

Transpennine Enlightenment: Literary and Philosophical  
Societies in the North of England, 1780-1800

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## Abstract

This thesis is primarily concerned with the first two decades of the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society, founded in 1781. Well known to historians of science and medicine, the society has not been much studied by literary historians. This dissertation aims to rectify this situation by taking the word “literary” in the society’s title seriously, and looking at what it meant by providing readings of its publications and studying its activities. The question is complicated because both “science” and “literature” were terms that were in the process of emerging as separate disciplines. The founders of the MLPS were clear in 1781, however, that “physics and the *belles lettres*” were jointly involved in a process of “improvement.”

The first three chapters take the MLPS from its inception up to 1800, investigating, especially, the pressures put on its associational structure by the French Revolution and the reaction against Joseph Priestley’s influential model of improvement via voluntary association and unlimited discussion. The MLPS had a particularly close relationship with groups associated with William Roscoe and James Currie in Liverpool, both of whom were honorary members. The Literary and Philosophical Society founded at Newcastle in 1793 was the direct result of the friendship between Thomas Percival and William Turner (both of whom had been graduates of the Warrington Academy). My final two chapters concentrate on Liverpool and Newcastle respectively, looking at what their development up to around 1800 can tell us about the ethos at Manchester and the broader spirit of the “literary” culture of these societies in their early decades.

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## Author's declaration

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. The thesis draws on some of the research published in Jon Mee and Jennifer Wilkes, "Transpennine Enlightenment: The Literary and Philosophical Societies and Knowledge Networks in the North, 1781-1830" *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 38.4 (December 2015), pp.599-612. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, University. All sources are acknowledged as references.

## Introduction

Throughout the course of the eighteenth century, Britain witnessed an astonishing explosion of clubs and societies. From convivial London clubs to provincial learned societies, the associational world was diverse and expanding. As Peter Clark and others have observed, many of these societies emerged partly as a response to a growing interest in books and learning at a time when books were still prohibitively expensive.<sup>1</sup> This clubbing together over books branched out into various different forms of association, including subscription and circulating libraries, but also debating societies and various literary coteries. Armed with the latest texts, people were able to gain access to the fashionable world of coffee-house culture even when they were excluded by distance and class from participating directly, the subject of much scholarly interest by Jürgen Habermas and others.<sup>2</sup> Habermas describes the emergence, in the eighteenth century, of a public sphere based on “rational-critical debate,” in which the private people assembled in a public forum, and “readied themselves to compel public authority to legitimate itself before public opinion.”<sup>3</sup> From its origins in the coffee-houses and the assembly rooms, the loose associational model of rational-critical debate developed into the more formally organised, nineteenth-century “age of societies,” a phenomenon Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall consider to be the expression of “middle-class men’s claims for new forms of manliness.”<sup>4</sup> Interest in literary sociability marked the emergence of an associational world which became hugely popular from around mid-century: Clark gives an estimate of up to 25,000 clubs and societies, of over 130 different types, in the

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Clark, *British Clubs and Societies 1580-1800* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000), p.2. See also William St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. Trans. Thomas Burger. 1962 (Cambridge: Polity Press. 1993).

<sup>3</sup> Habermas, *ibid.*, pp.25-26.

<sup>4</sup> Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and women of the English middle class, 1780-1850* (London: Hutchinson, 1987), p.416.

eighteenth century in the English-speaking world.<sup>5</sup> Members of such clubs were, of course, not simply swapping books: even the sort of associations with minimal contact between members, such as the subscription libraries, held meetings and discussions between members about books, whether in the form of reading groups, or simply committees for the discussion of suitable purchases. Recent interest in the sociable world of books by various scholars rightly recognises that texts were consumed not merely individually as passive objects, but circulated around networks.<sup>6</sup> Books played an important role in giving shape to those networks, not least when it came to practical questions of where to store them. A decision to create a library could determine the institutional form of any club or society, not least because of the question of costs.<sup>7</sup> Rather than viewing a book as a straightforward conduit of knowledge connecting text and reader, their role in these communicative networks needs to be acknowledged. When people grouped together to discuss books, there was often far more going on than may at first seem to be the case.

This thesis will explore these questions in relation to the literary and philosophical societies of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century. Literary studies have nearly entirely neglected these institutions, despite the fact they have been of longstanding interest, for instance, to historians of science. This thesis aims to think seriously about their “literary” activities, but also, in the process, note the way that they self-consciously proliferated into networks. Long associated with the new manufacturing towns of the Industrial Revolution, I wish to argue that these societies played a key role in the emergence of an Enlightenment that developed away from centres of traditional power. They promoted a culture of knowledge production particularly influenced by English dissent and the Scottish Enlightenment. They differed in their membership, makeup, and subjects of interest according to their locale, but they were strikingly similar and explicitly sought to “emulate” each other.

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<sup>5</sup> Clark, *op.cit.*, p.2.

<sup>6</sup> David Allan, *A Nation of Readers: the Lending Library in Georgian England* (London: British Library, 2008). See also Christy Ford, “‘An Honour to the Place’: Reading Associations and Improvement,” and Mark Towsey, “‘Store their Minds with Much Valuable Knowledge’: Agricultural Improvement at the Selkirk Subscription Library, 1799-1814,” both in *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 38.4 (December 2015).

<sup>7</sup> Jon Mee, *Conversable Worlds: Literature, Contention & Community 1762 to 1830* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2011), pp.23-24.



Indeed, literature produced by societies were frequently copied from each other verbatim.

For the purposes of my study I have focused primarily on the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society (MLPS). Manchester is of particular interest because of its role at the centre of the Industrial Revolution. John Aikin recognised and celebrated the town as the source of the region's transformation in his 1794 *A Description of the Country from Thirty to Forty Miles Round Manchester*: "Manchester is, as it were, the heart of this vast system, the circulating branches of which spread all round it, though to different distances."<sup>8</sup> Chapter 1 will explore the development of Manchester as a manufacturing town, and the foundation and activities of the MLPS, whose members were keen to create a space for rational and polite discussion. Chapter 2 will look at the role of the literary physician to the society. In this period the MLPS was a hotbed of activity surrounding ideas about the physical basis for taste, sensibility, and the imagination. Chapter 3 will explore how the changing political landscape of the 1790s made it increasingly difficult for the society to avoid controversy from spilling into the society's room. The final two chapters will focus on Liverpool and Newcastle respectively, examining their place within a broader network of association, an extension of Aikin's "circulating branches." While I consider these three towns to be representative of the transpennine Enlightenment, it should be noted that a second wave of similar societies commenced in the early nineteenth century, which lie beyond the scope of this thesis and which demand further study. Although this thesis will confine itself to Manchester and those societies it most immediately influenced, the period after 1815 witnessed another wave of literary and philosophical societies in the north of England: Leeds (1819), Sheffield (1822), Hull (1822) and York (1823) all self-consciously invoked what had happened in Manchester.

In order to better understand the context in which such societies flourished it is useful to start with the Royal Society, the most prestigious and enduring of the learned societies, founded in 1660. As Jan Golinski details, the society operated on a hierarchical model, dependent on aristocratic patronage.<sup>9</sup> Aristocrats made up the

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<sup>8</sup> John Aikin, *A Description of the Country from Thirty to Forty Miles Round Manchester* (London, 1795), p.3.

<sup>9</sup> Jan Golinski, *Science as Public Culture: Chemistry and Enlightenment in Britain, 1760-1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992), p.55.

majority of council members, and the president, Sir Joseph Banks, held considerable political influence. By the later eighteenth century, Golinski argues, experimental philosophers who were dissatisfied with the political establishment came to view the Royal Society with suspicion, chief among them Joseph Priestley. Priestley's disapproval of what Golinski terms "the tentacles of the government patronage machine" and its undue influence on the pursuit of learning led him to call for a different model.<sup>10</sup> In general terms, the literary and philosophical societies were influenced by the ideas of liberal education propounded by Joseph Priestley, who had a direct relationship with several of the founding figures.<sup>11</sup> Perhaps the most influential text on the formation of learned societies was Priestley's 1767 preface to *the History and Present State of Electricity*.<sup>12</sup> Looking to the development of societies in Europe, he calls for the adoption of a similar model at home. Priestley anticipated a network of provincial literary and philosophical societies, arguing that in a period of exceptional intellectual growth, the study of philosophy would benefit most from branching out into smaller subsections:

At present there are, in different countries in Europe, large incorporate societies, with funds for promoting philosophical knowledge in general. Let philosophers now begin to subdivide themselves, and enter into smaller combinations [...] The business of philosophy is so multiplied, that all the books of general philosophical transactions cannot be purchased by many persons, or read by any person. It is high time to subdivide the business, that every man may have an opportunity of seeing every thing that related to his own favourite pursuit; and all the various branches of philosophy would find their account in this amicable separation.<sup>13</sup>

In these terms, societies served as places where ideas and knowledge could be sifted and disseminated, independently of the corrupting influence of aristocratic

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<sup>10</sup> Golinski, *op.cit.*, p.70.

<sup>11</sup> Joseph Priestley, *Essay on a Course of Liberal Education for Civil and Active Life* (London, 1765), p.23. See also: *The Rudiments of English Grammar* (London, 1761); *A Course of Lectures on the Theory of Language and Universal Grammar* (Warrington, 1762), *A Course of Lectures on Oratory and Criticism* (London, 1777).

<sup>12</sup> Joseph Priestley, *History and Present State of Electricity* (London, 1767), pp.i-xxiii.

<sup>13</sup> Priestley, *op.cit.*, pp.xiv-xv. In this context, Priestley was primarily concerned with experimental science, but the founders of the literary and philosophical societies developed these ideas further.

patronage. In Manchester, one of the first points of order for the new society was the distribution of a regular publication of the best papers, which cemented its reputation within the scientific community. In Newcastle and in Liverpool, members took advantage of already established periodicals, especially the *Monthly Magazine*, founded in 1796 and edited by MLPS member John Aikin, in which to publish important papers. But whichever mode of publication a society favoured, in each case was a concerted effort to accumulate, discuss, and disseminate knowledge. Golinski argues that Priestley was a “social actor” who “cultivated a network of followers and friends in other provincial circles.”<sup>14</sup> This participatory model created a “public culture of science” that contrasts with the Royal Institution model that Priestley was critical of.<sup>15</sup> Jon Klancher makes a distinction between Priestley’s model of “natural philosophy” improvement communicated through sociable networks, and Humphrey Davy’s “arts and sciences” model: popularised rhetoric pronounced from the pulpit.<sup>16</sup> Klancher suggests that the natural philosophy model did not survive long into the nineteenth century.<sup>17</sup> However, this is not the case for the literary and philosophical societies included here. Indeed, after 1815 a new wave of societies emerged, as noted above.

The literary and philosophical societies are perhaps one of the most enduring symbols of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century pursuit of knowledge and learned sociability. The model most often cited as the prototype for later societies is the Lunar Society at Birmingham, founded around 1765, and which counted among its membership Priestley, Erasmus Darwin, Josiah Wedgwood, James Watt, and other noted figures of the Industrial Revolution, nearly all of whom later became honorary members at the MLPS. The Lunar Society was an informal group of friends who met monthly, but who as a society never published findings or communicated with the press, nor laid down rules or any sort of formal constitution.<sup>18</sup> The first literary and

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<sup>14</sup> Golinski, *op.cit.*, p.63.

<sup>15</sup> Golinski, *op.cit.*, p.68.

<sup>16</sup> Jon Klancher, *Transfiguring the Arts and Sciences: Knowledge and Cultural Institutions in the Romantic Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2013), p.1.

<sup>17</sup> *loc.cit.*

<sup>18</sup> For a discussion of the Lunar Society, see Peter M. Jones, *Industrial Enlightenment: Science, Technology and Culture in Birmingham and the West Midlands, 1760-1820* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2008), pp.82-94. See also Jenny Uglow, *The Lunar Men: The Friends Who Made the Future* (London: Faber, 2002).

philosophical society proper was set up in Manchester (1781), although, as we will see, it was preceded by a short-lived society in Liverpool (1780). Manchester's formal structure and communications with the press represented a step away from private conversational societies, of which the Lunar Society was a version, to a new, self-consciously public type of association. The societies at Manchester and Liverpool were followed in quick succession by those at Derby (1783), Bath (1788), Newcastle (1793), and many other towns across the country. New societies continued to be established throughout the course of the nineteenth century. As Clark has noted, membership was often socially diverse, consisting of local manufacturers, merchants, and landowners. Discussion tended to be broad ranging, with topics encompassing moral, literary, antiquarian, and scientific themes.<sup>19</sup> As Joel Mokyr and others have shown, the most successful learned societies tended to appear in the new industrial towns, rather than the metropolis, producing a manufacturing cultural phenomenon.<sup>20</sup> Mokyr claims that societies "often served as clearing houses for useful knowledge between natural philosophers, engineers, and entrepreneurs," with the implication that they existed as a kind of laboratory for the technological innovation which drove the Industrial Revolution.<sup>21</sup> But his description obscures key features of the phenomenon. It is perhaps more accurate to view the literary and philosophical societies as sites of the testing and dissemination of ideas more generally, rather than laboratories of "useful knowledge" in his narrower sense.<sup>22</sup> The Manchester society, in other words, did not exist merely to solve technological problems. Its founders were more concerned with the idea of self-improvement, and with sharing knowledge, as an examination of the society's *Memoirs* soon reveals. Their idea of knowledge did not exclude the "literary," as their very titles suggest, a point I'll return to later in this introduction.

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<sup>19</sup> Peter Clark, *British Clubs and Societies 1580-1800* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000), p.111.

<sup>20</sup> Joel Mokyr, *The Enlightened Economy: An Economic History of Britain 1700-1850* (London: Yale UP, 2009); Peter M. Jones, *op.cit.*

<sup>21</sup> Mokyr, *op.cit.*, p.48.

<sup>22</sup> Indeed, as Thackray has pointed out, amongst the founding members, the only paper published by a manufacturer was by a calico printer, Thomas Kershaw, on "The Comparative Merit of the Ancients and the Moderns with Respect to the Imitative Arts," in *Memoirs of the Literary and Philosophical society of Manchester*, 1 (Warrington, 1785), pp.405-12; Arnold Thackray, "Natural Knowledge in Cultural Context: The Manchester Mode," in *The American Historical Review* 79.3 (June 1974), p.697.

As I will explore in my analysis of societies in Manchester and the two towns on which it had the most immediate contact and influence, Liverpool and Newcastle, the emergence of the learned societies was a crucial aspect of the development of middle-class cultural identity. Societies of the late-eighteenth century did not merely reflect the emergence of the middle class, rather, they played an active role in its development, and shared the conflicts at the heart of its emergent identity.<sup>23</sup> In order to better explore the relationship between societies and social class, a helpful conceptual framework is Bruno Latour's Actor-Network Theory. Latour argues that it is not sufficient to observe static groups; it is the *formation* of groups which should be the focus of study: "If a given ensemble simply lies there, then it is invisible and nothing can be said about it [...] if it is visible, then it is being performed and will then generate new and interesting data."<sup>24</sup> Latour emphasises the role of controversies within a group: "in any controversy about group formation [...] some items will always be present: groups are made to talk; anti-groups are mapped; new resources are fetched so as to make their boundaries more durable."<sup>25</sup> This thesis will focus on the formation of the literary and philosophical societies in the light of the Manchester experience: their membership, rules, regulations, publications, aims and objectives. Few even of these seemingly mundane issues were without controversy. This thesis aims to dig beneath the surface of the formal arrangements and look into what the members talked about, how they facilitated discussion, which topics were forbidden, and which topics were encouraged. Who was excluded, and why, are also key questions. Understanding their relations with each other also enables a better understanding of their broader role. Their moments of formation, especially, reveal things that were later taken for granted, but also expose – as with the crisis over the library in Newcastle-upon-Tyne – the potential danger in things left unresolved when the societies were first set up. An examination of these issues is simultaneously an examination of the formation of middle-class culture, not least in its complicated attitude to the central question of "improvement."

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<sup>23</sup> For an account of the complexities of the emerging middling classes in the eighteenth century, see Dror Wahrman's "National Society, Communal Culture," in *Social History*, 17.1 (January 1992), pp.43.72.

<sup>24</sup> Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005), p.31.

<sup>25</sup> *loc.cit.*

“Improvement” has been described by Kurt Heinzelman as “that massive cultural category that so dominated 18th century theory and practice.”<sup>26</sup> Widely acknowledged as a public good, its meaning was often assumed, but frequently also the source of unresolved tension as to its remit. Joanna Innes has shown that the eighteenth-century concept of “improvement” was often contrasted with “reform,” a word more conspicuously bound up with heavy political and religious connotations.<sup>27</sup> Compared with eighteenth-century reform, improvement could seem a safer category, “the ultimately unthreatening word for ameliorative change.”<sup>28</sup> At a time of political unrest, especially during the period of the French Revolution, the divorce of intellectual progress from its political connotations were seen by some as a necessary project. Golinski identifies the 1790s as a time of profound crisis in this respect:

Ideas about the proper forms of civic activity (including science), which had become common during the decades of the Enlightenment, were subjected to conservative challenge. Reactionary thinkers disputed the desirability of widespread public education and the plausibility of the expectation that science would solve problems of health and welfare.<sup>29</sup>

Literature, science and politeness could all be seen as improving by the turn of the century, but, as later chapters will show, politics constantly seeped back in. Although many societies made an outward attempt to shed ideology from literature and science by barring discussion of political and religious topics, the reality was more complex. Many reformers and radicals found that societies served to increase the social legitimation of marginal men, in Thackray’s terms, but this was not a straightforward process. Improvement was, in the main, an ecumenical issue, but one which was liable to cause tensions between Anglican and dissenting members at times when political or religious differences moved to the fore. Thus Thomas Barnes’s project for improving the education of young gentlemen destined for the professions, the

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<sup>26</sup> Kurt Heinzelman, “The Last Georgic: Wealth of Nations and the Scene of Writing,” in *Adam Smith’s Wealth of Nations: New Disciplinary Essays*, ed. Stephen Copley and Kathryn Sutherland (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1995), pp.78-79.

<sup>27</sup> Joanna Innes, “‘Reform’ in English public life: the fortunes of a word,” in *Rethinking the Age of Reform*, ed. Arthur Burns and Joanna Innes (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003), pp.71-97. See also Jon Mee, “Introduction,” in *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 38.4 (December 2015), pp.475-82.

<sup>28</sup> Innes, *ibid.*, p.77.

<sup>29</sup> Jan Golinski, *Science as Public Culture: Chemistry and Enlightenment in Britain, 1760-1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992), p.157.

Manchester Academy, proved controversial within the MLPS as its Anglican members were keen not to identify the society with any one sect. Barnes and other dissenters had to be careful about the extent to which they assumed a cultural authority in the town.

Though it is important not to overstate the role of rational dissent in the literary and philosophical societies - societies often contained a mix of dissenting and Anglican members - it certainly played a crucial role in their development, particularly in the first generation of members. Roy Porter describes scholarly focus on the role of dissent in the Manchester society as a “caricature,” but as Thackray explains, even though the ratio of dissenters to Anglicans was small, it was dissenters – mainly Unitarians, with a small number of Quakers - who played a disproportionate role in the founding and running of the society.<sup>30</sup> Robert Owen described the society’s committee as an elite club, “composed of what were considered the select and most efficient members.”<sup>31</sup> Indeed, since dissenters occupied most of the senior roles, they had more influence than the majority of Anglican members.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, it is certainly the case that in Manchester and the other towns discussed in this thesis societies tended to cluster around the dissenting community. During the Manchester society’s early years, meetings took place in a back room of the Unitarian chapel. But more importantly, the founders and prominent members were largely educated in the dissenting academies and in the Scottish universities. Thomas Percival, effectively the founder of the Manchester society, was educated at both Warrington – of which more below - and Edinburgh; William Turner, founder of the Newcastle society, was a Warrington graduate; James Currie, founder of the Liverpool Literary Society, was also at Edinburgh. In these institutions, they received an education that gave weight to a liberal syllabus, and a participatory mode of learning in an atmosphere of sociability.<sup>33</sup> It was an ethos they would take with them to those towns in which they

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<sup>30</sup> Roy Porter, “Science, Provincial Culture and Public Opinion in Enlightenment England,” in *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 3.1 (March 1980), p.24; Thackray, *op.cit.*, p.681.

<sup>31</sup> Robert Owen, *The Life of Robert Owen Written by Himself* 1 (London, 1857), p.37.

<sup>32</sup> As Thackray has shown, this applies mainly to first generation members of societies and prominent families, with later generations frequently becoming Anglicans. See Thackray, *op.cit.*, pp.679-80.

<sup>33</sup> Joseph Priestley advanced these ideas in his published syllabi. See *Essay on a Course of Liberal Education for Civil and Active Life* (London, 1765); *A Course of Lectures on the Theory*

later settled, often as doctors or ministers. As David Allen has pointed out, scholarly interest in the role of Scottish universities and academies on the American educational system and political discourse in particular has been an important contribution to our understanding of the Scottish Enlightenment.<sup>34</sup> I intend to highlight similar networks of improvement that crossed the border to England, a transpennine Enlightenment. This “phenomenon sustained by heavily networked flows of information” is best represented by the towns of Manchester, Newcastle and Liverpool, rapidly developing towns with central importance to the industrial Enlightenment, and with strong links to Scotland and Warrington.<sup>35</sup> The literary and philosophical societies, I argue, were profoundly influenced by the culture of rational dissent, central to which is the idea of social interaction and conversation as a mode of instruction.

Warrington Academy was perhaps the most famous of the eighteenth-century dissenting academies. Founded in 1757, it opened its doors to students without the need for a religious test as a condition of admission. 397 students attended until its closure in 1783.<sup>36</sup> Noted tutors included John Aikins junior and senior, William Enfield, Joseph Priestley, and Gilbert Wakefield. The curriculum covered topics including divinity, natural philosophy, moral philosophy, and the belles lettres. The academy may have had relatively little influence on the dissenting establishment – the majority of its students did not enter the ministry - but its influence on political and cultural life during the eighteenth century was remarkable.<sup>37</sup> Many of the prominent figures I discuss in this thesis were educated at Warrington. In his history

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*of Language and Universal Grammar* (Warrington, 1762); and *A Course of Lectures on Oratory and Criticism* (London, 1777).

<sup>34</sup> David Allen, *Making British Culture: English Readers and the Scottish Enlightenment, 1740-1830* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008), p.7.

<sup>35</sup> Jon Mee and Jennifer Wilkes, “Transpennine Enlightenment: The Literary and Philosophical Societies and Knowledge Networks in the North, 1781-1830,” in *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 38.4 (December 2015), pp.519-612.

<sup>36</sup> See *Dissenting Academies Online: Database and Encyclopedia*, Dr Williams's Centre for Dissenting Studies. See also William Turner's account of the academy, first published as a series of articles in the *Monthly Repository: Warrington Academy* (Warrington: Library and Museum Committee, 1957).

<sup>37</sup> Simon Mills, “Warrington Academy (1757-1786),” in *Dissenting Academies Online*.



of the academy, Turner recounts the pedagogic style of the senior Dr Aikin which exemplifies the model for participatory learning at the heart of this thesis:

Dr Aikin [...] was always interesting, and frequently animated. He stated the arguments on both side of any disputed point, with great clearness and precision. After this, his custom was to stop, and say, "Gentlemen, have I explained the subject to your satisfaction?" or some equivalent expression. Any one, who did not fully comprehend him, was asked to state his difficulty. He then, in order to illustrate further, proceeded upon a quite different mode of explanation, which he would vary again, if requested by any present. In any disputed point of metaphysics, morals or theology, he avoided any dictatorial declaration of his own opinion, and freely encouraged his pupils to form their own. When any student embraced a sentiment different from what he imagined to be his tutor's, he, without any scruple, mentioned it, together with his reasons for it. A difference of opinion in the pupil produced no diminution of regard in the tutor, or of attention to his instruction.<sup>38</sup>

Beyond the classroom, the tutors fostered an atmosphere of polite sociability which would have a profound influence on both tutors and students. Of particular interest is what Thornton has termed the "Saturday Club," an informal weekly gathering of staff, students, and their guests that operated for most of the three decades of the academy's existence.<sup>39</sup> Aikins junior and senior attended, with at various times Priestley, Wakefield, and Enfield. Prominent members of the literary and philosophical societies central to this thesis - such as Percival, William Roscoe, Turner, and Currie, also attended at different periods. Indeed, Thornton claims it was during one of these meetings that Percival had announced and discussed his plans for the establishment of the Manchester society.<sup>40</sup> Tutors aimed to foster a culture of polite sociability through "free and friendly conversation," and this progressive and inclusive pedagogical approach had a profound influence on those who took part.<sup>41</sup> It was here, for example, that the young Anna Letitia Barbauld's poems were circulated,

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<sup>38</sup> William Turner, *op.cit.*, p.17.

<sup>39</sup> R.D. Thornton, *James Currie, The Entire Stranger, and Robert Burns* (Edinburgh and London: Oliver & Boyd, 1963), p.156.

<sup>40</sup> Thornton, *op.cit.*, p.157.

<sup>41</sup> The term "free and friendly conversation" is from Isaac Watts, *The Improvement of the Mind: or, a Supplement to the Art of Logick* (London, 1741), p.42.

and, as Anne Janowitz has argued, this proved to be a formative experience which shaped her poetic style.<sup>42</sup> In his memoirs Joseph Priestley wrote warmly of the meetings and their atmosphere of friendly and intelligent debate: “We drank tea together every Saturday, and our conversation was equally instructive and pleasing.”<sup>43</sup> Gilbert Wakefield recalled “the delightful converse” with similar fondness in his own memoirs.<sup>44</sup>

The distinctive culture of conversation imbibed at Warrington was developed at the literary and philosophical societies, but this thesis will look at its range and the limits it encountered in a broader more public environment, where activities were often tracked and reported on in the local press. At what point, for instance, did the candid exchange of views meet the limits of politeness?<sup>45</sup> What complexities arose as a result of this? Was there anything problematic about the trade-off between politeness and contention? And how did the political and religious landscape of the period shape these ideas? In the societies of Manchester, Liverpool and Newcastle, founding members were educated in Warrington and Scotland. There they were influenced by a pedagogical approach which favoured participation, encouraged the collision of ideas, and made room for disputation. As Mee has identified, these ideas were developed by writers such as Philip Doddridge and Isaac Watts.<sup>46</sup> At the Northampton dissenting academy, Doddridge fostered a culture which allowed students to interrupt their teacher to ask questions. Watts had argued for precisely this mode of learning in his 1741 *Improvement of the Mind*:

Often has it happened in free Discourse that new Thoughts are strangely struck out, and the Seeds of Truth sparkle and blaze through the Company [...] By Conversation you will both give and receive this Benefit; as Flints when put into Motion and striking against each other produce living Fire on both Sides,

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<sup>42</sup> Anne Janowitz, “Amiable and Radical Sociability: Anna Barbauld’s ‘Free Familiar Conversation,’” in *Romantic Sociability: Social Networks and Literary Culture in Britain, 1770-1840*, ed. Gillian Russell and Clara Tuite (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006), p.66.

