, essentially confiscating both their private and public presences. Several of the signatories had suffered from such repressive detention, so their appeal would have a genuine authenticity to it. It is clear that the anonymous

subscribers who are mentioned managed to provide significant assistance although further aid is still sought.



Fig. 55. Morning Chronicle front page advertising and notices.

Yet the full significance of the placement only arises when set alongside the items which appear next to it in the Wednesday edition. These are two celebratory events due to be held on the following Monday in recognition of ‘Mr. Fox’s Birthday’. The Whig constitutionalists, led by the Duke of Bedford and Thomas Erskine including five Earls, three Members of the Lords and assorted Aldermen and Members of Parliament, are proposing to have two highly

publicised feasts due to be held at the London Tavern and the Crown and Anchor, where tickets cost eight shillings apiece.

The social class divide between the London Corresponding Society (LCS) piece and the 'public' face of the aristocratic constitutionalists is made apparent. Events such as those being proclaimed were notoriously debauched and part of the public parade of indulgence and ostentation of the aristocratic elite and their social and political entourages. The statement within the LCS notice that "We are highly sensible that the present period is so replete with calamity, that few, very few, can with perfect convenience to themselves contribute materially to relieve the distress of others", establishes an acute contrast with the impending gluttony to be publicly staged at two very famous political venues. By the end of the century the older, aristocratic forms of public display and transgression were no longer serving as social sites for cross-class revelry and controlled disorder. Instead, they were beginning to assume specific class characteristics which the leaders of new political movements dissociated themselves from, often adopting consciously moderate and self-denying personal lives.

Here we can see in microcosm an example from 1796 of this tendency, with people like Thelwall (almost certainly the author of this notice) and Hardy, identifying their movement with the human suffering of their artisanal colleagues, fellow residents and social class compatriots and offering a vision of collective benevolence to address immediate needs. The LCS is using print in order to trigger debate. The form of the intervention into the public sphere emphasises the declining ability of the Foxite Whigs to be able to claim to speak for the interests of the artisan class and for democratic reform. By placing the piece as an advertisement, the LCS is making a public notice and by appending personal addresses is defying the threat of State-sponsored intimidation which the signatories would have faced on a daily basis. Whilst Worrall (1992) might be correct in suggesting a preference for oral forms of exchange, here we can see how identifiable radicals, who would have enjoyed a high public profile and who were very recognised at the time, could achieve much wider circulation of political viewpoints through the medium of newsprint and advertising. As we saw in chapter 5, the reception and consumption of reading matter of this type in coffee houses and inns, was a social rather than individual experience and it was not until later in the following century that the habit of purchasing newsprint for private and personal consumption came about.⁷⁸ The other feature of the advertisement is that despite severe repressive measures, the democrats continued to exist. Their cause and more importantly, their social and cultural base had become a fixed part of the political scene. It was from amongst these self-taught artisans and labourers who made up this cultural world, that the leaders of co-operatives, trade unions and

Chartists emerged, ensuring that right through to the late 1840s, *Rights of Man* continued to be read as a foundational work.

The same newspaper offers insights into other facets of the prevailing culture through the type of advertisements it contains. For example, John Lackington whose book emporium in Finsbury Square was called the ‘Temple of the Muses’ announced a revised and updated catalogue for the coming year containing 200,000 “volumes of scarce, valuable and useful books in almost every Language and class of learning, recently purchased in various parts of Europe”.⁷⁹ This advertisement shows that reading and book ownership had moved on considerably from the days when it was the sole preserve of the clergy and gentry, principally due to the high cost of individual volumes.

