

GLIMPSSES INTO A TOWN'S READING HABITS
IN ENLIGHTENMENT SCOTLAND:
ANALYSING THE BORROWINGS OF
GRAY LIBRARY, HADDINGTON, 1732–1816

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This article examines a unique record in library and book history: the detailed lending record of a Scottish town library from the early eighteenth century through to the early nineteenth century.¹ Unusually for such an early library this was a free public library, open to all residents of the town of Haddington in East Lothian, not charging any fee to join or borrow books. This means that not only is the lending record valuable for researchers of reading history, especially given the rarity of such lending records, but it can also provide new insights into the minds and interests of its borrowers.² Until now evidence for reading practices has been little used in wider social and cultural studies in Scotland, though elsewhere it has shed light for example on pre-Revolutionary France and social and cultural changes in seventeenth-century Ireland.³ This shortfall is particularly surprising given the Enlightenment context, but most research into Scottish Enlightenment reading has focused on either major cities, particularly Edinburgh, or elite readers with limited investigation of its impact on other parts of society.⁴ A rare Scottish provincial study is Allan's investigation of the books bought for Perth's subscription

¹ The author thanks Professor Bob Harris for comments on early drafts of this paper. This research is part of wider doctoral research funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council.

² There are only a few early Scottish library lending records including Gray Library, Innerpefferay in Perthshire (also free, but rural), Dumfries Presbytery, and Edinburgh University Library. Examples elsewhere include Bristol Library Society, several English Cathedral libraries, a Warwick circulating library, and Harvard College Library, but none are close in type to Gray Library.

³ J. Crawford, 'Reading and book use in 18th-century Scotland', *The Bibliothek*, vol. 19 (1994), pp. 23–43; and R. A. Houston, *Scottish Literacy and the Scottish Identity: Illiteracy and Society in Scotland and Northern England 1600–1800* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 163–78 review prior research into reading in 18th-century Scotland. For the international examples see R. Darnton, *The forbidden best-sellers of pre-revolutionary France* (London, 1996) and R. Gillespie, *Reading Ireland: print, reading and social change in early modern Ireland* (Manchester, 2005).

⁴ For an example of a wider social study of the Enlightenment's dissemination, albeit still focusing on major cities (Paris, London and Hamburg), see T. Munck, *The Enlightenment: A Comparative Social History 1721–1794* (London, 2000).

library which served local professionals and civic elite.⁵ However, such top-down studies focusing on provision of material are limited in how much they can uncover individual Scottish readers actively engaging with specific texts. By contrast Gray Library's records detail the borrowing choices of about 700 varied readers, young and old, male and female, professional and artisan.⁶ Furthermore their geographical focus on a single town makes it easier to consider this library and its borrowers in context and to use other local records to find out more about the people.⁷ Finally the lengthy borrowing records, covering over eighty years, straddle a period of substantial growth of print in Scotland and increasing significance of urban centres like Haddington as venues for bookshops, libraries and newspapers.

Investigating reading habits for a large group of readers even with rich sources involves a mix of quantitative and qualitative approaches.⁸ Pioneering research was done in the 1960s by Kaufman who studied library borrowing records in Britain, prompted in part by the fortunate survival of several significant library lending records.⁹ In Scotland Kaufman examined both the Gray Library borrowings and those of Innerpefferay Library in Perthshire, but in a broad way: compiling overall figures for borrowings as well as identifying the most popular books throughout the entire period.¹⁰ Kaufman did not undertake a detailed analysis of borrowings from the borrowers' perspective, nor did he track change over time. Such research would be extremely intensive if done manually, but modern computer tools make larger studies more practical and recently researchers have increasingly explored library lending record.¹¹ Gray Library's borrowing records are well suited to this

⁵ D.Allan, 'Provincial Readers and Book Culture in the Scottish Enlightenment: The Perth Library, 1784–c.1800', *The Library*, 7th series, vol. 3 (2002), pp. 367–89. There are no early catalogues or lending records for this library, hence the study instead of books bought for the library per the minutes of the library's committee.

⁶ The word 'about' is necessary because borrowers could be recorded in different ways (forenames and surnames, initials and surnames, titles and surnames, etc.) so counting them is not straightforward. After comparing signatures 717 separate borrowers have been noted, though there may still be some overlap.

⁷ This concentration of borrowers is thus very different from a rural library serving a large catchment area (like Innerpefferay) or any kind of postal lending library.

⁸ Two surveys of methodologies and possibilities are I. Jackson, 'Approaches to the history of readers and reading in eighteenth-century Britain', *Historical Journal*, vol. 4 (2004), pp. 1041–54; and L. Price, 'Reading: the State of the Discipline', *Book History*, vol. 7 (2004), pp. 303–20. For warnings about pitfalls of the quantitative approach see S. Eliot, 'Very necessary but not quite sufficient: a personal view of quantitative analysis in book history', *Book History*, vol. 5 (2002), pp. 283–93.

⁹ P. Kaufman, *Libraries and their Users: Collected Papers in Library History* (London, 1969) collects many of his studies of library records, including Scottish examples and others such as Bristol (1773–1784).

¹⁰ P. Kaufman, 'The Rise of Community Libraries in Scotland', *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, vol. 59 (1965), p. 265. For Innerpefferay where a small number of individual borrowers were followed in-depth see Kaufman, *Libraries and their Users*, pp. 158–60 and Houston, *Scottish Literacy*, pp. 174–7.

¹¹ J. Fergus, 'Eighteenth-Century Readers in Provincial England: The Customers of Samuel Clay's Circulating Library and Bookshop in Warwick, 1770–1772', *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of*

approach, providing a chronological series of over 5000 borrowings, each linking a named title to a named borrower.¹² The detail recorded about borrowers each time is usually restricted to name but sometimes extra information is given such as occupation or information about relatives. By gathering scattered references and using other local records it has been possible to establish additional biographical information for a third of Gray Library's borrowers, including typically their occupation, family background, birth date, and what happened to them later.¹³ It is not possible in a comparatively short paper to discuss in depth the borrowing runs of all of these hundreds of borrowers. Instead the focus is on general trends that emerge and what this reveals about reading habits in eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Scotland.