<sup>43</sup> Joseph Priestley, *Memoirs of Dr Joseph Priestley, to the Year 1795, Written by Himself*, 1 (Northumberland, 1806), p54.

<sup>44</sup> Gilbert Wakefield, *Memoirs of the Life of Gilbert Wakefield, B.A* (London, 1792), p.215.

<sup>45</sup> For a full discussion of conversational candour, see Jon Mee, *Conversable Worlds: Literature, Contention, & Community 1762 to 1830* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2011), particularly pp.138-44.

<sup>46</sup> Mee, *op.cit.*, p.68.

which would never have risen from the same hard Materials in a State of Rest.<sup>47</sup>

For Watts, the danger of reading is that one's thoughts remained unchallenged. Reading alone is not sufficient for the development of ideas: in order to produce knowledge, and develop ideas, one must discuss what has just been read. Watts argued that there was little point in consuming books alone; knowledge gleaned from books was best shared through conversation: "A Man of vast Reading without Conversation is like a Miser who lives only to himself."<sup>48</sup> *Improvement of the Mind*, which ran to several editions, was widely read amongst dissenting circles, and is likely to have been read by the founders of the literary and philosophical societies. Indeed, the introductory addresses at Manchester and Newcastle featured similar ideas copied almost verbatim from Watts. Percival's preface to the first volume of the Manchester *Memoirs* read:

Men, however great their learning, often become indolent, and unambitious to improve in knowledge, for want of associating with other of similar talents and acquirements: Having few opportunities of communicating their ideas, they are not very solicitous to collect or arrange those they have acquired, and are still less anxious about the further cultivation of their minds. -- But science, like fire, is put in motion by collision. -- Where a number of such men have frequent opportunities of meeting and conversing together, thought begets thought, and every hint is turned to advantage.<sup>49</sup>

Turner's plan for the Newcastle society echoed the same sentiments:

Among the various causes of the rapid advancement of science, which has taken place in modern times, the institution of Philosophical Societies is one of the most obvious and important. Men by their united labours accomplish undertakings far superior to the efforts of individual strengths; and this is particularly the case with intellectual pursuits. 'Knowledge, like fire, is brought about by collision'; and in the free conversations of associated friends many lights have been struck out, and served as hints for the most important

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<sup>47</sup> Isaac Watts, *The Improvement of the Mind: or, a Supplement to the Art of Logick* (London, 1741), p.43; Mee, *op.cit.*, pp.69-70.

<sup>48</sup> Watts, *op.cit.*, p.42.

<sup>49</sup> *Memoirs*, Vol. 1 (1785), p.vii.

discoveries, which would not, probably, have occurred to their authors, in the retirements of private meditation.<sup>50</sup>

In the literary and philosophical societies of all three towns considered in this study, this metaphor of knowledge as the product of the collision between minds recurs. For Watts, as with Turner and Percival, conversation, in theory at least, seems the most desirable mode of knowledge production. In practice, however, societies searched for the best means to sustain this ideal in a way that did not lead to acrimony and, ultimately, the dissolution of their efforts. The “free conversations of associated friends” originally aimed at by their founders were not so easily maintained.

These problems met similar developments in London. Michael Faraday’s 1817 essay *Some Observations on the Means of Obtaining Knowledge and on the Facilities afforded by the constitution of the City Philosophical Society* describes conversation as a “pleasing and effective means of acquiring information.”<sup>51</sup> He goes on to observe of social gatherings:

Our private evenings are calculated for conversation improved. They admit, not of that desultory kind of chit-chat, which is characteristic of a vacuity of mind, and where indeed method would be ill applied; but of a regular, orderly interchange of thoughts and opinions; of an easy and colloquial transference of information; of question and answer; of observation; without end.<sup>52</sup>

However, Faraday complained about the difficulty he found in keeping up a lively conversation, blaming “inertia of the mind”: “Our subjects are not confined, our laws are not curbing, and our incitements are numerous; yet it is with regret I observe, that so low are those evenings appreciated, that not one half of our members generally attend.”<sup>53</sup> In their attempts to regulate the free flow of conversation, societies sometimes struggled to maintain interest. In Liverpool, for example, the early Philosophical and Literary Society was disbanded after a short period citing “lack of zeal” amongst its members. On the other hand, rules and regulations were a necessary addition in order to avoid conversation transgressing the boundaries of

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<sup>50</sup> *Plan of the Literary and Philosophical Society* (Newcastle, 1793), p.2.

<sup>51</sup> Michael Faraday, *Some Observations on the Means of Obtaining Knowledge and on the Facilities afforded by the constitution of the City Philosophical Society* (London, 1817), p.10.

<sup>52</sup> Faraday, *ibid.*, p11.

<sup>53</sup> *loc.cit.*

politeness, so rules prohibiting the discussion of religion and politics were almost ubiquitous amongst the literary and philosophical societies.

There's no doubt that part of the attraction for these societies was that they offered local communities an opportunity for "literary conversation," but have hitherto received scholarly attention primarily from historians of science, who have often characterised them as "provincial science societies" and ignored the "literary" part of their titles. As Paul Elliott has traced, scholarship has tended to view "scientific culture" as primarily utilitarian, however this view has been more recently challenged.<sup>54</sup> Between the 1940s and 1970s scholars tended to conceive of societies as scientific, and arising as a result of the industrialisation of society. Robert Schofield, for example, argues that the Lunar Society represented "a conscious shaping of their world and a deliberate application to solve the problems of industrializing England."<sup>55</sup> More recent work by Roy Porter has questioned this approach, arguing that science was not simply a matter of pure utilitarianism, but ought to be understood as part of a broader culture of polite aspiration in these emergent cities.<sup>56</sup> Porter promisingly suggested that for the Manchester society "[t]he very name, '*Literary and Philosophical*' should alert us to the fact that, in the founders' minds, there were goals more pressing than technical expertise, industrially applied science, or the training of mechanics."<sup>57</sup> Unfortunately, his approach tends to reduce the question of the "literary" in the societies to politeness in a way that perpetuates Thackray's sense of it as primarily "ornamental."<sup>58</sup> This rather underestimates the commitment to the "literary" shown in the societies studied here. The sheer amount of literary work undertaken as reviewers of poetry and medicine for the *Monthly Review* by John Aikin and John Ferriar, while members of the society, indicated something of how important this dimension of their lives was to both men.<sup>59</sup> Aikin

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<sup>54</sup> Paul Elliott, *The Derby Philosophers* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2009), pp.4-5.

<sup>55</sup> R.E. Schofield, *The Lunar Society of Birmingham* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), p.440.

<sup>56</sup> Roy Porter, "Science, Provincial Culture and Public Opinion in Enlightenment England," in *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 3.1 (March, 1980), pp.20-46.

<sup>57</sup> Porter, *ibid.*, p.25.

<sup>58</sup> Arnold Thackray, "Natural Knowledge in Cultural Context: The Manchester Mode," in *The American Historical Review* 79.3 (June, 1974), p.685.

<sup>59</sup> For details, see Derek Roper, *Reviewing Before the Edinburgh, 1788-1802* (London: Methuen, 1978). Roper's analysis draws on Benjamin Nangle's index to the *Monthly Review*,

and Ferriar gave papers on both medical and literary topics to the society.<sup>60</sup> Porter lacks any real attention to the literary endeavours in and around the society, referring to societies repeatedly as centres of provincial science.<sup>61</sup> The Manchester society was never intended to be “scientific” in the way Porter suggests. As late as 1826 Charles Lyell commented that the first two *Memoirs of the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society* were “almost equally divided between literary and scientific articles.”<sup>62</sup> Lyell chooses in his review of the *Memoirs* to focus only on the scientific papers, however, because though the literary papers displayed “great originality and elegance [...] literature stands much less in need of this description of patronage than the experimental sciences.”<sup>63</sup> Indeed, it does not appear as though any historian has paid any serious attention to the society's literary output, an oversight which I mean to address.

Paul Keen has shown how far the definition and status of literature has shifted since the eighteenth-century, reaching a crisis point during the 1790s.<sup>64</sup> But despite this “literary” topics do not appear to have fallen out of favour in the literary and philosophical societies, at least until the early 1800s. This contradicts arguments put forward by Mokyr, who posits science – as opposed to literature – as “a natural rather than a moral discourse,” providing a “neutral common ground” on which the urban elite could meet, regardless of ideology.<sup>65</sup> Mokyr here cites Thackray, but slightly mischaracterises his argument: Thackray argues rather that science “was felt to offer a neutral means of communication between often hostile groups.”<sup>66</sup> What both Mokyr

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which identified Ferriar as a contributor. See Benjamin Christie Nangle, *The Monthly Review: First Series* and *The Monthly Review: Second Series* (Oxford, 1934, 1955).

<sup>60</sup> See, for example, John Aikin, “Remarks On the Different Success With Respect to Health, of Some Attempts to Pass the Winter in High Northern Latitudes,” in *Memoirs* 1 (1785), pp.89-119; and “On the Impression of Reality Attending Dramatic Representations,” in *Memoirs* 4 (1793), pp.96-108. See also John Ferriar, “Observations Concerning the Vital Principle,” in *Memoirs* 3 (1790), pp.216-41; and “Comments on Sterne,” in *Memoirs* 4 (1793), pp.45-86.

<sup>61</sup> Porter, *op.cit.*, p.25.

<sup>62</sup> Charles Lyell, “Scientific Institutions,” in *Quarterly Review*, 34 (June 1826), p.167.

<sup>63</sup> Lyell *loc.cit.*

<sup>64</sup> Paul Keen, *The Crisis of Literature in the 1790s* (Cambridge UP, 1999).

<sup>65</sup> Joel Mokyr, *The Enlightened Economy: An Economic History of Britain 1700-1820* (Oxon: Routledge, 2014), p.50.

<sup>66</sup> Thackray, *op.cit.*, p.693.

and Thackray fail to acknowledge, however, is that science is not inherently “value neutral.” Indeed, Thackray himself cites an incident in 1785 when an “apparently innocuous” proposal to raise a stipend for Priestley’s research led to a spate of resignations from the Manchester society.<sup>67</sup> A decade earlier Priestley had declared that “the English hierarchy (if there be anything unsound in its constitution) has [...] reason to tremble even at an air pump, or an electrical machine.”<sup>68</sup> What such incidents underline is that, far from being inherently “value neutral,” the goal of improvement free from ideology always had been a contested zone. Priestley saw science as inherently political, and this was not as straightforward as their public face of societies would suggest. Indeed, as Golinski argues, the 1790s was a watershed moment as scientists became increasingly aware that their sense of improvement ought to drop any connection with politics.<sup>69</sup> But this was a complex and drawn out process. By looking at different types of archives it is possible to gain a sense of what happened in private meetings, which were sometimes more fraught than we might think. Indeed, there was far from a liberal consensus during the society’s early years, as further chapters will explore.

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<sup>67</sup> Thackray, *ibid.*, p.693.

<sup>68</sup> Joseph Priestley, *Experiments and Observations on Different Kinds of Air* (London, 1775), p.xiv.

<sup>69</sup> Jan Golinski, *Science as Public Culture: Chemistry and Enlightenment in Britain, 1760-1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992), p.156.

# 1: The foundation of the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society

This chapter will trace the foundation and early years of the Literary and Philosophical Society of Manchester (MLPS), and its place within the broader context of the transpennine Enlightenment described in the introduction. It is my contention that the society at Manchester can be conceived as a central node from which emerged a broad network of intellectual communities throughout England, with knowledge production as its primary mode. The chief endeavour of this project was scientific and literary progress, with roots that can be traced back to the Scottish Enlightenment and the English dissenting academies. As we have seen, scholarship has previously tended to focus on the role of science and technology in provincial learned societies. I wish to contest the concept of the Manchester society and those like it as “clearing houses for useful knowledge between natural philosophers, engineers, and entrepreneurs.”<sup>1</sup> In reality, the situation was far more complex than this allows. Previous research has typically focused on the scientific achievements of the society, with critics focusing largely on the extent to which the Manchester society impacted on scientific discovery. I wish to highlight the hitherto unexamined importance founding members placed upon literary conversation in the early years. If scholars such as Margaret Jacob and Joel Mokyr want to focus on the idea of the Industrial Revolution as the product of a knowledge economy, then the range of “knowledge” taken account of in their analysis needs to be expanded.<sup>2</sup> Today the Manchester society is probably best known for famous members of the scientific community such as John Dalton and James Prescott Joule. Thackray asserts that by the nineteenth century science came to be “established as the cultural mode of the Manchester elite.”<sup>3</sup> Similarly, for R.J. Morris, “the urban elites used science as the

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<sup>1</sup> Joel Mokyr, *The Enlightened Economy: An Economic History of Britain 1700-1850* (London: Yale University Press, 2009), p.48.

<sup>2</sup> Margaret Jacob, *The First Knowledge Economy: Human Capital and the European Economy, 1750-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2014).

<sup>3</sup> Arnold Thackray, “Natural Knowledge in Cultural Context: The Manchester Mode,” in *The American Historical Review* 79.3 (1974), p.682.



basis for cultural assertion” and “Science was built into middle-class and urban elite identity as part of a bid for legitimacy and power.<sup>4</sup> But such judgments underestimate the importance of sociability and literary conversation to the project of the society. Indeed, the society’s published output includes a range of topics that would now be associated with the humanities, such as literary criticism, archaeology, moral philosophy, and discussions of the relationship between the body and the mind. Certainly - in its early years at least - the society seems to have been almost as interested in the consequences and possibilities of the century’s developing interest in culture and the arts as in the sciences. Which is why, for example, in 1826 Charles Lyell could remark that the society’s published output was “almost equally divided between literary and scientific articles.”<sup>5</sup> With this in mind, it is worth pointing out that historians have never given the “literary” of the society’s title the attention it deserves. Until now the society has largely attracted the interest of historians of science, and even literary scholars have tended to downplay the society’s literary output. Indeed, there does not appear to be any serious discussion of the society’s literary essays, an oversight I shall address in this chapter and throughout this thesis. By providing readings of its publications and activities, I will show that the Manchester society did not exist merely to solve technological problems; rather, its founders were more concerned with the idea of self- and civic-improvement, taste and conversation, and wrestled with the complex task of creating space for intellectual discussion that made room for disagreement without breaking the boundaries of politeness.

Why Manchester? For many reasons the town can be situated in the centre of both the English Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution. As John K. Walton shows, the county of Lancashire became the “cradle of the world’s first industrial revolution,” within which the town of Manchester flourished.<sup>6</sup> Geographical proximity to the rivers that powered the first water mills and to the canal that carried cotton from the port of Liverpool were significant factors in this development. Manchester saw, in the second half of the eighteenth century, an astonishingly rapid

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<sup>4</sup> R.J. Morris, “Clubs, Societies and Associations” in *The Cambridge Social History of Britain 1750-1950*, 3, ed. F.M.L Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990), p.410.

<sup>5</sup> Charles Lyell, “Scientific Institutions” in *The Quarterly Review* 34 (1826), p.167.

<sup>6</sup> John K. Walton, *Lancashire: A Social History* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1987), p.3.

expansion of its population and manufactures in only a few short years. In 1773 the town consisted of 3402 households with a total population of 22,481. By 1788, only 15 years later, the number of households had risen to 5916 households with a population of 42,821.<sup>7</sup> Contemporaries, including many involved in the MLPS, were acutely aware of the changes going on around them. They were celebrated, for instance, in John Aikin's 1795 *Description of the Country from Thirty to Forty Miles around Manchester*. In his introduction, Aikin, an honorary member of the MLPS, explained the reason for his focus on Manchester:

The centre we have chosen is that of the *cotton manufacture*; a branch of commerce, the rapid and prodigious increase of which is, perhaps, absolutely unparalleled in the annals of trading nations. Manchester is, as it were, the heart of this vast system, the circulating branches of which spread all around it, though to different distances.<sup>8</sup>

The rapid increase in the manufacture of cotton was made possible by a number of technological improvements from the mid-eighteenth century. From the 1760s to the early 1780s several improvements and inventions increased production to a remarkable extent never before seen in any context. The "famous trinity of spinning innovations" began with James Hargreaves' spinning jenny, and was followed by Richard Arkwright's water frame, and then the steam-powered mule.<sup>9</sup> Cotton was no longer spun in workers' homes on a small number of spindles, but on machines in huge factories with, by the 1790s, upwards of two hundred spindles. Britain's raw cotton import figures illustrate this rapid increase: in 1772, 4.2 million pounds of cotton were imported; in 1789 the numbers had increased to 24.7 million pounds; by 1800 the figure had increased to 41.8 million pounds.<sup>10</sup> Aikin claims that the gross profit of the cotton trade was £200,000 in 1775 with the total number of spindles under 50,000; by 1795, a period of only twenty years, the numbers had increased to over seven million pounds, and two million, respectively.<sup>11</sup> For the merchants and mill owners, this massive increase in productivity brought with it vast and

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<sup>7</sup> John Aikin, *A Description of the Country from Thirty to Forty Miles round Manchester* (London, 1795), pp.156-57.

<sup>8</sup> Aikin, *ibid.*, p.3.

<sup>9</sup> Walton, *op.cit.*, p.105.

<sup>10</sup> *loc.cit.*

<sup>11</sup> Aikin, *op.cit.*, p.178.

unparalleled accumulation of wealth. Aikin summarises Manchester's progress in trade and capital accumulation as occurring in four stages:

The trade of Manchester may be divided into four periods. The first is that, when the manufactures worked hard merely for a livelihood, without having accumulated any capital. The second is that, when they had begun to acquire little fortunes, but worked as hard, and lived in as plain a manner as before, increasing their fortunes as well by economy as by moderate gains. The third is that, when luxury began to appear, and trade was pushed by sending riders for orders to every market town in the kingdom. The fourth is the period in which expense and luxury had made a great progress, and was supported by a trade extended by means of rider and factors through every part of Europe.<sup>12</sup>

But this "great progress" in expense and luxury brought with it the squalor and poverty that would induce Engels fifty years later to pronounce Manchester "Hell upon Earth."<sup>13</sup> As Aikin also acknowledged, Manchester "unfortunately vies with, or exceeds, the metropolis, in the closeness with which the poor are crowded in offensive, dark, damp, and incommodious habitations, a too fertile source of disease!"<sup>14</sup> Aikin was not alone among members of the MLPS in seeing the social costs of the improvement of Manchester. Problems with disease and fever amongst the poor were issues that led to a power struggle over the Infirmary, a struggle that physicians like John Ferriar and Thomas Percival were closely involved in, the subject of chapter 2. Liberal dissenters like Aikin, Ferriar, and Percival, all later closely involved with the MLPS, saw a need for economic expansion to bring social benefits like new roads and street lighting, but also to do something about the social costs of economic expansion through provision of poor relief and other charitable work.<sup>15</sup>

Prior to the formation of the MLPS itself, a cultural circle was formed, comprising mainly of men involved with the Infirmary and the local Unitarian chapel at Cross Street. The most prominent of these, the physician Thomas Percival, had

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<sup>12</sup> Aikin, *op.cit.*, pp.181-82. Quoting Aikin's account of Manchester's accumulation of capital, Karl Marx remarked: "What would the good Dr. Aikin say if he could rise from his grave and see the Manchester of today?" *Capital*, 1, 1831 (Electronic book company, 2000), p.853.

<sup>13</sup> Friedrich Engels, *Condition of the Working Class in England* (London, 1891), p.80.

<sup>14</sup> Aikin, *op.cit.*, p.192.

<sup>15</sup> "No town in England has been more exemplary in the number and variety of its charitable institutions, and the zeal by which they have been supported," remarked Aikin, *op.cit.*, p.196.

brought with him a network that reached across the European Enlightenment when he settled in Manchester in 1767, practicing medicine privately until he was elected an honorary physician at the Infirmary in 1779.<sup>16</sup> Reportedly one of the first students to have enrolled at the Warrington Academy in 1757, there he had received tuition in ethics and theology, and was taught by the dissenting minister, John Seddon.<sup>17</sup> Prior to his enrolment at Warrington, Seddon had been Percival's private tutor; it was Seddon who introduced his Church-of-England foster mother, Elizabeth Percival, to dissent. The family converted to Unitarianism after Seddon's move to Warrington.<sup>18</sup> Percival later remembered Seddon warmly as a "gentleman, a scholar, a preacher, a companion and a friend."<sup>19</sup> Warrington Academy was an important locus from which the transpennine Enlightenment network spread. It was here that Percival became acquainted with Priestley, Aikin, Enfield, Currie, Turner, Walker and other figures important to this thesis. During Percival's time as a student at the college, he also attended the informal conversational society described in the introduction. Here his interest in conversation as a form of intellectual development was forged; this would prove to be a formative experience which would influence his activities in the MLPS. His education was continued at the University of Edinburgh, where he began his studies in Medical Science. His education was completed at Leyden, one of Europe's most progressive centres of medical education: he obtained his medical diploma there in 1765.

While at Edinburgh, Percival became immersed in the associational world of the Scottish Enlightenment in ways that would have deepened and strengthened his commitment to conversational exchange as an intellectual practice. As his son later recounted in his 1807 biography, Percival "had the good fortune, in particular, to enjoy frequent and friendly intercourse with the rival candidates for historic fame,

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<sup>16</sup> See J.V. Pickstone and S.V.F. Butler, "The Politics of Medicine in Manchester," in *Medical History* 28 (1984), p.230. He resigned the following year, but was appointed Physician Extraordinary in 1782 and continued to play a part in its running. For more detail about Percival's role in the Infirmary, see chapter 2.

<sup>17</sup> Edward Percival, *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Thomas Percival, M.D.* (London, 1807), p.viii.

<sup>18</sup> *loc.cit.*

<sup>19</sup> Thomas Percival, *A Father's Instructions; Moral Tales, Fables, and Reflections* (Warrington, 1781), p.39.

Mr. Hume, and Dr. Robertson.”<sup>20</sup> He later spent time with Hume during a visit to Paris in 1765. He became especially close to the historian William Robertson.<sup>21</sup> He also became friends with the philosopher James Beattie, who was later made an honorary member of the MLPS. Notably Percival had been a member of the Printing Committee of Edinburgh’s Royal Medical Society, a highly respectable position shared with Aikin and Currie. Thornton, Currie’s biographer, argues that the distinction marked them as “three of the most promising students in Edinburgh.”<sup>22</sup> After Edinburgh, Percival spent a year in London, during which time he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society, the first of several learned societies to which Percival was admitted.<sup>23</sup> He went on to present several papers to the society over the course of his career; most of which were later published in several volumes of *Essays Medical, Philosophical and Experimental*.<sup>24</sup> Not least because of these varied connections, he became, as Nicholson puts it, the “central figure in the cultural circles of Enlightenment Manchester,” but the description is misleading as it overlooks how extensive Percival’s connections remained.<sup>25</sup> Percival’s circle spread far wider than Manchester; his network of friends and acquaintances stretched throughout all of those places he had lived and visited: Warrington, Edinburgh, Leiden, London, Paris, and beyond. His friendship with Benjamin Franklin and Benjamin Rush meant that his network was transatlantic as well as transpennine.<sup>26</sup> Aikin had settled in Manchester in 1766 after

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<sup>20</sup> Edward Percival, *op.cit.*, p.xiii.

<sup>21</sup> Edward Percival, *op.cit.*, p.xvii. Percival was unanimously elected Fellow of the Royal Society in Paris in 1777, “an honour which was conferred without solicitation.” Edward Percival *op.cit.*, p.lxii.

<sup>22</sup> R.D. Thornton *James Currie, The Entire Stranger, and Robert Burns* (Edinburgh and London: Oliver & Boyd, 1963), p.85.

<sup>23</sup> H. McLachlan, *Warrington Academy: Its History and Influence* (Manchester: Chetham Society, 1943), p.124.

<sup>24</sup> Thomas Percival, *Essays, Medical and Experimental* (London, 1772); *Philosophical, Medical, and Experimental Essays* (London, 1776); *Essays Medical, Philosophical, and Experimental* (London, 1788).

<sup>25</sup> Francis Nicholson “The Literary and Philosophical Society 1781-1851,” in *Manchester Memoirs* 68.9 (August 1924), p.98. Nicholson had access to the society’s archival resources before they were destroyed in the Second World War.

<sup>26</sup> Edward Percival, *op.cit.*, p.xxix. Franklin and Rush were both honorary members of the MLPS. Rush had papers published in the second and third volume of *Memoirs*, and a letter from Franklin was read before the society by Percival and published in the second volume of *Memoirs*.

studying at Edinburgh (although he never completed his degree there), and, like Percival, was taught by the surgeon Charles White. Although Aikin moved away after three years, he stayed in touch with Percival.<sup>27</sup> Within Manchester, Percival's closest associates were probably Thomas Henry and Thomas Barnes.

Henry, an apothecary and chemist originally from Wrexham, had moved to Manchester in 1764, where he operated a successful apothecary business for almost fifty years.<sup>28</sup> His success allowed him the freedom to explore his interest in chemistry and to contribute to Manchester's intellectual circles. He was friends with Priestley and was elected Fellow of the Royal Society in 1775 as a result of this connection, but he "did not think highly of Sir Joseph Banks [...] nor was he in turn highly thought of in London."<sup>29</sup> Originally a member of the established church, like Percival, he converted to Unitarianism in 1775, joining the dissenting community at the Cross Street Chapel. W.V. Farrar, Kathleen Farrar and E.L. Scott suggest that, although Henry was careful to keep his political opinions from the public eye, in private his "sympathies were with the radicals."<sup>30</sup> Barnes was the figure at the centre of the dissenting community in Manchester. A Presbyterian minister from Warrington, he had attended Warrington Academy between 1764 and 1768, where he became friends with Percival. In 1780 he became co-minister at Cross Street Chapel and remained in this position until his death in 1810.

Percival, Henry and Barnes were the founding members of the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society, established officially in 1781. Predictably enough, given the associational context in which the founders were all accustomed, the society originated in a small, informal discussion group "for *conversation*," meeting weekly in Percival's home, "the resort of the literary characters, the principal inhabitants, and of occasional strangers."<sup>31</sup> As later recounted by Percival, the

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<sup>27</sup> Lucy Aikin, *Memoir of John Aikin, M.D* (1823), p.15. Aikin thanks Percival in his *Description of the Country* for "the communication of various papers, as well as for many judicious hints and remarks towards the execution of the design." See Aikin, *op.cit.*, p.3.