The resilience of the literate culture that had been growing throughout the century relied not only upon the doggedness and bravery of its leading voices and publishers. Had this been the case, the state repression directed towards radical publications, publishers and representatives might have succeeded permanently. But it failed to achieve its avowed aims. This was because the public institutions of the tavern, workshop, chapel, philosophical society book-shop and coffee house were too thoroughly embedded into the social and cultural fabric to be repressed. The public sphere had ceased to be an aspiration or potential space – embodied within a number of meeting places. Instead, by the end of the century social sites such as coffee houses had become the dominant social forum engaging hundreds of thousands in social exchange on a daily basis, rendering other spaces such as the theatre less significant in terms of direct impact upon people’s lives. The symbiosis that existed between tavern, chop and coffee houses and the newsprint industry was almost complete, so attempts by Government to repress open, democratic debate would have necessitated the closure of such places, something which James II had failed to achieve in the early years of the growth of these social spaces.

It was at this point that conservative Anglicans started to listen to the arguments from voices such as Hannah More and Sarah Trimmer that it was necessary to support the schooling of the children of the poor in “due subordination” and thus rescue them and the society from the consequences of receiving their instruction from infidel teachers.⁸⁰ By that time the spread of committed, public literacy practices had become embedded into all layers of the population, particularly so within urban centres. This process was not the product of the extraordinary political circumstances of the 1790s but rather of much deeper processes which exerted cross-generational influences right through the eighteenth century. It was self-taught artisans and labourers in the main, who dominated the proto-labour movement organisations

which consolidated themselves in the first three decades of the following century, often allied with self-educated artisan proprietors and businessmen. These people were not the product of improved access to and quality of schooling but were rather the products of an embedded culture of self-directed learning which had been spreading for three generations. The story of the education of the common people and the growth of literacy therefore begins in the eighteenth century rather than in the period following state grants in aid for school building.

This chapter has shown that despite concerted action by the state to suppress democratic and radical publication, reading, printing, meeting, organization and teaching, the social movement towards self-education and expression consolidated during the last decade of the century and contributed towards the formation of a distinct class consciousness. We can only begin to appreciate the long-term significance of this social movement when it is seen as primarily an educational movement. It was this that was to endure even when its political strength was to wane.

¹ See Raymond Williams' discussion of 'Class' in *Keywords*, 1976. pp. 60-68.

² Anon. Probably J. Bowles (1792) *Dialogues on the Rights of Britons Between a Farmer, Sailor and a Manufacturer*, Longman.

³ Ellis, K (1958) *Post Office in the Eighteenth Century*, Oxford. This is an extended administrative and organisational history tracing the way that a relatively small department established during the Restoration expanded into one of the most significant facilitators of Britain's rapid economic and cultural expansion. Ellis shows how postal history most certainly did not begin in the 1840s with the Penny Post.

⁴ Using the Eighteenth Century Catalogue Online database (Accessed May 25th 2009).

⁵ Smith, O (1984) *The Politics of Language*, Oxford.

⁶ Louis XVI was guillotined on October 16th 1793. This event more than any other, fixed the British Government's attitudes towards the spread of democratically infused working class public literacy.

⁷ Cited in Smith, O (1984) p 46. Italicised as in the original.

⁸ For example, I. Thomas and E.T. Andrews published a third edition in Boston in 1791. Paine released the text before its first publication in expectation of substantial public demand.

⁹ Paine, T (1776) *Common Sense, Addressed to the Inhabitants of America...* Philadelphia, sold by R.Bell.

¹⁰ A recent hagiographical treatment is that by Craig Nelson, (2006) *Thomas Paine, Enlightenment, Revolution and the Birth of Modern Nations*, Viking. Nelson sets out to include Paine in the pantheon of "Americas' founding fathers". A popular fictional rendition of this theme is Howard Fast's 1943 *Citizen Tom Paine*, Duell, Sloan and Pearce, New York.

¹¹ Keane, J (1995) pp 110-111.

¹² Keane, p. 112.

¹³ Corner G.W (ed) (1948) *The Autobiography of Benjamin Rush*, pp 114-15.

¹⁴ Smith, O (1984) p 36.

¹⁵ Paine, T (1776) *Common Sense: Addressed to the Inhabitants of America..* Philadelphia, sold by R.Bell. p.8.

