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Book Ownership in Late Eighteenth-Century Scotland: a Local Case Study of Dumfriesshire Inventories

ABSTRACT

Late eighteenth-century Scotland saw a period of growth in the availability of print material set against the backdrop of the Scottish Enlightenment. Yet despite much scholarly attention having been paid to the Enlightenment and an increasing interest in the books people were reading, little attention has been paid to the books that would have been found in individual Scottish houses and what they reveal about Scottish mindsets in these years. This paper addresses this topic, using a local case study of after-death inventories of personal possessions. These rich records reveal the size of household libraries, the varieties of books they contained, variation by occupation and social class, and the extent to which their owners engaged with and were influenced by debates and ideas of the time. In addition, the evidence allows us to consider the uses to which different types of books were put, examine differences between urban and provincial Scotland, and consider how and where people bought their books.

Book history and the history of reading are increasingly popular topics in Scottish historical research, reflected by a raft of new publications such as *The Edinburgh History of the Book in Scotland* and a growing number of journal articles.¹ However, research in this area was relatively

¹ *The Edinburgh History of the Book in Scotland* is being published by Edinburgh University Press in four volumes. Recent relevant journal articles and book chapters include D. Allan, 'Provincial Readers and Book Culture in the Scottish Enlightenment: The Perth Library, 1784–c1800', *The Library* 4 (2002) 367–89; H. Holmes, 'The circulation of Scottish agricultural books during the eighteenth century', *Agricultural History Review* 54 (2006) 45–78; M. Towsey, 'First Steps in Associational Reading: Book Use and Sociability at the Wigtown Subscription Library, 1795–9', *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 103 (2009) 455–95, and R. Harris, 'Communicating', in E. A. Foyster and C. A. Whatley (eds), *A History of Everyday Life in Scotland 1600–1800* (Edinburgh, 2010), 164–90.

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slow to take off, surprisingly so given a well-developed scholarly interest in the Enlightenment and the wide-ranging implications of high Scottish literacy levels.² Scotland is also reasonably well-served by records of reading, such as library borrowing records, which should have attracted greater attention from researchers before, given their potential to provide a valuable insight into the minds and attitudes of Scots in the past. Nevertheless, even now book ownership in Scotland remains under-explored, both in terms of estimating its extent and considering its significance for reading habits.³ In part, this may be due to doubts (expressed most forcibly by Houston) about how much book ownership can be measured.⁴ Another possible reason, and arguably a stronger one, is uncertainty about the extent to which people actually read the books they owned.⁵ Yet recent research into reading habits in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries has shown that books owned by people played an important part in Scottish reading opportunities, not just those of their owners but also of their wider social networks, given the widespread evidence of informal lending of books among friends and neighbours.⁶ Indeed, many recorded early reading experiences focused around the books in family homes, with their presence the catalyst for later reading practices.⁷

In what follows book ownership in late eighteenth-century Scotland will be explored in more detail. This was a period of significant growth in the availability of print material, and the local case study approach adopted here allows us to probe the significance of the books available to wider reading practices. It addresses questions such as to which books did people have access at home, how the picture changed over time in terms of volume and subject matter, whether professionals built up substantial work-related collections of books, and the extent to which contemporary influences can be traced in book ownership. Although such questions are of immediate interest to book historians, the issues raised extend beyond that context alone, given their implications

² Rab Houston has contended that Scottish literacy levels were little better than those elsewhere in Europe. See R. Houston, 'The Literacy Myth? Illiteracy in Scotland 1630–1760', *Past and Present* 96 (1982) 81–102. His assertion is based primarily on research into ability to write. Other researchers such as Smout have shown that reading was a far more widespread skill in Scotland than writing. See T. C. Smout, 'Born Again at Cambuslang: New Evidence on Popular Religion and Literacy in Eighteenth-Century Scotland', *Past and Present* 97 (1982) 114–127. For a similar reappraisal of the wider importance of the Enlightenment beyond the privileged elite, see T. Munck, *The Enlightenment: A Comparative Social History 1721–1794* (London, 2000).

³ J. Crawford, 'Reading and book use in eighteenth century Scotland', *The Bibliothek* 19 (1994) 24–8. Crawford only briefly comments on a handful of subscription lists and a single will, before moving on to consider other aspects of the history of reading more fully.

⁴ R. A. Houston, *Scottish Literacy and the Scottish Identity: Illiteracy and Society in Scotland and Northern England 1600–1800* (Cambridge, 1985), 163–71.

⁵ Houston, *Scottish Literacy*, 173.

⁶ V. S. Dunstan, 'Reading habits in Scotland circa 1750–1820', unpublished Ph.D. thesis (University of Dundee, 2010), 42–6.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 51–3.

for understanding the mentalité of Scottish people in the past. For example, scholars have written much about the Scottish Enlightenment, but few have considered how individuals at this time engaged with the written word. Studying the books in the houses of Scots can help to address this, and provides a 'bottom-up' perspective to Enlightenment history—a field typically dominated by elite groups.⁸ Similarly, the perception of a relatively highly-educated society raises the question of how individuals used books as tools to find out about the world in which they lived and to self-educate themselves.⁹

Uncovering book ownership

Past attempts to measure book ownership in Scotland have tended to focus on printed lists of subscribers, detailing people who placed advance orders for new publications and were thus included in lists of names printed inside some books.¹⁰ Yet subscription lists provide only a rough guide to book ownership, since most books were not sold in this way and knowing that an individual bought one particular book is an unreliable guide to their wider buying practices.¹¹ Moreover, subscription lists recording sufficient details for useful analysis such as occupation are relatively rare.¹²

Given such limitations, more comprehensive records of book ownership are attractive as a research resource, particularly lists that record all books owned by individuals. Such lists can be found among private estate papers in local and national archives. However, they are generally restricted to landed and aristocratic families, and are relatively small in number, even across the whole of Scotland. Another

⁸ Typical of the top-down approach are R. B. Sher, *The Enlightenment and the Book: Scottish Authors and their Publishers in Eighteenth-Century Britain, Ireland, and America* (Chicago, 2006) and M. Towsey, 'All Partners may be Enlightened and Improved by Reading Them: The Distribution of Enlightenment Books in the Scottish Subscription Library Catalogues, 1750–c.1820', *Journal of Scottish Historical Studies* 28 (2008) 20–43. Towsey, however, also studies individuals engaging with specific book. See M. R. M. Towsey, 'Patron of Infidelity: Scottish Readers Respond to David Hume, c.1750–c.1820', *Book History* 11 (2008) 89–123.

⁹ See J. Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (New Haven and London, 2001) 16–8, 59–61. This definitive study of self-education argues for a growth of autodidact culture in eighteenth-century Scotland.

¹⁰ See Crawford, 'Reading and book use', 24–6. See also W. Zachs, *The First John Murray and the Late Eighteenth-Century London Book Trade* (Oxford, 1998), 68–70. Here Zachs describes the process of publishing-subscription. Other relevant studies are R. E. Jones, 'Book owners in Eighteenth-century Scotland: a note on subscription lists in books edited by John Howie', *Local Population Studies* 23 (1979) 33–5, and P. Laslett, 'Scottish weavers, cobblers and miners who bought books in the 1750s', *Local Population Studies* 3 (1969) 7–15.

¹¹ J. Feather, *The Provincial Book Trade in Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge, 1984), 44–68.