<sup>28</sup> W.V. Farrar, Kathleen R. Farrar, and E.L. Scott, "The Henrys of Manchester Part I: Thomas Henry (1734-1816)," in *Ambix* 20 (1793), pp.183-208.

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*, p.188.

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*, p.189.

<sup>31</sup> Edward Percival, *op.cit.*, p.lxvii.

meetings were so popular and well attended that it was decided to form an official society:

Many years since, a few Gentlemen, inhabitants of the town, who were inspired with a taste for Literature and Philosophy, formed themselves into a kind of weekly club, for the purpose of conversing on subjects of that nature. These meetings were continued, with some interruption, for several years and many respectable persons becoming desirous of becoming Members, the numbers were increased so far, as to induce the founders of the Society to think of extending their original design...<sup>32</sup>

As Percival's son Edward later recounted, attendees became so numerous that the group decided to hold meetings in a local tavern and to implement rules "for the better direction of their proceedings."<sup>33</sup> After June 1781 the Society began meeting at the Assembly Coffee House. Five months later, it was decided by ballot that the society meet in a back room of the Cross Street Chapel, where Barnes was minister.<sup>34</sup> It was not until December 1799 that the society was able to move into its own purpose-built premises.

What were the goals of the original founders? As discussed in the introduction, Mokyr and others have positioned the society as a scientific one, contributing primarily to the development of science and technology. All these men did have scientific interests, especially in relations between chemistry and medicine, but they were equally serious about the social function of the "literary," as they called it, and made it central to their society. Despite the assumptions made by Mokyr, Jacob, and others that the society was largely concerned with the testing and dissemination of technology in relation to the burgeoning cotton manufactures, its founders understood "Physics and the Belles Lettres" to be jointly involved in the process of improvement:

The progress that has been made in Physics and the Belles Lettres, owes its rapidity if not its origin, to the encouragement which these Societies have given to such pursuits, and to the emulation which has been excited between

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<sup>32</sup> *Memoirs of the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society* 1 (1785), p.vii.

<sup>33</sup> Percival, *op.cit.*, p.lxvii.

<sup>34</sup> Nicholson, *op.cit.*, p.119.

different academical bodies, as well as among the individual members of each institution. The collecting and publishing the more important communications which have been delivered to them, have saved from oblivion many very valuable discoveries, or improvements in arts, and much useful information in the various branches of science.<sup>35</sup>

Papers were to be given on topics encompassing “natural philosophy, theoretical and experimental chemistry, polite literature, civil law, general politics, commerce, and the arts.” In his *Description of Manchester*, Aikin advanced the society as proof of the region’s improvement, describing it as “uniting the pursuits of science and literature with commercial opulence,” a project he deemed “highly laudable.”<sup>36</sup> He recognised that the society operated on a certain level of exclusivity: membership was distinctly the preserve of the middling class. The process of electing members was strictly governed, limited to a maximum number of forty at first : “probably for reasons of convenience and accommodation.”<sup>37</sup> Demand saw the numbers slowly increase to fifty, and then sixty in subsequent years.<sup>38</sup> Membership criteria was strict: any person wishing to become a member had to be recommended by at least three existing members, “who shall sign a Certificate of his being [...] which shall be read at four successive meetings of the Society, previously to the election.”<sup>39</sup> With a quorum of thirteen, new membership was often difficult due to low turnout, but this appears to have suited members, since a motion to reduce quorum to five was rejected in 1788.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, the annual subscription price was one guinea, pricing much of the town’s population out of membership. The middle-class character of the society was not just exclusive below, but also above. There was a notable absence of local gentry and aristocracy on the list of ordinary members, although some do appear to have

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<sup>35</sup> *Memoirs, op.cit.*, p.v.

<sup>36</sup> John Aikin, *A Description of the Country* (London, 1795), p.200.

<sup>37</sup> Francis Nicholson “The Literary and Philosophical Society 1781-1851,” in *Manchester Memoirs* 68.9 (August 1924), p.104.

<sup>38</sup> *loc.cit.*

<sup>39</sup> *Memoirs, op.cit.*, p.xii.

<sup>40</sup> Nicholson, *op.cit.*, p.104.



been honorary members.<sup>41</sup> As later chapters will show, members did not shy away from their antagonism to the establishment; Percival, for example, attacked Pitt's fustian tax as "an oppressive and impolitic duty on the Cotton Manufactory" in a paper presented at the society, later published as a pamphlet.<sup>42</sup> The division was not entirely straightforward, however. The society, for example, had sought approval from the Establishment in its early years: Percival had, in 1785, written to Pitt requesting permission to dedicate the first volume of its publication, the *Memoirs of the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society* to the King.<sup>43</sup> His request was granted, and the title page of its first volume reads:

[T]o the king, these volumes are humbly inscribed by the members of the Literary and Philosophical Society of Manchester, with the profoundest respect and loyalty: and with peculiar gratitude for his gracious patronage of their first fruits of their institution.<sup>44</sup>

Percival's letter certainly lends credence to Thackray's argument that the driving force behind the society was the "social legitimation of marginal men."<sup>45</sup> While the Manchester model was a clear departure from the patronage of the Royal Society, its relationship with the upper class was sometimes uneven: keen to retain independence at the same time as heralding its place firmly within the established order. There was, however, a certain ambivalence about the society's position in this regard. It was a provincial society, loyal to the region and proud of its independence, but which aspired to a universal idea of knowledge that sought approval from the scientific and political establishment.

From its very inception the society's founders were keen to contribute to the public wealth of knowledge, where the word "public" stretched from the community in Manchester to the cosmopolitan enlightenment of London and beyond. In adopting

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<sup>41</sup> See the *Complete List of the Members & Officers of the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society, from its Institution on February 28th, 1781, to April 28th, 1896* (Manchester, 1896).

<sup>42</sup> Thomas Percival, *A Short View of the Grounds and Limits of the Obligation to Pay Taxes* (Warrington, 1785), p.3.

<sup>43</sup> Edward Percival, *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Thomas Percival, M.D* (London, 1807), pp.ccl-ccli.

<sup>44</sup> *Memoirs, op.cit.*, p.iii.

<sup>45</sup> Arnold Thackray, "Natural Knowledge in Cultural Context: The Manchester Mode," in *The American Historical Review* 79.3 (1974), p.678.

a public role for itself, Manchester differed from the more private project of the Lunar Society (however public its individual members may have made their writings). But the society's approach to what it deemed public and private was certainly not a straightforward matter, and complexities would develop further, particularly in the following decade of political turbulence. But for the founders, public output was an early goal, not least because the society was one way of giving these "marginal men" a civic agency. At a meeting in 1783 it was agreed that the society should publish a volume of papers every two years. The first volume of *Memoirs of the Literary and Philosophical Society of Manchester* was published in 1785, and featured essays on a range of topics both scientific and literary.<sup>46</sup> The *Memoirs* played an important role in the early success of the society, securing its reputation within the scientific community. But its primary purpose was its place within an intellectual network that stretched beyond the region; literary and philosophical societies often held proceedings from other societies in their libraries. The MLPS was keen to make ties with foreign societies; as Musson and Robinson have shown, regular scientific correspondence was established between James Watt junior on behalf of the MLPS and the German scientist Lorenz Crell.<sup>47</sup> Papers for the *Memoirs* were selected by the Committee of Papers, whose primary function was to veto the presentation before the Society of any papers deemed unsuitable. The first Committee of Papers was comprised of the President, Vice-Presidents, officers, and four other members. This method of selection enabled public output to be strictly controlled, from selection to publication, in a manner which differed from other societies at the time, where papers often fed into the periodical press. At Newcastle, for instance, although in many ways modelled after Manchester, the route followed seems to have been for individual members to publish articles independently in the periodical press. Indeed, the Manchester society appears to have been wary of publicity of this sort, and made a point of avoiding responsibility for the papers contained within its *Memoirs*. As the "Advertisement" in the fourth volume stated, "responsibility for the truth of facts, or justness of opinions, to be found in this or any future volume, rests with their

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<sup>46</sup> Indeed, the *Memoirs'* literary output was by no means ignored by contemporary reviewers. An extensive review of the first two volumes featured in *The English Review* and paid particular attention to the literary papers. See *The English Review* (January 1786), pp.1-14.

<sup>47</sup> A.E. Musson and Eric Robinson, *Science and Technology in the Industrial Revolution* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1969), pp.96-97.

respective authors.”<sup>48</sup> In its early years the society did occasionally communicate its resolutions in the press; reports of meetings could be found in the London papers.<sup>49</sup> Sometimes meetings were advertised beforehand in the local press, but this appears to have been rare, and may have been done only to advertise the first lecture of the season.<sup>50</sup> By 1821, however, members had resolved that details of papers read at the society should no longer be communicated to the public press.<sup>51</sup>

From the outset the society’s founders were keen to emphasise the importance of conversation to the goal of improvement. Indeed, as noted in the aims of the society, it was founded “for the purpose of conversing.”<sup>52</sup> The *Memoirs* provide us with information about the society’s publications, members lists and rules, but the absence of archival materials means certain details are lacking. The extent to which members agreed on particular topics is sometimes difficult to discern, but some things can be surmised. The question arises as to whether the rules and regulations of the society eased the “free flow of conversation” or hindered it, but clues point to evidence of lively discussion. Regulations strictly governed the form proceedings would take: meetings were every Wednesday evening, for two hours. Those wishing to speak were required to submit their paper to the secretary on the topic of “natural philosophy, theoretical and experimental chemistry, polite literature, civil law, general politics, commerce, and the arts.”<sup>53</sup> Upon approval, the paper’s author would be given no more than half an hour to read it out, followed by a discussion on the topic. The society’s founders recognised the crucial role conversation played in the

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<sup>48</sup> *Memoirs* 4 (1793), p.iv. A reviewer in the *British Critic* disagreed with the disclaimer: “when the subjects of morality and metaphysics are included in the publication, we cannot think it justifiable, in a literary body, to suffer any thing to be circulated, under the sanction of its name, which may prove injurious to society.” *British Critic* 3 (January 1794), p.362.

<sup>49</sup> Meeting notices appeared in the classified adverts section of some papers, for example in the *General Evening Post* (London, September 6, 1785), *World and Fashionable Advertiser* (London, May 19, 1787), and *World* (London, February 12, 1788).

<sup>50</sup> The *Manchester Mercury* ran an advertisement for Aikin’s paper “On the Impression of Reality attending Dramatic Representations” in October, 1791. Aikin himself did not read the paper, it was communicated by Percival. *Manchester Mercury* (4 October 1791); there was also an advertisement in the same paper in September, 1795 for “The first meeting of the Literary and Philosophical Society, for the ensuing session [...] when a paper by Dr. Ferriar will be read, entitled ‘Illustrations of Sterne.’” *Manchester Mercury* (29 September 1795)

<sup>51</sup> Nicholson, *op.cit.*, p.109.

<sup>52</sup> *Memoirs* 1 (1785), p.vii.

<sup>53</sup> *ibid.*, p.xiii.

progress of intellectual improvement, but in practice there were difficulties in this model. A balance between polite conversation, where differences could be rubbed off in a series of cordial exchanges, and the sparking heat of rational debate was never easy to find in this period.<sup>54</sup> This often registered in a paradoxical need to regulate the “free flow of conversation.” More prosaically, there was the simple question of maintaining sufficient interest among the membership to produce debate. Members were instructed to “enter the Society’s room with silence, and without ceremony,” which seems at odds with a society so keen to encourage the free exchange of ideas. Francis Nicholson’s analysis of the minutes, now lost, suggests that the society found some difficulty in achieving productive meetings due to lacklustre attendance, but whether this was caused by a stale atmosphere or a heated one is difficult to ascertain. In 1792, a committee was formed for the purpose of improving attendance.<sup>55</sup> Following this came a new set of proposals: members presenting a paper were to provide a summary prior to the meeting in order to regulate discussion, and speakers were to stand up when addressing the President “when it is difficult to command attention,” suggesting perhaps that debates could become animated despite low turnouts.<sup>56</sup> But despite difficulties surrounding low meeting turnout, no effort was made to increase the membership size of the society itself, suggesting that the flow of conversation was better facilitated in a smaller group. The class of honorary members, for those who lived outside the town, points to the society’s keenness to extend its network. This class included several men who were already members of Percival’s extensive network of friends and colleagues from Warrington, Edinburgh and London: Aikin, Erasmus Darwin, Franklin, Rush and Priestley were all honorary members.<sup>57</sup> Membership seems to have been taken as a mark of prestige in these circles, at least for a while, and writers were keen to show off their status in published work. Sir John Talbot Dillon, for example, did so in his 1790 *Historical and Critical Memoirs of the General Revolution in France*.<sup>58</sup> James

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<sup>54</sup> See Jon Mee, *Conversable Worlds* (Oxford: OUP, 2011), pp.7-10.

<sup>55</sup> Nicholson, *op.cit.*, p.105.

<sup>56</sup> *ibid.*, p.106.

<sup>57</sup> *Complete List of the Members*.

<sup>58</sup> Sir John Talbot Dillon, *Historical and Critical Memoirs of the General Revolution in France, in the Year 1789* (London, 1790).

Beattie, who was already a well-known and respected poet and philosopher, announced his honorary membership to the MLPS on the title page of his 1786 work *Evidences of the Christian Religion*.<sup>59</sup> Beattie's moral philosophy, which attacked Hume's scepticism, was "the most famous apologetical work from a contemporary Scottish source," according to Allan.<sup>60</sup> Texts such as Beattie's *Evidences* were often embraced by contemporary readers as a comforting affirmation of their pre-existing beliefs. As Allan argues, "it may always be more common for individuals to find affirmation of existing viewpoints, even a measure of self-justification, in what they read."<sup>61</sup> In much the same way, Percival looked to Butler's *Analogy of Religion, Natural and Revealed, to the Constitution and Course of Nature* after reading Hume. Percival's son recounts in his biography that in his youth his father's faith "was staggered a while by the perusal of Mr. Hume's Essay on Miracles," but that "he attributed the final removal of his doubts to the powerful reasoning and copious illustration of Butler."<sup>62</sup>

For the early members of the Manchester society, conversation was understood to play a key role in the production of knowledge, an assumption that was very much part of the ethos at Warrington. As described in the introduction, the pedagogic approach favoured by the Warrington tutors encouraged the participatory collision of ideas and the sociable gathering of groups committed to sympathetic exchange. The Manchester society sought to strike a careful balance that would enable productive debate without leading to acrimony. Many of the papers published in the first and second volumes of *Memoirs* are concerned with taste, and most of these make some mention of conversation on the topic. The papers presented before the society were clearly designed as stepping stones on the way to developing a candid discussion.<sup>63</sup> So Barnes, for example, introduced his paper "On the Nature and

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<sup>59</sup> James Beattie, *Evidence of the Christian Religion; Briefly and Plainly Stated* (Edinburgh, 1786).

<sup>60</sup> David Allan, *Making British Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2008), p.77.

<sup>61</sup> *ibid.*, p.127.

<sup>62</sup> Edward Percival, *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Thomas Percival, M.D* (London, 1807), p.ccviii.

<sup>63</sup> One review of the first volume of *Memoirs* in the *Critical Review* praised the society's choice of subjects, "as they might lead to an improving instructive conversation." The reviewer expressed concern, however, that many of the papers were "of too little importance for publication." *Critical Review* 61 (1786), p.343.

Essential Characters of Poetry” by acknowledging that the subject matter may not at first appear to be particularly interesting:

As, however, one great object of this society is, *the enjoyment of free and friendly conversation* upon subjects connected with science, it is probable, that the topics, which are not in themselves of the greatest importance, may sometimes open up a wider field, than other of more intrinsic excellence. Where much may be said in support of different hypotheses, *we may hope for that collision of friendly argument, which may strike out some sparks, both of amusement and information.* [...] Our time will not be quite misspent, if we can only glean from the topic before us, a single hours’ agreeable and literary entertainment.<sup>64</sup>

Barnes indicated that the conversation should throw out sparks without heat: they should be amusing and informative, but never contentious. The topic at hand should give rise to entertainment that is “agreeable” and in the process, as Hume had suggested, help mould the tastes of the participants. Similarly, in his paper “On the Influence of the Imagination,” Barnes makes clear that his work is merely an outline of the topic at hand, “intended only as a subsidiary to conversation,” containing only “hints” rather “than a regular composition of finished and artificial sentences.”<sup>65</sup> In his essay “On the Pleasure which the Mind Receives,” Charles de Polier indicated that his intention was for the paper to “give room to some interesting conversation,” which he made clear was “the avowed purpose of the essays presented to this society.”<sup>66</sup> Barnes remarked in his “Nature and Essential Characters of Poetry” that each argument he put forward was merely an outline from which conversation would more fully develop:

I shall not pretend to decide, absolutely, upon the strength or weakness of the forgoing arguments. I shall be happy to hear them fully discussed in the

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<sup>64</sup> Emphasis mine. Thomas Barnes, “On the Nature and Essential Characters of Poetry,” in *Memoirs of the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society* 1 (1785), pp.54-55.

<sup>65</sup> Thomas Barnes, “On the Influence of the Imagination,” in *Memoirs of the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society* 1 (1785), pp.377-78.

<sup>66</sup> Charles de Polier, “On the Pleasure which the Mind Receives,” in *Memoirs of the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society* 1 (1785), pp.131.

ensuing conversation, from which I promise myself, both instruction and amusement.<sup>67</sup>

In another paper he stated: “I mean only to draw the *rudest outline* of the plan, and would leave it to the ensuing conversation to be filled up, with colouring, or shade.”<sup>68</sup> This debate was picked up by William Enfield some years later, in a paper given at the Newcastle Literary and Philosophical Society, “An Enquiry Whether There Be Any Essential Difference between Poetry and Prose,” as discussed in chapter 5.<sup>69</sup> Enfield’s paper was published in the *Monthly Magazine*, and addressed topics that would later be developed in Wordsworth’s “Preface” to *Lyrical Ballads*.<sup>70</sup> Elsewhere, Barnes remarked upon the inspiration for their papers arising from conversation in the society. “A sentiment was advanced in conversation several evenings ago, in this place,” he stated in his paper “On the influence of the imagination,” “which, to some Gentlemen, appeared strange [...] The respect I owe to this Society, and above all, to Truth, obliges me to endeavour to defend a point.”<sup>71</sup> From all of these comments, and more – the words “conversation” and “converse” feature 21 times in the first volume of the *Memoirs* alone – it is clear that conversation’s productive role was of particular emphasis during the early years of the society. Conversation was imagined as a means of producing knowledge and as a means of shaping the sociable demeanours of those involved.

These values can be traced back to the Warrington influence on the society, even if that was not the only source. Although Nicholson, in his brief history, presented to the society in 1924, downplayed any connection with Warrington Academy, the membership details suggest otherwise: in 1785 at least fourteen members were Warrington alumni.<sup>72</sup> There were a total of nineteen tutors at

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<sup>67</sup> Thomas Barnes, “On the Nature and Essential Characters of Poetry,” in *Memoirs of the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society* 1 (1785), pp.62-63.

<sup>68</sup> Thomas Barnes, “On the Affinity Subsisting between the Arts,” in *Memoirs of the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society* 1 (1785), p.86.

<sup>69</sup> William Enfield, “An Enquiry Whether There Be Any Essential Difference between Poetry and Prose,” Newcastle, Literary and Philosophical Society, MS, Papers Read to the Monthly Meetings, 1.8.

<sup>70</sup> The published version featured in *Monthly Magazine* 2.6 (July 1796), pp.453-56; William Wordsworth, *Lyrical Ballads* (London, 1800).

<sup>71</sup> Thomas Barnes, “On the Influence of the Imagination,” in *Memoirs* 1 (1785), p.375.

<sup>72</sup> Francis Nicholson, “The Literary and Philosophical Society 1781-1851,” in *Manchester Memoirs* 68.9 (August 1924), p.97.

Warrington between 1756 and 1782. Out of those nineteen, six were either ordinary or honorary members of the Manchester society: these were Aikin, Enfield, Ralph Harrison, Priestley, Wakefield, and George Walker. Aikin, Enfield, Priestley and Wakefield were all involved in teaching belles lettres, among other subjects. Unlike the traditional establishment places of education, Cambridge and Oxford, the dissenting academies placed special importance on vernacular literature which, as John Guillory notes, suggests an interest in belles lettres as a species of practical knowledge open to those who might not have access to a classical education:

In this way a *difference* from the aristocracy was preserved within the gradual process of cultural homogenization; and this difference expressed both a resentment against exclusions based upon class and religious belief, and a canny recognition that the dissemination of polite speech provided a cultural basis for the *dispersion* of political power.<sup>73</sup>

Aikin taught vernacular literature at Warrington, as did Enfield. Priestley became tutor of languages and the belles lettres at Warrington between 1761 and 1767 following Aikin's move to the post of tutor of divinity. Priestley published a series of lectures given at Warrington, together with an "essay on a course of liberal education for civil and active life," in which he outlined his approach to education and the need for educational reform. Classical education, he argued, was outdated. Although a knowledge of Latin and Greek was still useful, the separation of the literati from the rest of society was becoming antiquated. Belles lettres was a form of practical knowledge as it inculcated ideas about conduct that were important to social being:

The politeness of the times has brought the learned and the unlearned into more familiar intercourse than they had before. They find themselves obliged to converse upon the same topics. The subjects of modern history, policy, arts, manufactures, commerce, &c. are the general principles of all sensible conversation [...] those times of revived antiquity have had their use, and are now no more.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> John Guillory, *Cultural Capital: the Problem of Literary Canon Formation* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1993), p.100.

<sup>74</sup> Joseph Priestley, *An Essay on a Course of Liberal Education for Civil and Active Life* (London, 1765), p.xxix.



Although Priestley advocated a move away from classical elitism more vehemently than many of his colleagues, his sights were firmly set on the advancement of the middle classes.

As discussed in the introduction, Priestley's suspicion of the entrenched hierarchies and aristocratic values of the Royal Society signify a conscious distancing of the middling class from the ruling class. But similarly, the middling class was in the process of distinguishing itself from the lower class. Thomas P. Miller notes that despite their activity in the reform movement of the late eighteenth century, "in other respects the dissenting tradition was losing its practical engagement with the lower classes," a point certainly supported by the exclusivity of the literary and philosophical societies.<sup>75</sup> The outreach projects of the Manchester dissenters were primarily concerned with the education of professional men, although the activities involved with the Infirmary, subject of the next chapter, were centred around the treatment of Manchester's poor. Priestley was certainly an important influence on the Manchester society's efforts in regards to education: he argued that "The most important object of education [...] is to form the minds of youth to virtue."<sup>76</sup> He advocated the education of men destined for the professions, and felt that courses in history and the belles lettres would prove invaluable for civil society. Without a proper grounding in history for the "useful citizen" and the "able statesman," "no person can be qualified to serve his country except in the lowest capacities."<sup>77</sup> He made it clear, however, that the knowledge imparted to the middle classes was likely to be of little use to those of lower social standing: "This is not teaching politics to low mechanics and manufacturers, or encouraging the study of it among persons with whom it could be of no service to their country, and often a real detriment to themselves."<sup>78</sup> A liberal education, in other words, was the preserve of the middle class. Priestley emphasised the need for those entering the professions to acquire an education in commerce:

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<sup>75</sup> Thomas P. Miller, *The Formation of College English: Rhetoric and the Belles Lettres in the British Cultural Provinces* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997), p.107.

<sup>76</sup> Priestley, *op.cit.*, p.vii.

<sup>77</sup> *ibid.*, p.xxiii.

<sup>78</sup> *ibid.*, p.xxxiv.

It is hoped, that when those gentlemen, who are intended to serve themselves and their country in the respectable character of merchants, have heard the great maxims of commerce discussed in a scientific and connected manner [...] they will not easily be influenced by notions adopted in a random and hasty manner, and from superficial views of things: whereby they might, otherwise, be induced to enter into measures seemingly gainful at present, but in the end prejudicial to their country, and to themselves and their posterity, as members of it.<sup>79</sup>

Here Priestley presents the merchant as an ambassador, entering into the world market as representatives of their country and culture, but also, implicitly at least, articulating emergent middle-class values that would displace aristocratic values. For this reason, the argument follows, it is essential that such men are sufficiently educated.

Priestley's pedagogic style was similarly influential for the founders of the MLPS. As Priestley explained, there was a disparity in the lengths of his different lectures depending on how much time he was leaving for questioning:

My method [...] was to read the text, and illustrate it by a familiar address, questioning the pupils very particularly on the subject of the former lecture before I proceeded to a new one; and on some of the subjects I happened to have much more to say to them, and to enquire of them, than on others.<sup>80</sup>

This approach to learning, Miller has argued, signalled a desire to encourage critical thinking and free enquiry. He compares this to the situation in Scotland where, despite the clubbability of Scottish intellectual life, professors tended to dictate their lectures for students to copy down "as the received knowledge of their masters."<sup>81</sup> John Seddon succeeded Priestley as chair of the belles lettres. Seddon, like Priestley, placed an emphasis on rhetoric for political purposes, but was not as antagonistic towards the classics. After Seddon's death in 1770, Enfield succeeded him in the post. Enfield is best known for his 1774 publication *The Speaker*, an early vernacular anthology which achieved huge success and was used in the classroom.<sup>82</sup> Though

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<sup>79</sup> *ibid.*, p.xxiii-xxiv.

<sup>80</sup> *ibid.*, p.viii.

<sup>81</sup> Miller, *op.cit.*, p.114.

<sup>82</sup> Guillory, *op.cit.*, p.101. Enfield also encouraged the reading of Anna Laetitia Barbauld, daughter of Aikin, whose poem "Warrington Academy" was published in *The Speaker*. As

Enfield was a Unitarian he was, until the struggle over the Test and Corporation acts, moderate in his politics. He implored Priestley in an anonymous pamphlet to “restore *Discretion* to its proper place in your system of virtues.”<sup>83</sup> His approach to the belles lettres, as Miller notes, reflects this departure from his predecessors. His “belletristic” approach placed more emphasis on the influence of taste as a shaping force on the moral citizen, rather than Priestley’s more rationalistic idea of moral being.