¹⁶ Burke, Edmund (1790) *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, London.

¹⁷ Burke, *ibid.* p. 17. 2nd Ed. Printed for J. Dodsley

¹⁸ For example see Locke's, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education Addressed to a Friend.*

¹⁹ For a discussion about the contribution of Tyndale to the King James Bible see Nicholson, A. (2003) *Power and Glory*. Harper Collins. pp. 221-5.

²⁰ One example of this is communities characterized by networks of inter-related families as revealed in most parish registers of the period.

²¹ Ashton, T (1758) *A Sermon Preached at the Parish Church of St. Botolph Without Bishopsgate, on Friday, Feb. 17, 1758. Being the Day Appointed by Proclamation for a General Fast*. London, T. Waller.

²² For mass circulation amongst soldiers and sailors see p 307, Keane, J. (1996).

- ²³ O’Gorman, Frank (2006) *Past & Present*, No 193. ‘The Paine Burnings of 1792-1793’, pp 138-141 describes the relations between local clergy and gentlemen and the use of inducements to participation.
- ²⁴ Clay, Richard (2008) ‘Riotous Images : Representations of Joseph Priestley in British Prints During the French Revolution’, pp. 584-604, *History of Education*. Vol. 37, Issue 4.
- ²⁵ Evans, Chris (2006) *Debating the Revolution*. I.B. Tauris. p.56. Barrell, John (2006) *The Spirit of Despotism*, Oxford. pp 2/3, Macoby, S (1955) *English Radicalism 1786-1832*, p. 55/6.
- ²⁶ Feather, John (1988) *A History of Publishing*, Routledge, Chapter 7, pp 84-105. Feather shows how the State gradually ceded control over printing and publishing to commercial interests with developments during the eighteenth century laying a basis for the eventual commercialization of key aspects of the public sphere.
- ²⁷ When using the term ‘state’ this embraces the Anglican Church, the courts, the military, magistracy, crown and so on. The term is not used only to refer to ‘the Government’. Smith, Olivia, page 74, highlights the dilemma of conservatives who strove for subordination of commoners addressing such a message to active readers.
- ²⁸ Irish rebellion was fomenting, urban unrest widespread in Scotland and organized radical activity taking place everywhere across England and Wales whilst the country was at war with France.
- ²⁹ Gregory, J. & Stevenson J (2000) *Britain in the Eighteenth Century 1688-1820*, Longman. p 287.
- ³⁰ Collections of correspondence are in the H.O. 44 series containing the letters received by the Home Secretary.
- ³¹ The full name of the organisation was The Association for the Preservation of Liberty and Property Against Republicanism and Levellers. Gregory Claeys provides an account of the organization in *Thomas Paine, Social and Political Thought*, 1989, Unwin Hyman, London.
- ³² See the section ‘Remarks on the Type of Representative Publicness’, Habermas (1989) pp 5-14.
- ³³ Habermas J (1989) *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. Chapter 1; 2, ‘Remarks on the Type of Representative Publicness’, pp 5-14.
- ³⁴ One common use of the term ‘bully’ during the eighteenth century was a protector of a prostitute, distinct from the pimp who managed her affairs, but someone who, if called upon, would use violence against a client.
- ³⁵ From the advertisement of volume five. *The Works of Hannah More, in Eight Volumes; including several pieces never before published. Vol. V. “Tales for the Common People.”* London. Printed by A. Strachan for T.Cadell Jun and W. Davis (1801).
- ³⁶ At the age of 24 William Pitt became Prime Minister in 1783 and held office until 1801. He briefly returned for a second administration between 1804-06. Claeys, G (1995) *Political Writings of the 1790s* 8 Vols. PickeringChatto, provides a selection of a hundred publications from the period drawn from both radical and loyalist sources. In a companion edition, John Barrell and John Mee, have edited the *Trials for Treason and Sedition, 1792-94*, 8 Vols, PickeringChatto.
- ³⁷ National Archives. H.O. 102 series. Cowan, S. (2004) ‘Introducing New Sources of Evidence in the History of Reading’. pp 80-85 *Educate*, Vol. 4/2.
- ³⁸ National Archives. T.S. 24/2. ‘T’ indicates the Treasury Solicitor’s Department.
- ³⁹ T.S. 24/2. Collection of letters received by the solicitors acting for the Treasury Solicitors Lincolns Inn fields
- ⁴⁰ T.S. 24/2/4. Written 8th December 1792
- ⁴¹ T.S. 24/2/4.
- ⁴² T.S. 24/2/4.
- ⁴³ Defoe, D. (1738) 2nd Ed. 3 vols. *A Tour Through the Whole Island of Great Britain*, London.
- ⁴⁴ Following W.B. Stephens’ (1987) conclusion. See Chapter 3.
- ⁴⁵ T.S. 24/2/9. Written 9th December 1792.
- ⁴⁶ T.S.24/2/10 Care has been taken to retain original punctuation. Written 9th December 1792
- ⁴⁷ Op. cit. Defoe. Ist. Vol.
- ⁴⁸ Berry, A. (2004) *Early Eighteenth Century Sudbury*, Colchester. p. 28
- ⁴⁹ T.S. 24/2/18. Written Dec. 16th 1792.
- ⁵⁰ T.S. 24/2/18.
- ⁵¹ T.S. 24/2/18.
- ⁵² Piggott, Charles (1792) *The Jockey Club; or a sketch of the manners of the age*, H.D. Symonds, London. Possibly, the publication that excited the most offence within government circles, as it publicly ridiculed identifiable characters from a republican viewpoint. The 7th edition is used here, significantly published in 1792 by Symonds who went to Newgate along with other Radicals of the time. See Parolin, C (2010) *Radical spaces: Venues of popular politics in London 1790-1845*, Australian National University, Ch.1 pp 17-41.
- ⁵³ Gurney, J (1792) *The whole proceedings on the trial of an information exhibited ex officio by the King's Attorney-General against Thomas Paine for a libel upon the Revolution and settlement of the Crown and regal government as by law established; ... Tried by a special jury in the Court of King's Bench, Guildhall, on Tuesday, the 18th of December, 1792. ... Taken in short-hand by Joseph Gurney.*