¹² For other discussions of subscription lists see Crawford, 'Reading and book use', 26; Jones, 'Book owners in Eighteenth-century Scotland', and M. F. Suarez, 'The Production and Consumption of the Eighteenth-Century Poetic Miscellany', in I. Rivers (ed.), *Books and their Readers in Eighteenth-Century England: New Essays* (London, 2001), 217–51.

set of records covering a broader range of individuals is the Court of Session productions in process, often concerning sequestrations.¹³ Lists of books owned by individuals, such as merchants and lawyers, can sometimes be found in these records, but they too are limited in number, particularly in the late eighteenth century.¹⁴ An alternative source, both more numerous and covering a broad spectrum of society, is after-death inventories—lists of goods drawn up after their owners died. Such records have been used extensively by historians of reading elsewhere in Europe and America to study book ownership in more detail.¹⁵ To date, however, in Scotland such records have been largely ignored by book historians. Houston studied them in the context of the history of reading, but he viewed them negatively, based on his own survey of wills and inventories for Lasswade in Midlothian 1660–1760 and on Shaw’s study of the Highlands and Islands before 1750.¹⁶ Just six of the ninety-five Lasswade wills and inventories mentioned books.¹⁷ That having been said, Houston focused on the period before 1760, and more recent research suggests that book listings became more common in Scottish inventories later. Martin, for example, studying the material culture of the eighteenth-century inhabitants of Cupar, Fife, found lists of books in a third of the inventories.¹⁸ More recently a Leverhulme Trust pilot project, ‘The Late Enlightenment Scottish Burgh’, addressed inventories in the Angus area between 1750 and 1820 and found a similar frequency of book listings.¹⁹

It should be acknowledged that there are difficulties with Scottish after-death inventories for all periods if they are to be used to attempt to survey society as a whole. Even in the later period, such records are largely sporadic in terms of people covered, their completeness, and

¹³ Edinburgh, National Records of Scotland [NRS], Court of Session Productions in Process, CS96.

¹⁴ *Scottish Record Office Court of Session Productions c1760–1840* (List and Index Society Publications: Special Series 23, 1987). These records became more numerous in the early nineteenth century.

¹⁵ Houston, *Scottish Literacy*, 171. Houston cites examples from around Europe, but mainly from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Inventory studies of books from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries include R. Chartier, *The Cultural Uses of Print in Early Modern France* (Princeton, 1987), 184–9; J. de Kruif, ‘Classes of readers: Owners of Books in 18th-century The Hague’, *Poetics* 28 (2001) 423–52; R. G. Cárcel, ‘La posesión del libro en la Cataluña del Antiguo Régimen’, *Bulletin Hispanique* 99 (1997) 135–60; H. Grönroos and A.-C. Nyman, *Boken i Finland: Bokbestandet hos borgerskap, hantverkare och lagre sociala grupper i Finlands städer enligt stadernas bouppteckningar 1656–1809* (Helsinki, 1996); and M. Robert, ‘Le livre et la lecture dans la noblesse canadienne 1670–1764’, *Revue d’Histoire de l’Amérique Française* 56 (2002) 3–27.

¹⁶ Houston, *Scottish Literacy*, 165–71, 297–300; F. J. Shaw, *The Northern and Western Isles of Scotland and their Economy in the Seventeenth Century* (Edinburgh, 1980), particularly 9–12.

¹⁷ Houston, *Scottish Literacy*, 170.

¹⁸ Martin checked ninety-one inventories between 1689 and 1827 and found references to books in one third of them. P. Martin, *Cupar: the history of a small Scottish town* (Edinburgh, 2006), 107–26, 132–4.

¹⁹ Leverhulme Trust, ‘The Late Enlightenment Scottish Burgh’ (F/00143-F).

the level of detail recorded. The impression gained from examining a large number of Scottish testaments is that middle-class and wealthier individuals were more likely to appear in the registers of testaments than working-class people, but no more or less likely to have a detailed inventory of their possessions recorded there. Even where a detailed list of possessions was copied into the surviving registers, books owned might be unrecorded because they were missing or lent to others, or ignored by a valuer, perhaps because they were considered to be of low or no value. They might even have been taken already by family and friends of the deceased person.²⁰ Nevertheless, inventories are still worth examining for book references as they list books more frequently than previously thought, and cover a wider cross-section of society than private estate papers.

The analysis which follows is based on a study of testaments which include after-death inventories as well as wills. Whereas the Angus study was based on burgh inhabitants, this larger study of Dumfriesshire has a broader scope, and considers both urban and rural dwellers. The hit-and-miss nature of the references to books in the testaments suggested that any type of statistical sampling (for example looking at every tenth testament) would be unsuccessful. Instead, a comprehensive search of a court's entire register of testaments throughout the late eighteenth century was opted for. Such a search avoided the problem of comparing different courts with different consistency of recording books and allowed for a thorough investigation of a particular area over a long time period.

Dumfries Commissary Court was selected as an ideal choice in terms of scale, rural/urban contrasts and the potential for comparison with the extant Angus material. The court covered the whole of Dumfriesshire, as well as small portions of Kirkcudbrightshire. This area in the south west of Scotland had good transport links, and booksellers and printers appeared relatively early on in Dumfries, with a bookbinder trading from at least the 1660s, and a printer from 1715 onwards.²¹ Dumfriesshire's population in the late-eighteenth century has been estimated to be approximately 50,000—lower than would ideally be surveyed for a case study like this but small enough to be practical to search its testaments in precise detail.²²

²⁰ Houston comments on these factors, including the possibility that some assessors considered books to have been of too low a value to worry about when compiling total valuations for tax on the estate at 5%. Houston, *Scottish Literacy*, 165–6.

²¹ For a modern overview of the local area see J. R. Hume, *Dumfries and Galloway: an illustrated architectural guide* (Edinburgh, 2000), particularly 3–5. For late-eighteenth-century county and parish reports see J. Sinclair (ed.), *The Statistical Account of Scotland 1791–1799: Volume IV Dumfriesshire* (Wakefield, 1978). See also the Scottish Book Trade Index, <http://www.nls.uk/catalogues/scottish-book-trade-index>, accessed 14 July 2012.

²² The *New Statistical Account* gives the population of Dumfriesshire in 1755 as 39,788 and in 1801 as 54,597.

The research focused on the court's registers of testaments across the years 1750 to 1800.²³ This was followed by a manual check of the court's warrants of inventories, additional executory papers of appraisements and inventories to identify detailed lists including books not copied into the registers of testaments.²⁴ This additional check was prompted by concerns about the perceived rarity of book references – hence the value of any additional ones found.