One topic of particular concern to members during the early years of the Manchester society was the role of improvement in the belles lettres, particularly in relation to shaping the taste of the manufacturer and his connections. Influenced by the Scottish tradition that included Beattie, there was an emphasis on the role of the “literary” and polite conversation in producing a moral citizen. Numerous papers published in the first two issues of the *Memoirs* reflect ongoing anxieties around the influence of Manchester’s newfound wealth on the moral character of the manufacturing middle classes. Several papers wrestled with the question of improvement amongst the manufacturing and merchant classes, and the role of taste inculcated through informed reading and polite conversation. Henry’s 1781 paper “On the Advantages of Literature and Philosophy in General, and Especially on the Consistency of Literary and Philosophical, with Commercial, Pursuits” argued that to neglect the cultivation of improvement amongst the commercial class was to endanger a group of men who are at risk of succumbing to extravagance and vice:

The pursuit of knowledge, when properly directed, and under due influence, is of the greatest importance to mankind. In proportion as a nation acquires superior degrees of it, her state of civilization advances, and she becomes distinguished from her less enlightened neighbours by a greater refinement in the manners of her inhabitants, and a departure from those ferocious vices, which mark the features of savage countries.<sup>84</sup>

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Guillory notes, the opening lines of “Warrington Academy”: “express the fact of struggle through a rhetoric of literary culture; that culture is where the struggle takes place [...] language is produced as a signifier of fluidity, of social mobility.” *ibid.*, pp.104-105.

<sup>83</sup> William Enfield, *Remarks on Several Late Publications Relative to the Dissenters; in a Letter to Dr. Priestley. By a Dissenter* (London, 1770), pp.5-6. Priestley replied that his only fault was “that of speaking out *certain truths* too bluntly, and condemning those who would *trim*, and *accommodate* them to the fashion and manners of the age.” Joseph Priestley, *Letters to the Author of Remarks on Several Late Publications Relative to the Dissenters* (London, 1770), p.4.

<sup>84</sup> Thomas Henry “On the Advantages of Literature and Philosophy in General, and Especially on the Consistency of Literary and Philosophical, with Commercial, Pursuits,” in *Memoirs of*

Henry suggested that the type of improvement familiar to readers of Addison and Steele, whom he quotes in the paper, must be carefully moderated.<sup>85</sup> Learning is a force for good so long as it is “properly directed,” and “in proportion,” positing himself and the society in a paternalistic role, the implication being that they themselves are the source of such “proper” direction and influence. Above all, for Henry, was the danger of letting the passions rule over reason. If left unchecked, he warned, passion “becomes criminal, and ought to be resisted.”<sup>86</sup> Improvement is a means by which men can spend their leisure time, which might otherwise be spent in more unsavoury pursuits, of particular danger for men of means: “Young men of fortune may turn to vice in their many hours of leisure [...] the time would better be served studying history and literature.”<sup>87</sup> For Henry, the English classics “will be a rich fund of entertainment and improvement,” citing Shakespeare, Milton, Pope, Addison, Thomson, Gray and Mason as authors who “will yield him charming refreshments, after the fatigues of the day.” The programme clearly perpetuated the promotion of vernacular literature propounded by Priestley and Enfield.<sup>88</sup> Ultimately for Henry, a taste for polite literature has a restraining influence upon dangerous behaviour, and provides a necessary function for the commercial class. Improvement here plays an instrumental role for eighteenth-century society. Barnes’ “On the Nature and Essential Characters of Poetry,” read two months later, extolls the nature of poetry as the means by which “the imagination is elevated, the heart delighted, and the noblest passions of the human soul expressed, improved, and heightened.”<sup>89</sup> This view of poetry’s influence on the affections and the imagination is similar to that

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*the Literary and Philosophical Society* 1 (1785), p.7. Thomas Pettigrew’s *An Eulogy of John Coakley Lettsom delivered before the Society* [London Philosophical Society] 20 Nov 1815 (London, 1816) ends by quoting Henry’s essay, suggesting that these essays on taste were remembered for a long time after their publication.

<sup>85</sup> “[...] a man of polite imagination, not only secures himself a favourable reception in the world, but as Mr. Addison observes, ‘is let into a great many pleasures, that the vulgar are not capable of receiving.’” Henry, *op.cit.*, p.9.

<sup>86</sup> *ibid.*, p.15.

<sup>87</sup> *ibid.*, p.13.

<sup>88</sup> *ibid.*, p.18.

<sup>89</sup> Thomas Barnes, “On the Nature and Essential Characters of Poetry,” in *Memoirs* 1 (1785), p.56.

expressed by Enfield when he argued that “as the primary aim of the poet is to please and to move, it is to the imaginations and the passions that he addresses himself.”<sup>90</sup>

It should also be noted that, unsurprisingly, the society was most likely entirely male-dominated. There is, however, some evidence that women may have attended meetings, but were unlikely to have been eligible for membership. An 1819 edition of the *Leeds Mercury* featured the following from a letter signed by a “literary woman”: “A gentleman of my acquaintance informs me, that at the celebrated institutions of Liverpool and Manchester, ladies are admitted; and I shall stamp the town of Leeds as only one degree removed from barbarism, if they refuse us the same advantages.”<sup>91</sup> Whether this was the case from the society’s institution, or introduced at a later date, however, is unclear. There is no mention of women in any of the society’s publications, apart from one intriguing instance. Percival’s tribute to Charles de Polier following his death in 1784 suggested that:

If the coarser pleasures of the bottle be banished from our tables; or if rational conversation, and delicacy of behaviour, *with the sweet society of the softer sex*, be now substituted in their room, this happy revolution has been rendered more complete by the influence of Mr. de Polier.<sup>92</sup>

It is unclear whether Percival was speaking of the society’s rooms, or of the private sphere. However, Percival’s point clearly associated taste with the softening of brute passions and with female influence.

Several papers placed an emphasis on the importance of a broad-ranging education, rather than a specialisation in any one field. To focus on only one topic, argued Barnes in “On the Affinity Subsisting between the Arts,” is to limit oneself to an overly narrow viewpoint within which one becomes incapable of conceiving of the whole view.<sup>93</sup> “[I]f not accustomed to look around him to a wider range of vision,” he warned, “his view will be narrow, and, when he turns from that lucid point, he will be

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<sup>90</sup> William Enfield, *A Familiar Treatise on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (London, 1809), p.251.

<sup>91</sup> *Leeds Mercury* (20 February 1819).

<sup>92</sup> Emphasis mine. Thomas Percival, “A Tribute to the Memory of Charles de Polier, Esq.,” in *Memoirs* 1 (1785), p.291.

<sup>93</sup> Thomas Barnes, “On the Affinity Subsisting between the Arts, with a Plan for Promoting and Extending Manufactures, by Encouraging Those Arts, On Which Manufactures Principally Depend,” in *Memoirs* 1 (1785), pp.72-89.

enveloped with darkness.”<sup>94</sup> An appreciation and education in the arts, he argued, is essential for the improvement of trade and industry. Thus, in order to contribute to civic improvement, Barnes set about a plan for the education of skilled workers: “It is now *more* necessary than *ever*, that our artists and workmen, in the different branches, shall be possessed of some kind of *taste*.”<sup>95</sup> In doing so he echoed Adam Smith’s critique of the division of labour; when the manufacture of a pin comprises eighteen different operations, a workman becomes alienated from the process and cannot conceive of the mechanism of the whole process.<sup>96</sup> Similarly, for Barnes, the labour involved in the production of a watch becomes fragmented and alienated. “How many hands concur,” he argued, “in the formation of a Watch, but very few of whom are so well acquainted with the *whole mechanism*, as to be able to put the Watch together, or to calculate the different wheels, of which it is composed.”<sup>97</sup> The wider implication was that such workers could not have a full grasp of the wider society in which they lived and would therefore be lost to the social obligations necessary for society to be maintained.

The anxieties surrounding these issues are indicated by how often the topic was addressed in the papers given at the society in its early decades. De Polier’s paper “On the Pleasure which the Mind Receives from the Exercise of its Faculties; and That of Taste in Particular,” read to the Society in February 1782, followed the argument that necessity and pleasure stop us becoming indolent, like brutes.<sup>98</sup> Pleasure gives rise to the arts and sciences, exercising the mind without fatiguing it. For de Polier, improvement is not done primarily/solely to impress others, but for personal pleasure. Pleasure can be both intellectual and physical, and an excess of either can cause fatigue and pain. Taste he defined as the ideal balance of the two, a perception of a harmonious relationship in nature. De Polier’s argument is that an order and symmetry within the structure of the arts - whether poetry, painting, or music - enables the mind to take in all the constituent parts without labour. The

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<sup>94</sup> *ibid.*, p.74.

<sup>95</sup> *ibid.*, p.81.

<sup>96</sup> Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (London, 1776), pp.8-9.

<sup>97</sup> Barnes, *op.cit.*, p.82.

<sup>98</sup> Charles de Polier, “On the Pleasure which the Mind Receives from the Exercise of its Faculties; and That of Taste in Particular,” in *Memoirs* 1 (1785), pp.110-34.

experience of this order and symmetry, De Polier assumed, develops the moral sense of the perceiver through continual exposure. For de Polier, this kind of training in taste provides an education in the understanding of order that is essential for the development of an idea of civil society: “Any object becomes agreeable, whose parts are so formed [...] as to present the mind with an easy, clear, and distinct idea of the whole.”<sup>99</sup> De Polier was quite explicit in acknowledging the influence of the moral philosophers of the Scottish Enlightenment in his thinking. He acknowledged the influence of Henry Home, Lord Kames, who was a friend of Adam Smith and David Hume.<sup>100</sup> De Polier concluded the essay with the following quote from Home:

The reasonings employed in the fine arts, are of the same kind with those, which regulate our conduct [...] a just taste of the fine arts, derived from rational principles, furnishes elegant subjects for conversation, and prepares us for acting in the social state, with dignity and propriety.<sup>101</sup>

The moral sense and taste are therefore, concluded de Polier, intimately linked, and so in turn is the ethical sense of what one owes to society.

Ideas of the moral importance of taste often ran into the question of where it left religion in terms of moral guidance and social authority. Hume’s influence on these debates was always mired in the question of his scepticism on religion. Thomas Percival’s son claimed that his father had been almost turned to unbelief by reading Hume’s essay “Of Miracles,” but was recovered by reading Joseph Butler’s *Analogy*.<sup>102</sup> James Beattie’s popularity was partly to do with the fact he had fiercely refuted Hume’s scepticism while otherwise insisting on the moral importance of the sentiments. Nevertheless, there seems to have been anxiety in some quarters of the MLPS about the idea that taste and sentiment could be understood as sufficient moral guides. Perhaps predictably, the anxiety is most obvious in an early essay by the

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<sup>99</sup> *ibid.*, p.119.

<sup>100</sup> Franklin E. Court notes that Smith’s course in English Literature at Edinburgh University was brought about at the suggestion of Kames, whose motivation was “distinctly political.” A lawyer and a judge, he was “acutely aware of the necessity for formal training in English [...] and of the need to promote ethnic English culture among the Scottish middle class.” See Franklin E. Court, *Institutionalizing English Literature: The Culture and Politics of Literary Study, 1750-1900* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1992), p.18.

<sup>101</sup> De Polier, *op.cit.*, p.133.

<sup>102</sup> Edward Percival, *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Thomas Percival, M.D* (London, 1807), p.ccviii.

Anglican clergyman Samuel Hall, curate of St Ann's church between 1777 and 1794. His views on education stood in sharp contrast to those he mixed with. Hall was friendly with Percival and the dissenters in the society. He was said to have once omitted the Athanasian Creed from a sermon in order to avoid offending the dissenters present, and was described by Charles Bardsley as "an extremely broad Churchman for his day."<sup>103</sup> Even so, he was adamant about the importance of institutions of religion as moral guides that could not be safely abandoned. In the paper he presented to the society in 1782, "An Attempt to Shew, that a Taste for the Beauties of Nature and the Fine Arts, has no Influence Favourable to Morals," Hall argued that proponents of taste as a positive influence, such as Henry and Barnes, were in danger of confusing the moral character with the moral sense.<sup>104</sup> While agreeing with de Polier that taste is a mixture of physical and the intellectual qualities, he differs on the connection between taste and morals. The moral sense, for Hall, is more intellectual than corporeal. Just as nobody can master a taste in all the arts, it follows that taste can become diffuse, and not easily translated from one sphere to another. Thus, a man with taste in one thing may also be deficient in a taste for virtue. The fact that a reader can recognise virtuousness in a literary character, Hall argued, does not necessarily mean that the reader will seek to emulate that quality. For Hall, the passions will always rule over reason without the support of religion and its institutions.<sup>105</sup> An appreciation of the arts can easily become an extravagance without the sobering influence of reason and religion. Here, Hall highlights the decline of classical civilisation as a warning against an overemphasis on moral virtues over religion:

Athens was once the feat of learning, taste, and refinement. The liberal arts were cultivated with the greatest care and attention, and rose to a pitch of perfection. [...] But the history of those times, and the moral lectures of Socrates, sufficiently evince, that the Athenians were a people, addicted to every kind of sensual pleasure: at once, refined and voluptuous, licentious and effeminate. [...] When a taste for the liberal arts was introduced among the

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<sup>103</sup> Charles Bardsley, *Memorials of St Ann's Church, Manchester, in the Last Century* (Manchester and London, 1877), pp.96-97.

<sup>104</sup> Samuel Hall, "An Attempt to Shew, that a Taste for the Beauties of Nature and the Fine Arts, Has No Influence Favourable to Morals," in *Memoirs* 1 (1785), pp.223-43.

<sup>105</sup> Hall, *op.cit.*, p.230.



Romans [...] You will say, perhaps, their rugged tempers were softened, and their austere manners refined. But refinement is often remote from virtue. [...] It is true, they improved in all the elegances of life; but it is equally true, that their native vigour degenerated, into unmanly sloth.<sup>106</sup>

Hall's paper picks up on eighteenth-century anxieties about the corrupting influence of commercial society on the moral sense, and that increasing wealth brings with it a susceptibility to vice which only increases with exposure to the arts. Far from educating the moral sense, a taste for the "literary" may simply be an indulgence of the senses. A literary taste may "probably suit the retired temper of the philosopher, or the apathy of the stoic," but is no preparation "for 'the busy haunts of men,' and the tumults of social life."<sup>107</sup> Hall argued that taste and moral character are not synonymous, pointing to the "irritability of a Pope, and a Grey [...] the voluptuousness of a Montague, and a Chesterfield [...] as instances, amongst numberless others, of the truth of what has been advanced."<sup>108</sup> Ultimately Hall was concerned to place some limit on the idea that morals can be grounded in something other than religious institutions. A close friend of Thomas de Quincey's father, although hated by the son, Hall became the guardian and tutor of the boy following his father's death. Grevel Lindop suggest that Mrs. Quincey would have thought him a suitable tutor because he was a "fairly 'low' churchman" who mixed with dissenters and did not think himself of higher social status.<sup>109</sup> Lindop recounts that on weekdays de Quincey and his brother would go to Hall's home for Latin and Greek lessons. On Sundays, they would attend St Ann's to hear him preach. Every Monday de Quincey was expected to recount the previous day's sermon, "couched as far as possible in the original words, with the sequence of ideas preserved intact."<sup>110</sup> De Quincey would later come to remember Hall as uninspired and dull, as "one of that class [...] who sympathize with no spiritual sense or spiritual capacities in man; who understand by religion simply a

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<sup>106</sup> *ibid.*, pp.236-237.

<sup>107</sup> *ibid.*, p.229.

<sup>108</sup> *ibid.*, p.233.

<sup>109</sup> Grevel Lindop, *The Opium-Eater: A Life of Thomas De Quincey* (London: Dent, 1981), p.15.

<sup>110</sup> *loc.cit.*

respectable code of ethics, leaning for support on some great mysteries dimly traced in the background.”<sup>111</sup>

In 1783 Barnes and several other members became involved in the creation of the Manchester College of the Arts. Barnes was the driving force behind the project, an attempt to widen the spirit of enquiry and extend the project of improvement beyond the rooms of the society. It was aimed in particular at the education of young men in the period between leaving school and taking up a profession. It is probably no coincidence that the Warrington Academy had for several years been dwindling until finally closing its doors in 1783 due to financial difficulties. The College ought probably to be seen as an attempt by Barnes to continue the Warrington project. Barnes gave a number of papers before the Manchester society where he explored the merits of such a project, including “A Brief Comparison of Some of the Principal Arguments in Favour of Public and Private Education,” “A Plan for the Improvement and Extension of Liberal Education in Manchester,” and “Proposals for Establishing in Manchester a Plan of Liberal Education for Young Men Designed for Civil and Active Life, Whether in Trade or Any of the Professions,” all of which were published in the second volume of *Memoirs*.<sup>112</sup> In his “Plan for the Improvement and Extension of Liberal Education in Manchester,” Barnes set out his arguments for the foundation of a school for the further education of business men. Such an education would be necessary, he argued, in order to improve the minds of the class of newly wealthy men in the burgeoning trades:

The society to which I have now the honour of addressing myself, has added no small degree of respectability, in the eyes of our fellow countrymen, and even of foreigners. They have seen, with pleasure, a set of Gentlemen rise up, in the midst of a place devoted to commerce, as the friends of literary and philosophical excellence. An institution, such as I am now recommending, would strengthen that favourable impression, by declaring to the world, that increasing wealth is accompanied with its rare, but honourable attendant,

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<sup>111</sup> *loc.cit.*

<sup>112</sup> Thomas Barnes, “A Brief Comparison of Some of the Principal Arguments in Favour of Public and Private Education,” in *Memoirs* 2 (1785), pp.1-15; “A Plan for the Improvement and Extension of Liberal Education in Manchester,” in *Memoirs* 2 (1785), pp.16-30; “Proposals for Establishing in Manchester a Plan of Liberal Education for Young Men Designed for Civil and Active Life, Whether in Trade or Any of the Professions,” in *Memoirs* 2 (1785), pp.30-41.

increasing wisdom--and, that those, whose sagacity and industry have been able to extend the manufactures, are equally desirous of extending the best improvement and embellishment, of their country. It would contradict the disgraceful idea, that a spirit of merchandize is incompatible with liberal sentiment, and that it only tends to contract and vulgarise the mind.<sup>113</sup>

Such anxieties surrounding the improvement of young wealthy men reflect those evident in the papers on taste explored earlier in the chapter.

Barnes requested the patronage of society members, and in April 1783 a proposal was put forth to members for the establishment of the institution which would deliver evening lectures to young men after leaving grammar school and before managing a business. The Manchester College of Arts and Sciences was instituted in June 1783, and Barnes boasted in 1785 that the plan had been “carried into execution with considerable length.”<sup>114</sup> Patrons included the Earl of Derby and two Knights of the Shire. The college and the society were closely linked: upon its institution Thomas Percival was elected president and nine of the society’s officers became governors of the college.<sup>115</sup> Lectures included topics on practical mathematics, chemistry with reference to arts and manufactures, history of fine arts, the origin and progress of arts, manufactures and commerce, and on moral philosophy. Henry’s lectures on chemistry, bleaching, dyeing, and calico printing were the most successful of the syllabus, according to C.P. Darcy.<sup>116</sup> It was under Henry’s guidance that “members of the community were discovering much about the techniques of applied art as well as textile manufacture.”<sup>117</sup> Indeed, attendance was not limited to gentlemen, but included skilled workers. The college was ultimately unsuccessful, however, lasting only a few years, but its legacy “established a precedent,” argues Darcy, by establishing itself as a forerunner to other similar

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<sup>113</sup> Thomas Barnes, “A Plan for the Improvement, p.29.

<sup>114</sup> Thomas Barnes, “Constitutions and Regulations of the College of Arts and Sciences in Manchester,” in *Memoirs 2* (1785), p.42.

<sup>115</sup> H. McLachlan, *Warrington Academy: Its History and Influence* (Manchester: Chetham Society, 1943), p.123.

<sup>116</sup> C.P. Darcy, *The Encouragement of the Fine Arts in Lancashire, 1760-1860* (Manchester: Chetham Society, 1976), p.97.

<sup>117</sup> *loc.cit.*

institutions throughout Manchester and other industrial towns.<sup>118</sup> As Darcy points out, the college was a forerunner of Owens College which in turn became Manchester University. Indeed, the college's importance should not be underestimated as "a pioneer of the adult education movement."<sup>119</sup> John Dwyer argues that such attempts to extend the educational process effectively created their own concept of adolescence, which "allowed for considerable supervision and control over the prospective moral community."<sup>120</sup> In guiding future generations of business owners and merchants, Barnes' motivations were undoubtedly influenced by such discourses. For the Anglican members of the MLPS, however, the project was looked upon with suspicion, with some expressing frustration about the increasing dominance of dissenting influence. As Farrar, Farrar and Scott have traced, the College caused a controversy among the Anglican faction of the society, a number of whom resigned their membership in protest. In a letter to Benjamin Rush, Henry complained that "Bigotry and Party rage strove to impede our designs, and to this cause is owing the many dashes you will observe through the names of the members."<sup>121</sup> For the most part, liberal-minded Anglicans co-operated with the rational dissenters in their pursuit of improvement, but at various points there were pressure points which caused that co-operation to fall away.

Following the dissolution of the college, Barnes later set about his next project, the Manchester Academy, founded in 1786. Like the Warrington Academy, it delivered a university education to dissenters barred from the traditional establishments, and intended to deliver "a full and systematic course of education for divines - and preparatory instructions for the other learned professions - as well as for civil and commercial life."<sup>122</sup> The academy had enduring importance for the dissenting community. It existed in Manchester until 1803 before moving to York, eventually evolving into the Harris Manchester College at Oxford. Though it held strong links with the MLPS, with some of its most prominent members teaching there

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<sup>118</sup> *loc.cit.*

<sup>119</sup> Darcy, *op.cit.*, p.21.

<sup>120</sup> John Dwyer, *Virtuous Discourse: Sensibility and Community in Late Eighteenth Century Scotland* (Edinburgh: J. Donald, 1987), p.6.

<sup>121</sup> "T. Henry to B. Rush, 10 May 1784," qtd. in W.V. Farrar, Kathleen R. Farrar, and E.L. Scott, "The Henrys of Manchester Part I: Thomas Henry (1734-1816)," in *Ambix* 20 (1793), p.194.

<sup>122</sup> Thomas Barnes, *A Discourse Delivered at the Commencement of the Manchester Academy* (Warrington, 1786), Appendix 1, p.2.

and promoting the project, it nevertheless attracted a sense of unease and controversy amongst members. Perhaps because of the spate of resignations prompted by the earlier College, a resolution was brought forward at a meeting to publish a notice in the press distancing the society from the Academy. On 15 March 1786, the following notice appeared in the *Manchester Mercury*:

Whereas an Inference has been drawn from a Passage in the first Page of the Report of the new Institution, now called, or intended to be called the MANCHESTER ACADEMY, that this Society, *as such*, favour the Principle and Design of that intended Academy.

Resolved, that this Society having, at their first Institution, totally disavowed, and still continuing to disavow all Bias toward, or Intercourse with any Religious Opinion, or Sect whatever, do hereby declare their Independence; and that they do not mean to afford any Patronage to the above named Academy.<sup>123</sup>

The letter was signed by the secretaries, Thomas Barnes and Thomas Henry. Without access to the minutes it is impossible to ascertain just how contentious the meeting was, and what Percival and Barnes' position was, although it seems likely that this public disavowal was a source of embarrassment for its founder. Alexander Eason, a founding member of the MLPS, was scathing about the project in private correspondence:

The foundation stone of the New Academy is not yet laid, but this ceremony is expected soon to take place. It is to be on a small footing, and if it fails, which I think it must do, the loss will not be great. To insure success, very little more is wanted than able masters, scholars, money, and the ruin of the Warrington Academy, in most of which they will be disappointed.<sup>124</sup>

According to the *List of Members*, both Eason and Barnes were Vice-Presidents of the society until 1784; by the following year they had both been replaced. One can speculate that Eason's ire could easily have caused ill-feeling within the committee. It seems that from the mid-1780s rational dissent was beginning to dominate the town, and after a controversy like the Anglican resignations and the contempt felt by Eason,

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<sup>123</sup> *Manchester Mercury* (March 15, 1786)

<sup>124</sup> A. Eason to Charles Macintosh, 1784," qtd. in George Macintosh, *A Biographical Memoir of the Late Charles Macintosh, F.R.S. of Campsie and Duxchattan. Compiled and Edited, from Authentic Documents* (Glasgow, 1847).

Barnes and his allies had to begin to take care not to assume a cultural authority. Even before the 1790s then, it appears that the liberal elite had to tread very carefully in order to avoid linking improvement too closely with dissent.

Despite the public notice, however, the Academy was, in practice, still strongly linked with the now dissolved academy at Warrington. Indeed, upon its foundation the subscribers petitioned the trustees of Warrington Academy for the loan of the library and scientific apparatus. Barnes was appointed professor of Hebrew, metaphysics, ethics, and theology.<sup>125</sup> Rev. Ralph Harrison was appointed professor of Greek and Latin languages, and polite literature.<sup>126</sup> Harrison and Barnes were charged with the appointment of teachers for all other subjects. The second address of the committee called for applications to be made for a professor in mathematics and natural philosophy: “some Gentleman of eminent ability and industry, who will pay peculiar attention to those branches, which have a more immediate relation to Commerce and the Arts.”<sup>127</sup> Amongst the members of the MLPS involved in the academy were Henry, who was to deliver a course of lectures in chemistry, and Percival, appointed chairman. Patrons of the academy and college enjoyed, according to Barnes, a “friendly correspondence” with each other, “a circumstance mutually favourable to both Establishments. [...] By this friendly cooperation, the circle of studies [...] is agreeably enlarged.”<sup>128</sup>

Barnes’ “Discourse Delivered at the Commencement of the Manchester Academy” extolled the virtues of a modern society governed by reason, rather than religion: “Observe the abject servility of men educated under the debasements of despotism, or superstition! Contrast with this the manly spirit of those, who have been born under the auspices of freedom, and of reason.”<sup>129</sup> Again, for Barnes, conversation played a key role in the development of modern society: the “noble

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<sup>125</sup> Barnes also revived a course of lectures delivered to the College of Arts and Sciences, “On the History and Principles of Commerce, the Commercial Laws and Regulations of Different States, and on Commercial Ethics, Including the Nature of Oaths, Contracts, Commutative Justice, &c.,” in Barnes, *op.cit.*, Appendix 2, p.8.

<sup>126</sup> The Polite Literature course included “the theory of language, particularly the English; oratory; criticism; composition; history; and geography,” *loc.cit.*

<sup>127</sup> Barnes, *op.cit.*, Appendix 2, p.9.

<sup>128</sup> Barnes, *op.cit.*, Appendix 2, p.26.