⁵⁴ On 20 May 1792 Fox had managed to secure support for his Libel Bill thus ensuring that juries in trials for seditious libel could hear both the facts of the case and then decide upon the law. Previously, they could only pass judgement on whether the alleged act of publishing was done by the accused. It was the judge and not the jury who decided on the question of sedition. This historic victory for Fox ensured that many radical publishers were acquitted during the period of reaction that was to come.

⁵⁵ For a detailed, chronological account of the loyalist organisations see Dozier, R (1983) *For King and Country*.

⁵⁶ For example, in the published speech that Thelwall made at Copenhagen Fields in November 1795 he argues that violence belongs to the other side.

⁵⁷ From the Treasury Solicitors files at the National Archives, T.S. 24. 9. 5. Due to the predations of historians these documents are now on restricted access only.

⁵⁸ Printed by Longman, for G. Nicol of Pall Mall, who was the supplier of books to the King and W. Richardson whose bookshop was at the Royal Exchange, 1792, price One Shilling. *A Protest Against T. Paine's "Rights of Man" addressed to the Members of the Book Society of -----*. The aim is for loyalists to take the arguments into their own local book subscription libraries and to seek to pass resolutions against purchasing radical titles.

⁵⁹ T.S. 11/578/1793. Throughout July a series of identikit charges were brought against printers, with Perceval leading for the prosecution. The case papers for several of these trials are located at T.S. 11.

⁶⁰ T.S. 24/3/10

⁶¹ For a useful definition and description of technical bibliographical terms see Carter, J. (1952) *ABC for Book Collectors*, Hart Davis, pp 61-63 & 182/83.