Of the individuals appearing in these various records, 156 had testamentary records referring to books.²⁵ Thirteen were found with inventoried book furniture (book cases etc.) but no further references in their inventories to books. Another twenty-nine were found with more explicit references to books (e.g. valuations), but without detail. The remaining 114 cases (73% of those found) offered detailed lists of books including titles or subjects. References to books were found in over a third of the detailed inventories of personal possessions recorded in a quarter of the testaments in the court's registers.²⁶

One of the major strengths of the evidence from the inventories is the number of different book owners; the evidence for 156 different book owners permits a level of analysis not possible with a smaller sample. Nonetheless, the problems with the underlying evidence – in particular concerns about its coverage of the local population – prevent any kind of large-scale statistical analysis, and indeed limit the extent that these results might be meaningfully compared with similar inventory studies in other countries.²⁷

Figure 1 shows the spread of the book owners through time.²⁸ Places of residence are recorded for 147 of the book owners. Of these seventy-eight (53.1%) lived in rural areas, forty-nine (33.3%) in Dumfries, and twenty (13.6%) in smaller towns and villages.²⁹ The rural nature of the

²³ The relevant Dumfries Commissary Court volumes are held in the NRS: CC5/6/13 (1746–1752), CC5/6/14 (1752–1766), CC5/6/15 (1766–1775), CC5/6/16 (1775–1785), CC5/6/17 (1785–1795), and CC5/6/18 (1795–1802). These papers include 1,379 testaments, including 345 with detailed inventories and 82 with wills.

²⁴ For warrants of inventories covering this period, see NRS CC5/10/1 (1741–1766), CC5/10/2 (1767–1778), CC5/10/3 (1779–1791), CC5/10/4 (1792–1798), and CC5/10/5 (1799–1804).

²⁵ Of these, 148 were found in the registers of testaments and four in the warrants.

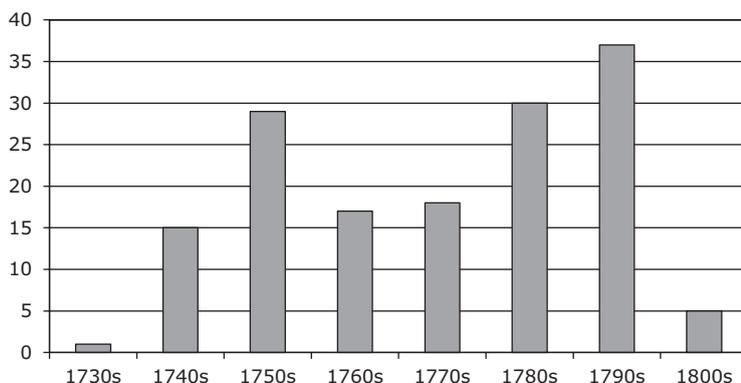
²⁶ Just 5% of testaments were found to contain legacies, and only a tiny fraction of those mentioned books. In volumes CC5/6/13–18 out of 1379 testaments only 82 listed any legacies.

²⁷ As well as warrants of inventories, this court has warrants of testaments which may have uncovered some more legacies mentioning books. NRS, CC5/8/1 has warrants of testaments for years 1694–1800. It was decided not to check these manually, because references to books were so rare in the wills copied into the registers of testaments, that an additional trawl for uncopied wills was thought unlikely to yield many additional book references.

²⁸ One died in 1733 and her testament was not registered until 1751. This was Agnes Maxwell (ob. 1733), widow of Rev. James Elder minister of Keir, who left her 'Gilded Bible' to her nephew Edward McCulloch of Ardwall.

²⁹ The population of Dumfries in the 1790s was about 5,600. Smaller settlements included Annan, with about 1,620 people; Langholm, with about 1,500; Lockerbie,

Figure 1: Numbers of Book Owners Dying per Decade, (1730s–1800s).



Source: Edinburgh, National Records of Scotland [NRS], Dumfries Commissary Court, Testaments, CC5/6/13–18, and Dumfries Commissary Court, Warrants of Testaments, CC5/10/1–5.

local area is further reflected in the occupations of book owners, with the largest group comprising tenant farmers.

Such a high number of rural dwellers and occupations among the book owners modifies Houston's perception of the dominance of urban dwellers among book owners recorded in inventories. However, some groups are better represented than others. For example, there are relatively few women (sixteen out of 156 book owners) which might suggest that they owned fewer books, or perhaps that their possessions were recorded in less detail after death. In addition, there are few members of the titled nobility, even if lesser gentry are represented in significant numbers.³⁰ The presence of professionals is unsurprising, but the large number of merchants is striking, half in Dumfries itself, and the rest scattered throughout smaller towns and villages. There are also more working-class book owners than might be expected given Houston's reservations. They remain in the minority, but are a sizeable minority nonetheless.

Subjects of books owned

One of the clearest trends evident in the books recorded is the persistence of religious book ownership throughout the period. The books of people dying in the late 1740s and 1750s generally consisted

²⁹ (*Continued*) with about 700; and (with unspecified village populations in the *OSA*) Sanquhar, Lochmaben and Moffat. See Sinclair, *The Statistical Account of Scotland 1791–1799: Volume IV Dumfriesshire*, xii–xi.

³⁰ A rare example of the aristocracy is Richard Dalzell (1753–1782), 'Lord Dalzell', younger of Glenae. See J. B. Paul (ed.), *The Scots Peerage: Volume II* (Edinburgh, 1905), 416–7.

Table 1: Occupations of Book Owners, 1746–1802

Occupational profile	Number
tenants, mostly farmers	32
merchant	22
gentry	21
minister	9
unspecified	6*
writer	5
residential/indweller	4
soldier	4
squareman/joiner	4
innkeeper/vintner	3
late Provost	3
sadler	3
surgeon	3
chapman	2
gardener	2
miller	2
overseer	2
smith	2
baker's widow, bookseller, brewer, chamberlain to Duke, deacon convener, labourer, land surveyor, landwaiter, mason, mason's widow, merchant's widow, messenger, minister's widow, portioner, schoolmaster, servant, shipmaster, shoemaker, shopkeeper, skinner, staymaker, surveyor general of customs, tobacconist, town clerk, washerwoman, wright's widow, writer's widow	1 each

*: these were mostly farmers.

Source: NRS, Dumfries Commissary Court, Testaments, CC5/6/13–18, and Dumfries Commissary Court, Warrants of Testaments, CC5/10/1–5.

Table 2: Occupational Categories of Book Owners, 1746–1802

Occupational Category	Number (%)
farming/agriculture	39 (25.0%)
artisans/tradesmen	32 (20.5%)
professionals	25 (16.0%)
merchants	22 (14.1%)
gentry	21 (13.5%)
military	4 (2.6%)
servants	2 (1.3%)
shipmaster	1 (0.6%)
other/unspecified	10 (6.4%)
<i>Total</i>	<i>156</i>

Source: NRS, Dumfries Commissary Court, Testaments, CC5/6/13–18, and Dumfries Commissary Court, Warrants of Testaments, CC5/10/1–5.

of a bible and a few other religious books, but by the 1790s and early 1800s the equivalent lists included secular books such as histories *alongside* the Bible, usually taking the numbers of books listed into double figures. Widespread ownership of religious books is consistent with contemporary accounts which describe how every house would have at least one copy of the Bible and that this was often the first book that children learned to read. The incidence of bible ownership in Dumfriesshire may have been higher than elsewhere in Scotland because the county's traditional Covenanting reputation is likely to have left a legacy for the eighteenth century. In addition, Glasgow – relatively nearby – was renowned for producing religious books which might have further skewed the pattern of bible ownership.³¹ One possible explanation for the Bible being found in so many household inventories is that this was often the family's most valued book, and thus more likely to be preserved, with inventories underestimating the ownership of other reading material. This could be so, but it does not adequately explain the increasing presence of secular works in inventories over the ensuing decades, which fits with a demonstrable change in subjects of books owned during that period.