<sup>129</sup> Barnes, *op.cit.*, p.6.

invigorating spirit” is “infused and cherished by the conversation, the writings, the manners, of those around you; by the monuments of your ancestors, by their history.”<sup>130</sup> Andrew Kippis’ lectures on the belles lettres given in 1767 to the Hoxton Dissenting Academy were recommended by Barnes. Kippis encouraged readers to “converse with the works which have stood the test of ages.” A taste for polite literature, he argued, “refine[s] the manners,” “improve[s] the understanding,” and “corrects and softens the turbulence of the passions.”<sup>131</sup> Similarly, Barnes felt that improvement of the mind plays a key role in the advancement of civilisation; those “subjects which belong to cultivated Taste” serve to “regulate the Imagination and refine the Feelings [...] give correctness to vigour, and elegance to strength.”<sup>132</sup> Contrary to the belief that too broad an education is injurious, a proper check on the refinement of taste would have only positive results:

[W]here the refinements of taste have been kept in due subordination to the piety of the heart, where the sense of duty, the love of God, and its amiable offspring, the warm desire of doing good to men, have been kept alive, as the first and strongest passions of the soul, this inconvenience cannot exist.<sup>133</sup>

As with Priestley, a liberal education was ultimately a middling class pursuit which “cannot possibly be enjoyed by all. It can only reach to those, whose time and fortune, and future prospects, give them leisure, ability, and incitement to the acquisition.”<sup>134</sup>

The Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society is perhaps one of the most enduring symbols of eighteenth-century improvement, spanning over 230 years. In the nineteenth century it became synonymous with the Industrial Revolution, boasting among its membership a number of famous scientists. Its founding members had originally set out to create a culture of polite conversation which had been instilled in them during their formative years in the dissenting academies and Scottish universities. But the free flow of conversation was not one which came naturally. Such mode of interaction needed careful regulation, with tensions between politeness and contention needing to be kept in careful check. Too regulated, and the

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<sup>130</sup> Barnes, *op.cit.*, pp.6-7.

<sup>131</sup> Andrew Kippis, “Introductory Lectures to the Belles Lettres,” Oxford, Harris Manchester College, MS, Belsham 4, 36. Thanks to Jon Mee for providing me with a copy.

<sup>132</sup> Barnes, *op.cit.*, p.14.

<sup>133</sup> Barnes, *op.cit.*, p.17.

<sup>134</sup> Barnes, *op.cit.*, p.9.

society would suffer from a lack of engagement and boring discussion. Too heated, and contention would lead to an overemphasis of the passions. The society's founders placed an emphasis upon conversation as a spark from which knowledge would be produced, but this did not come easily. Although the early years of the society appear to have been relatively free from controversy, tensions began to heighten around the turn of the 1790s. The broader political atmosphere was felt within the society's walls, despite members' attempts to keep politics and religion outside the door. The following two chapters will explore the difficulties faced in Percival's association model, which endeavoured to promote improvement without contention.



## 2. Manchester's literary physicians

From its institution, the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society's founders placed particular emphasis on the goal of improvement. They strove to create a space in which conversation struck out sparks of learning, but not at the cost of politeness. The numerous papers concerned with taste outlined in the previous chapter reveal that the founders and early members found equal advantage in the literary as well as the scientific as improving. While the previous chapter explored the role of dissent in the foundation of the society, this chapter is concerned with the role Manchester's medical men played in the project, although the two groups largely overlapped. For these men, an interest in taste was not merely a literary matter, a side issue incidental to their medical concerns. Rather, it was generated out of their professional knowledge. Taste was, for them, a fundamental part of their interest in the human body: a medico-literary concept based upon the question of how physical responses were written on the body. Taste - as with imagination - was at the forefront of questions that preoccupied medical and literary men both during this period. What makes us human? What is the source of life? What is the relationship between mind and body? Is there a soul? Manchester was, around the turn of the 1780s, a hotbed of ideas of this sort, a matter which has been previously overlooked by literary scholars.

As the historian of medicine Roy Porter has argued, societies such as the MLPS arose not from men of industry developing useful knowledge, but from groups of "affluent but marginal men – medical practitioners and Unitarians above all."<sup>1</sup> Thackray, who first developed the idea of "marginal men" in relation to the society's activities, notes the importance of medical men to the foundation of the MLPS: sixty per cent of the twenty-four founding members were physicians or otherwise professionally involved in medicine.<sup>2</sup> This group included six physicians, six surgeons and two apothecaries. Moreover, medical men were disproportionately represented

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<sup>1</sup> Roy Porter, "Science, Provincial Culture and Public Opinion in Enlightenment England," in *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 3.1 (March, 1980), p.34.

<sup>2</sup> Arnold Thackray, "Natural Knowledge in Cultural Context: The Manchester Mode," in *The American Historical Review* 79.3 (June 1974), p.684.

in the society's committee, with "absolute control [...] mitigated only by the presence of two vice-presidents from outside the medical world."<sup>3</sup> This inner circle included Thomas Percival, Thomas Henry, and John Ferriar. John Aikin, James Currie and John Haygarth, though not living in Manchester, were doctors who were corresponding members, and all contributed papers to the society. The Manchester Infirmary, founded in 1752, had attracted a new class of professional, educated men to the area. Porter and Thackray see their involvement in the MLPS as part of a need to entrench themselves in the polite society of the expanding town, but Thackray's claim that the literary interests of medical men were merely "ornamental" overlooks how deeply connected the literary was to the medical for many of them.<sup>4</sup> In this period, interests in literature, taste and morals were closely entwined with the medical. Ideas about taste and the imagination were being increasingly seen as having a physiological basis, a question that occupied both the physician and the poet. This intersection between medicine and literature has attracted recent interest from literary scholars, such as Alan Richardson, who asserts the influence of contemporary scientific discovery to the literature of the Romantic period: "Only in the Romantic period, in fact, was the brain definitively established as the organ of thought, although this seemingly inevitable notion would continue to be challenged on religious and other grounds well into the 1820s."<sup>5</sup> But while Richardson's study examines the influence of neuroscience on Romantic writers like Wordsworth, Coleridge, Austen and Keats, I am concerned with the interplay of medical and literary writing, rather than treating the former as a background for the latter. In this regard, then, this chapter focuses primarily on the literary interests of men of science, rather than the scientific interests of literary men. It will focus especially on Ferriar, a "literary physician" connected with both the MLPS and the Infirmary.<sup>6</sup> Ferriar has previously attracted

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<sup>3</sup> Thackray *op.cit.*, p.684. These two vice-presidents were, however, connected with the dissenting Cross Street Chapel. Thackray argues that this makes them "not so remote from the medical world as one might at first suppose."

<sup>4</sup> Thackray, *op.cit.*, p.685.

<sup>5</sup> Alan Richardson, *British Romanticism and the Science of the Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001), p.1.

<sup>6</sup> The term "literary physician" was coined by Aikin in a short essay titled "Apology for the Literary Pursuits of Physicians." See *The Gentleman's Magazine* 60.2 (1786), pp.667-69.

the attention of literary historians, mainly for his interest in Sterne.<sup>7</sup> His influence on Coleridge's ideas has also received some attention, but Ferriar's work has largely been relegated to footnotes. Several of the papers he presented to the society, however, were concerned with medico-literary matters, such as how taste and the imagination can be traced on the physical body. It is these papers that will be my primary concern. His body of medico-literary work has never received much serious attention in its own right.<sup>8</sup> I provide a reading of this previously neglected area of Ferriar's work, examining the ways in which the medical and the literary intersect.

Before turning to the involvement of the medical men in the MLPS, however, I want to sketch out another institutional context for their work, the Manchester Infirmary, which was contemporary with the development of their role in the society. The Infirmary was an ongoing site of tensions between ideology and public health, even if the two cannot always be neatly mapped one onto the other. These tensions were also expressed in the MLPS and put pressure on the idea of a space free from rancour. The tensions around the Infirmary were partly to do with the arrival in town of a new class of young, educated physicians. These outsiders, the most obvious case being Ferriar, had to undergo a very public struggle to carve out a position for themselves within the profession. Ferriar, a young Scottish doctor, was the son of a Presbyterian minister with a profile similar to many of those who attended Warrington. Although he was not educated there, like most of the medical graduates at Warrington he was trained at Edinburgh University. After his graduation from Edinburgh in 1781 he practised in Stockton-On-Tees for a short period before moving to Manchester in 1785. On arrival, he soon became involved in the MLPS, forming a close friendship with Percival. Indeed, it may have been Percival who encouraged Ferriar to move to Manchester, probably on the basis of his continuing links with the

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<sup>7</sup> See, for example, H.J. Jackson, "Sterne, Burton, and Ferriar: Allusions to the *Anatomy of Melancholy* in Volumes V to IX of *Tristram Shandy*," in *Laurence Sterne*, ed. Marcus Walsh (London: Routledge, 2013), pp.123-37.

<sup>8</sup> Ina Ferris and Michelle Faubert do consider Ferriar's work more extensively, as I will explore later in the chapter. However, they still treat Ferriar within a comparative framework. Ferris compares Ferriar's work with that of Sir Walter Scott, and Faubert compares his work with James Hogg. See Ina Ferris, "'Before Our Eyes': Romantic Historical Fiction and the Apparitions of Reading," in *Representations* 121.1 (Winter 2013), pp.60-84. See also Michelle Faubert, "Ferriar's Psychology, James Hogg's Justified Sinner, and the Gay Science of Horror Writing," in *Romanticism and Pleasure*, ed. Thomas H. Schmid and Michelle Faubert (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp.83-108.

medical faculty in Edinburgh. Percival and Ferriar found themselves at the forefront of a struggle for control of Manchester's medical institutions which John Pickstone has termed the "Infirmity revolution."<sup>9</sup> The Infirmity, a subscription hospital, was founded by the surgeon Charles White.<sup>10</sup> Control was, at the time of Ferriar's arrival, largely in the hands of surgeons close to the ruling group, mainly the wealthy Hall and White families, Tory-Anglicans who used their position to promote family members within the Infirmity. In 1779, for example, Richard Hall was appointed to the Infirmity staff after a surgeon was forced out. Richard was the son of Edward Hall, one of the founding members of the Infirmity along with White. The move attracted public criticism of a "surgical monopoly," but it would be several years before the ruling group faced any serious challenge to their position.<sup>11</sup>

In 1789 Percival, Ferriar, and other reformers began to push for an expansion of the Infirmity staff, a move which may have been initiated partly in order to obtain a physician appointment for Ferriar.<sup>12</sup> The honorary staff consisted of six physicians and surgeons, and the reformers wanted this number to be doubled. The group associated with Ferriar also called for an increase in the public health role of the hospital, namely improvements to the home visiting role of physicians, particularly for poor fever patients. The move for expansion was blocked by the largely Anglican ruling group associated with White at the first attempt, but a second push in 1790 was a success. They continued to fight for better provisions and were met with further resistance from the established group, but their efforts succeeded in 1796 in the institution of the Board of Health and the House of Recovery. Pickstone argues that this second struggle was a "re-enactment" of the 1788-90 disputes, and that the

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<sup>9</sup> John Pickstone and S.V.F. Butler, "The Politics of Medicine in Manchester, 1788-1792," in *Medical History* 28 (1984), pp 229-230.

<sup>10</sup> White was the surgeon who had attended Thomas De Quincey's sister Elizabeth when she contracted hydrocephalus in 1792. See Grevel Lindop, "De Quincey and the Portico Library," in *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 76:1 (1994), p.183. He was also involved in the foundation of the MLPS and the College of Arts and Sciences, together with Percival and Barnes, and had been Percival's mentor at the Infirmity.

<sup>11</sup> See letter from Burchall, *Manchester Mercury* (12 January 1779).

<sup>12</sup> John Pickstone "Ferriar's Fever to Kay's Cholera," in *History of Science* 22:4 (December 1984), p.403.

reformers' earlier success had paved the way for their success.<sup>13</sup> The expansionists were closely associated with reform more generally in the town; supporters of the abolition movement and the campaign against the Test and Corporation Acts largely overlapped.<sup>14</sup> Radicals like Thomas Walker and Thomas Cooper, friends of Ferriar, were among those who initiated the Infirmary revolution; they who would later go on to found the Manchester Constitutional Society. The MCS was the primary player in the town's push for political reform on the national stage, a subject to which I will turn in the following chapter.<sup>15</sup> The expansion of the Infirmary has been considered "the major concrete achievement of Manchester radicalism," but together with other reformist causes, this provoked a strong loyalist reaction, the repercussions of which were keenly felt in the 1790s.<sup>16</sup>

The fact that a large proportion of medical men on either of the dispute were involved in the MLPS meant that ill-feelings were in danger of disrupting the notion of amiable exchange. Indeed, two key players pitted against each other, Percival and White, were both founding and committee members of the MLPS. Percival's original goal of cultivating improvement without descending into political rancour was apparently at risk. Percival wanted to preserve some version of the "public sphere" within the MLPS, but one which was heavily moderated and as far as possible separated from politics. The Infirmary reforms enacted, and the ensuing tensions which were undoubtedly experienced by those involved, fed directly into the text for which he is now best remembered, *Medical Ethics; Or, a Code of Institutes and Precepts, Adapted to the Professional Conduct of Physicians and Surgeons*, first published in 1803.<sup>17</sup> Together with John Gregory, author of *Lectures on the Duties and Qualifications of a Physician*, Percival's work is considered to be one of the cornerstones of modern medical ethics.<sup>18</sup> As he explained in his preface, the project

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<sup>13</sup> John Pickstone and S.V.F. Butler, "The Politics of Medicine in Manchester, 1788-1792," in *Medical History* 28 (1984), p.247.

<sup>14</sup> *loc.cit.*

<sup>15</sup> John Pickstone, "Thomas Percival and the Production of Medical Ethics," in *Philosophy and Medicine* 45 (1993), p.169.

<sup>16</sup> Pickstone, "Ferriar's Fever," p.403.

<sup>17</sup> Thomas Percival, *Medical Ethics; Or, a Code of Institutes and Precepts, Adapted to the Professional Conduct of Physicians and Surgeons* (Manchester, 1803).

<sup>18</sup> John Gregory, *Lectures on the Duties and Qualifications of a Physician* (London, 1772).

was started over a decade earlier, in 1792, at the request of physicians and surgeons at the Manchester Infirmary.<sup>19</sup> As Lisbeth Haakonssen argues, Percival was interested in the way in which medical professionals related with each other, and with their patients, based on the idea of mutual sympathy.<sup>20</sup> The recently fought battle for control of the Infirmary had been ideologically fraught, and raised many issues about how people with such profoundly polarised views would continue working and socialising alongside one another. In the context of the medical institutions, the ruling group no longer felt able to work alongside Percival and the expansionists. White and many of the surgeons resigned from the Infirmary and set up a separate lying-in hospital. In the context of the MLPS, however, it is testament to Percival's desire to separate the idea of improvement from politics that White remained a member. Nor, in fact, did Ferriar and Percival resign from the society with their friends following a political dispute in 1791, an event discussed in more depth in the following chapter.

Inspired by Percival, the men involved in the Infirmary revolution obviously retained a concern to keep the MLPS as a space where differences might be put aside in the name of a broader project of improvement. Percival's model of interaction based on mutual sympathy was developed in *Medical Ethics*, which stressed the importance of sentiment to the medical profession. Although the text is specific to the medical profession, clearly the same model of interaction could be applied equally to the interaction of men with ideological differences in the MLPS. In his opening paragraph Percival argued that medical staff had a responsibility to treat their patients with appropriate compassion:

Hospital physicians and surgeons should minister to the sick, with due impressions of the importance of their office; reflecting that the ease, the health, and the lives of those committed to their charge depend on their skill, attention, and fidelity. They should study, also, in their deportment, so to unite *tenderness* with *steadiness*, and *condescension* with *authority*, as to inspire the minds of their patients with gratitude, respect, and confidence.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Percival, *op.cit.*, p.1.

<sup>20</sup> Lisbeth Haakonssen, *Medicine and Morals in the Enlightenment: John Gregory, Thomas Percival and Benjamin Rush* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1997), p.216.

<sup>21</sup> Percival, *op.cit.*, p.9.

Percival's insistence upon employing tenderness in dealing with the poor and the sick illustrates the emphasis he placed on the idea of morality based upon mutual sympathy. Pickstone argues that *Medical Ethics* was an attempt by Percival to preserve and defend his position as a leading member of the cultural elite.<sup>22</sup> But Percival does not appear to have been interested in the elitism of his profession, having never been a member of the Royal College of Physicians.<sup>23</sup> Haakonssen, rather, conceives of Percival as a "valuable mediator": a member of the middling class, neither hostile to the establishment nor politically radical. "He was not antagonistic toward the aristocracy but his criticism of some of their values certainly had a sharper edge than Gregory's," she argues.<sup>24</sup>

According to this judgement, Percival was relatively apolitical, and his role in the creation and expansion of institutions such as the Academy and the Infirmary was driven by the desire to create separate "public spheres" outside of the political sphere. But Haakonssen does not give sufficient weight to the role of the MLPS. Rather, Percival had attempted to preserve a form of the public sphere relatively free from politics, and this took the form of the MLPS. In fact, Percival was not apolitical. He had strong Whig principles, and was a member, together with Ferriar, Barnes, Cooper and others, of the Manchester Abolition Society, founded in 1787.<sup>25</sup> He broadly supported the ideals of reform, and was involved in the campaign against the Test and Corporation Acts. The battle for control of Manchester's medical institutions, indeed, was a politicised struggle against the existing surgical monopoly in the name of improved social medicine and poor provision. Furthermore, despite having publicly distanced himself from popular radicalism, correspondence reveals his private sympathies:

I am equally with you a zealous lover of my country, and a warm admirer of its form of government, which I would have exchanged for any other, either conceived or established, in the world. My solicitude is for the security of what is so invaluable, by the reformation of abuses, and by restoring to each estate

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<sup>22</sup> John Pickstone, "Thomas Percival and the Production of Medical Ethics," in *Philosophy and Medicine* 45 (1993), p.172.

<sup>23</sup> See Haakonssen, *op.cit.*, p.120.

<sup>24</sup> Haakonssen, *op.cit.*, p.136.

<sup>25</sup> "Society for the Purpose of Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade," in *Derby Mercury* 3 January, 1788.

its true dignity, independence, and efficiency. We should remember also, that the human mind, in nations as well as individuals, is progressive; that to promote this progress is one of the most important objects of the social union; and that political improvements should therefore proceed in a gentle pace, but always proportionate to such advancement.<sup>26</sup>

Clearly Percival was careful to keep his politics from getting in the way of the ethos of improvement that was central to the MLPS. Indeed, a controversy which occurred in the aftermath of the 1791 Birmingham riots and led to the resignation of several radical members put serious pressure on Percival's model of association, but he retained his position as president of the society. Privately, however, his correspondence reveals that he was sympathetic to the resigning group who wished to publish an open letter of support for Priestley.<sup>27</sup>

In his friendships, too, Percival put aside political disagreements and differences. His large network encompassed men like Haygarth who, though an Anglican, shared many of Percival's ideals. Haygarth similarly put aside his differences in his friendship with the more outspokenly radical Aikin. As Lucy Aikin recalls in his biography, it was:

[O]ne of the most sincere, cordial, and valuable friendships [...] tried by long years of continued absence, -- by much diversity of tastes, pursuits and connections, -- and, above all, by a marked opposition both of political and religious sentiments, when party contests ran the highest; which, nevertheless, through all the mutations of half a century, stood without even a suspicion of insecurity.<sup>28</sup>

Whatever Percival's private politics, it is difficult to judge with any degree of accuracy. The fact that he stayed in the society following the 1791 controversy unlike the radicals who resigned in protest could be seen as a prudent move in the name of improvement, or could perhaps be taken as a snub and a betrayal. More probably, his ideals and allegiances shifted over time: perhaps he was swept up in the optimism and confidence experienced by reformers in the 1780s, but changed his stance after

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<sup>26</sup> "Percival to Haygarth, 1793," qtd. in *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Thomas Percival, M.D.*, ed. Edward Percival (London, 1807), p.clxxiv.

<sup>27</sup> "Currie to Percival, 12 November 1791," Published in W.W. Currie, *Memoir of the Life, Writings, and Correspondence of James Currie* (London, 1831), pp.69-70. See chapter 3.

<sup>28</sup> Lucy Aikin, *Memoirs of Dr John Aikin* 1 (London, 1823), p.17.



the tide had turned in the early 1790s. It is certainly the case, however, that Percival was willing to challenge the received hierarchy in the events leading up to the Infirmary revolution. The result of Percival and Ferriar's efforts was relative control of the town's medical institutions and the birth of a "new form of social medicine."<sup>29</sup> Although Percival wanted to preserve the MLPS as a space free from politics, this model was tested to its limits in the face of the tumultuous 1790s. But the continued survival of the society, and the fact that neither he, Ferriar, or White resigned, show that ultimately Percival's project was a success, even if this did come at the cost of surrendering some of his own principles.

While the Infirmary dispute was being played out, Ferriar began his studies of fever, prompted by the typhus epidemics of 1789 and 1790.<sup>30</sup> Fever was, in this period, a fraught social and political issue. Thomas Henry's 1789 paper "Observations on the Bills of Mortality for the Towns of Manchester and Salford" explicitly made the connection between ill health and poverty, blaming the virulence of a "very destructive" fever that had swept through the town on the "crowded and uncleanly manner, in which the poorer people have been lodged."<sup>31</sup> Expanding on Henry's observations, Ferriar was scathing about the effects of poverty on public health in the town. "Fevers of this species," he wrote, "always exist among the poor, in certain quarters of this town; and their ravages are only checked by the privilege which patients in indigent circumstances enjoy, of being visited at their own houses by the physicians of the infirmary."<sup>32</sup> Ferriar was frustrated by the ineffectiveness of treating patients in crowded and filthy dwellings, overcrowded, filthy and lacking ventilation. He promoted the idea that lodging houses should be licensed and regulated to try and keep the poor sanitation and overcrowding in check. He also began to push for the foundation of a hospital dedicated to the treatment of fever:

This plan would require the aid of fever-wards, to be established in different quarters of the town, to receive patients from infected houses, or from close

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<sup>29</sup> John V. Pickstone, "Ferriar's Fever to Kay's Cholera: Disease and Social Structure in Cottonopolis," in *History of Science* 22:4 (December 1984), p.401.

<sup>30</sup> John Ferriar, *Medical Histories and Reflections* (London, 1792).

<sup>31</sup> Thomas Henry, "Observations on the Bills of Mortality for the Towns of Manchester and Salford," in *Memoirs* 3 (1790), pp.161-62.

<sup>32</sup> Ferriar, *op.cit.*, p.135.

cellars, or pent-up rooms, where the want of air and of proper attendance leaves little chance of escape to the sufferer.<sup>33</sup>

The proponents of the fever hospital drew on their wider network of medical allies, gathering testimonies from Haygarth in Chester and Currie in Liverpool in support of their plan.<sup>34</sup> Those who opposed the hospital felt that the concentration of large numbers of infected people would increase the chance of disease spreading. This fear had an obvious class element, for the elite had an apprehension of contagion from the poor. Pickstone argues that the early radicals did not see themselves as being a world apart from the poor. The poor were, for Ferriar, fundamentally the same as those better off: "Poor men had their sensibilities; poverty, like luxury disturbed that sensibility."<sup>35</sup> The idea that everyone is fundamentally the same, creatures of sensibility made different only by circumstance, was shared by Percival, whose *Medical Ethics* advocated the compassionate treatment of those less fortunate. Fever was, for Ferriar, not simply a peripheral problem. Instead, he recognised that all of his patients were deserving of empathy. In his 1792 *Medical Histories and Reflections* Ferriar published a scathing paper attacking the injurious effects of class division upon the poor, "Origin of contagious, and new diseases."<sup>36</sup> He argued that luxury and opulence of the upper classes were directly responsible for illness amongst the poor, and that the rich were not safe from contagion:

While innumerable methods are proposed for supporting the poor of this nation, with the least possible expence, it has not been sufficiently explained to the public, that their present situation is extremely dangerous, and often destructive of health and life, to the middle and higher ranks of society.<sup>37</sup>

He warned that the rich must take responsibility for the welfare of the poor, or else risk succumbing to the same diseases that they had inadvertently given rise to:

Thus it appears, that the safety of the rich is intimately connected with the welfare of the poor, and that a minute and constant attention to their wants, is

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<sup>33</sup> *ibid.*, p.143.

<sup>34</sup> See *Proceedings of the Board of Health of Manchester* (Manchester, 1806).

<sup>35</sup> Pickstone and Butler, *op.cit.*, p.415.

<sup>36</sup> Ferriar, "Origin of Contagious, and New Diseases," in *Medical Histories and Reflections* (London, 1792), pp.218-48.

<sup>37</sup> Ferriar, *op.cit.*, p.218.

not less an act of self-preservation than of virtue. For we are not only exposed now, to the ravages of disorders, the poisons of which are perpetuated in the abodes of misery, but we are threatened with the rise of new contagions, the danger of which cannot be foretold, nor perhaps the remedies easily ascertained.<sup>38</sup>

He went on to attack the corrupting influence of luxury, arguing that the “voluptuous habits” of the individual “induce him to withhold his real superfluities from the indigent,” and he thus “contributes to the diseases and destruction of thousands.”<sup>39</sup>

These were the same concerns shared by the earlier members of the MLPS about the corrupting influence of wealth and luxury. Ferriar had seen first-hand the devastating effects of growing inequalities between the rich and poor upon public health, and he used that knowledge to agitate for better provisions for those less fortunate.

It is important to emphasise that many of the actors involved in these deeply divisive battles for control of the town’s medical institutions were, at the same time, also attempting to carve out a space free from political rancour in the MLPS. The Infirmary revolution was a very public battle, played out openly in the press. Did MLPS members manage to keep their personal feelings about the Infirmary battle from spilling over into meetings? Or did contention creep into their interactions? It is, of course, very difficult to gauge without surviving archival records. But there are some signs that internal tensions were beginning to build as a result of the growing confidence of dissenters in the town. The letter from Alexander Eason complaining about the Academy, the letter published by Barnes disavowing the society’s involvement in the same, the letter from Henry to Rush complaining of “Bigotry and Party rage,” the spate of resignations of Anglican members. All indicate a growing sense of unease amongst members with different religious and political sympathies. The Infirmary battle, moreover, was fought publicly in the press; a spate of letters on the topic appeared in the *Manchester Mercury* between January and March 1789. One letter, signed by “A constant reader,” decried the reformers’ plan as “a Medical Republic of the worst kind,” and warned that any institutional reform enacted would be injurious to the welfare of patients: they would “become the objects of experiment

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<sup>38</sup> Ferriar, *op.cit.*, pp.246-47.

<sup>39</sup> Ferriar, *op.cit.*, p.247.

to the uninformed or rash practitioner.”<sup>40</sup> The phrasing of the letter highlights that highly politicised language was beginning to creep into the debate. The rhetoric of “A constant reader” played on contemporary fears of republicanism in the lead up to the French Revolution.