⁶² T.S. 24/3/10. This copy is marked on the front page in ink as being bought on 29th November 1792 "at the shop of Mr. Cooper, tea dealer". on page 19 for example there is heavy underlining of seven lines of print with a large inked bracket and three margin lines to highlight the significance of the identified passage.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Wood, M (1994) *Radical Satire and Print Culture 1790-1822*, Oxford, Chapter 2 focuses on Eaton and Spence, radical publishers who developed modes of subversion of the dominant form.

⁶⁵ For several centuries there was a royal menagerie of imported wild animals at the Tower of London. A copy of *Rights of Man* located at T.S. 24/3/10 has been used.

⁶⁶ There is a valuable collection of political publications in the Kress collection of the Sterling Library in Senate House, University of London. The material is accessible on microfilm, reel 1512, Numbers 15425-15473.

⁶⁷ Ibid. *Declaration of noblemen and gentlemen who assembled at the St. Alban's Tavern*.

⁶⁸ The letter is dated November 26th 1792 and is found Home Secretary's files for that date. At the National Archives these are prefixed with 'H.O.'

⁶⁹ Thelwall, John (1795) *Speech delivered at Copenhagen Fields*. London.

⁷⁰ Wollstonecraft's riposte to Burke's *Reflections, Vindication of the Rights of Men, in a Letter to the Right Honourable Edmund Burke, Occasioned by His Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) was the first response. Paine probably took the idea for his title from Wollstonecraft's earlier book.

⁷¹ Alexander, D (1998) *Richard Newton and English Caricature in the 1790s*, Manchester University.

⁷² Worrall, D (1992) *Radical Culture: Discourse, Resistance and Surveillance, 1790-1820*, Harvester.

⁷³ Drawn from the *Parliamentary Debates, Vol xxxi*. p 502. Edited by Cobbett.

⁷⁴ Cited in Smith, O (1984) *The Politics of Language: 1791-1819*. p 65. Clarendon.

⁷⁵ Worrall (1992) p 5.

⁷⁶ A Crown sheet was the size between Royal and Imperial.

⁷⁷ *Morning Chronicle*, January 20th 1796. Wednesday, Number 8, 180.

⁷⁸ Francis Place spearheaded agitation amongst the middle classes culminating in the reduction to 1d of the Stamp on newspapers in 1836. The Stamp was finally abolished as late as 1855. A characteristic of working-class attitudes towards the issue was to defend the unstamped press which by the late 1830s could lay claim to four decades of service to the movement. Place was later to become an outspoken opponent of the independent unstamped press, making him an unpopular figure amongst activists within the working class movement.

⁷⁹ See Lackington's colourful autobiography, (1792) *Memoirs of the first forty five years of the life of James Lackington bookseller*, London. Lackington's first published catalogue of 1784 ran to 181 pages. He made his name by refusing credit to anyone regardless of social rank and thus changed the gentlemen's arrangement for credit within the book trade. This marks the arrival of the urban bourgeoisie as the main customer rather than the rural, gentry collector, a decisive shift in the social class of readership. Lackington pioneered the re-sale of remainders at discounted prices.

⁸⁰ For a positive evaluation of the purpose underlying Sarah Trimmer's *Plan of Appropriate Instruction* (1792) see Pauline Heath's article, (2003) 'Mrs. Trimmer's plan of appropriate instruction: a revisionist view of her textbooks'. *History of Education* Vol 32. No 4.

Chapter 7. Conclusion.