Gray Library was founded after Mr John Gray (1646–1717), former minister of Aberlady parish in East Lothian, bequeathed his private collection of books to his home town.¹⁴ In the eighteenth century Haddington's population was about 2000 people and although lying only seventeen miles east of Edinburgh the town was both an important market town and administrative centre of East Lothian, housing county institutions such as the Sheriff Court.¹⁵ Gray's original deed of mortification specified who could use the library and on what terms.¹⁶ From the start the library was to be open to all residents of the town. Use by ministers was to be restricted with only the town's ministers able to borrow books; others were supposed to consult books in the library room.¹⁷ Mr John Gray died in 1717 but the library was only transferred to the town's control after his widow died in 1729.¹⁸ From that point the library was managed by a committee of trustees drawn from the town's officials: Haddington's Provost, the Bailies, the Dean of Guild, and the Town Clerk. The library was housed in Church Street, part of the burgh

America, vol. 78 (1984), pp. 155–218; and M. Olsen and L.-G. Harvey, 'Reading in Revolutionary Times; Book Borrowing from the Harvard College Library, 1773–1782', *Harvard Library Bulletin*, New Series vol. 4 (1993), pp. 57–72.

¹² The lending registers for 1732–1796 and 1803–1816 are part of the Gray Library records in the N.L.S. MSS 16446–16482. For this research the borrowings (N.L.S. MSS 16480–16481) were entered into a relational database with linked tables for borrowings, book details, and borrower information.

¹³ Other local records used include parish registers (Church of Scotland and non-conformist), late 18th-century tax records (particularly shop tax, inhabited house tax, window tax, and consolidated tax) and council minutes in the N.A.S., local directories, wills and census returns. Significant extra information for 242 Gray Library borrowers has been traced in this way.

¹⁴ Gray Library thus fits into the early 18th-century Scottish idea of a parish library based on a minister's own books – W.R. Aitken, *A history of the public library movement in Scotland to 1955* (Glasgow, 1971), pp. 6–13. For English parochial libraries see P. Borsay, *The English Urban Renaissance* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 132–3.

¹⁵ This population figure is based on the per-burgh figures for Haddington. Almost as many people again lived outside the burgh but still inside Haddington parish.

¹⁶ This document is copied into the start of N.L.S. MSS 16479, the volume containing 18th-century minutes of the library's committee of trustees.

¹⁷ This rule was not stuck to rigidly and borrowers included ministers of other East Lothian parishes Bolton, Dirleton, Gladsmuir, North Berwick, and Ormiston.

¹⁸ W.J. Couper, *The Gray Library of Haddington* (Haddington, 1916), p. 6.

school, and remained there for over 150 years. A succession of librarians were appointed, almost all of them Haddington schoolmasters.

Two important factors contributing to the use of the library were that it was convenient in terms of location and opening times. The library was near the commercial heart of Haddington, lying just east of the main High Street and Market Street. It was also handy for scholars at the school, though having a schoolmaster as librarian may have deterred some youngsters from borrowing, as happened with Dr Samuel Smiles (1812–1904) who tried Gray Library in his youth:

I did not make much use of the library. Patrick Hardie, the master of the English School, was the librarian; and when I took out Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*, he havered a bit to me, in his dictatorial way, as to how I was to read it. I did not like this, and went to other libraries.¹⁹

Opening times can be uncovered from the printed library rules and inferred from the borrowing registers. According to the rules printed with the 1828 catalogue, 'The Librarian will give out and receive books at the Library, on Tuesdays and Thursdays, betwixt the hours of 12 and 1'.²⁰ This may have been the case by 1828 but the earlier borrowing registers indicate that from the 1730s onwards people borrowed books on most days of the week, even occasionally on Sundays.²¹ Particularly popular days were Monday through to Wednesday but from the 1780s onwards Saturday borrowing increased until by the 1810s it was the most popular day followed by Wednesday: 27% of 1810s borrowings were on Saturday and 24% on Wednesdays. Saturday borrowing was favoured by certain groups such as lawyers and clerks, whereas merchants and artisans were more likely to borrow during the week. Another group favouring Saturday borrowing in the 1810s were female borrowers, particularly teenagers: 55% of female borrowings during the 1810s were on Saturday and 28% on Wednesday; for teenage girls the equivalent figures are 64% and 18%. Unfortunately the surviving borrowing registers finish too early to see if a later shift away from Saturday openings affected their borrowing patterns.

The library's initial holdings were predominantly religious with at least three-quarters of pre-1717 books falling in that category. By 1828 over 200 of the library's books, about a fifth of the entire stock, dated from the sixteenth century, one title even from 1497, and the library also held Mr Gray's extensive collection

¹⁹ T. Mackay (ed), *The Autobiography of Samuel Smiles, LL.D.* (London, 1905), p. 29. According to the Gray Library borrowing register Dr Samuel Smiles's father Samuel, a general merchant and later china dealer, borrowed Burns, Rollin's *History*, Abercrombie's *Scottish Warriors*, Robertson's *History of America*, and Cook's *Voyages to the Pacific Ocean*, all between 1810 and 1813.

²⁰ *Catalogue of the books in the town of Haddington's library. MDCCCXXVIII* (Haddington, 1828), p. iv.

²¹ Sunday borrowing was extremely rare, accounting for only 2.3% of Gray Library borrowings with known days.