With this in view, it is unlikely that personal difficulties did not get in the way when the battle was fought in such a public manner. That White, founder of the Infirmary, was pitted against his protégé Percival, was certain to have led to difficulties within the society. White’s resignation letter, published in the *Mercury* in August 1790, was printed directly below Ferriar’s canvas for supporters, an editorial decision that would have done little to assuage tensions.<sup>41</sup> In his resignation, White movingly celebrated his role as founder of the institution: “I have ever looked upon it as a Child of my own, have watched over it with zealous Solicitude, even to a degree of Enthusiasm, and have exerted my utmost Abilities to serve and to extend so Useful and so Humane an Establishment.”<sup>42</sup> Directly above it, was a short letter from Ferriar, who extended his gratitude to his supporters, and assured them that “Should any Change in the Business of the Hospital throw an unexpected share of it into my Hands, you may depend on the Exertion of my utmost Endeavours to execute whatever the Urgencies of the Situation my exact.”<sup>43</sup>

The fact that White remained in the MLPS is testament to Percival’s model of association. White continued to play an active role, contributing several papers in 1795 which he later published together as *An Account of the Regular Gradation in Man, and in Different Animals and Vegetables*.<sup>44</sup> When over half of the society’s members were involved in the medical institutions it seems unlikely that such a protracted battle would not spill over into the meeting room, especially when sensitive medical topics such as the relation between mind and body were discussed. As Richardson claims, during this period such issues were always fraught with ideological conflict. The topic was a “fertile site,” and an examination of its treatment

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<sup>40</sup> “Letter from ‘a constant reader,’” in *Manchester Mercury* (17 March 1789).

<sup>41</sup> “To the Chairman of the Weekly Board of the Infirmary in Manchester,” in *Manchester Mercury* (10 August 1790).

<sup>42</sup> *loc.cit.*

<sup>43</sup> “To the Trustees of the Manchester Infirmary,” in *Manchester Mercury* (10 August 1790).

<sup>44</sup> Charles White, *An Account of the Regular Gradation in Man, and in Different Animals and Vegetables* (London, 1799).

in this period uncovers religious, political, and cultural tensions during a period in which “an immaterial and indivisible conception of mind seemed an indispensable prop to established religious doctrine and even political stability.”<sup>45</sup> The MLPS was one such site of debate around these topics. An examination of the exchange around the vitality debate, together with the reactions it provokes, reveals ideological tensions which would become increasingly strained around the turn of the 1790s.

Before the Infirmary revolution, and the ideological polarisation of the 1790s, the MLPS was the site of a debate between Cooper and Ferriar about vitality, the fundamental question of whether life arises from a purely material, physical basis, or whether it was “superadded.” The debate began with Cooper’s “Sketch of the Controversy on Materialism,” read at the MLPS in January 1787.<sup>46</sup> The paper was not published in the *Memoirs*, perhaps significantly, but Cooper included it in his *Tracts Ethical, Theological and Political* published in 1789.<sup>47</sup> Cooper began by noting that “the phenomena termed mental are a frequent topic of discussion in this society,” but that he was induced to produce the paper “as I have reason to believe I am hitherto singular in my sentiments concerning the explanation of those phenomena.”<sup>48</sup> Although he was responding directly to Barnes, and though his paper is a clear attack on the vitality position, Cooper was nevertheless careful to treat his fellow Unitarian with respect. Arguing for a physical basis for consciousness against a range of positions he identified with “immaterialism,” Cooper stated:

There is a necessary connection therefore, between such a structure as the brain and the property of *perceiving, or being conscious of* impressions made upon our senses; for there is precisely the same reason for this assertion, as there can be for any other the most incontestable, namely, the certainty or universality wherewith we observe perception, and the brain accompany each other.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Alan Richardson, *British Romanticism and the Science of the Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001), p.xiv.

<sup>46</sup> In fact, Cooper’s paper was a response to Thomas Barnes’ 1784 paper “On the Voluntary Power Which the Mind Is Able to Exercise over Bodily Sensation,” *Memoirs* 2 (1785), pp.451-66.

<sup>47</sup> Thomas Cooper, *Tracts Ethical, Theological, and Political* 1 (Warrington, 1789), pp.167-303.

<sup>48</sup> *ibid.*, p.167.

<sup>49</sup> *ibid.*, pp.179-80.

In a footnote, Cooper asserted that the concept of consciousness arising from the brain was, for anatomical and physiological authors, “a settled point.” He argued that since the severance of a nerve results in the loss of movement below the cut, but not above, it follows that voluntary motion is dependent on the brain. All cases of injuries, palsies, and drugs that affect the brain in this way also have a corresponding effect on movement. As far as perception is concerned, Cooper addressed arguments made by immaterialists that brain function can continue despite significant damage. He argued that exceptional cases of people continuing to experience perception after injuries to the brain did nothing to prove that the soul exists. Rather, Cooper made the argument that the burden of proof was on the immaterialists to prove there was a soul, rather than the materialists prove there was not:

But indeed whether there be facts enough to limit perception to the whole brain, or only to some part thereof, or to the nervous system in general, is of little consequence to the materialist, whose sole business is to prove that the phenomena of thinking are the necessary result of the impressions made by external objects on our corporeal system, without admitting the existence of a distinct immaterial being for the explication of those phenomena.<sup>50</sup>

Cooper concluded that there was no evidence for the existence of a soul, stating frankly: “The soul does not exist.”<sup>51</sup> He pointed to Priestley’s *Disquisitions Relating to Matter and Spirit*, arguing that Priestley had “better and differently considered” the materialist argument.<sup>52</sup> In deferring to Priestley, Cooper situated his work within a broader context than his exchange with Ferriar; he would later express his solidarity with Priestley following the loyalist backlash in 1791.

Ferriar responded only a few weeks later, in February 1787, in a paper titled “Observations Concerning the Vital Principle,” later published in the third volume of *Memoirs*.<sup>53</sup> In many ways Ferriar was echoing the hostility to vitalism expressed in Cooper’s paper, particularly in his rebuttal of the Edinburgh trained physicians Hunter and Monro. Ferriar traced some of the history of philosophical thought

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<sup>50</sup> *ibid.*, pp.181-82.

<sup>51</sup> *ibid.*, p.192.

<sup>52</sup> Cooper, *op.cit.*, p.192; Joseph Priestley, *Disquisitions Relating to Matter and Spirit* (London, 1777).

<sup>53</sup> John Ferriar, “Observations Concerning the Vital Principle” *Memoirs* 3 (1790), pp.216-41.

around the immateriality of the soul and dissected arguments by immaterialists in support of the vital principle. He came close to a materialist view, but unlike Cooper's confident assertion to the contrary, he felt that further proof was needed in support of the existence of a vital principle: "At present, it is evident that we gain nothing by admitting the supposition, as no distinct account is given of the nature or production of this principle, and as an investigation of facts seems to lead us back to the brain, as the source of sensibility and irritability."<sup>54</sup> Although he came close to agreeing with Cooper, he explicitly stopped short of coming to any firm conclusion on either side of the debate. His concluding remarks, in fact, drew attention to the rules of the MLPS: he had "purposely omitted to consider the application of the doctrine of a vital principle to pathology, as the subject would lead to disquisitions inadmissible by the rules of the Society."<sup>55</sup> In pointing out that the society's rules were a barrier to a full and comprehensive argument on the topic, Ferriar was chafing against Percival's model of improvement that valued politeness but which did not allow the free exchange of ideas. How could improvement be rigorous and enlightening, he appeared to be arguing, if one was not allowed the freedom to explore one's ideas in full? Cooper, too, had argued in his preface to *Tracts* that the most important thing above all was the truth, not the way in which it was communicated or any perceived danger in those ideas.<sup>56</sup> The Cooper-Ferriar exchange of the late 1780s uncovers some of the pressures that were beginning to build around ideas about freedom of speech that would reach their peak in the coming years. It shows that, despite the appearance of unity within the society, Cooper and Ferriar were beginning to resist against the Percival model.

Three years later, Ferriar provided a full response to Cooper's materialist argument in an "Argument Against the Doctrine of Materialism, Addressed to Thomas Cooper, Esq," read before the society in 1790.<sup>57</sup> Ferriar revisited the argument made by Cooper in his footnote regarding the brain's role in perception. Recounting a series of cases in which brain injuries appeared to have no effect on the patient's intellectual

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<sup>54</sup> Ferriar, *op.cit.*, p.240.

<sup>55</sup> Ferriar, *op.cit.*, p.241.

<sup>56</sup> See Cooper, *op.cit.*, pp.x-xii.

<sup>57</sup> John Ferriar, "An Argument Against the Doctrine of Materialism, Addressed to Thomas Cooper, Esq," in *Memoirs* 4 (1793), pp.20-44.

faculties, Ferriar theorised that, since no one part of the brain appeared to affect the intellectual faculties, “This seems to point out a difference in the causes of thought and sensation.” He concluded that since no one part of the brain could be isolated and observed to be the cause of intellectual faculties, “something more than the discernible organization must be requisite to produce the phaenomena of thinking.”<sup>58</sup> While still not explicitly coming down firmly on either side of the materialism debate, Ferriar made it clear that not believing in a vital principle did not mean he was a Cooperian materialist. His conclusion framed the debate as a playful and amiable exchange between friends, rather than the serious politically charged topic it was soon to become. He opened his paper by addressing Cooper in a joking but warm manner: “When you were employed, some time ago, my good friend, in subjecting the Doctrines of the Immaterialists to the terrible Ordeal of your Logic [...]”<sup>59</sup> He concluded the paper by again addressing his friend: “However we may have differed in opinion, concerning this, and other subjects of importance, we have always agreed in preserving good humour.” He made it clear that he did not take the exchange too seriously, referring jokingly to their exchange as a “contest,” and implying it was a good-natured rivalry. In closing, he referenced a pun in Greek, from Lucian’s *How to Write History*. According to the story, upon hearing that they were about to be invaded, the Corinthians set about in a commotion preparing for the event, compiling arms and repairing the wall:

Diogenes observing this, as he had nothing to do, (for no one chose to employ him) tucking up his cloak, with great earnestness as well as the rest, rolled about the earthen tub he used to live in, up and down the Craneum; and upon one of his acquaintances asking him, “why do you do this, Diogenes?” “I too am busy, says he, rolling my tub, that I may not appear the only idle person among so many at work.”<sup>60</sup>

The line Ferriar quotes translates as “my tub has been rolled on the Kranion.” Ferriar was making a joke about the fact that his paper is about brain injuries.<sup>61</sup> He appears

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<sup>58</sup> *ibid.*, pp.43-44

<sup>59</sup> *ibid.*, p.20.

<sup>60</sup> Lucian, “A Treatise on the Art of Writing History” in *Select Dialogues of Lucian, Translated from the Greek by Thomas Franklin, D.d. The Sungraphein, by G. W. Vernon, Esq.* (1792), p.5.

<sup>61</sup> I thank Christopher Pelling for providing a translation of Ferriar’s Greek.



to have been making a self-depreciating joke about the fact that he had spent the last twenty-four pages rolling up and down the skulls of brain injury patients arguing against Cooper's claims that the soul and the brain are one and the same. In his papers for the MLPS, Ferriar did not push the hard line that "the mind is the brain," a phrase used by Richard Price and quoted in Cooper's essay.<sup>62</sup> The playful tone of Ferriar's exchange with Cooper gives an impression of the society as a place of friendly and respectful exchange up until the 1790s, albeit with signs that resistance to the model was beginning to build. It was an idea that was harder to sustain over the next few years, when Ferriar found his position appropriated to various ideological attacks on materialism that he did not explicitly endorse.

Several years on from the Cooper-Ferriar exchange, the reactions it provoked reflect the ideological polarisation that had taken place between 1790 and 1793. In 1790, the materialism debate was at least framed as good humoured, but by 1793 onwards such arguments were becoming increasingly politically charged. The High-Church *British Critic*, in 1793, signalled their approval of Ferriar's attempts to disprove the materialist arguments laid out by Cooper:

Dr. Ferriar is resolved to expel the materialist from every corner of the skull, and proves, by the testimony of surgeons and anatomists of the best reputation, that there is no part of the brain which has not, in some instances, received material injury, without occasioning the immediate loss of life, or derangement of the reasoning powers.<sup>63</sup>

The reviewer deliberately seized upon Ferriar's equivocation on the issue in order to paint him as a determined anti-materialist, and entirely ignored the nuance of his exchange with Cooper. The following year, William Tattersall revisited Ferriar's paper in his *Brief View of the Anatomical Arguments for the Doctrine of Materialism; Occasioned by Dr. Ferriar's Argument Against It*, and thus brought the debate back into the spotlight, eliciting a flurry of reviews.<sup>64</sup> Tattersall took the view that Ferriar did not approach the topic with enough respect:

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<sup>62</sup> Thomas Cooper, *Tracts Ethical, Theological, and Political* 1 (Warrington, 1789), p.184.

<sup>63</sup> "Memoirs of the Literary and Philosophical Society of Manchester," in *British Critic* (September, 1793), p.364.

<sup>64</sup> William Tattersall, *A Brief View of the Anatomical Arguments for the Doctrine of Materialism; Occasioned by Dr. Ferriar's Argument Against It*, (London, 1794).

Dr. Ferriar's introductory observations might have some more propriety when addressed to an old acquaintance, and written in the sportiveness of intimate friendship, but they are certainly improper in an author, writing gravely upon a metaphysical subject, and appearing before the bar of the public.<sup>65</sup>

Writing in the *Critical Review*, one reviewer found fault with Tattersall's argument, taking the side of Ferriar: "Dr Tattersall openly avows himself a champion on the other side, and, in this pamphlet takes some pains to confuse his opponent; but, we by no means think, with decided success."<sup>66</sup> The reviewer argued that although Tattersall's reasoning was clever, it was not necessary valid. On the other hand, the liberal *Monthly Review* felt that, out of Ferriar and Tattersall, the latter had "the better part of the controversy."<sup>67</sup> Probably Ferriar's paper was the source for Coleridge's joke in a letter to Thelwall in 1796: "Ferriar believes in a *Soul*, like an orthodox Churchman — So much for Physicians & Surgeons."<sup>68</sup> Thelwall's position in the vitalism debate was close to Cooper's around this time, as Yasmin Solomescu shows.<sup>69</sup> In 1793, Thelwall gave two papers before the Guy's Hospital Physical Society. The first paper, which argued for the existence of "animal vitality" as arising from the conjunction of organised matter with "electric fluid," was a success, giving rise to a discussion that lasted for six meetings, and earned him a letter of thanks from the society. His second paper, "On the origin of sensation," came firmly on the materialist side of the debate, arguing that "the phenomena of mind" was based "upon principles purely physical."<sup>70</sup> The society debated the paper and rejected it, leading Thelwall to quit the society in protest.<sup>71</sup> Because of the equivocation in Ferriar's papers it is difficult to gauge exactly his position in the vitality debate - both in terms of his views

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<sup>65</sup> *ibid.*, pp.9-10.

<sup>66</sup> "A Brief View of the Anatomical Arguments for the Doctrine of Materialism," in *The Critical Review, or, Annals of literature* 13 (February 1795), pp.232-33.

<sup>67</sup> "A Brief View of the Anatomical Arguments for the Doctrine of Materialism," *Monthly Review* (March, 1795), p.41.

<sup>68</sup> "S.T. Coleridge to John Thelwall, 31 December 1796," in *The Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* 1, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1956).

<sup>69</sup> Yasmin Solomescu, *John Thelwall and the Materialist Imagination* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p.3.

<sup>70</sup> qtd. in Solomescu, *ibid.*, p.3.

<sup>71</sup> *ibid.*, p.4. For Thelwall's account of the incident, see John Thelwall, *Poems Written Chiefly in Retirement*, (London, 1801), pp.xxii-xxiii.

on materialism and on his political sympathies. But considering how early on this exchange took place – 1787 to 1790 - Ferriar may not have realised when he wrote his paper the extent that it would enter into polarised debates on these matters on a national stage. Neither Cooper nor Ferriar could know how charged the debate would become in the coming decade, and for Cooper in particular, as the next chapter will show, his views would come to be used against him by loyalists who conflated his political activism with his philosophical views.

As the 1790s progressed, the repressive atmosphere and persecution of those who publicly expressed sympathy with the ideals of revolutionary France and criticism of the British government would lead to several men of science being viewed with suspicion. One obvious example of this is the riots in Birmingham in July 1791 when Priestley's laboratory and home were destroyed by a loyalist mob. Beddoes' ties with Priestley and his Lunar Society circle, and his outspoken sympathies with the radical cause, would also come under fire. Beddoes' circle included other well-known radicals Coleridge and James Watt, junior. Following the 1791 riots he came out publicly against church and king groups, and expressed sympathy with the French cause, and as a result he was investigated by the Home Office.<sup>72</sup> In his 1792 *Letter on Early Instruction, Particularly that of the Poor*, Beddoes argued that the mob violence seen in Birmingham was fed by ignorance and a lack of education among the poor. He pressed for "the urgent necessity of humanizing the minds of the poorer class of Citizens" in order to stave off "the murmurs of ignorance or the fury of fanaticism."<sup>73</sup> As Trevor H. Levere shows, Beddoes' political sympathies were not well received in Oxford, where he was a distinguished chemist, and when the vice-chancellor of the university attempted to make him Regius Chair in chemistry, the move was blocked in June 1792 by the Home Secretary, Henry Dundas, who accused him in a letter of being a "most violent *Democrate*" who "takes great pains to seduce Young Men to the same political principles as himself."<sup>74</sup> Throughout his career Beddoes was interested in respiratory diseases, particularly in the use of gases as treatment. Following his resignation from Oxford, he moved to Bristol where

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<sup>72</sup> Trevor H. Levere, "Dr. Thomas Beddoes (1750-1808): Science and Medicine in Politics and Society," in *The British Journal for the History of Science* 17.2 (July 1984), p.187.

<sup>73</sup> Thomas Beddoes, *Extract of a Letter on Early Instruction, Particularly That of the Poor* (London, 1792), p. 1; p.22.

<sup>74</sup> "Willoughby to Dundas, 21 July 1792," PRO MS HO 42.208. Qtd. in Levere, *op.cit.*, p.190.

he began raising subscriptions for the Pneumatic Institution, which opened in 1797. As with Ferriar's treatment of fever, close contact with the poor and a heightened awareness of the debilitating effects of poverty were contributing factors to his reformism. As Golinski argues, the 1790s was a time of profound crisis that badly affected the careers of men like Beddoes:

Ideas about the proper forms of civic activity (including science), which had become popular during the decades of the Enlightenment, were subjected to conservative challenge. Reactionary thinkers disputed the desirability of widespread public education and the plausibility of the expectation that science would solve problems of health and welfare. Priestley, Beddoes, and others were subjected to criticism and ridicule for their espousal of chemistry and other sciences as a means of advancing the material and moral progress of humanity.<sup>75</sup>

He found many supporters amongst the "English provincial Enlightenment," as Golinski terms it: Priestley, Watt, Darwin, Boulton and Wedgwood, amongst others, alongside Edinburgh professors such as Joseph Black.<sup>76</sup> Beddoes cited Ferriar's work in support of his pneumatic work, but Ferriar never openly expressed support for him.<sup>77</sup> Certainly Ferriar was careful not to express his political views openly. Like Priestley, Beddoes began to feel isolation from the Royal Society: Golinski shows that their grievances with the Royal Society were founded, as there appears to have been "a campaign by [Joseph] Banks to pack the Society's Council with members of the political establishment and to exclude troublesome radicals."<sup>78</sup> Ferriar equivocated over Beddoes' nitrous experiments, but finally came out against their use in his *Medical Histories and Reflections* in 1798, though he was careful not to fan the flames. *The British Critic* warmly greeted the "manly and decisive tone" with which Ferriar "finally delivers his own opinion on the subject of pneumatic medicine," although the use of the word "finally" indicates a degree of impatience that it took him so long.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Jan Golinski, *Science as Public Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992), p.156.

<sup>76</sup> *ibid.*, p.162.

<sup>77</sup> Thomas Beddoes, *Considerations on the Medicinal Use, and on the Production of Factitious Airs Part 1* (Bristol, 1795), p.165.

<sup>78</sup> Golinski, *op.cit.*, p.163.

<sup>79</sup> "Book review," in *The British Critic* 12 (August 1798), p.125.

The materialism debate was a fraught arena in the 1790s, but at the time the papers were given at the MLPS, between 1787 and 1790, there could have been little sense of how seriously they would be taken. Indeed, Ferriar takes slightly different positions in his papers, indicating some anxiety or indecision about the extent to which the moral sense had a physical basis, and in fact his tone appears playful and joking, a far cry from the seriousness with which the materialism debate would move to the heart of the debate over the French Revolution. Coleridge, even at his most radical, was always worried about the moral consequences of a radicalism that promoted materialism. His essay on “Modern Patriotism,” for instance, warned radicals that morality without God was in danger of sinking into sensuality: “You must give up your sensuality and your philosophy, the pimp of your sensuality; you must condescend to believe in God, and in the existence of a Future State!”<sup>80</sup> This position framed his debates with Thelwall in the mid-1790s. Richardson, in his study exploring the intersection between Romanticism and brain science, asserts that Coleridge in the 1790s was “thoroughly caught up in questions of perception, epistemology, and mind-body interaction” at a time when Priestley and Erasmus Darwin were making important scientific discoveries about the mind (It is worth noting here that both Darwin and Priestley were honorary members of the MLPS).<sup>81</sup> In Manchester, debates about the interaction between mind and body were given importance much earlier than Richardson suggests. Barnes’ paper “On the Voluntary Power which the Mind Is Able to Exercise over Bodily Sensation” was read in 1784, initiating a debate that would reach the national stage, attracting the attention of Romantic writers like Coleridge.

Although Richardson recognises Coleridge’s interest in the vitalism question, he overlooks the influence that the Manchester society had in the formulation of the poet’s ideas. Coleridge visited the town on at least two occasions when Ferriar was very active in the MLPS, first in February 1796 during his tour to raise subscriptions for *The Watchman*, and then for “a short sojourn” three months later.<sup>82</sup> It is unknown for certain whether he met Ferriar personally, but he was certainly acquainted with

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<sup>80</sup> S.T. Coleridge, “Modern Patriotism,” in *The Watchman* 3 (17 March 1796), pp.98-99.

<sup>81</sup> Alan Richardson, *British Romanticism and the Science of the Mind* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), p.xiii

<sup>82</sup> See letters 103 and 126. *The Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* 1, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1956).

his work, and mentioned him by name in a letter to Thelwall from 1796, as I have already noted. Coleridge was, as Arthur Nethercot claims, “extremely intimate” with the second and third volumes of the *Manchester Memoirs*, having borrowed the second volume from Bristol Library in April 1798, returning it over a month later.<sup>83</sup> It was from the third volume, however, that Coleridge appears to have drawn the most inspiration. Nethercot suggests that although there is no record of Coleridge having borrowed the volume, he may simply have worked on it from a desk in the library itself.<sup>84</sup> Evidence of Coleridge’s interest in some of the third volume’s papers can be traced in both his poetry and notebooks. The final lines of Coleridge’s “Constancy to an Ideal Object,” for example, reflect John Haygarth’s account of a Brocken spectre in his “Description of a Glory,” which was published in the third volume of *Memoirs*.<sup>85</sup> Coleridge acknowledged the paper in a footnote and, in an annotated copy of *Aids to Reflection*, commented: “This refers to a curious phenomenon. [...] I have myself seen it twice, and it is described in the 1<sup>st</sup> or 2d vol. of ye Manchester Phil. Transactns.”<sup>86</sup> J.L. Lowes suggests that Coleridge’s reading of Ferriar’s “Of Popular Illusions, and particularly of Medical Demonology,” in which Ferriar tells of how Marcatus “had seen a very beautiful woman break a steel mirror to pieces, by a single glance of her eyes, and blast some trees by merely looking on them; solo aspectu,” can be traced in the following lines from “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner”:

Listen, O listen, thou Wedding-guest!  
 “Marinere! thou hast thy will:  
 “For that, which comes out of thine eye, doth make  
 “My body and soul to be still.”<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Arthur Nethercot, *The Road to Tryermaine: A Study of the History, Background, and Purposes of Coleridge’s “Christabel”* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1962), p.59; George Whalley, “The Bristol Library Borrowings of Southey and Coleridge, 1793-8,” in *Library*. 5-4.2 (September 1949), pp.114-32.

<sup>84</sup> *ibid.*, p.59.

<sup>85</sup> S.T. Coleridge, “Constancy to an Ideal Object” *Poetical Works* 2 (London, 1828), p.95; John Haygarth, “Description of a Glory,” in *Memoirs* 3 (1790), pp.463-67.

<sup>86</sup> Qtd. in John Livingston Lowes, *The Road to Xanadu: A Study in the Ways of the Imagination* (London: Constable and Company, 1927), p.471.

<sup>87</sup> Lowes, *op.cit.*, p.500; John Ferriar, “Of Popular illusions, and Particularly of Medical Demonology,” in *Memoirs* 3 (1790), p.49.; S.T. Coleridge, “The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere,” in *Lyrical Ballads* (London, 1798), lines 362-65.

Similarly, both Lowes and Nethercot name Ferriar's paper "Of Popular Illusions, and Particularly of Medical Demonology" as one likely source of Coleridge's interest in vampires. In his paper Ferriar spends seven pages recounting examples through history of "the bodies of deceased men [who] were sometimes reanimated by demons."<sup>88</sup> As Ina Ferris shows, copies of Ferriar's *An Essay Towards a Theory of Apparitions* were owned by Wordsworth, Coleridge and Scott; Ferris argues that the work popularised the notion of a physiological basis for illusions.<sup>89</sup> Ferriar was interested in cases of illusions and hallucinations experienced by patients not under the influence of drugs, who had experienced some brain injury but were otherwise of sound mind. He was fascinated with the coexistence of the rational and the irrational in the mind. Ferriar sided with the materialist argument that our perceptions and thoughts are based on physical reactions of the body, rather than the view, espoused by Coleridge, that there must be a supernatural explanation. Samuel Hibbert, another physician-author whose 1824 *Sketches of the Philosophy of Apparitions; or, An Attempt To Trace Such Illusions to Their Physical Causes* was similarly influential for authors such as Scott, was also from Manchester.<sup>90</sup> He had attended the Manchester Academy under Barnes and become a member of the MLPS in 1805, at the age of 23, before moving to Edinburgh in 1815, where he remained for several years after completing his medical degree. Born in 1782, Hibbert belonged to a younger generation, but the vitalism debate of the late 1780s was clearly an influential one. As a member of the society, he would have access to the earlier volumes, and he was a member of the society at the same time as Ferriar, who died in 1815.