Another large category of books in Dumfriesshire can be identified as probably bought for work purposes; this was particularly noticeable among occupations using highly specialised reference books. A large group of professionals with work-related books were (predictably) ministers. Nine Church of Scotland ministers were recorded as book owners, with all but one minister being from a rural parish.³² A few of their inventories only list the total value of their books. For example, Thomas Mack's 'Library of Books in Folio, Quarto, Octavo et Infra' was valued at £13 12s 8d sterling, but its detailed catalogue was not copied into the registers of testaments.³³ Most ministers' books were listed, however, and there are several recurring titles: Pool's *Annotations*, Burket on the New Testament, the Cambridge Concordance, Hebrew bibles and dictionaries, and books of sermons.

Of the five legal professionals recorded as book owners – one writer in Lockerbie, three writers in Dumfries, and a town clerk of Dumfries – all owned numerous legal books.³⁴ These included Bankton's *An Institute of*

³¹ The sheer volume of religious books published in Glasgow during this period is apparent by studying the *English Short Title Catalogue*, <http://estc.bl.uk>, accessed 14 July 2012.

³² These were John Good at Auchencairn (ob. 1746), Thomas Mack at Terregles (ob. 1750), Alexander Ker at Dunscore (ob. 1751), John Irving at Sanquhar (ob. 1752), John Allan at Kirkmichael (ob. 1758), Walter Cook at Cummertrees (ob. 1759), William Sloan at Dunscore (ob. 1765), Dr John Burgess at Kirkmichael (ob. 1795) and James Finnan at Kirkpatrick Irongray (ob. 1796). Nine ministers out of 152 book owners is a smaller proportion than the twenty ministers out of fifty-six book owners found by Shaw in the pre-1750 Northern and Western Isles. See Houston, *Scottish Literacy*, 169–70.

³³ NRS, CC5/6/13, 5 Sep. 1750.

³⁴ The five legal professionals were Archibald Bell, writer in Lockerbie (ob. 1768); William Clerk, elder writer in Dumfries (ob. 1783); Robert Gordon, writer in Dumfries

the Laws of Scotland in Civil Rights, dictionaries of decisions in the Court of Session, copies of acts of parliament, Stair's *Institutions of the Law of Scotland*, Erskine's *An Institute of the Law of Scotland*, Spottiswood's *An Introduction to the Knowledge of the Stile of Writs, Simple and Compound*, and abridgements by Swinton and others. Another book owner with an extensive collection of legal texts, including many already mentioned, was John Hynd of Drumcoltrane (ob. 1779)—a rural laird. He may have trained as a lawyer, or could have inherited or been gifted some of the books.³⁵ Hynd may also have been a local legal official, or might have needed law books for his own needs as a landowner in an era during which litigation and boundary disputes were common.

Among other professionals, James Tait, land surveyor in Lockerbie (ob. 1796), owned nearly one hundred books, including Muller's *The Field Engineer*, Wyld's *The Practical Surveyor*, *The Surveyor's Guide*, *The Art of Surveying*, a treatise on surveying, and books on inland navigation, mathematics and other related sciences. Similarly, work-related books were owned by surgeons Ebenezer Donaldson (ob. 1785) and Alexander Brown (ob. 1800), both in Dumfries. Donaldson's list of books was modest: Brookes's *The general practice of physic*, Sharp's *A treatise on the operations of surgery*, 'Worthcoats Marine Practice', a dispensatory, and a number of old (unspecified) medical books.³⁶ Brown's inventory, however, listed many more books of all kinds. Like Donaldson, he owned core texts such as Cullen's *First Lines of the Practice of Physic*, Bell's *The Anatomy of the Human Body*, surgery books, and the *Edinburgh New Dispensatory*.³⁷ Other medical books listed covered more specialist topics such as smallpox, gonorrhoea, female diseases, and medical jurisprudence. In addition, he owned volumes of the *Medical Review*. One other medical book owner appears in the testaments, but here the evidence is to be found in his will. Matthew Gowenlock, surgeon in Moffat (ob. ca. 1747), left all of his books, pocket instruments, blue coat and breeches to his apprentice, Robert Ewart. This provides interesting evidence of how books were passed on, but there is no detailed information about the books he owned.³⁸

Clearly, it is not surprising to find professionals owning large numbers of work-related texts, given the length of training they would undergo, and the need to check reference works later. Non-professionals had a less obvious need for such texts—an impression supported by the Dumfriesshire inventories. A few artisans and tradesmen owned work-related books, such as Andrew Watson, late Deacon of the Squaremen (ob. 1793), who had thirteen books. These

³⁴ (*Continued*) (ob. 1789); Thomas Stothart of Arkland, writer in Dumfries (ob. 1791); and Archibald Malcolm, conjunct town clerk of Dumfries (ob. 1795).

³⁵ Hynd owned the classic *Justice of the Peace* manual by Burn, as well as two copies of Schaw's *Justice of Peace*, and one of Neilson's.

³⁶ NRS, CC5/6/17, 10 Feb. 1786.

³⁷ NRS, CC5/6/18, 11 June 1801.

³⁸ NRS, CC5/6/13, 12 April 1748.

were mainly religious, but included ‘two books on Architecture worth ten shillings and sixpence’.³⁹ Similarly, John McKinnell of Glen (ob. 1786), brewer and residenter in Dumfries, owned ‘four books relating to Brewing’.⁴⁰ These were rare examples; most artisans and tradesmen did not own work-related books. A similar scenario is revealed in the case of tenant farmers—the largest group of book owners found in these records. Not surprisingly, most of these individuals had crops, animals and farming equipment among their inventories of personal possessions. Yet no agricultural or farming books can be seen. Again, religious books predominate, as with John Hyslop in Glengar in the parish of Penpont (ob. 1775) with ‘Seventeen Small Books upon practical Divinity . . . a Bible & Psalm Book . . . Sundry Pamphlets’.⁴¹ The inventories suggest that Dumfriesshire farmers at this time were highly literate, but perhaps either read little about agricultural improvement and new methods of husbandry, or were accessing such books by other means.

The many merchants among the book owners also show little evidence of work-related books. Most of these men appear to have been small shopkeepers, selling a range of goods including cloth, buttons, food, and bottles. Only rarely were there hints of international trading, for example Mr Charles Johnston ‘of Ostend in the Dominions of his August Majesty the Emperor of Germany Merchant who for some time resided in the Burgh of Dumfries’.⁴² Nine merchants had books among their shop stock, in other words they were books to sell rather than any guide to the individual’s own reading tastes. Of the remaining fifteen merchant book owners, most of their book collections were modest, little extending beyond the standard Bible and usual associated religious works.⁴³ Most of them owned fewer than ten titles, with only one having a significantly larger collection. William Bell, merchant and Bailie of Dumfries (ob. 1766), had nearly one hundred books (many trade-related) and a ‘parcel of Unbound Magazines and Pamphlets’. By the early nineteenth century, merchants were prominent among lists of subscribers to new books.⁴⁴ However, in late eighteenth-century Dumfriesshire, merchant book collections tended to be more modest, and Bell’s large collection was the exception rather than the norm.

The legacy of a classical education in Scottish schools and universities can be traced in the ownership of Latin and Greek texts by nineteen

³⁹ Another two squaremen (masons) appear as book owners: William Affleck, Deacon of Squaremen in Dumfries (ob. 1745), and Andrew Hog, sometime Deacon of the Incorporation of Squaremen in Dumfries (ob. 1790). In a related occupation, Archibald Ewart, joiner in Dumfries (ob. 1795), also owned books.