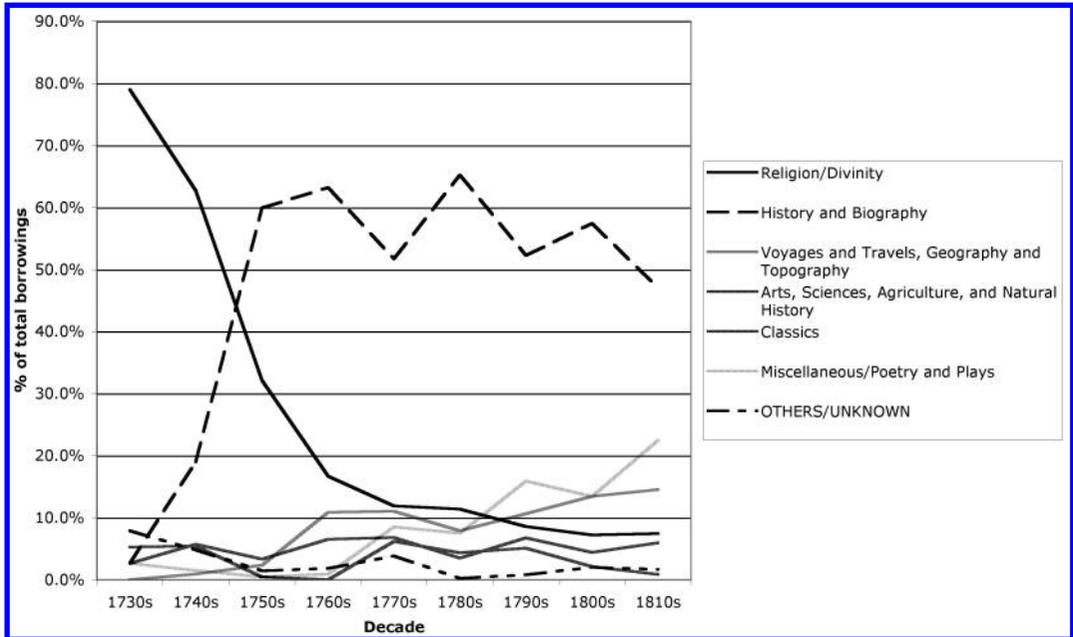


Figure 1. Borrowings by subject²²

of pamphlets, again mostly religious. Such titles appealed particularly to religious scholars, both trainee and qualified ministers, and looking at the subjects of books borrowed it is clear that religious books were the most frequently borrowed early on, accounting for 79% of all borrowings in the 1730s. By the 1740s the proportion of religious books borrowed was dropping, and by the 1750s history and biography books were the most frequently borrowed and remained so over the following decades (see figure 1).

Borrowing numbers were rising fairly steadily during most of this period and the changeover in subjects borrowed c.1750 was probably due to a more diverse mix of borrowers combined with changing library holdings.²³ Ministers still used the library but local professionals and merchants increasingly appear as borrowers.

²² These subject categories are based on those used by William Lyon Mackenzie (1795–1861) to categorise his reading between 1806 and 1820 before he emigrated from Dundee to Canada – C. Lindsey, *The Life and Times of William Lyon Mackenzie* (Toronto, 1862), vol. II, pp. 303–13. There is no standard category scheme used by researchers of reading and Mackenzie’s categories were chosen because they fit well with the Gray Library holdings. Some books could fit under multiple categories but particular care was taken with these, e.g. books about other countries (travel-focused ones under Voyages and Travels; more dedicated histories under History), early church histories (under Religion/Divinity), science/practical books (under Arts, Sciences etc.) and varied collections such as Fielding’s (under Miscellaneous).

²³ Average yearly borrowings were just 7 in the 1730s, 33 in the 1740s, 21 in the 1750s, 32 in the 1760s, and 47 in the 1770s. The apparent boom in the 1740s was due largely to a single trainee minister borrowing heavily.

In the earliest years such borrowers often borrowed religious books: for example in the 1740s and 1750s Andrew Dickson (merchant), Dr James Lundie (surgeon) and John Martine (tanner and postmaster) borrowed mainly published sermons and annotations on the Bible.²⁴ By the 1760s similar borrowers were favouring other subjects, particularly as new books were bought for the library. A rare religious book still borrowed widely was Stackhouse's *History of the Bible*, borrowed between 1768 and 1813 by twenty-eight people, including several merchants, a brewer, teacher, solicitor, tinsmith, and daughters of a butcher and a millwright. Generally though religious borrowing was in decline, consistent with changing patterns detected by historians elsewhere and Engelsing's 'reading revolution' in the eighteenth century: a shift from intensive reading, frequent rereading of a small number of usually religious books, to extensive reading, where a wider range of books and subjects are read.²⁵ Despite the decline in religious borrowing at Gray Library readers may still have had access to devotional works such as a Bible at home, and could continue to read these intensively while borrowing other books from the library.

From 1750 the library's trustees ordered new books for the library, regularly drawing up lists of recommended titles to order from the booksellers.²⁶ The books chosen were similar to those ordered by the committees of more restricted subscription libraries: histories, biographies, travels, poems, educational books and religious books.²⁷ Fiction was largely absent, though poems were frequently bought, and the library – unlike contemporary subscription libraries – did not buy any periodicals, including reviews.²⁸ The shortage of fiction and periodicals is puzzling, and not explained by the minutes of the trustees. Such books may have been deemed too frivolous, particularly given the origins of the library.²⁹ Between

²⁴ As sometime provosts these borrowers are easier to identify because their signatures are frequently recorded in the Haddington council minutes (N.A.S. B30/13) and can thus be compared with signatures in the Gray Library borrowing register.

²⁵ R. Engelsing, *Der Bürger als Leser: Lesergeschichte in Deutschland 1500–1800* (Stuttgart, 1974). Historians still debate this 'revolution' though, including its speed, timing, and the true diversity of reading practices – see Jackson, 'Approaches to the history of readers and reading', p. 1050; and D. Finkelstein and A. McCleery, *An introduction to book history* (New York and Abingdon, 2005), p. 113.

²⁶ N.L.S., MS 16479, 28 Feb. 1750.

²⁷ Subscription libraries spread in 18th- and 19th-century Scotland. Private ones were similar to book clubs, used by a limited number of subscribers, often professionals. Public ones were open to more people, for a fee, and could form the basis of future town libraries. W. St Clair, *The reading nation in the romantic period* (Cambridge, 2004), p. 263 summarises the key characteristics (stock, type of users, access, etc.) of different types of British library at this time. See also Allan, 'The Perth Library', particularly pp. 375–80.

²⁸ For example Arbroath Private Subscription Library in 1809 was buying the *Monthly Review*, *Monthly Magazine*, *Critical Review*, and *Edinburgh Review* – Angus Archives, Forfar, MS 451/2/1, Arbroath Subscription Library Catalogue, 1797–1844.

²⁹ W. F. Gray, *A short history of Haddington* (Dunbar, 1944), p. 138 comments that the library's regulations prevented it from stocking fiction. No such regulation has been traced in the early records and even from the 18th century fiction was stocked, albeit in small numbers, including Fielding's *Tom Jones*.

1750 and 1810 over ninety new titles were bought and often borrowed heavily after they came in.³⁰ In addition the library sometimes received gifts of books. At the same time as acquiring new stock, books were sometimes lost, or borrowed but never returned. Each year the trustees inspected the books, and this together with re-cataloguing helped to identify missing volumes to be recalled or replaced.³¹ This task became increasingly important as the volume of borrowings and borrowers increased throughout the eighteenth century and early nineteenth century (see figure 2).