As previously mentioned, due to a lack of surviving archival records it is difficult to judge the extent to which the MLPS founders' attempt to create a space for polite exchange was a success, or, more particularly, to what extent rancour about questions of mind and body affected the society. A scene recounted by Robert Owen, however, provides a tantalising view of one meeting in particular, and at the same

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<sup>88</sup> Ferriar, *op.cit.*, p.84.

<sup>89</sup> John Ferriar, *An Essay Towards a Theory of Apparitions* (London, 1813); Ina Ferris "Before Our Eyes': Romantic Historical Fiction and the Apparitions of Reading," in *Representations* 121.1 (Winter 2013), p.64.

<sup>90</sup> Samuel Hibbert, *Sketches of the Philosophy of Apparitions; or, An Attempt To Trace Such Illusions to Their Physical Causes* (Edinburgh, 1825).

time tells us something of Ferriar's character.<sup>91</sup> He describes a meeting at which Ferriar gave a paper on the nature of genius, not published in the *Memoirs* but later printed in *Illustrations of Sterne*.<sup>92</sup> According to Owen, the subject of Ferriar's paper was "to endeavour to prove that any one, by his own will, might become a genius, and that it only required determination and industry for any one to attain this quality in any pursuit."<sup>93</sup> In his paper Ferriar decried the deification of poets and philosophers: they are, after all, only human. He attempted to provide a medical explanation for the visions and prophets of antiquity: "The state of mind in which men were anciently supposed to acquire a knowledge of futurity, was formed by dreaming, drunkenness, madness, epilepsy, or the approach of death. In one word, delirium was the characteristic of a prophet."<sup>94</sup> His argument, that anybody, poor or rich, had the potential for genius, is suggestive of someone inclined not to believe in ideas of super-added qualities of mind, whether a vital principle or a more traditional soul. It was also a deeply levelling conception of human intelligence, similar to his views on fever discussed earlier: again, Ferriar asserts the idea that we are all made of the same stuff, only differentiated by our circumstances and experiences. Although Owen thought the paper "a very learned one," he felt disappointed when, following the paper's conclusion, the audience fell silent.<sup>95</sup> Complaining that, since he had brought his friends along with the promise of a lively debate, he ought to do something to provoke a discussion on the topic, he caused some offense to Ferriar by standing up and announcing that as he had never personally succeeded in his efforts to become a genius, "there must be some error unexplained in our learned author's theory."<sup>96</sup> Ferriar, in response, "blushed, or became so red with suppressed feeling as to attract the attention of the members, and merely stammered out some confused reply."<sup>97</sup> Owen claims that the incident caused Ferriar to bear him a grudge: "from that night

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<sup>91</sup> Robert Owen, *The Life of Robert Owen. Written by Himself* 1 (London, 1857).

<sup>92</sup> John Ferriar, "Of Genius," in *Illustrations of Sterne: with Other Essays and Verses* (London, 1798), pp.271-88.

<sup>93</sup> Owen, *op.cit.*, p.38.

<sup>94</sup> Ferriar, *op.cit.*, pp.282-83.

<sup>95</sup> Owen, *op.cit.*, p.38.

<sup>96</sup> *loc.cit.*

<sup>97</sup> *loc.cit.*



Dr. Ferriar never forgot my short speech, for he was never afterwards so cordial and friendly as he had been previously.”<sup>98</sup> Ferriar’s blushing response was strikingly apt for a “man of feeling” who admired Sterne’s novels, for which Ferriar is now probably best known among literary scholars.

Ferriar’s contribution to Sterne scholarship has been acknowledged for many years now. He first set out his research in January 1791 at the MLPS when he read his “Comments on Sterne,” published in the 1793 volume of *Memoirs*.<sup>99</sup> He expanded the study and published it in a series of chapters in 1798 as *Illustrations of Sterne*, and later republished it in a 2-volume expanded form in 1812.<sup>100</sup> Although Sterne’s critics would come to seize upon Ferriar’s work as evidence that he was a plagiarist, the physician himself made it clear that he remained a devoted admirer of the novelist:

In tracing some of Sterne’s ideas to other writers, I do not mean to treat him as a Plagiarist; I wish to illustrate, not to degrade him. If some instances of copying be proved against him, they will detract nothing from his genius, and will only lessen that imposing appearance he sometimes assumed, of erudition which he really wanted.<sup>101</sup>

He was not always so forgiving in print, however. The published essays declared that, “in the ludicrous, [Sterne] is generally a copyist, and sometimes follows his original so closely, that he forgets the changes of manners, which give an appearance of extravagance to what was once correct ridicule.”<sup>102</sup> In the main, however, Ferriar’s work was clearly a celebration and admiration of the author. But the work allowed Sterne’s critics to claim the moral high ground, particularly during the rise of the Evangelical movement, with critics such as Hannah More and William Wilberforce attacking the corrupting influence of sentimentality.<sup>103</sup> His position as a “man of feeling” further strengthened the argument that for men like Ferriar the intersection of the literary and the medical was deeply felt. Far from being merely ornamental, his literary interests were deeply rooted in his medical work. Sentimentality was not

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<sup>98</sup> *loc.cit.*

<sup>99</sup> John Ferriar, “Comments on Sterne,” in *Memoirs* 4 (1793), pp.45-86.

<sup>100</sup> John Ferriar, *Illustrations of Sterne* (London, 1798, 1812).

<sup>101</sup> Ferriar, “Comments on Sterne,” p.47.

<sup>102</sup> Ferriar, *Illustrations of Sterne*, p.7.

<sup>103</sup> Alan B. Howes, “Introduction,” in *Laurence Sterne: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Alan B. Howes (London: Routledge, 1971), p.14.

merely a literary interest but was written on the body, further supported by his interest in the existence of a vital principle.

Ferriar's interest in dramatic representation is another aspect of his literary interests somewhat overlooked by literary scholarship, but it was another concern that touched on his interest in relations between literature and medicine. He was an admirer of Philip Massinger and read an "Essay on the Dramatic Writings of Massinger" at the MLPS in 1786, later published in the third volume of *Memoirs*, in which he celebrated the author, "not often much inferior, and sometimes nearly equal to" Shakespeare. Ferriar argued that while Shakespeare was idolised, Massinger – "this injured poet" – was too often overlooked.<sup>104</sup> He also published an adaptation of Thomas Southerne's play *Oroonoko: A Tragedy* (1696). *The Prince of Angola, a Tragedy, Altered from the Play of Oroonoko. and Adapted to the Circumstances of the Present Times* was published in 1788.<sup>105</sup> It was performed at the Manchester Theatre where it was "favourably received."<sup>106</sup> Ferriar's version was an abolitionist text, designed to kindle the feelings "by a single spark" in protest at the slave trade. In his preface Ferriar explicitly linked his play to the town's abolition movement, and stated that the idea of the play was collaborative:

When the attempt to abolish the African Slave Trade commenced in *Manchester*, some active friends of the cause imagined, that by assembling a few of the principle topics, in a dramatic form, an impression might be made, on persons negligent of simple reasoning.<sup>107</sup>

He attacked Southerne for launching a "groveling apology for slave-holders" and for conveying an "illiberal contempt of the unhappy Negroes."<sup>108</sup> Most of the preface consists of a critique of Southerne's depiction of slavery. Ferriar argued that literature had a responsibility for social issues. And when the horrors of the slave trade were of such a magnitude as to be almost impossible to comprehend, it was an

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<sup>104</sup> John Ferriar, "Essay on Massinger," in *Memoirs* 3, p.124.

<sup>105</sup> John Ferriar, *The Prince of Angola, a Tragedy, Altered from the Play of Oroonoko. and Adapted to the Circumstances of the Present Times* (Manchester, 1788).

<sup>106</sup> *The Gentleman's Magazine: and Historical Chronicle*, 58.4 (April 1788), p.343.

<sup>107</sup> Ferriar, *ibid.*, p.i.

<sup>108</sup> Ferriar, *ibid.*, p.ii.

attention to more personal, humanised stories that would evoke sympathy and affect societal and political change:

The magnitude of a crime, by dispersing our perceptions, sometimes leaves nothing in the mind but a cold sense of disapprobation. We talk of the destruction of millions, with as little emotion, and as little accuracy of comprehension, as of the distances of the Planets. But when those who hear with Serenity, of depopulated Coasts, and exhausted Nations, are led by tales of domestic misery, to the sources of public evil, their feelings act with not less violence for being kindled by a single spark.<sup>109</sup>

Ferriar argued that change could be invoked by feeling, rather than reason, but his overtly political views were not looked upon kindly by one reviewer, who complained that it was “avowedly a political pamphlet, and for that reason we do not consider it in a dramatic light.”<sup>110</sup> Ferriar’s interests in literature, sensibility and feeling were deeply rooted in his medical work, which in turn informed his political activities, such as his abolitionism. He felt deeply that people were creatures of sensibility, an idea that was observed in his medical work and his interest in fever, and developed throughout his time in the MLPS, in which he celebrated the literary works of Sterne and Massinger. He was fascinated, too, with the mind, with hallucinations and dreams and visions; his work would come to be picked up by the Romanticists who felt equal thrall in the myriad wonders of the human brain.

Ferriar’s 1809 poem *The Bibliomania, an Epistle* neatly illustrates the extent to which the literary and the medical were connected for Manchester’s medical men.<sup>111</sup> The term “bibliomania” was in fact coined by Ferriar, and in the poem he describes his love and passion for books as a sort of feverish sickness of the mind: “What wild desires, what restless torments seize / The hapless man, who feels the book-disease.” Books invoke in Ferriar an irresistible urge, a dangerous and uncontrollable desire:

Like Cacus, bent to tame their struggling will,  
The tyrant-passion drags them backward still:  
Ev’n I, debarr’d of ease, and studious hours,  
Confess, mid’ anxious toil, its lurking pow’rs.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Ferriar, *ibid.*, p.i.

<sup>110</sup> *Monthly Review, or, Literary Journal* 88 (June 1788), p.522.

<sup>111</sup> John Ferriar, *The Bibliomania, an Epistle* (London: 1809), Lines 1-2.

<sup>112</sup> *ibid.*, lines 133-36.

But this threatening loss of control, as unnatural as Cacus, soon gives way, in the following lines, to a description of Ferriar's pleasure in handling books laden with pastoral imagery:

How pure the joy, when first my hands unfold  
The small, rare volume, black with tarnish'd gold!  
The Eye skims restless, like the roving bee,  
O'er flowers of wit, or song, or repartee,  
While sweet as Springs, new-bubbling from the stone,  
Glides through the breast some pleasing theme unknown.<sup>113</sup>

In fact, Ferriar's obsession with books was not so far from the truth. Letters from Ferriar to his publisher Cadell provide some insight into Ferriar's own passion for books. He was so keen to obtain an edition of *Histoire et Description Générale de la Nouvelle France*, listed for £100, that he willingly signed away the copyright for his *Essay Towards a Theory of Apparitions* in return.<sup>114</sup> What Ferriar's poem further emphasises is the democratic view he took of his patients. Just as he saw his fever patients as ultimately the same as him, so he also did not treat himself as superior to the pathologies of sentiment. In *Bibliomania* Ferriar was again making a self-depreciating joke: Ferriar the physician is as pathological as his patients. He did not see himself as being apart from people who are suffering, as he was suffering in his own way. As Michelle Faubert shows, Ferriar's texts on psychology, *Bibliomania*, together with *An Essay Towards a Theory of Apparitions and the Theory of Dreams*, illustrate the intersection of literature and psychology, and how they both relate to pleasure.<sup>115</sup> It was never Ferriar's intention, in writing about serious matters such as mania and hallucinations, to provide dry and serious scientific disquisitions. He instead wrote for pleasure and amusement, to delight and amuse, rather than to spread scientific knowledge. As Faubert argues, Ferriar "endeavoured to apply his psychological knowledge to the literary realm and thereby integrate his audience's

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<sup>113</sup> *ibid.*, lines 137-42.

<sup>114</sup> "John Ferriar to Cadell & Davies, 22 May 1812," California, Huntington Library, MS Records of Cadell & Davies, CD 204. I thank Jon Mee for providing me with copies of these letters.

<sup>115</sup> Michelle Faubert, "Ferriar's Psychology, James Hogg's Justified Sinner, and the Gay Science of Horror Writing," in *Romanticism and Pleasure*, ed. Thomas H. Schmid and Michelle Faubert (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p.82.

experiences of both.”<sup>116</sup> Pickstone contrasts Ferriar’s democratic attitude to his laboring-class patients with that of James Phillips Kay, a Manchester physician who worked with cholera patients some forty years after Ferriar. Kay published his *Moral and Physical Condition of the Working Classes Employed in the Cotton Manufacture of Manchester* in 1832, and despite some similarities between Ferriar and Kay’s circumstances, Pickstone points to striking differences in their attitudes to the poor.<sup>117</sup> Kay presented the poor of Manchester “as another world [...] an under-world which has to be uncovered by special techniques, by social statistics; a world to be approached as one would approach a community of savages.”<sup>118</sup> This difference, argues Pickstone, is evidence of the difference between class divisions between 1792 and 1832. In Ferriar’s time, when class identities were not as starkly divided, his attitude to the poor was democratic. He saw himself as made of the same stuff, different only in material circumstances. By the 1830s, class divisions were so pronounced that Kay came to view the poor as inhabiting an entirely different realm, worlds apart from his own.

The ideal nature of an open sphere of conversation was, by the early 1790s, as we have seen, increasingly coming under pressure. The Infirmary revolution pitted liberal dissenters such as Percival and Ferriar against the received hierarchy in the town, the Tory-Anglican elite who dominated control of the hospital. That Percival’s former mentor, White, retreated from the Infirmary following his defeat, but remained in the MLPS, is testament to Percival’s project to create a moderate space free from political rancour. The MLPS was, around this time, a focal point for new ideas exploring the relationship between the medical, the literary and – increasingly – the political. Ferriar and Cooper’s exchange about the existence of the soul, and the source of life within the body, was framed by the participants themselves as a good-natured and playful exploration of ideas. But the increasingly heated political atmosphere of the 1790s, during which time men of science began to be aware that their political ideas were coming under scrutiny, meant that the Cooper-Ferriar

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<sup>116</sup> *ibid.*, pp.86-87.

<sup>117</sup> James Phillips Kay, *Moral and Physical Condition of the Working Classes Employed in the Cotton Manufacture of Manchester* (Manchester, 1832); John V. Pickstone, “Ferriar’s Fever to Kay’s Cholera: Disease and Social Structure in Cottonopolis,” in *History of Science* 22.4 (December 1984), pp.401-19.

<sup>118</sup> *ibid.*, p.408.

exchange also began to be looked at with more seriousness than its authors had originally intended. Though a major success for the reformers of the town, the Infirmary revolution also prompted a reactionary backlash in the formation of a church and king group, the repercussions of which would be keenly felt as tensions deepened throughout the 1790s. Ferriar and Cooper were both radicals who challenged rules: Ferriar in the Infirmary, and Cooper in the MLPS, as the following chapter will explore. Ferriar never made his politics publicly known, preferring to focus his energy on the treatment of fever in the town. So improvement, for him, took the form of social and medical improvement, rather than political. Cooper, on the other hand, was avowedly and unapologetically radical in his politics. His influence would be felt within the society in the first half of the 1790s, which provided Percival with a challenge to maintain the MLPS as a space free from rancour, as the next chapter will explore.

### 3. Manchester and the politics of protest

This chapter will more directly examine the changing shape of the Manchester society in relation to the fraught political atmosphere of the period and the ways in which broader ideological tensions profoundly influenced the future direction of the society. As seen in the first chapter, from its foundation in 1781, the members of the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society placed an emphasis on the role of conversation as a means of knowledge production. They were conscious that a certain level of disagreement was inevitable and even necessary to the creation of ideas, but were concerned with maintaining a level of politeness. Consequently, discussion of politics and religion were strictly forbidden as potentially too inflammatory to keep discussions within these boundaries. Nevertheless, the intersection of literature and medicine discussed in the previous chapter had obvious political implications, as we have seen, and in many ways Manchester at this time was a hotbed of new and exciting ideas about the relationship between body and mind. Furthermore, the 1780s was a period when the slave trade and the Test and Corporation Acts united those who saw these issues as part of a wider programme of social and political improvement. This section of Manchester opinion tended to view the onset of the French Revolution with the same optimism, but it was an optimism that was not to last: the 1790s brought with it an intense backlash against reformism and, with it, “conservative challenge” against the English provincial Enlightenment more broadly.<sup>1</sup> Scientists such as Priestley and Beddoes realised that their careers were becoming negatively affected by their politics. In Manchester, Ferriar and Cooper were similarly attracting negative attention for their views. All of this meant that the idea of a space of improvement defined by polite conversation was becoming increasingly difficult to navigate. Those who had previously enjoyed the intellectual freedom to explore their ideas in societies such as the MLPS were becoming increasingly aware that any talk of improvement was likely to be met with suspicion. The Infirmary revolution prompted a reactionary backlash against the reformers and radicals of the MLPS by the local church and king group, which had been formed in response to the campaign against the Test and Corporation Acts.

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<sup>1</sup> Jan Golinski, *Science as Public Culture* (Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 1992), p.156.

This chapter focuses on the tumultuous decade of the 1790s and the external pressures put on the model of associational culture favoured by Percival. It also discusses the increasing confidence about the power of improvement in the 1780s, a confidence that had started to put pressure on some of the regulations that governed the original society. As optimism grew amongst reformers throughout the 1780s, a change in the rules which dropped the ban on the discussion of politics and religion hints at the tensions inherent in the balance between freedom of enquiry and amiable exchange. With the onset of the French Revolution and, with it, a wider political struggle between loyalists and reformers, submerged tensions within the society began to break out into open controversy. The collision of mind with mind became a harder thing to stage in a period of sharp ideological polarisation. Despite attempts to provide a neutral ground on which to promote improvement, divisive politics led to a series of fractures and splits which would permanently change the shape of the society, a phenomenon whose reverberations would be felt throughout the country, the focus of the final two chapters.

The MLPS has been primarily positioned as a scientific society, with historians ignoring its literary interests and rarely providing a reading of its output. In his influential prosopographic study of the society, Arnold Thackray provides an in-depth exploration of the society's early years through an analysis of the individuals involved.<sup>2</sup> He argues that the material circumstances of Manchester – its lack of political representation, for example, and extraordinary population growth - led to the emergence of a new class of increasingly wealthy men. This new elite “understandably sought cultural means through which to define and express themselves.”<sup>3</sup> But Thackray goes on to question why science became the dominant mode of cultural expression:

The question remains why the main vehicle of that culture was initially to be natural knowledge and before long “science” in the modern sense of the world. Music, drama, the classics, and modern literature were all, at least in theory, possible alternatives. Its very name indicates that natural knowledge was not intended as the dominating mode it soon became.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Arnold Thackray, “Natural Knowledge in Cultural Context: The Manchester Mode,” in *The American Historical Review* 79.3 (June 1974), pp.672-709.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p.681.

<sup>4</sup> *loc.cit.*



The problem with Thackray's argument is that natural knowledge was *not* the dominant mode of expression. Music, drama, the classics, and modern literature *were* alternatives, at least well into the 1800s, as an analysis of the *Memoirs* shows. Furthermore, I wish to contest Thackray's claim that science became the dominant mode for reasons of politics and religion. Thackray conceives of this shift towards science as an inevitable conservatism, a result of the increased legitimacy of a marginalised group:

By the early nineteenth century science was established as the cultural mode of the Manchester elite. At the same time that elite, more secure and self-aware in its commercial and incipient political power, was inevitably attracted toward conservative beliefs, beliefs which would emphasize the rightness of its dominance as also its connection with and claims on the central value system of English culture.<sup>5</sup>

There are two main problems with this view. Firstly, as previously stated, the concept of science as a "value-neutral" mode that became dominant is problematic. In fact, literary topics featured throughout the 1790s and well into the first decades of the nineteenth century. Furthermore, as the previous chapters have shown, science was far from value neutral, even if some members of the society represented both literary and scientific topics as transcending politics. The second issue with Thackray's argument is the idea that the elite naturally gravitated towards science and inevitably became more conservative. It is overly simplistic to suggest that there is a straightforward trajectory of a group: from socially marginalised, to powerful elite, to inevitably conservative. Thackray argues that, though the first generation of the society's founders was comprised of "marginalised men," by the third generation the Manchester elite was firmly rooted in the establishment. He points to the Henrys and the Heywoods:

...who in three generations went from self-made Unitarians with strong scientific interests to liberal Anglicans with far different concerns: the Henrys as Herefordshire gentry, the Heywoods as men of affairs in Manchester and London.<sup>6</sup>

But Thackray fails to explore in any depth the process by which this change occurred. In reality, the process is uneven, and it is doubtful that members of the MLPS, such as

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<sup>5</sup> Thackray, *op.cit.*, p.682.

<sup>6</sup> Thackray, *op.cit.*, p.680.

Percival, simply became “inevitably attracted toward conservative beliefs.” It is more likely that, in the face of a dangerous counter-revolutionary backlash, liberals and radicals were under pressure to create a space of moderation free from ideological conflict, to a certain extent retreating from their confident faith in an across-the-board reform as articulated in the later 1780s.

As argued in chapter 1, what was most important to the society’s founders was a version of freedom of enquiry which made room for differences while maintaining a certain level of politeness. Improvement was the goal of the society, but as this chapter will explore, pressures both outside and within the society meant that members had to consciously work to create and negotiate such a space. For example, a controversy amongst the membership which resulted in a number of high profile resignations of its most radical members indicates that many members were uncomfortable with the outward expression of radicalism that had begun to build in the 1780s. Likewise, such an account also downplays deep ideological tensions in the town during the French Revolution that culminated in the 1794 trial for sedition of Thomas Walker, one of its most high-profile radical members.<sup>7</sup> By some accounts, it appears that the society may well have been specifically targeted by a loyalist association.<sup>8</sup> The society did not inevitably drift towards conservatism, as Thackray argues, but instead outside pressures and ideological conflict meant that pressure was put on the founders’ original aim of creating a space devoted to improvement through the collision of mind with mind. In the process, ironically enough, they seem to have had to leave some of their opinions at the door.

The intellectual elite of pre-1790 Manchester was comprised largely of socially marginalised men, keen to bring to Manchester the Enlightenment ideas of progress and improvement that they had picked up in the Scottish universities and the English dissenting academies. The project of the MLPS was, in Thackray’s terms, fundamentally concerned with the social legitimation of these marginal men. V.A.C. Gatrell claims that, in the MLPS, the elite of Manchester “was training itself in the subversion of the established political society,” citing an increasingly radical

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<sup>7</sup> For Walker’s own account of the trial, see Thomas Walker, *The Whole Proceedings on the Trial of an Indictment Against Thomas Walker of Manchester* (Manchester and London, 1794).

<sup>8</sup> See V.A.C. Gatrell, “Incorporation and the Pursuit of Liberal Hegemony in Manchester, 1790-1839,” *Municipal Reform and the Industrial City*, ed. D. Fraser (Leicester University Press, 1982), p.33.

membership, Percival's critique of public health conditions, and Barnes's college as examples of a society manifesting "an overt philosophical and political bias."<sup>9</sup> Indeed, in the 1780s this bias appears to have stepped up a gear with the inclusion of more radical members, and corresponding attention given to political matters within the *Memoirs*. The most obvious example of this is Thomas Cooper, whose exchange with Ferriar on the topic of materialism was explored in the previous chapter. Cooper became an ordinary member of the society in 1785, having been an honorary member previously.<sup>10</sup> In 1786 he was elected vice-president, a position he remained in until 1791.<sup>11</sup> Cooper had been educated at Oxford, moving to Manchester in 1785 where he took up a position in a firm of calico printers. He was interested in chemistry and claimed to have been involved in the introduction of a successful new bleaching process and a new method of producing oxymuriatic acid.<sup>12</sup> In 1787 he began working as a barrister. Dumas Malone conceives of the MLPS as populated by "men of conservative temper," with Cooper shedding "the light of his radical philosophy" in "this complacent and unsuspecting community," but this is an exaggeration that papers over the more complex negotiations that took place to create a space free from ideological conflict.<sup>13</sup> In reality, it is fairer to conceive of Cooper as having brought out radical aspects of the older generation's thinking, although events may have been pushing them in that direction anyway. Gatrell, Malone and Katrina Navickas see the membership as capitulating to loyalism, but this judgement largely ignores the complexities involved in a dynamic and diverse group who attempted to navigate the society through a time of enormous political turmoil.<sup>14</sup> Membership of the society prior and indeed after Cooper did not exist in a conservative/radical dichotomy, but was rather a complex mix of men with differing ideological, religious, and political sympathies who aimed to negotiate a space for moderate discussion and improvement. Moreover, members' ideological positions

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<sup>9</sup> *loc.cit.*

<sup>10</sup> *Complete List of the Members & Officers of the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society, from Its Institution on February 28th, 1781, to April 28th, 1896* (Manchester, 1896), p.20.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, p.10.

<sup>12</sup> Dumas Malone, *The Public Life of Thomas Cooper* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1926), pp.8-9.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*, pp.10-11.

<sup>14</sup> Gatrell, *op.cit.*, p.33; Malone, *op.cit.*, p.6; Katrina Navickas, *Loyalism and Radicalism in Lancashire, 1798-1815* (Oxford: OUP, 2009), p.89.

were never static, but shifted over time as the political landscape progressed throughout the final decade of the eighteenth century.

It is clear, however, that Cooper was one of the more radical of the society's membership, and he certainly created difficulties for those liberal-minded men whose idea of improvement was shed of its ideological and political connotations. E.P. Thompson argues that Cooper was one of the most "able propagandists and organisers" of the radical movement.<sup>15</sup> He shared Paine's enthusiasm at events in France in the early 1790s, which brought to reformers a sense of optimism about the change possible in society. Together with his friend Walker - member of the MLPS between 1790 and 1791 - Cooper aimed to share that enthusiasm with the populace, founding societies with the aim of educating the lower classes in Paine's philosophy. The Manchester Constitutional Society (MCS) and the Manchester Reading Society were two such societies they founded.<sup>16</sup> Cooper was also secretary of the Manchester Reformation Society.<sup>17</sup> Walker and Cooper were also responsible for establishing the *Manchester Herald*, a weekly newspaper which ran between 1792 and 1793 before its printers, Falkner and Birch, were forced to flee to America, "preferr[ing] a voluntary exile to imprisonment."<sup>18</sup> The *Herald* was unabashed in its radical aims; its opening statement in the first issue, published in March 1792, read:

Remote from the temptation of literary prostitution, we shall have little inducement to favour any cause but the *cause of the public*. [...] We are aware of the dangerous and unconstitutional extent of the doctrine of *LIBEL*, and we are not anxious to incur the lash of the law by indulging unnecessary freedom - but short of this, no fear nor favour shall prevent us from making our publication - *decidedly the PAPER OF THE PEOPLE*.<sup>19</sup>

Such an address during the increasingly repressive atmosphere of the 1790s was incredibly confrontational, and undoubtedly made Cooper and Walker's fellow

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<sup>15</sup> E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Pantheon, 1964), p.179.