⁴⁰ NRS, CC5/6/17, 30 Dec. 1786.

⁴¹ NRS, CC5/6/16, 18 March 1776.

⁴² NRS, CC5/6/17, 14 June 1793.

⁴³ Exceptions to the typically religious subject matter include reference works such as dictionaries, the *Spectator* and an eight-volume edition of Shakespeare’s works.

⁴⁴ As an example of this, see H. Holmes, ‘For the Encouragement of Agricultural Improvement in Scotland in the 1780s: Subscribers to the agricultural books of David Young’, *Review of Scottish Culture* 17 (2004–2005) 30–3.

people.⁴⁵ Some of these were professionals and gentry, but others were of more humble origins, such as William Hamilton Smith in Sanquhar (ob. ca. 1747) whose collection consisted of 'Item a large bible, an old Confession of faith, Durham upon Isaiah, Perkins Cases of Conscience, weaving spiritualized, Flavels Fountain of Life, an Explanation of Zechariah in Latin, An Explanation of the Song of Soloman, Dissertations upon Logiks in Latin, a Latin Book upon the use of Words, Priors Philosophy in Latin, a Psalmbook, Vincents Catechism, a Latin Confession of Faith, an Old Latin Testament, Juvenals Satires in Latin, Two old psalm books, a Sermon book in writing, Caesars Commentarys in Latin, Solomons Temple spiritualized all worth Three pounds Seventeen shillings Scots'.⁴⁶

More recent influences probably accounted for the presence of French books, both language guides and other books in French, revealing an interest in and appreciation for wider European and intellectual culture. Professionals were well represented among the owners of such books, but also Alexander Nivison in Kirkbog (ob. 1744) who left 'all my Greek & Latine & French books' to his second son, as well as a collection of pamphlets to his sister, and bibles and other religious works to his nephew and nieces.⁴⁷ Similarly Mary Craig, residenter at Mabie (ob. 1788), owned 'Eighteen books, mostly french, worth five shillings'.⁴⁸ Around the same time, William Roddan in Bilbow in the parish of Troqueer (ob. 1784) owned a dictionary, mathematics, science and bookkeeping books plus Boyer's French Grammar and *Telemaque* in two volumes.⁴⁹ Likewise, the inventory of Lieut-Col. Robert Irving of the 70th Regiment of Foot (ob. 1794) included 'French & English Rudiments & Vocabulary worth Two shillings... French Collection, Recuil, Fishers Arithmetic and another French Vocabulary worth Two shillings & Sixpence' and the 'Seventh Volume of Rosseau's Works and Fathers Legacy worth Sixpence'.⁵⁰

In terms of Enlightenment texts, only two had works by Rousseau, although four had writings by Voltaire.⁵¹ Nobody owned a copy of Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, although six owned works by Hume, and generally those owning such books were either gentry or writers.⁵² Looking for books by key figures, however, is only one approach to

⁴⁵ R. D. Anderson, *Scottish Education since the Reformation* (Glasgow, 1997), 6, 10.

⁴⁶ NRS, CC5/6/13, 27 April 1748.

⁴⁷ NRS, CC5/6/13, 17 Aug. 1748.

⁴⁸ NRS, CC5/6/17, 10 April 1788.

⁴⁹ NRS, CC5/6/17, 9 June 1785.

⁵⁰ Like the other three book owners from a military background, there was no sign of reading related to military matters among Lieutenant Colonel Irving's books.

⁵¹ Samuel Young of Gulyhill (ob. 1782) and Charles Ewart of Rotchell (ob. 1787) each owned ten-volume editions of Rousseau's *Works*. Meanwhile, works by Voltaire were owned by William Bell, merchant and bailie of Dumfries (ob. 1766); Robert Lorimer in Auchennaugh (ob. 1778); Samuel Young of Gulyhill; and Robert Gordon, writer in Dumfries (ob. 1789).

⁵² Owners of works by Hume were John Hynd of Drumcoltrane (ob. 1779); Samuel Young of Gulyhill (ob. 1782); Charles Ewart of Rotchell (ob. 1787); Robert

examining the Enlightenment influence—other genres were relevant too. Reference works were increasingly important in this age of learning, and three men owned copies of Johnson's *Dictionary* and another two the multi-volume *Encyclopedia Britannica*.⁵³ The latter publication was a sizeable investment, and may have been bought as a luxury item to collect, reflecting the growing trend of conspicuous consumption and the acquisition of luxury items for display.⁵⁴ However, owning it afforded its owner the opportunity to research more widely the world around him/her, and is consistent with an enquiring mind keen to engage with contemporary ideas.

Another crucial Enlightenment genre was history, particularly the popular narrative form championed by Hume, Robertson and others.⁵⁵ Over twenty Dumfriesshire book owners owned history books. Such texts appear in the largest collections but also in some smaller ones, often in addition to a core collection of religious books. For example, William Wilson, staymaker (ob. 1800), owned seventeen titles including a household Bible, religious exercises and commentaries, Young's *Night Thoughts*, five volumes of *The Spectator*, and history works by authors such as Hume and Robertson on the Stuarts, England, Mary Queen of Scots, James VI and I, and Emperor Charles V.⁵⁶ Such widespread ownership of narrative history suggests a considerable interest in this new form of writing, and a high degree of dissemination of the corresponding Enlightenment ideas. History was a particularly popular subject at this time, both in the books available to buy on the market and among books stocked by libraries around Scotland, and so it is not surprising to find a high number of such books in private libraries, large and small.

Another popular type of publication in the eighteenth century was the magazine, and twenty Dumfriesshire book owners had magazine back issues among their collections. There was a bias towards the gentry in this group, along with smaller numbers of professionals and merchants present. Reading magazines at this time in Dumfriesshire seems to have been pursued by wealthier sectors of society, probably for cost reasons.

⁵² (*Continued*) Gordon, writer in Dumfries (ob. 1789); Thomas Stohart of Arkland, writer in Dumfries (ob. 1791); and William Wilson, staymaker in Dumfries (ob. 1800). Most had copies of Hume's *History of England*, but Robert Gordon had *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, and Samuel Young had both that work and the history.

⁵³ Johnson's *Dictionary* was owned by John Hynd of Drumcoltrane, Samuel Young of Gulyhill and brewer, John McKinnell, in Dumfries. The *Encyclopedia Britannica* was owned by David Blair of Bellenmont, late provost of Dumfries (ob. 1793), and Alexander Brown, surgeon in Dumfries (ob. 1800).

⁵⁴ The term 'conspicuous consumption' was introduced by economist Thorstein Veblen, writing specifically about the nineteenth century. However, historians of earlier periods recognise this pattern too. See for example J. Brewer and R. Porter (eds), *Consumption and the World of Goods* (London, 1993).

⁵⁵ 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), 105–133.

⁵⁶ NRS, CC5/6/18, 26 Aug. 1800.