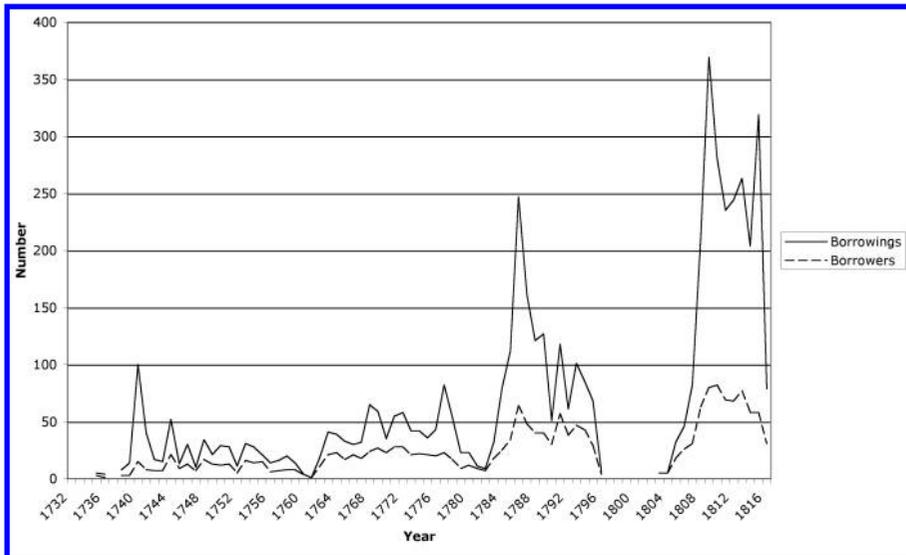


Figure 2. Yearly numbers of borrowings and borrowers³²

Charting the most frequently borrowed books throughout the different decades reveals the changing borrowing choices of the library’s borrowers (see table 1).

Popular titles again illustrate the shift from religious books to history. The *Universal History* multi-volume works were bought early on and remained popular for several decades, as were the histories of Rollin.³³ Later narrative histories proved popular too, though often bought decades after first publication. These

³⁰ Purchased books mirrored the borrowing patterns. The library continued long-term to buy religious books (particularly sermons) but history soon predominated.

³¹ After one such examination the trustees found that overdue volumes were being held by the Sheriff-Clerk, a parish minister, the daughter of a late Bailie, and a local merchant – N.L.S., MS 16479, 5 Oct. 1782.

³² The break in the graph is due to the gap in the borrowing register for most of 1796–1804. There are short-term fluctuations, for example 1740 (trainee minister borrowing heavily) and 1786 (unclear why), but the general trend is steadily upwards.

³³ K. O’Brien, ‘The history market in eighteenth-century England’, in I. Rivers (ed.), *Books and their readers in eighteenth-century England: new essays* (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 105–33 describes the publication of these and other history titles.

Table 1. Most frequently borrowed books at Gray Library, decade by decade

<i>1740s</i>	<i>1760s</i>
Rollin's Ancient History	Universal History (Modern)
Greenhill on Ezekiel	Universal History (Ancient)
Poli Synopsis Criticorum	Rollin's Roman History
Rapin's History of England	Rollin's Ancient History
Universal History (Ancient)	Anson's Voyages Round the World
Poole's Annotations on the Bible	Callander's Collection of Voyages
Buchanan's History of Scotland	History and Proceedings of the House of Commons
Rollin's Roman History	Nature Delineated or Philosophical Conversations (trans. from French)
Andilly's Josephus's Works	(equal) Rapin's Tindal's continuation;
(equal) Davila's History of the Wars of France;	Ludlow's Memoirs of the Civil Wars in the reign of Charles I; and Rollin's Belles Lettres
Wodrow's History of the Church of Scotland; and Erasmi Paraphrases in Novum Testamentum	
<i>1780s</i>	<i>1800s</i>
Sully's Memoirs	Rollin's Ancient History
Rollin's Roman History	Forsyth's Beauties of Scotland
Universal History (Ancient)	Gibbon's Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire
Universal History (Modern)	Fielding's Works
Raynal's History of the East and West Indies	Rollin's Roman History
Robertson's History of Charles V	Hume's History of England
Rollin's Ancient History	Russel's History of Modern Europe
Wraxall's Memoirs of the Kings of France of the Race of Valois	Henry's History of Great Britain
Fielding's Works	Burns's Works
Wraxall's Tour through some of the Northern parts of Europe	Cook's Voyages

included the Enlightenment histories of Robertson (bought by the library between 1762 and 1804), Hume's history of England (bought 1804), Henry's history of Great Britain (bought 1804), and Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (bought 1806). The delayed purchase of these popular titles is curious, suggesting relatively late reading in this community of these key Enlightenment texts and that the people were not accessing them by other means, for example via Edinburgh.³⁴ By contrast books of voyages and travels were bought soon after publication and also borrowed heavily, particularly Anson's (bought 1753), Callander's (bought 1768), and Cook's (bought 1776). Closer to home Robert Forsyth's multi-volume *Beauties of Scotland: containing an Account of the Agriculture, Commerce, Mines, Manufactures, Population, &c. of each County* (bought 1804) was extremely popular, borrowed twice as often as any other book in the 1810s,

³⁴ Some of the Gray Library borrowers could have accessed circulating or other fee-paying libraries in Edinburgh, or may have been able to afford to buy desirable books.

probably due to the combination of local subject matter and Enlightenment interest in practical knowledge. As well as factual books the library acquired a number of fictional and imaginative works in the later eighteenth century, though still in small numbers if compared with circulating libraries.³⁵ One such acquisition borrowed heavily for many decades was Fielding's *Works* (bought 1776). This trend continued with the poems of Burns (bought 1804), Scott's *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (bought 1808), and *Ossian's Poems* (gifted anonymously in 1810), more Scottish works that were popular with the borrowers. Fiction and poetry were particularly favoured by Haddington's female borrowers whereas male borrowers were more likely to borrow history or travel (see table 2).

Table 2. Comparing popular books, male versus female borrowers³⁶

<i>Male borrowers</i>	<i>Female borrowers</i>
Rollin's Ancient History	Fielding's Works
Rollin's Roman History	Johnson's Works
Fielding's Works	Scott's Minstrelsy of Scottish Border
Forsyth's Beauties of Scotland	Henry's History of Great Britain
Universal History (Ancient)	Pope's Works
Universal History (Modern)	Burns's Works
Cook's Voyages to Pacific Ocean	Ossian's Poems
Robertson's History of Charles V	Rollin's Roman History
Callander's Collection of Voyages	(equal) Forsyth's Beauties of Scotland;
Sully's Memoirs	Robertson's History of America;
	Rollin's Ancient History

In many respects this pattern fits with what might be expected at this time, particularly bearing in mind the library's limited stock. The dominance of history and biography is no surprise, nor is the long-lasting popularity of writers such as Fielding and Johnson, and later the rising popularity of Burns and Scott.³⁷ The difference in borrowings between male and female borrowers is striking and to an extent fits with conventional stereotypes, even if the library's stock of novels was

³⁵ E. Jacobs, 'Eighteenth-century British circulating libraries and cultural book history', *Book History*, vol. 6 (2003), p. 19 reviewed circulating library catalogues and found that fiction accounted for 20% of stock of larger ones (average holdings of about 5000 titles) and 70% of stock of smaller ones (average holdings of 430 titles).