There dwelt a Shepherd, Michael was his name;
An old man, stout of heart, and strong of limb.
His bodily frame had been from youth to age
Of an unusual strength: his mind was keen,
Intense, and frugal, apt for all affairs,
And in his shepherd's calling he was prompt
And watchful more than ordinary men.
Hence had he learned the meaning of all winds,
Of blasts of every tone; and, oftentimes,
When others heeded not, He heard the South
Make subterraneous music, like the noise
Of bagpipers on distant Highland hills.¹

When Wordsworth sat and gazed at Michael, a lone shepherd tending his flock, he missed the likelihood that he was also reading cheap versions of *Rights of Man* alongside Hannah More's *Cheap Repository Tracts* (Fig. 56). The image of intelligence, of having a 'keen' mind was a familiar one for skilled workers like shepherds, but in revolutionary times many commentators felt more comfortable with mythologized pastorals, such as we read above in Wordsworth's poem '*Michael*'. One way of reading the romanticized pastoral turn of Wordsworth is as an attempt to rediscover a lost authenticity of character among commoners in response to evident challenges to traditional notions of behaviour and social relations. By the time '*Michael*' was written most shepherds had no option but to undertake a number of other jobs in order to make ends meet. Many took work in non-agricultural sectors thus bringing them into contact with artisans and labourers. The 'bagpipers of distant hills' were more likely making the sound of discontent as many who remained in rural areas, suffered poverty and physical hardship. Displaced shepherds entered an urban environment in which, citing Montesquieu, "the very slaters had the newspapers brought to the roofs of the houses on which they were working, that they might read".² This study has argued that the process of transformation was an extensive one, stretching throughout the long eighteenth century.³ The participation of commoners in public affairs was premised upon their being able to acquire the means with which to do this, namely public literacy. A common reader was likely to be shaped by contrasting and conflicting influences such was the variety of printed matter available to him or her.

A history of literacy during the eighteenth century needs to be sensitive to the modes of communication prevailing during the period. It has been shown that public literacy practices

were particularly attuned to the inter-relationship between oral and aural, with reading, rather than writing, acting as the main marker for someone being able to participate fully in wider, cultural affairs. The modern notions of literacy connoting reading with writing are the product of a later period.

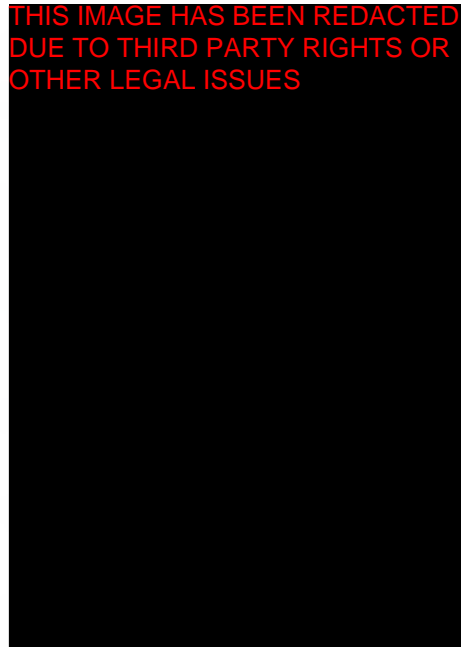


Fig. 56. The Shepherd of Salisbury Plain. Hannah More. 1795

This study has stressed the importance of focussing upon the experience of being involved with public communicative practices and has argued that there exists a rich source base for such investigation. Earlier chapters have explored both how and why people came to be readers and revealed some of the reasons why they came to use their acquired public literacy. The history of literacy therefore lies not only in measurable trends but also in reclaiming the sensibilities of people who very often are excluded from historical accounts, the commoners.

Despite always seeking to reflect the integrity of the subjects who are the focus of the research and discussion, it was argued that the rise of a public literacy was a broad social movement. Social sites grew which offered significant space in which commoners could participate. While people were able to make choices in a freer political and cultural climate, they nevertheless were shaped by new ways of meeting, discussing, listening and exchanging. The lifeworld of most commoners was enriched by a substantial, shared, orally-based heritage which was social in orientation rather than private and personal. If an individual could not personally read, this did not necessarily mean that they would be cut off from active participation in literate culture as hybrid forms developed and became accessible, like the