Table 3: Ownership of Named Magazines, 1746–1802

Title	Number of owners	Owners who were gentry (% total)
<i>Spectator</i>	13	15.4
<i>Universal Magazine</i>	4	0
<i>Tatler</i>	3	66.7
<i>Scots Magazine</i>	2	0
<i>Town & Country</i>	2	100
<i>Dumfries Weekly</i>	1	100
<i>Edinburgh Magazine</i>	1	0
<i>Literary Magazine</i>	1	0
<i>London Magazine</i>	1	0

Source: NRS, Dumfries Commissary Court, Testaments, CC5/6/13–18, and Dumfries Commissary Court, Warrants of Testaments, CC5/10/1–5.

The *Spectator* was easily the most popular periodical among the Dumfriesshire book owners. This publication dated originally from the early-eighteenth century, but was republished in book form and became a bestseller in later decades. Its popularity among the Dumfriesshire book owners suggests a considerable local interest in the ideas it was promoting, such as Addisonian politeness. Generally, however, lists of new books and detailed book reviews were an important part of many of these magazines, influencing what their readers subsequently read, and reflecting the growth of literary criticism. Entertainment was also an important part of their remit, as indicated by their full titles, such as *Town and Country Magazine, or Universal Repository of Knowledge, Instruction and Entertainment*, and *The Universal Magazine of Knowledge and Pleasure*. In addition, some of the magazines, such as the *Scots Magazine*, included a chronological review of recent events, keeping their readers in touch with recent developments in Scottish and British society, as well as informing them about European and global perspectives.

More interest in reading about and engaging with British issues is suggested by ownership of magazines such as *Town & Country*, *Universal Magazine*, *The Spectator* and *The Tatler*. However, there were also Scottish-specific titles in the collections, such as the short-lived *Dumfries Weekly Magazine*. This period of book collecting was before Scott's Waverley novels, and probably also too early for Burns—only Alexander Brown, surgeon in Dumfries (ob. 1800), had a copy of Burns's works. Slightly earlier, two men had copies of *Ossian* or a discussion about that publishing sensation.⁵⁷ Similarly, two more had copies of Pennant's *Tour in Scotland*.⁵⁸ One local landowner had the *Transactions of the Dumfries*

⁵⁷ Samuel Young of Gulyhill (ob. 1782) owned a 1762 edition of *Ossian's Works* and Alexander Ferguson of Craigdarroch (ob. 1796) owned a *Critical Dissertation on Ossian's Poems*.

⁵⁸ These were John Williamson in Crolchapel (ob. 1775) and Robert Gordon, writer in Dumfries (ob. 1789).

Agricultural Society – a title one might have expected to find among these private book collections.⁵⁹

The Spectator and *The Tatler* above were reprints from the early eighteenth century and reprints were increasingly significant in the Scottish book market. The Dumfriesshire inventories reveal that the ‘Old Canon’ body of literature was present in many collections, something that would be further spurred on by the copyright relaxations following the copyright trials of the 1770s, which made such works more readily available, and at lower cost.⁶⁰ Old Canon works found in Dumfriesshire homes included relatively recent works by Fielding, as well as works of poetry and plays by Milton, Pope, Dryden, Thomson and Shakespeare. It is likely that almost all of these copies were relatively recent reprints, even though they may still have been bought decades earlier. By collecting Old Canon works Dumfriesshire book owners were rediscovering older texts in a similar way to other readers throughout Britain.

By contrast, novels appeared only occasionally in the inventories, were usually about journeys to foreign lands, and were owned by a small group of men.⁶¹ Limited ownership of such a popular genre is unsurprising if people were more likely to borrow them from circulating libraries or from friends.⁶² Dumfries had at least two circulating libraries in this period. Moreover, some of the Dumfriesshire book owners would have had access to circulating libraries outside the county, even in Edinburgh, if they went there for the season.⁶³ In addition, Dumfriesshire had other early libraries, such as the Dumfries Gentlemen’s Library (founded circa 1750) and the Dumfries Presbytery Library (founded circa 1706). Indeed, Towsey has shown that the latter library attracted at least 140 borrowers between 1732 and 1826, predominantly local churchmen, but also students, schoolmasters, merchants and medical men.⁶⁴

⁵⁹ This was Alexander Fergusson of Craigdarroch (ob. 1796).

⁶⁰ W. St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge, 2004) describes the growing market for Old Canon works at this time.

⁶¹ Recorded owners of novels were Samuel Young of Gulyhill (ob. 1782) with seven titles; David Blair of Bellenmont, late provost of Dumfries (ob. 1793), with five; Robert Maxwell, late Provost of Dumfries (ob. 1793), and Alexander Fergusson of Craigdarroch (ob. 1796) with two each; and James Neilson, late Servant to Sir William Grierson of Lag (ob. 1754), John Hynd of Drumcoltrane (ob. 1779) and Dr John Burgess, minister at Kirkmichael (ob. 1795), with one each. As for the novels themselves, *Don Quixote* is listed five times, *Robinson Crusoe* and Montesquieu’s *Turkish Spy* three times; *Arabian Tales* and *Peregrine Pickle* twice; and *Gulliver’s Travels*, *Tom Jones*, *Humphry Clinker*, and *Roderick Random* once each.

⁶² E. Jacobs 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). See E. Jacobs, ‘Eighteenth-century British circulating libraries and cultural book history’, *Book History* 6 (2003) 1–22.

⁶³ This includes both individuals who spent some time in Edinburgh, and others who could afford to pay the additional cost of borrowing books through the postal system.

⁶⁴ M. R. M. Towsey, *Reading the Scottish Enlightenment: books and their readers in provincial Scotland, 1750–1820* (Leiden, 2010), 123–5.

Over time the subjects of books found in the Dumfriesshire inventories changed. Generally, in the 1740s only religion, classics, and grammar and spelling books were listed. In the 1750s history and biography, poetry and magazines started to appear. Over the remaining decades of the century other subjects emerged: voyages and travels, novels, and plays. This shift to a more varied and increasingly secular range of books fits well with Engelsing's 'reading revolution' in the eighteenth century.⁶⁵ Typical of Engelsing's theory would be a reader circa 1700 who might have a bible which was read repeatedly, but had little access to other reading material. By 1800 or so an equivalent reader might still have access to a bible at home but would also be reading a broader range of material, whether in his/her own possession or borrowed from local libraries or from friends and relatives. Engelsing's revolution is somewhat out-dated now, with historians debating its speed, timing and the true diversity of reading practices present.⁶⁶ Yet, in a broad sense it fits with what is seen in these Dumfriesshire inventories, and should not be discounted too readily. In Europe and North America several researchers have studied book ownership in this period, often using after-death inventories, and have found similar broad trends, even if some details vary.⁶⁷ Research into historic book ownership in England has been more limited, often focusing on the early modern period, and on larger private libraries belonging to wealthier individuals.⁶⁸ These individual examples can be difficult to contextualise, making it harder to study change over time, as is possible in Scotland with extensive records of after-death inventories. Documents of this nature are found rarely after the 1720s in England.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ R. Engelsing, *Der Bürger als Leser: Lesergeschichte in Deutschland 1500–1800* (Stuttgart, 1974).

⁶⁶ I. Jackson, 'Approaches to the history of readers and reading in eighteenth-century Britain', *Historical Journal* 47 (2004) 1041–1054; and D. Finkelstein and A. McCleery, *An Introduction to Book History* (New York, 2005), 113.