³⁶ This breakdown is based on 584 individual male borrowers and 73 female borrowers at Gray Library. Another 44 borrowers are either mixed (for example a brother or sister, a mother and children), identified only by initials and untraceable in any other records, or their signatures are totally unreadable.

³⁷ For a recent overview of reading trends in this period see St Clair, *Reading nation*, especially pp. 210–67.

low.³⁸ However many titles were borrowed by both genders, including the most popular books of all.³⁹

Turning now to look more closely at reasons for borrowing, the example of ministers borrowing religious books has been noted. Others probably borrowing for work-related reasons were legal professionals, usually the main people to borrow the library's small collection of legal volumes. For example Erskine's *Institutes of the Laws of Scotland* (1773) was borrowed by Sheriff-Clerk Alexander Fraser, writers James Templeton and David Rothead, and Sheriff-Substitute Thomas Fairbairn; indeed the latter two each borrowed this three times, possibly suggesting that they were using it for reference at work. Burn's *The Justice of the Peace and Parish Officer* (1772) was also borrowed by David Rothead and Thomas Fairbairn. Another example of work-related borrowing was David Jack, teacher of Mathematics in Edinburgh who in June 1740 borrowed Rami's *Arithmetica et Geometria* (1599) and Sacra-bosco's *Sphaera* (1639).⁴⁰ Apart from these examples most borrowings were not work-related and should probably be regarded as either recreational or some kind of improving reading.

A persistent concern about library lending records as evidence of reading is whether people actually read the books they borrowed.⁴¹ Something in favour of the Gray Library borrowings as evidence of this is the large number of people who returned time and again to borrow successive volumes in turn, not just with many volume anthologies such as the *Universal History* (Ancient and Modern, twenty and forty-four volumes respectively) and Rollin's *History* (Ancient and Roman, six and sixteen volumes), but also shorter works.⁴² For example between September 1753 and January 1756 the local Clerk of the Peace David Fall visited the library nine times to borrow the twelfth through to the twentieth volumes of the Ancient part of *The Universal History* (published 1747). Half a century later David Diddep, teenage son of a local writer, borrowed books twenty-five times between December 1808 and November 1809, working in turn through successive volumes of Rollin's *Ancient History*, Callander's *Collection of Voyages*, Marshall's

³⁸ J. Pearson, *Women's reading in Britain 1750–1835: a dangerous recreation* (Cambridge, 1999); and St Clair, *Reading nation*, pp. 280–283. However one study of a 1770s Warwick circulating library suggests that men may have borrowed novels as much as women – see Fergus, 'Customers of Samuel Clay's Circulating Library and Bookshop', p. 179.

³⁹ Just twenty core titles accounted for half of all borrowings, some borrowed heavily throughout the whole period (Rollin's *History*), some earlier (the *Universal History* volumes), and others later (Fielding's *Works* in the 1770s–1810s and *Beauties of Scotland* in the 1800s–1810s). Such heavy borrowing of a small number of titles raises questions about how the library room was organised. Were the most popular titles shelved separately from the 1000+ other titles for the librarian's convenience?

⁴⁰ As an outside borrower David Jack would have needed special permission to borrow these books, though perhaps he was visiting Haddington for a time.

⁴¹ Houston, *Scottish Literacy*, p. 175; and S. Eliot, 'The Reading Experience Database; or, what are we to do about the history of reading?', www.open.ac.uk/Arts/RED/redback.htm, accessed 26 Mar. 2006.

⁴² These volume counts are based on the numbers of volumes listed for each title in the 1828 Gray Library catalogue.

History of General Washington, and Cook's *Voyages*, as well as single volumes such as Boswell's *Account of Corsica* and Clarkson's *Slave Trade*. There are numerous other examples and reading volumes in turn was the norm among regular borrowers. Readers might not always get the next volume they needed though, particularly for the most popular books. For example between December 1815 and April 1816 demand for Forsyth's five-volume *Beauties of Scotland* was so high, borrowed by seven different people, that several borrowed volumes out of sequence: George Cunningham took the first, third, second, fifth, and fourth volumes; James Fairbairn took the first and fourth; and James Knox took the first, second, and fifth. This was not unique to Gray Library of course: in 1811 Dundee grocer Thomas Handyside Baxter noted in his diary that he 'could not get the Book I wanted' from the library so instead 'took out the Annals of Geo the 1st its an old fashioned like Book and am afraid won't get thro' it'.⁴³ At Haddington borrowing successive volumes was accompanied by a rapid turn-round of books, particularly in the later decades. For example repeat borrowers in the 1750s tended to borrow books every six months but by the 1800s half of such borrowers returned fortnightly or even more often, further support for a general shift towards more extensive reading practices, or at least a greater appetite for reading.

The phenomenon of returning for successive volumes was particularly marked from the 1780s onwards. Until then borrowers appear to have often borrowed multiple volumes at a time, but from the 1780s single volume borrowing became the norm, possibly reflecting a change restricting the number of volumes that could be borrowed as library usage increased. Certainly by 1828 the printed rules included the rule that 'no more than one book, or volume of a book, be lent to any person at a time'.⁴⁴ One consequence of this change was that from the 1780s borrowing records increasingly record declarations by borrowers that they were borrowing volumes for other people, typically a member of their family, or friend, or work associate. Such borrowing for others is under-recorded in general in library borrowings from this time yet could happen, even with the most restricted libraries. For example writer Mrs Anne Grant in Edinburgh read books from the both the Signet Library and the library of the Society of Advocates, borrowed by young male friends on her behalf.⁴⁵ Such practices were less necessary at Gray Library since it was open to all residents of Haddington.⁴⁶ Borrowing a volume for another person may have been a technique to borrow more for yourself than normally allowed, and certainly some entries suggest this took place. In 1786,

⁴³ Dundee University Archives, MS184/1/1, Thomas Handyside Baxter diary, 25 Jun. 1811. Baxter probably borrowed books from Dundee Library (subscription), a companion institution to the Exchange Coffee Room which he visited daily.