ballad sheet and chap-book which were often read socially or transmitted verbatim orally when committed to memory. Leslie Shepard reproduces a 1689 publisher's list of available ballads for purchase by chapmen issued by William Thackery of Duck Lane in London, which has almost 300 different ballad sheets and 65 "small merry books".⁴ Adam Fox and Robin Ganev have shown how rich this orate/literate cultural heritage could be where repetitive reading and hearing could lead to people holding a large store of lore in their memories.⁵ This leads us to revise views that perceive non-literate individuals as somehow being affected by an educational deficit. Thomas Coram and James Brindley are examples of individuals who acquired certain elements only of formal literacy and much later than many, but they were nevertheless able to draw from traditional orate cultural practices to sustain their social and commercial activities. The nexus of communicative practices that existed was diverse and complex, allowing people to exchange ideas and feelings in ways that were every bit as sophisticated as later literate-based modes. The point is to stress that they were different. One example of such a difference is the tendency towards shared, social practices in orate-based cultures and towards private, individual practices in literate-based cultures.

Hogarth depicts market butchers, brewers and fishwomen engaged as readers with varied types of publications. This new public arena gave birth to new forms like magazines, periodicals, novels, newspapers alongside a highly differentiated market for readers so we saw how within a few years a book such as *Robinson Crusoe* would be available in many different formats depending upon the type of reader being targeted. We also saw that much of the chap-book publication was linguistically adventurous and was far more sophisticated than many historians have given credit. This popular sub-literature was often the inspiration for common readers to pursue their reading and studies further.

During the eighteenth century there were several concurrent movements of large numbers of people; from the British Isles to the colonies across the Atlantic; from village to town; from the north to the south; from provinces to the metropolis, from the land to service and manufacturing. Accompanying such social and geographical movements was a need to survive the uncertainties of a future life free of the parochial restraints. The acquisition of reading and often writing helped people to secure employment and to traverse social class boundaries. Thomas Holcroft was a case in point, journeying from itinerant hawker to famous dramatist.

Although many commoners benefitted from only brief periods of formal schooling it often provided a secure basis for future development of literacy. This was shown in the case

of Thomas Pellow and Thomas Spence, for whom periods of formal schooling played a foundational role in their lives even if it did not last for many years. The thesis argues that note should be taken especially of what happened after schooling, such as the learning process that Pellow had to undergo in order to survive in Morocco, or the apprenticeship that Spence followed which equipped him with generic skills and abilities that could be transferred to other activities. By using examples drawn from Cornwall, Scotland, Northumbria and the Midlands the thesis shows how people were able to participate in a growing, shared, common culture of print.

Out of this social movement, a less formal, more flexible spoken and written English emerged which became, by the end of the century, the dominant medium for international trade and finance. The growing cities, London especially, were spaces in which hundreds of thousands of people moved and lived and where the traditional familiarities of the rural village, town or estate had been replaced by looser, less determining ties. The city was essentially a space where people were freed and could sense their individuality. The population in urban centres swelled at certain times of the year and many amongst its throng still had one foot in the provinces and the other in the city. The city acted as a magnet for those with wealth and this concentrated large numbers of servants, artisans and traders of goods and services. The city was also either a regional hub or, in the case of London a national and international centre for trade, so to be part of it, to sense a belonging, was to assume unto oneself a sense of the importance of the affairs that took place within its bounds. Cities like Bristol and Liverpool also developed distinct characters arising from their connections with colonies. Young people with initiative and talent invariably would be attracted to the city where a wider range of life opportunities presented themselves. This reinforced the extent to which literacy became a characteristic of the urban, rather than rural setting. As survival was so often a matter of participating in business or of appearing respectable to a potential employer, the ability to read and write, such as for a male servant in a bourgeois household, was a distinct advantage. The social culture that developed in the city was centred around commerce, politics, international events and the activities of prominent people. At its heart was a range of literate practices, most especially the reading of periodicals and newspapers. The extent of this activity was one of the most striking national characteristics for foreign commentators. This took place principally in coffee houses and other spaces, like theatres, assembly rooms, galleries and local societies.