⁶⁷ For example, see de Kruiif, 'Classes of readers: Owners of Books in 18th-century The Hague'; Cárcel, 'La posesión del libro en la Cataluña del Antiguo Régimen'; and Robert, 'Le livre et la lecture dans la noblesse canadienne 1670–1764'.

⁶⁸ For example, see M. Bell, 'Reading in Seventeenth-Century Derbyshire: the Wheatcrofts and their Books', in P. Isaac and B. McKay (eds), *The Moving Market: Continuity and Change in the Book Trade* (London, 2001), 161–8; T. A. Birrell, 'Reading as pastime: the place of light literature in some gentlemen's libraries of the 17th century', in R. Myers and M. Harris (eds), *Property of a Gentleman: the Formation, Organisation and Dispersal of the Private Library 1620–1920* (Winchester, 1991), 113–32, and R. Milward, 'Books and booksellers in late 17th century Chesterfield', *Derbyshire Miscellany*, 10 (1985) 119–45. Often it is easier to find records from a bookseller's perspective, as with Fergus's study of Warwick bookseller Samuel Clay. See 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 America*, 78 (1984) 155–218; and J. Fergus, *Provincial Readers in Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford, 2006).

⁶⁹ L. Weatherill, *Consumer Behaviour and Material Culture in Britain, 1660–1760* (London, 1996), 2.

Larger book collections

It is striking that a number of individuals recur among the Dumfriesshire inventory owners of Enlightenment works, novels, Old Canon literature, and magazines. Each of these individuals had built a large collection of books, and Table 4 shows the subjects that dominate the larger book collections.⁷⁰ Such larger collections were owned almost exclusively by members of the professional class or the landed gentry. Six of the larger collections comprised a hundred volumes or less; the remaining five collections varied in size up to 300 volumes. Owners in the latter group included a number of professionals, but the very largest book collections tended to be owned by gentry – those people best able to invest heavily in substantial private libraries.

The investment in these books should not be underestimated, although one drawback of after-death lists is that they are little guide to the time-scale over which books were acquired, and which books were inherited from other family members. Nor should it be assumed that all professionals and gentry were following the book collecting patterns of the men shown in Table 4. These may have been people who valued books more than others, both for reading, and as objects to acquire. Nevertheless, it is likely that other like-minded Scots would have built or aspired to similar collections, and the habit of book collecting was becoming more widely diffused, at least among sections of the middling sort. Since some of the books could have been lent among friends, their owners should be considered not as isolated readers or hoarders but as participating in a provincial Enlightenment setting.

With larger collections, storage became more of an issue, both in terms of specific furniture and use of dedicated rooms.⁷¹ Twenty-four of the inventories mention furniture to store books – William Carlyle of Locharthur (ob. 1751), for example, having ‘a parcel of Old Books in a press’.⁷² More references to book cases appear from the 1770s onwards, possibly partly because they were found more frequently in the houses then, possibly also because they were valuable pieces of

⁷⁰ There is no standard subject category scheme used by historians of reading history, but the near contemporary categorisation scheme used by William Lyon Mackenzie (1795–1861) in his reading list between 1806 and 1820 provides a useful basis for a Scottish study, fitting with contemporary reading lists and library holdings. See C. Lindsey, *The Life and Times of William Lyon Mackenzie*, 8 vols (Toronto, 1862), ii. 303–13.

⁷¹ For a recent overview of book storage at this time in Scotland see M. C. T. Simpson, ‘Housing Books in Scotland before 1800’, *The Journal of the Edinburgh Bibliographical Society* 4 (2009) 11–31. Generally, though, this aspect of book history has been little researched. A rare example addressing the issue for an earlier English gentry family is offered in S. West, ‘Studies and spaces for books in seventeenth-century Penshurst Place, Kent’, *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society* XII (2002) 266–92.

⁷² NRS, CC5/6/13, 26 Nov. 1751.

Table 4: Larger Book Collections in Dumfriesshire Inventories, 1746–1802

Name	Died	Number of books	Subjects represented
Mr John Good, minister at Auchencairn	1746	94	dictionaries, grammar, religion,
William Bell, merchant and Baile of Dumfries	1766	99 (and) parcel of magazines and pamphlets	biography, classics, dictionaries, gazetteers, geography, health, history, law, magazines, mathematics, novels, poetry, politics, religion, <i>Spectator</i> , atlases, trade, voyages/travels
John Hynd of Drumcoltrane	1779	150 or thereabouts	classics, dictionary, essays, history, mathematics, poetry, religion, <i>Spectator</i> , trade
Richard Dalzell, younger of Glenae (‘Lord Dalzell’)	1782	90 or thereabouts	animals, dictionaries, gardening, history, horses, hunting, maps, medical, peerage, religion, speeches, sporting, voyages/travels
Samuel Young of Gulyhill	1782	61	angling, annual registers (reference work), classics, dictionaries, history, husbandry, law, magazines, mathematics, medical, plays, poetry, religion, voyages/travels,
Robert Gordon, writer in Dumfries	1789	92 named ones (and) 51 volumes of old magazines different books etc.	classics, dictionary, Enlightenment, grammar, history, law, magazines, novels, philosophy, poetry, reading, science, voyages/travels
Thomas Stothart of Arkland, writer in Dumfries	1791	165 or thereabouts	grammars, history, husbandry, law, logic, novels, plays, poetry, religion, science, <i>Spectator</i> , <i>Tatler</i>
David Blair of Bellenmont, late Provost of Dumfries	1793	75 (and) odd volumes of plays and pamphlets	atlas, cookery, dictionaries, education, encyclopedia, gaming, gardening, grammar, history, husbandry, magazines, mathematics, medical, novels, plants, plays, poetry, religion, songs, <i>Spectator</i> , trade

Table 4: Continued.

Name	Died	Number of books	Subjects represented
Dr John Burgess, minister at Kirkmichael	1795	270 named ones (and) 64 odd volumes of books	agriculture, botany, classics, clock-making, dictionaries, Gaelic language, gaming, gardening, gazetteers, grammar, history, mathematics, medical, novels, poetry, politics, religion, science, <i>Spectator</i> , voyages/travels
Alexander Fergusson of Craigdarroch	1796	123 named ones (and) 67 odd volumes of books	agricultural, classics, gardening, gazetteer, geography, history, law, magazines, novels, plays, poetry, politics, religion, voyages/travels
James Tait, land surveyor in Lockerbie	1796	99 (and) magazines, newspapers	dictionaries, geography, grammar, history, magazines, mathematics, newspapers, plays, religion, science, surveying, voyages/travels

Note: the phrase 'odd volumes' is used repeatedly in the testaments.

Source: NRS, Dumfries Commissary Court, Testaments, CC5/6/13–18, and Dumfries Commissary Court, Warrants of Testaments, CC5/10/1–5.

furniture and thus more likely to be noted by valuers.⁷³ This was the era of David Allan's painting 'The Connoisseurs' (1780) which shows a characteristic Edinburgh-made book case.⁷⁴ In the Dumfriesshire inventories, Thomas Stothart of Arkland, writer in Dumfries (ob. 1791), had 'a Mahogany Book Case worth Ten pounds Ten shillings' in his parlour and 'Drawers and Book Case worth Six pounds Ten Shillings' in his bedroom.⁷⁵ Dedicated library spaces were mentioned in a number of the inventories, particularly those of ministers like Alexander Ker at Dunscore (ob. 1751), John Irving at Sanquhar (ob. 1752), Dr John Burgess at Kirkmichael (ob. 1795), and James Finnan at Kirkpatrick Irongray (ob. 1796).