⁴⁴ *Catalogue of the Books in the Town of Haddington's Library*, p. iv.

⁴⁵ J. P. Grant (ed.), *Memoir and Correspondence of Mrs Grant of Laggan* (London, 1845), vol. III, p. 24.

⁴⁶ The librarian needed to be sure of the borrowing rights though. George Bee (1798–1856), Gray Library's librarian after the surviving borrowing registers, apparently 'entered' the residence and occupation for each borrower before issuing the book to them – J. Martine, *Reminiscences of the royal burgh of Haddington and old East Lothian agriculturists* (Edinburgh and Glasgow, 1883), p. 202.

for example, merchant Robert Vetch repeatedly declared that he was borrowing successive volumes for himself and his father:

	<i>for himself</i>	<i>for his father James</i>
1786 March 16	Fielding's Works, volume 8	Ditto, volume 9
1786 March 30	Fielding's Works, volume 10	Ditto, volume 11
1786 April 26	Lord Lyttletons Works, volume 1	Ditto, volume 2
1786 August 7	Rollins Roman History, volume 13	Ditto, volume 1

On the other hand, it is also possible that father and son really were reading the same volumes at the same time. Other references in the borrowing registers hint at the practice of relatives borrowing successive volumes, possibly for shared reading aloud in a family setting. This latter practice has been little discussed in Scotland though it has been noted and described for other parts of Britain in this period.⁴⁷ Several Scottish accounts from this time describe the practice, including Hugh Miller who read aloud circa 1810 to his uncle and neighbours, and Mrs Grant who read aloud with her daughters and recommended in 1819 reading material to friends who wanted to read in this way at home.⁴⁸ There are hints of such family reading practices in the Gray Library records including in 1807 schoolmaster James Johnston borrowing three volumes 'for Mrs Fraser's family' and in 1816 Jess and Christian Dods taking it in turns to borrow all four volumes of Johnson's *Works*.⁴⁹

However, in most cases where relatives or other individuals were mentioned the borrowings appear to fit with different reading tastes.⁵⁰ The largest identifiable proportion of such borrowings were people borrowing for relatives, particularly sons for fathers, but also sons for mothers, daughters for fathers or mothers, fathers for sons, and brothers for siblings. From the 1780s onwards an increasing number of Gray Library's borrowers can be identified as teenagers and many can be traced as initially having books borrowed for them by a parent or an older sibling before borrowing them themselves. For example in 1791 Hugh Fraser (b. 1771) son of Sheriff-Clerk Alexander Fraser started to borrow books regularly and was soon followed by his mother and sisters Mary and Jean. The father-child pattern was more common, possibly resulting from a child curious about the books being

⁴⁷ N. Tadmor, 'In the even my wife read to me: women, reading, and household life in the eighteenth century', in J. Raven, H. Small and N. Tadmor (eds), *The practice and representation of reading in England* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 162–74.

⁴⁸ J. Robertson (ed.), *Hugh Miller: My Schools and Schoolmasters, Or The Story of my Education* (Edinburgh, 1993), pp. 33–5; and Grant, *Mrs Grant of Laggan*, vol. II, p. 230.

⁴⁹ The volumes were borrowed in Jan. 1816: Jess borrowing volume 1 on Wednesday 10th, then volume 2 the next Saturday, Christian borrowing volume 3 the next Wednesday, then Jess borrowing volume 4 on Saturday 20th.

⁵⁰ For example in 1808 merchant's son William L. Thornton borrowed all four volumes of Robertson's *History of America* for his mother while at the same time starting to work through the many volumes of Rollin's Ancient and Roman Histories, probably reflecting his own reading interests.

brought home or accompanying their parent on trips to the library. In 1785 for example watchmaker William Veitch started to borrow volumes of Fielding's *Works* for his teenage daughter Jean (b. circa 1770) although it would be another five years before she borrowed directly herself, borrowing Cook's *Voyages* before marrying and moving away.⁵¹ A more sustained pattern is seen in the family of brewer William Shiells, a regular borrower whose teenage daughters Susan (b. 1797) and Sarah (b. 1800) also borrowed books. Sarah – or as she was also known Sallie – was a particularly heavy borrower and probably visited the library with her father, often borrowing books on the same day.⁵² Sarah Shiells was one of several girl borrowers visiting the library regularly in 1815, usually on Saturdays, and preferring books such as Scott's *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, Burns's *Works*, *Ossian's Poems*, Fielding's *Works*, and Johnson's *Works*. Indeed on many Saturdays the same group of girls appear as borrowers: brewer's daughter Sarah Shiells, surgeon's daughter Mary Anne Somerville, seedsman's daughter Marianne Dods, and others. Why they were drawn to the library at the same time is unclear but clearly they were not intimidated by it, were happy to use it, and between them represent some of the most consistent borrowers of their time. All were of a similar age and may have been school-friends. Certainly if the library was only open for a short time they would have been likely to see each other there, most weeks. A notable omission from this group is Jane Welsh Carlyle (1801–1866), though she may have used Gray Library later. Her uncle Dr Benjamin Welsh appears as a borrower, as do her friends the Misses Donaldson of Sunnybank, daughters and sisters of town clerks of Haddington.⁵³ Jane Welsh Carlyle's teacher and close friend Edward Irving also appears as a borrower between 1809 and 1812 while teaching at the Mathematics School in Haddington.

Heavy use by teenage girl borrowers is particularly apparent by the 1810s. Around the same time several teenage boy borrowers stand out because of the volume of books that they borrowed. All were sons of artisans or similar and later in life became professionals, mostly staying in Haddington. For example between the ages of thirteen and fifteen Alexander Matthew (1795–1855) a glover's son who became a Justice of the Peace and Solicitor at Haddington Sheriff Court borrowed books from Gray Library on most weeks, particularly favouring histories, working in turn through multi-volume works such as Rollin's *Ancient History*, Rollin's *Roman History*, Cook's *Voyages to the Pacific Ocean*, Robertson's *History of America*, Hume's *History of England* and Smollett's continuation of it. He also borrowed Fielding's and Johnson's *Works* but at least one of these volumes was borrowed for his aunt so others may have been too. Another borrower in this

⁵¹ Jean Veitch married farmer Richard Somner in 1794. His family combined farming with a surgery practice in Haddington but do not appear as Gray Library borrowers.