In addition there were powerful traditions of literacy amongst dissenting families which meant that a substantial section of the population could be active participants within this emerging culture. The extent of these practices was such that an entirely new sphere developed which challenged and in some instances superseded the authority and monopoly of institutions like the church, government, the crown and the court to act as arbiters of knowledge, and taste. With the expansion of British communities in the thirteen colonies, the open public sphere expanded even more rapidly and the politics of this development began to interact back into Britain. The open public sphere was socially promiscuous and available to anyone who was within reach of the mail system.

Although short-lived as formally effective organisations, the Corresponding Societies of the 1790s built upon the generational experiences of the democratic coffee-house culture and drew from the culture of self-directed learning. Their members were the antithesis of the boorish libertinism that characterised so much of ‘traditional’ urban English culture and which Vic Gattrell and Dan Cruickshank have so meticulously recorded.⁶ These radical associations were the prototype of later, ‘popular’ political organisations and the first form of self-organisation for sections of the working classes. What took place within Corresponding Society meetings set a style for subsequent conduct within Co-operatives and Trade Unions, and the connections they had with locally-based lecture halls emphasised their primary educational purpose. These societies were closely associated with radical printers, publishers, booksellers, lecturers and authors whose activities further connected the Corresponding Society members with literate practices. We are able to speak about a politics of literacy when examining these organisations and recognise their specifically educative character. They attracted the most repressive legislation that any government in Britain in the modern era has passed through Parliament, suggesting that, at least from the perspective of Church and Crown loyalists, there was real substance to their aims of transforming the basis upon which the society operated, through a process of widespread education, so that the weight of right reason might prevail. It has been argued that these organisations deserve reassessment as significant influences upon literacy of commoners both during the time they existed and into the following decades.

The last major study of education in Britain during the eighteenth century was published nearly sixty years ago. Hopefully this thesis has suggested possibilities for a further reconsideration of literacy and education in its broadest sense throughout this period and laid a basis for taking forward the pioneering work of Nicolas Hans. There might well be three

studies that could be developed from the present thesis. The first is an overview of education and learning during the eighteenth century in Britain designed to offer a vision of an expanding nation which required ever increasing supplies of literate and educated people equipped to staff changing social and economic realities. This would focus upon Britain as it then was, and thus include for much of the century, the thirteen colonies. A second project would be a focussed study of changing literacy practices during the same period, particularly tracing the emergence of new forms of social communication, often rooted in older oral and aural traditions and practice. Finally, a third project would be an expansion of chapter five of the present study to include additionally, figures like the Thomases Paine, Bewick, Beddoes, Rowlandson, Chatterton and Newcomen. The purpose of further research and enquiry would be to demonstrate the wide range of ways and means of acquiring various forms of education and literacy, spanning all social class backgrounds during this period and emphasise the point that one of the main characteristics of society in Britain during the long eighteenth century was its capacity to foster education and learning.

¹ First published in Wordsworth and Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads*, 1798. This is taken from an 1800 edition.

² Montesquieu's *Notes sur Angleterre*. Cited in Barker, (1998) Translation available, I. Stewart (2002) University of Oxford

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⁴ Shepard, L. (1969) *John Pitts: Ballad Printer of Seven Dials, London 1765-1844*. Public Libraries Association, London.

⁵ Fox, Adam. (2000) *Oral and Literate Culture in England, 1500-1700*. Oxford. Ganev, Robert. (2009) *Songs of protest, songs of love*. Manchester Univ. Press.

⁶ Gatrell, Vic. (2006) *City of Laughter*. Atlantic Books. Also, Cruickshank, D. (2009) *The Secret History of Georgian London*. Random House, pp. 126-139, for a view on the commercial value of the sex industry in London.

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2. ECCO. Online digitised archive. Gale/Cengage (registered UK office, Andover, Hampshire).

3. JSTOR. For journals from 19th century onwards I have used the journal storage data-based JSTOR. Originally published through Anne Arbour, Michigan. Since 2009 it has merged with Ithaka.

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HO 44; HO 102;

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