Such large book collections also raise the issue of where people obtained their books. Fortunately there is a particularly valuable record for one Dumfries bookseller in the Dumfries Commissary Court

⁷³ In private correspondence, David Jones, furniture history expert, observed that '1770–1780 was certainly the hey day for bookcases in Scotland'. For retrospective specifications of late eighteenth-century book cases, see D. Jones (ed.), *The Edinburgh Cabinet and Chair Makers' Books of Prices 1805–1825* (Cupar, 2000).

⁷⁴ This painting may be viewed in the Scottish National Gallery in Edinburgh.

⁷⁵ NRS, CC5/6/17, 2 Oct. 1792.

Table 5: Subjects Stocked in Ebenezer Wilson's Bookshop in 1788

Subject	Titles stocked (%)
religion	27.4
history and biography	10.2
poetry	9.8
classics	7.4
novels	7.4
miscellaneous	5.9
grammar and spelling	5.1
education	3.7
mathematics	3.3
plays	2.8
other/ unconfirmed	17.0

Source: NRS, CC5/6/17, 16 February 1790.

testaments—an inventory including the complete stocklist of Ebenezer Wilson's bookshop drawn up after his death in 1788.⁷⁶ Such detailed after-death stocklists for booksellers are rare in this period, yet they can give a more complete snapshot of a bookseller's stock than the more limited number of books mentioned in a surviving newspaper advertisement or catalogue of new books. Wilson's stocklist includes a detailed list of the books stocked, including for each item its title, number of copies held, and the valuation, presumably its market value.⁷⁷ Listed here are 260 different items representing between them a total of 3,076 copies for sale. Table 5 shows the best represented subjects stocked in Wilson's bookshop.

Because Wilson's stock list records the number of copies held of each title, it is also possible to speculate about the bestsellers, assuming that the books he had most copies of were the more popular texts, and not unwanted unsold copies. For such a long-running and probably successful bookshop, trading from at least 1756 until Wilson's death in 1788, this seems a reasonable assumption to make, for the quantities involved are so great that it seems unlikely Wilson would have kept them if they were not going to sell.

Wilson's stock has a higher presence of books for school children than the inventories, which is perhaps unsurprising if these books were either considered of low value, or not retained later in life. Generally, though, Wilson's stock correlates closely to the books found in local homes,

⁷⁶ NRS, CC5/6/17, 16 Feb., 1790. The *Scottish Book Trade Index* indicates that Wilson was trading as a bookseller in Dumfries from 1756 onwards so, was a long-established local bookseller. A fuller analysis of Ebenezer Wilson's bookshop in Dumfries will be published as part of a larger paper examining him and another south-west Scotland bookseller, James Meuros in Kilmarnock, in the *Journal of the Edinburgh Bibliographical Society*.

⁷⁷ For example 'Item fifty Copies of Caesar worth Ten pence each inde Two pounds One shilling & eight pence'. For a more detailed analysis of Wilson's stock, including the most popular titles, see Dunstan, 'Reading habits in Scotland', 81–3.

Table 6: Top Titles in Ebenezer Wilson's Bookshop in 1788

Title (as given)	Copies held
Aesop's Fables	234
Dunlop's Greek Grammar	220
Gregory's Legacy	186
Craighead on the Sacrament	82
Telfair's Spelling Book	78
Watt's Psalms	76
The French Convert	54
Oeconomy of Love	52
Scott's Spelling Book	52
Caesar	50
Thomson's Seasons	50

Source: NRS, CC5/6/17, 16 February 1790.

suggesting a close relationship between supply and demand. Most titles found in the local inventories could be bought in his Dumfries shop, and only older or more specialised texts (particularly legal and medical) are missing from Wilson's range and would have had to have been ordered from further afield. The Dumfriesshire inventories also reveal other local sources for buying books, with both general merchants and chapmen stocking religious works.⁷⁸

Conclusions

The late Georgian period saw a huge growth of print in Britain, and after-death inventories offer the opportunity to study the impact of this on Scottish homes. Such records cover a relatively broad section of Scottish society, and are far more numerous than other inventories of the time, such as those found in private estate papers or records of sequestrations. Some features of Dumfriesshire might make the pattern of book ownership distinct from other places. For example, there may have been a different attitude to religious books, given the local Covenanting tradition and proximity of Glasgow. It was also a rural area with significant numbers of farmers, although this was the case with much of Scotland at this time, when most people lived in the countryside. It would be easy – if wrong – to view Dumfriesshire as a quiet rural backwater, compared with urban centres such as Edinburgh and Glasgow. Ebenezer Wilson's detailed stock list shows that Dumfriesshire people with money to spend on books in the late-eighteenth century had local access to a wide range of reading material – a picture reinforced by the books found in their homes. Moreover, it is likely that the books owned in this county are a useful indicator of those owned by similar readers elsewhere in provincial Scotland.

⁷⁸ See, for example, NRS, CC5/6/16, 19 Sep. 1780; NRS, CC5/6/16, 2 Oct. 1781; NRS, CC5/6/14, 4 Feb. 1758; NRS, CC5/6/16, 15 March 1784.

However, one must be wary of deducing a general picture from this data. While previous research has shown that working-class Scots bought books as well as their better-off neighbours, relatively few working-class book owners were found in this study.⁷⁹ The nature of the source material in this instance might skew the representation in favour of the more well-to-do. One must also be alert to the implications of personal collecting chronologies. Although they provide a snapshot in time, book collections found in after-death inventories tend to be those of older owners, built up over a lifetime, raising the question of how accurately they reflected their owners' reading tastes at any one time. Some books might have sat unread on shelves, or been read by other members of the household. Others would have been bought decades earlier, but not read in a long time, or may have been inherited from older relatives. In addition, it is inevitable that inventoried collections were skewed towards more valuable texts owned by families, such as bibles. Many volumes were often no doubt left un-recorded. Other research, moreover, suggests that Scots in this period were more likely to borrow novels than to own them, and that their private book collections lagged behind wider reading tastes.⁸⁰

Despite such concerns, the Dumfriesshire inventories provide a good insight into the books Scots had in their homes in the late eighteenth century, and are important as indicators of reading material and ideas, particularly for young readers. Indeed, examining books in people's houses provides a valuable insight into mentalities in the past, showing the extent to which Scots in the late-eighteenth century valued the written word and engaged with the products of a rapidly growing written culture. Studied over time, the inventories reveal a marked shift from small collections focused around the family bible to a more diverse mix by the end of the century. Professionals and their work-related collections appear frequently, as do Enlightenment books and reading material linking into wider British society, particularly magazines. Some of the collections were very large indeed, particularly those of gentry, raising the question of how people stored their books, as well as how they obtained them. This era saw the growth of conspicuous consumption, and the importance of books as objects to be acquired and treasured grew as part of this. Yet many books owned by the Dumfriesshire book owners had more practical uses as well, and reveal how their owners formed a world view, learned about manners, confirmed or challenged their religious values, and sought entertainment.

⁷⁹ For example, Laslett, 'Scottish weavers, cobblers and miners', 7–15.

⁸⁰ Dunstan, 'Reading habits in Scotland', 189–95.