⁵² For example William and Sarah Shiells both borrowed books on the following dates in 1815: 4, 15 and 18 Feb.; 11 Mar.; 1 and 29 Apr.; 20 May; and 8 Jul.

⁵³ *From threshold to roof-tree: The Haddington home of Jane Welsh Carlyle* (Edinburgh, 1984), pp. 20–1.

group, Henry Laidlaw (1801–1871), a coachman's son who became a Stipendiary Magistrate in Jamaica, appears to have borrowed books from Gray Library from the age of nine.⁵⁴ He may have been encouraged by his older brother John (b. 1794) who was borrowing books from 1808. A similar pattern is likely in the case of John Ferme (1797–1883) who became a banker and whose saddler father was a regular borrower from Gray Library, indeed father and son regularly signed out books on the same day.⁵⁵ In their choice of titles these teenage boys are similar to other young borrowers but it was the frequency and quantity of their borrowings that mark them out, possibly reflecting a greater interest in learning and application which helped them to succeed later in life. Equally it might also indicate the potential of such a library for promoting upward social mobility.

Despite the above teenage examples the library's borrowers appear to have been weighted towards professional backgrounds, particularly early on. Later an increasing number of people from other sectors of society, particularly artisans, became borrowers too (see table 3).

Table 3. Changing occupational balance of Gray Library borrowers⁵⁶

	1730s–1750s	1760s–1780s	1790s–1810s
Professional	57%	43%	33%
Merchants	19%	21%	17%
Artisans/manufacturers	17%	31%	42%
Gentry	6%	4%	2%
Farming/agriculture	0%	1%	2%
Military	0%	0%	3%

The professionals category includes solicitors, ministers, schoolmasters, surgeons, lawyers and their families. Merchant is a loose term and can cover both small-scale shopkeepers and richer traders.⁵⁷ Artisan includes brewers, shoemakers, watchmakers and glovers.⁵⁸ The proportion of professional borrowers may be over-estimated though because they could be easier to trace, often leaving a greater

⁵⁴ Initially it looked more likely that it was the father Henry borrowing in this case. However, checking the borrowings in detail, including looking at them in sequence, revealed tell-tale evidence of a young boy's steadily improving handwriting.

⁵⁵ On 6 Jun. 1810 (Wednesday) the whole family borrowed books: William Ferme borrowed the fourth volume of Henry's *History of Britain*, his wife Sarah borrowed the second volume of *Spectacle of Nature*, and their son John borrowed the third volume of Cook's *Voyages to the Pacific Ocean*.

⁵⁶ The occupational categories are based on the identified subset of borrowers (those whose occupation has been confidently established): 47 out of 117 in 1730s–1750s, 80 out of 255 in 1760s–1780s, and 126 out of 395 in 1790s–1810s.

⁵⁷ This broad category includes several wealthy merchants who acquired estates on the edge of the burgh. Several professionals who similarly became 'new gentry' are categorised as professionals, reserving 'gentry' for older established families.

⁵⁸ Artisan includes small businessmen and employees and like the other categories is no guide by itself to incomes and only an approximate guide to social class.

record in the relevant documents.⁵⁹ Another group of potential borrowers who might be easier to identify are little represented: the gentry, though they may have had less need for this library due to owning more books and borrowing amongst friends. Rare exceptions include elderly Lady Castlehill (1668–1752) at Stevenson House near Haddington and probably also her daughter-in-law Mrs Sinclair.⁶⁰ Similarly only a handful of farming borrowers appear including Alexander and Andrew Begbie (of East and West farms of Barney mains) in the 1770s and 1780s.⁶¹ Another notable absence given their known presence in Haddington, particularly during the Napoleonic era, are soldiers.⁶² In 1760 Colonel John Cawfield of ‘General Walgraves Regiment of Dragoon Guards’ borrowed a volume and gifted others when he left Haddington.⁶³ In 1809 innkeeper Edward Pooley borrowed a volume of Burns for Colonel Bath, possibly the same J. Bath who borrowed other titles earlier that year, although whether he was linked to troops in the town or travelling on his own is unknown. A clearer army connection can be traced in the 1810–1811 borrowings of George Roy, either the Barrack Sergeant in Haddington or his teenage eldest son. This example is revealed partly using evidence from the local Church of Scotland parish registers which record the baptisms of younger children and identify the father’s occupation.⁶⁴ Other soldiers temporarily resident in Haddington are recorded in the same parish registers, and in the marriage registers of the local Episcopalian Church, but none so far have been firmly identified as borrowers of Gray Library.⁶⁵

Grouping borrowers is useful for analysing borrowers and their changing pattern over time but if their borrowings are examined by occupation the picture is one of diversity. Among known watchmakers for example William Veitch borrowed mainly Sully’s *Memoirs* for his own use in the 1780s. In the 1810s by contrast William Aitken borrowed *Beauties of Scotland* and Burns’s *Works* whereas Matthew Dawson at the same time was working through dozens of volumes of Rollin’s Roman and Ancient History titles. Similar diversity is seen in the

⁵⁹ Lists of schoolteachers are readily available, as well as ministers and local legal officials. Such people may also have been more likely to leave wills. Local artisans and shopkeepers are better covered by the end of the 18th century in local tax records in the N.A.S. Before then some can be traced in local council records, but church registers which cover them too do not always specify occupations.

⁶⁰ Martha Lockhart, lady laird of Castlehill near Glasgow, married Sir John Sinclair 4th Baronet of Stevenson. Her sole borrowing from Gray Library in 1750 was a volume of Buchanan’s *History of Scotland*.

⁶¹ Farmers living outside Haddington would have needed special permission to borrow but this could have been granted, particularly for those living inside Haddington parish (mix of urban and rural) but outside the burgh boundaries.

⁶² Martine, *Reminiscences of the royal burgh of Haddington*, pp. 122–7.

⁶³ N.L.S., MS 16479, 11 Mar. 1760.

⁶⁴ General Register Office for Scotland, Edinburgh, Old Parochial Registers 709.

⁶⁵ N.A.S., CH12/2, Haddington Holy Trinity Episcopal Church records. As well as baptism and marriage registers (the latter often including signatures for bride and groom) this church’s records include a ‘Register of Members’ (CH12/2/23) providing useful family listings, including older children born elsewhere.

borrowings of known brewers, lawyers, ministers etc. There were certainly broad overall trends across all borrowers such as the shift towards history and the trend of successive borrowing. Also some groups may have been more likely to borrow certain books than other borrowers: ministers and religious books, lawyers and legal ones, female borrowers and poems. Beyond that, however, the picture was of individual variation rather than uniformity.

Such diversity of choice and borrowers suggests a library popular with local people, even if later commentators assumed that it was of limited appeal due to the predominantly religious stock.⁶⁶ It is true that the number of borrowers was a minority of those living in the burgh of Haddington, but it was a significant number nevertheless: by the 1810s about one in ten of the burgh population were probably borrowing books from Gray Library with possibly a greater number accessing the books through family, friends and shared reading.⁶⁷ One probable reason for the library's popularity was its acknowledgement from its foundation as the 'town library' of Haddington. In this respect Gray Library fits into an older tradition of burgh libraries in Scotland dating back to Dundee's sixteenth-century burgh library and more recent council-sponsored institutions such as those at Montrose (circa 1683) and Linlithgow (1790).⁶⁸ The library at Haddington however was notable for its freedom of access, not being any kind of subscription or otherwise restricted library, and closer to the later free public libraries that spread throughout Scotland from the mid nineteenth century onwards.⁶⁹ Even among other so-called 'town' libraries Gray Library was unusual in being controlled not by a self-selecting group of individuals but always by a committee of key civic officials.⁷⁰ Gray Library also had a role in local ceremonial life. In 1732 when Haddington's Tolbooth had become unsafe the council relocated its meetings to the library room.⁷¹ Even long after the new Town House was completed the Magistrates continued to meet on Sundays in the library room and process

⁶⁶ For example Gray, *A short history of Haddington*, p. 138, and *Haddington Royal Burgh: A History and a Guide* (East Linton, 1997), p. 36.

⁶⁷ This is based on 237 borrowers in the 1810s compared with a probable burgh population of about 2000 (based on contemporary parish populations and Haddington's burgh:parish population ratio), and allows for outside borrowers too.

⁶⁸ Kaufman, *Libraries and their Users*, pp. 148–152 describes Dundee Burgh Library. For other town council-sponsored libraries see J. C. Crawford, 'The origins and development of societal library activity in Scotland', unpublished MA dissertation (University of Strathclyde, 1981), pp. 54–5. A. J. Mann, *The Scottish Book Trade 1500–1720: Print Commerce and Print Control in Early Modern Scotland* (East Linton, 2000), pp. 30–3 comments on the interaction between burghs, books, and learning, particularly in Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Glasgow.

⁶⁹ Free public libraries in Scotland were encouraged by a combination of the 1853 Public Library Act (Scotland), allowing local taxation to fund them, and Andrew Carnegie donating to local authorities the money needed for new library buildings.

⁷⁰ Allan, 'The Perth Library', pp. 371–4 notes that that library's self-selected committee in the 1780s, albeit large and unwieldy (seventeen members, not all attending regularly), nevertheless represented a socially-diverse cross-section of local society including ministers, teachers, lawyers, provosts, magistrates and merchants.

⁷¹ D. Dick, *Street biographies of the Royal Burgh of Haddington* (Haddington, 1997), p. 175.

from there to the Church, in their chains of office, accompanied by the town officers.⁷²

From the early nineteenth century Gray Library faced increasing competition from other local sources for books and reading material. In 1817 Samuel Brown, a Gray Library borrower, founded his Itinerating Libraries in East Lothian, setting up small portable libraries which moved from town to town and village to village, providing low-cost borrowing to local residents, particularly in rural areas.⁷³ At a similar time Haddington Subscription Library was founded, as was Begbie's Library, based on the legacy of local farmer Andrew Begbie, another Gray Library borrower.⁷⁴ Local booksellers were also starting circulating libraries, including George Neill (from circa 1805), George Miller (from 1814) and George Tait (by 1826).⁷⁵ These would have provided access to a greater range of new books, as would the bookshops for those who could afford them.⁷⁶ Although Gray Library prospered in the early nineteenth century the situation apparently changed later with it struggling to appeal to new readers.⁷⁷ Despite this the early origins and aims of the library were remembered and later it became part of Haddington's modern free Public Library in Newton Port.⁷⁸

Even if readers in Haddington had in Gray Library an unusual facility in their midst, their ease of access to it makes this library's borrowings significant and indicative of what similar readers elsewhere in Scotland may have borrowed, given the opportunity. Among Gray Library borrowers there is evidence for a considerable appetite for reading, even though the library records reveal only part of the picture for people who may have accessed reading material elsewhere, by buying, reading items already at home, or borrowing from other libraries or friends. In the absence of detailed personal diaries many of their wills and inventories have been checked, hoping for references to books owned, with little success.⁷⁹ The borrowing registers reveal a vivid picture but how much more did these people read?

Although this paper has emphasised the extensive use of this library until the

⁷² Martine, *Reminiscences of the royal burgh of Haddington*, pp. 203–205.

⁷³ A. Tyrrell, 'Illuminating the World: Samuel Brown and Itinerating Libraries', *Scottish Local History*, issue 64 (Summer 2005), pp. 35–46.

⁷⁴ Dr Samuel Smiles recalled using Begbie's library whose foundation is described in J. Martine, *Reminiscences and notices of the parishes of the county of Haddington* (Haddington, 1999), p. 103. Begbie's will (N.A.S., SC70/1/15, Edinburgh Sheriff Court, 7 Mar. 1817) provides little detail about the intended library and its purpose.

⁷⁵ These dates are based on entries in R. Alston's online Library History Database (www.r-alston.co.uk/contents.htm, accessed 26 Mar. 2006) which draws on a variety of sources including trade directories.

⁷⁶ The lending records of a Scottish circulating library in this period would be particularly useful for uncovering the reading tastes of many people, throughout society. Unfortunately there are no known surviving examples.

⁷⁷ Gray, *A short history of Haddington*, p. 138.

⁷⁸ Dick, *Street Biographies*, p. 141.

⁷⁹ Detailed lists of books in after-death inventories are rare but sometimes found.

1810s it is probably fair to say that Gray Library succeeded in spite of factors against it. The initial collection of books was so specialised that no amount of free access would have attracted significant numbers of borrowers without the careful selection of new titles to extend the holdings. The resulting stock was still limited but included enough popular titles to attract general borrowers over many decades, fortunately recorded in surviving borrowing registers. Such lending records are rare enough anywhere, but particularly so for an early free town library revealing general reading habits of a local urban population. Given its importance the example of Gray Library should not be overlooked as it has been in the past, but should instead be set alongside other better known eighteenth-century libraries such as Innerpefferay and Bristol.