<sup>16</sup> The Manchester Reading Society was founded in order to encourage more working class members to read and become involved in the political conversation.

<sup>17</sup> Katrina Navickas, *Loyalism and Radicalism in Lancashire, 1798-1815* (Oxford: OUP, 2009), p.40.

<sup>18</sup> Thomas Walker, *A Review of Some of the Political Events Which Have Occurred in Manchester, During the Last Five Years* (London, 1794), p.55.

<sup>19</sup> *Manchester Herald* (31 March, 1792).

society members uncomfortable. Cooper had, in 1789, expressed some discomfort with the limits to free exchange imposed on him by the rules of the MLPS; by 1792 his objections to the government's attack on free speech had become a battle cry.

In a bold effort to extend his radical network, Cooper set out to see revolutionary France for himself and foster a relationship between the MCS and the Society of Friends in Paris. He travelled there in 1792 with James Watt junior, in order to deliver an address to the National Convention on behalf of the MCS. Back home, they were denounced as traitors in parliament by Edmund Burke. In response, Cooper launched a lengthy defence of Burke's attack, published as *A Reply to Mr Burke's Invective Against Mr Cooper, and Mr Watt*, in which he complained about Burke's "ridiculous fears, and intemperate invectives" which "seemed to me to require no Apology."<sup>20</sup> In his appendix Cooper included an open letter from the MCS and a translation of the address made by Cooper and Watt to the Society of Friends of the Constitution in Paris, at which they declared their allegiance with the revolutionary aims: "Now that a concert is forming among the Despotic Powers of Europe, to overwhelm to cause of Liberty, and annihilate the rights of Man, it will no doubt give you pleasure to be informed, that there exist every where [...] Men who feel strongly interested in your cause – the cause not merely of the French, but of all Mankind."<sup>21</sup> In their reply, also reprinted in Cooper's appendix, the Society of Friends of the Constitution celebrated the formation of a political alliance between England and France elicited by Cooper and Watt's visit to Paris:

This novel and all-powerful federation, whose sole view will be the happiness and prosperity of the great family of the human race, will completely banish the paltry cunning and deceit of diplomatic intrigue; and those secret negotiations of fraud and imposture, which answer no other purpose than to create division among nations, to subject them more easily to oppression. But 'tis over; the sun of reason shines with meridian splendor all around, and in spite of the coalition of tyrants against us, the triumph of the friends of justice

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<sup>20</sup> Thomas Cooper, *A Reply to Mr Burke's Invective Against Mr Cooper, and Mr Watt, in the House of Commons, on the 30<sup>th</sup> of April, 1792* (London and Manchester, 1792), p.5.

<sup>21</sup> Cooper, *ibid.*, pp.72-73.

and humanity is certain. Worthy citizens of Manchester, you will participate in this triumph.<sup>22</sup>

Immediately following these letters, in the final pages of the pamphlet, Cooper included a reprint of his paper "Propositions Respecting the Foundation of Civil Government," clearly stating that it had been read before the MLPS and printed in the society's *Memoirs*.<sup>23</sup> His move, connecting the MLPS with the Constitutional Society, is likely have made fellow members justifiably nervous. This was an overt and confrontational act against the political establishment that carried the name of a society which was so at pains to avoid any association with political or religious controversy.

Other members in Cooper's circle notable for their radicalism in this period include the baronet Sir George Philips, James Watt junior, Thomas Henry junior, and Thomas Garnett. Philips was from a landed Methodist family, and when he inherited money without any estate, he invested in the cotton industry, "eventually becoming the richest man in his native Manchester and a landed baronet in his own right."<sup>24</sup> He joined the MCS in 1790 and published a pamphlet in 1793 which called for universal suffrage, *The Necessity of a Speedy and Effectual Reform in Parliament*.<sup>25</sup> The pamphlet not only argued for universal male suffrage, but extended the argument to women: "I make no exception of women either single, or married. They are as well entitled as men are to vote for representatives, and have an equal interest in the government of a country."<sup>26</sup> David Brown claims it was Ferriar's influence that led Philips to publish the pamphlet: "With his new friends, Ferriar and Cooper, implanting 'mischievous and factious opinions' in George's mind, he felt it was natural that he was 'led astray' by the 'popular delusion' caused by the French Revolution."<sup>27</sup> But Brown does not

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<sup>22</sup> Cooper, *ibid.*, p.75.

<sup>23</sup> Thomas Cooper, "Propositions Respecting the Foundation of Civil Government," in *A Reply to Mr Burke's Invective*, pp.93-112; also published in *Memoirs* 3 (1790), pp.481-509.

<sup>24</sup> Boyd Hilton, *A Mad, Bad and Dangerous People? England 1783-1846* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008), p.158.

<sup>25</sup> George Philips, *The Necessity of a Speedy and Effectual Reform in Parliament* (Manchester, 1793). The pamphlet was published by Falkner, who was later exiled in America, as noted above.

<sup>26</sup> George Philips, *op.cit.*, p.12.

<sup>27</sup> *loc.cit.*

give a source for his claim, so it may be that he presumes Ferriar was radical only because he moved in the same circles.<sup>28</sup> Whatever his politics, unlike Philips and Cooper he was careful not to make them public, choosing instead to focus his efforts on the health reforms outlined in the previous chapter. For Philips, a public backlash following the publication of his pamphlet led him to publicly retract his views, “pleading youthful indiscretion,” a move that turned the radical circle against him.<sup>29</sup> Thomas Garnett, another of Cooper’s circle, was an Edinburgh-educated chemist and physician who lived in Harrogate but with Manchester connections. He was a corresponding member of the MLPS and gave a paper in 1795 on meteorology.<sup>30</sup> He gave philosophical lectures in Manchester, Warrington and Lancaster, and pointedly lectured to a mixed-sex audience, as a proponent of female education.<sup>31</sup> He was involved in Beddoes’ experiments on gases, and Beddoes published several extracts of his letters – along with Ferriar’s - in his *Considerations on the Medicinal Use, and on the Production of Factitious Airs*.<sup>32</sup> The manufacturer James Watt junior, who accompanied Cooper to Paris, was also in the radical circle. He was a member of both the MLPS and the MCS.

Another member of the radical circle was Thomas Henry’s eldest son, Thomas Henry junior. He had been awarded the Silver Medal by the MLPS for a chemistry paper given at the age eighteen, and had acted as an assistant to his father during his chemistry lectures at Manchester College, then later at the Manchester Academy; he also helped run his father’s magnesium factory.<sup>33</sup> As Farrar, Farrar and Scott have shown, Henry junior’s career was unfocused and he never settled into a profession, partly because of his father’s indecision. He was originally intended to study medicine, but was sent to London in 1788 to attend chemistry lectures. He returned

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<sup>28</sup> David Brown, “From ‘Cotton Lord’ to Landed Aristocrat: the Rise of Sir George Philips Bart., 1766-1847,” in *Historical Research* 69 (1996), p.74.

<sup>29</sup> *loc.cit.*

<sup>30</sup> Thomas Garnett, “Meteorological Observations, Collected and Arranged,” in *Memoirs* 4 (1793), p.154.

<sup>31</sup> Arianne Chernock, *Men and the Making of Modern British Feminism* (Stanford, Stanford UP, 2010), p.24.

<sup>32</sup> Thomas Beddoes, *Considerations on the Medicinal Use, and on the Production of Factitious Airs* (Bristol, 1795), pp.115-22.

<sup>33</sup> W.V. Farrar, Kathleen R. Farrar, and E.L. Scott, “The Henrys of Manchester Part 2,” in *Ambix* 21 (1974), pp.179-180.

to London to work in a fustian business, and then his father again sent him away, this time to learn surgery and midwifery under the tutelage of Dr Lyon in Liverpool, who was corresponding member of the MLPS.<sup>34</sup> He appears to have returned to Manchester; around this time, in the late-1780s, Henry became associated with the radicals Watt, Cooper, and others, and was “almost certainly” a member of the MCS. After a short period in Anglesey as a partner in a chemical company which eventually failed, Henry enrolled as a medical student at Edinburgh University. This, again, was short-lived. In February 1794, Henry set sail for America; his father had written to Benjamin Rush in Philadelphia a few weeks earlier:

He had long looked up to America as a land of civil and religious liberty to which he is zealously, but I trust prudently, attached; and possessing knowledge that may be usefully employed there, I have consented to his going in search of better Fortune in the *new* world than he has experienced in the *old*.<sup>35</sup>

In Philadelphia Henry joined Cooper and Joseph Priestley junior, who by this time had emigrated there in the previous year. They purchased a large amount of land, around 300,000 to 700,000 acres, north of Northumberland, Pennsylvania, paid for by Joseph Priestley senior.<sup>36</sup> The dream was naïve, however, and “not many of their radical and democratic ideals outlasted their first New England winter.”<sup>37</sup> The following year the land had been abandoned and Henry and Priestley junior were living in New York. Henry’s father wrote to Watt junior in December 1794 and complained that his son “is returned to Philadelphia quite cured of the ideas he had strongly entertained of the advantages & happiness attendant on first settlers.”<sup>38</sup> In August 1794, six months after Henry, Cooper and Priestley junior purchased their land, Coleridge wrote to Charles Heath to inform him the plan he had formed with Wordsworth and Southey:

A small but liberalized party have formed a scheme of emigration on the principles of an abolition of individual property [...] at present our plan is, to settle at a distance, but at a convenient distance, from Cooper’s Town on the

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<sup>34</sup> *ibid.*, p.180.

<sup>35</sup> Qtd. in *ibid.*, pp.182-83.

<sup>36</sup> *ibid.* p.184.

<sup>37</sup> *ibid.*, p.184.

<sup>38</sup> Qtd. in *ibid.*, p.184.



banks of the Susquehanna [...] For the time of emigration we have fixed on next March.<sup>39</sup>

Their plan, named Pantisocracy, was given high hopes, but were never realised. Perhaps Henry, together with Owen and the rest of Manchester's radicals, had some hand in inspiring Coleridge's plans. Whatever the case, Henry's failure had likely also showed him the difficulties inherent in their utopian venture.

By 1790, the MLPS and its committee was disproportionately headed by reformers and dissenters, with Percival as president; White, Cooper, Henry and Philips as vice-presidents; and Ferriar and James Watt, junior as secretaries. A minor rule change which occurred in the society in the final years of the 1780s provides an indication that Cooper's ideas about unlimited discussion were beginning to gain traction. Unlike the society's founders, Cooper felt that improvement ought to be married with reform. The published laws of the society as printed in the third volume of the *Memoirs*, in 1790, do not include the rule prohibiting the discussion of political or religious topics. At some point, then, between 1787 and 1790 the rule had been dropped.<sup>40</sup> It is worth noting the content of papers that make up the third volume of *Memoirs*, following this change: it represents, out of all those examined in this thesis, the high point of reform. Papers of interest include: "an Inquiry into the Principles and Limits of Taxation as a Branch of Moral and Political Philosophy" and "Propositions Respecting the Foundation of Civil Government" by Cooper; "Observations on the Bills of Mortality for the Towns of Manchester and Salford" by Henry; "An Account of the Progress of Population, Agriculture, Manners, and Government in Pennsylvania," a letter by Benjamin Rush communicated by Percival.<sup>41</sup> Many papers concern literature and the arts: "Of Popular Illusions, and Particularly of

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<sup>39</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Collected Letters* 1, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1956), pp.96-97.

<sup>40</sup> The 1785 rule stated that "Religion, the Practical Branches of Physic, and British Politics, be deemed prohibited." *Memoirs of the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society* 1 (1785), p.xiii; Cooper and Ferriar's papers, which mention the rule, were given in early 1787, so it must have been sometime after this.

<sup>41</sup> All in *Memoirs* 3 (1790): Thomas Cooper, "An Inquiry into the Principles and Limits of taxation as a branch of moral and political philosophy," pp.1-31; Thomas Cooper, "Propositions Respecting the Foundation of Civil Government," pp.481-519; Thomas Henry, "Observations on the Bills of Mortality for the Towns of Manchester and Salford," pp.159-73; Benjamin Rush, "An Account of the Progress of Population, Agriculture, Manners, and Government in Pennsylvania," pp.183-97.

Medical Demonology,” “Observations Concerning the Vital Principle” and “Essay on the Dramatic Writings of Massinger” by Ferriar; “On the Comparative Excellence of the Sciences and Arts” by William Roscoe; “Observations on the Art of Painting, Among the Ancients” by Cooper.<sup>42</sup> Many of the individuals who feature in this thesis also appear in the third volume of *Memoirs*: Percival, Ferriar, Cooper, Henry, Henry junior, Barnes, and James Watt junior. The number of papers by honorary members that feature in the third volume illustrates how far-reaching the network of improvement was spread: there are papers by William Roscoe of Liverpool, John Haygarth of Chester, Richard Sharp and Thomas Willis of London, James Wood of Cambridge, William Hey of Leeds, and Rush of Pennsylvania.

The opening paper of the third volume neatly illustrates the shift in tone within the society: Percival’s “Inquiry into the Principles and Limits of Taxation as a Branch of Moral and Political Philosophy,” read in March 1785, was a particularly topical critique of Pitt. As a footnote remarks, the topic was a current one: “[T]his little tract was written for discussion,” Percival argued, “at a period when taxation was a subject peculiarly interesting to the inhabitants of Manchester, on account of a recent duty on the cotton manufactory.”<sup>43</sup> He argued that individuals in a State have a moral obligation to pay taxes without any attempt to evade, “for the protection which it affords to life, liberty and property; and for the energy which it exerts in the promotion of order, industry, virtue and happiness.”<sup>44</sup> In return, he argued, certain obligations were due to the taxpayer, namely, the taxation must be employed in the public good; the sovereign power must not employ tyranny between the sovereign power and the people. Percival held up historical examples of tyrannical rulers in support of his argument: Henry VIII, Edward VI, and Charles II. Percival’s critique would certainly have been considered inflammatory had it been given any later; his paper is further suggestive of the fact that he was not so conservative as commenters such

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<sup>42</sup> All in *Memoirs* 3 (1790): John Ferriar, “Of Popular Illusions, and Particularly of Medical Demonology,” pp.31-116; John Ferriar, “Observations Concerning the Vital Principle,” pp.216-41; John Ferriar, “Essay on the dramatic writings of Massinger,” pp.123-158; William Roscoe, “On the Comparative Excellence of the Sciences and Arts,” pp.241-60; Thomas Cooper, “Observations on the Art of Painting, Among the Ancients,” pp.510-97.

<sup>43</sup> Thomas Percival, “Inquiry into the Principles and Limits of Taxation as a Branch of Moral and Political Philosophy,” in *Memoirs of the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society* 3 (1790), p.1. Cooper and Walker successfully campaigned against Pitt’s fustian tax, which was eventually repealed in April 1795.

<sup>44</sup> Percival, *ibid.*, p.3.

as Malone would place him.<sup>45</sup> Indeed, it suggests rather that prior to the French Revolution even moderate liberals such as Percival were open to the possibility of parliamentary reform, as well as medical reform.

The third volume of *Memoirs* also carries Cooper's 1787 paper, "Propositions Respecting the Foundation of Civil Government."<sup>46</sup> Cooper's essay set out and discussed 34 propositions of government, including arguments around hereditary rule, divine authority, the role of taxation, tyranny, and many other issues of political philosophy.<sup>47</sup> Cooper's paper was starkly critical of the authority of posterity, years before Burke staked his famous defence of the ancient regime on the concept: "If a fellow-creature informs me that I and my posterity are bound to obey his commands, it is not for me to prove that I am not so bound, but for him to prove that I am."<sup>48</sup> As Cooper admitted, he was undecided on many issues; the paper itself was a means of promoting discussion. So, for example, on the subject of taxation, Cooper tentatively suggested that suffrage should not be extended to those too poor to pay tax, as he felt that a portion of the population who have no stake in society should not have a say in how it is run. He concluded, however, by admitting that "I still think the subject requires more discussion than has yet been give it."<sup>49</sup> As Malone points out, Cooper's contributions to the society were "neither original nor profound," but that they were notable "in their indication of tendencies of thought, and in their revelation of the spirit and point of view of their enthusiastic author."<sup>50</sup> To which could be added, that Cooper's paper was in the spirit of the society's founders, who wished to promote discussion. Such outspokenly reformist sentiments, however, were at odds with the founders' wish to promote improvement without causing contention. Cooper was always more interested in speaking the truth than in keeping the peace: in his preface to *Tracts* he argued, in a lengthy disquisition lasting ten pages, that truth must always be spoken regardless of how it may be received:

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<sup>45</sup> Dumas Malone, *The Public Life of Thomas Cooper* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1926), p.6.

<sup>46</sup> Thomas Cooper, "Propositions Respecting the Foundation of Civil Government," in *Memoirs of the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society* 3 (1790), pp.481-519.

<sup>47</sup> Cooper, *ibid.*, p.483.

<sup>48</sup> *loc.cit.*

<sup>49</sup> Cooper, *ibid.*, p.504.

<sup>50</sup> Dumas Malone, *The Public Life of Thomas Cooper* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1926), p.6.

Such are the chief arguments upon which I found the expediency of publishing every opinion on subjects of importance, whatever may be its real or supposed tendency. *Magna est veritas et praevalabit*. Indeed if I were asked what opinion, from the creation to the present day, has been productive of the most harm, I should answer without hesitation, “the opinion of the inexpediency of published sentiments of supposed bad tendency.” It is this opinion principally that has filled Europe with blood-shed almost unremittingly for seventeen centuries; for it is this opinion that has induced the infamous and tyrannical interference of the civil power in matters of mere controversy.<sup>51</sup>

In his conclusion to “Propositions Respecting the Foundation of Civil Government,” Cooper argued that the overarching maxim of legitimate government from which all his propositions must derive is that “all power is derived from the people,”<sup>52</sup> and he situated his arguments firmly within the contemporary political conversation:

The structure of political oppression [...] begins now to totter: its day is far spent: the extension of knowledge has undermined its foundations, and I hope the day is not far distant when in Europe at least, one stone of the fabric will not be left upon another.<sup>53</sup>

Cooper’s time in the MLPS was evidently spent developing his political and philosophical ideas, which were amalgamated in his *Tracts*. In his preface, Cooper argued that the papers “originated from a desire of contributing to the entertainment of the literary and philosophical society,” but “are such, as from the nature of the subjects treated, could not be read at that Society.”<sup>54</sup> The papers published in Cooper’s *Tracts* that were not read at the MLPS are “Whether the Deity Be a Free-Agent,” and “A Summary of Unitarian Arguments.” The latter paper is an argument against the “strange absurdity” of Trinitarian doctrine, and Cooper concludes by asserting that “Ecclesiastical [...] as well as political tyranny seems on the decline, and it is the duty of every friend of mankind to exert his endeavours unceasingly to hasten their down-fall.”<sup>55</sup> Ironically the publishing of papers not read at the society suggests

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<sup>51</sup> *ibid.*, p.176.

<sup>52</sup> Cooper, *op.cit.*, p.509.

<sup>53</sup> Cooper, *loc.cit.*

<sup>54</sup> Thomas Cooper, *Tracts*, p.vii.

<sup>55</sup> Cooper, “A Summary of Unitarian Arguments,” *Tracts*, p.491; p.526.

that Cooper found it necessary, despite the rule change and despite his arguments about freedom of speech, to limit discussion of religion in order to maintain the free flow of conversation in the society's meeting room. It is noteworthy that the two papers he did not read at the society were on theological topics, suggesting perhaps that though he felt that although political matters were fair game, matters of religious controversy ought to be left alone; his paper on Unitarianism would certainly have caused offense to the Anglican members. Secondly, it suggests that, contrary to Gatrell's narrative of conservative infiltration in the 1790s, there was already a certain degree of resistance to Cooper's radicalism among existing members of the MLPS in the earlier period of the 1780s, as illustrated by the letter from Eason to Mackintosh attacking the Academy.<sup>56</sup> Percival always had to be careful about how far Cooper's influence could be pushed. Clearly Cooper was aware of the limits that he could express his views within the society rooms, and though he complained about the limits of free speech, he chafed against those limits without explicitly transgressing them. Where Ferriar sat on this divide is unclear, despite Brown's portrayal of him as sharing Cooper's views. His political leanings are difficult to ascertain; it is possible that he found medical reform more important to focus his energy on, and left the business of parliamentary reform to men like Cooper.

In 1791, the increasing political polarisation sparked by events in France led to an incident in the MLPS which A.E. Musson and Eric Robinson have termed a "minor revolution."<sup>57</sup> Following the riots in Birmingham in which Priestley's home and laboratory were destroyed, the Derby Literary and Philosophical Society sent a message of support to Joseph Priestley. In Manchester, the radical Samuel Jackson moved a similar vote of sympathy for Priestley "that this Society do write to Dr. Priestley, expressing their concern at the losses he has sustained by the late disgraceful riot at Birmingham."<sup>58</sup> The membership were not in agreement, however; perhaps the violent turn of events was sufficient cause for alarm for the conservative and liberal members. The motion was postponed twice, and the controversy ended

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<sup>56</sup> See V.A.C. Gatrell, "Incorporation and the Pursuit of Liberal Hegemony in Manchester, 1790-1839," in *Municipal Reform and the Industrial City*, ed. D. Fraser (Leicester University Press, 1982), p.33.

<sup>57</sup> Albert Edward Musson and Eric Robinson, *Science and Technology in the Industrial Revolution* (London: Gordon and Breach, 1969), p.366.

<sup>58</sup> Qtd. in Robert Angus Smith, *A Centenary of Science in Manchester* (London, 1883), p.173.

with the resignation of five prominent members: Cooper, Watt, Walker, Jackson, and Priestley junior.<sup>59</sup> Effectively, the radical element of the society, which had been gaining increasing influence throughout the course of the 1780s, was pushed out. Pre-1791, reform had been slowly creeping into the concept of improvement, but this event marked the beginning of the end to Cooper's influence. Priestley, who had been an honorary member since 1782, and had earlier been awarded a stipend of fifty pounds by the society to enable him to carry out experiments, was perturbed by the snub. He strongly criticised the Manchester society for its actions, which he argued was entirely ideological:

One of the reasons alledged at Manchester against the proposed Address was, that none had been sent to me from the *Royal Society*. Many persons have expressed their surprise that I had no letter of condolence, or even pecuniary assistance, from that body, to which I hope I have been no disgrace. I have even been insulted by the High Church party on this account. Had it been a clergyman of the church of England who had been a member of that body, and whose laboratory had been destroyed by rioters [...] his case, I doubt not, would have been considered by the opulent members of the society, or the patron of it. But I was too well acquainted with the political principles of that society to expect any thing of the kind in *my* favour.<sup>60</sup>

A letter from James Currie in Liverpool to Percival suggests that Percival was perhaps involved in drawing up the motion, or was at least sympathetic to its aims:

The accounts I received of the issue of the business you had the goodness to communicate to me, at your society, prevented me from troubling you farther, as they decided me against attempting any thing of the kind here. I must confess, I heard the decision at Manchester with great regret, as well as its consequences. Some hesitation I should have felt on the propriety of bringing forward the subject at all; but as it was brought forward, in my own case I should assuredly have voted for such an address as you would have proposed, which I think would have done the society honour.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Francis Nicholson, "The Literary and Philosophical Society 1781-1851," in *Manchester Memoirs* 68.9 (August 1924), p.105.

<sup>60</sup> Priestley, *loc.cit.*

<sup>61</sup> "Currie to Percival, 12 November 1791," in W.W. Currie, *Memoir of the Life, Writings, and Correspondence of James Currie* (London, 1831), pp.69-70.

Despite his privately shared feelings on the matter, and despite the resignation of the bulk of the radical members, Percival continued in his position as president of the society. His associational model had been put under increasing pressure throughout the course of the 1780s; tensions between amiability and free exchange were tested to their limits due to external factors. Ultimately, though Percival had been swept up in the reformist optimism of the mid to late 1780s, this optimism could not continue in the face of the loyalist reaction to the French Revolution. As with the Infirmary revolution, however, the society survived. The model had been tested to its limits, but ultimately Percival's site of amiable exchange continued; this time, however, by more explicitly uncoupling reform from improvement.

In December 1792, tensions in Manchester came to a head. A church and king mob attacked the premises of Falkner and Birch, publishers of the *Manchester Herald*, and then continued to Walker's home. Walker described the attack:

Soon after dark I was informed, that the people were encouraged and irritated, by various persons, to raise violent outcries against Jacobins and Presbyterians [...] This went on for about two hours, when the people were, by liquor and other means, sufficiently inflamed for any mischievous undertaking. Every thing now seemed to wear the appearance of a preconcerted scheme [...] Parties were collected in different public houses, and from thence paraded the streets with a fiddler before them, and carrying a board, on which was painted CHURCH and KING, in large letters.<sup>62</sup>

The events occurred less than a week after the *Manchester Mercury*, a Tory newspaper, had published an article inciting "every town, county, and borough in the kingdom" to "crush those insidious vipers who would poison the minds of the people, level all distinctions and *all property*, and make on general wreck of the happiness of the empire."<sup>63</sup> A day after the riot, sixty-seven men gathered at the Bull's Head pub to form "An association for preserving constitutional order and liberty, as well as property, against the various efforts of levellers and republicans."<sup>64</sup> Their efforts were

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<sup>62</sup> Thomas Walker, *A Review of Some of the Political Events Which Have Occurred in Manchester, During the Last Five Years* (London, 1794), pp.44-45.

<sup>63</sup> Qtd. in Walker, *ibid.*, p.46.

<sup>64</sup> "Association for Preserving Constitutional Order Against Levellers and Republicans," Constitution and Minutes of Committee 1792-99, Manchester, Chetham's Library, MS A.64.5;

clear and coordinated: at the first meeting ten thousand copies of their resolutions were ordered to be printed, they advertised a reward of ten guineas to anybody willing to come forward with information about treasonous or seditious activity, and they put pressure on local innkeepers to forbid seditious meetings. On 24 December 1792, the society ordered “that a paper called the *Manchester Herald*, of Dec. 22, 1792, be recommended to the consideration of the committee on papers,” and solicitors were ordered to “give such opinion as they may think proper as to the legality of it.”<sup>65</sup> On January 17, 1793, a list of thirty-four names was given to magistrates, who were requested “to summon the following persons to appear before them as soon as possible, and to take the oath of allegiance to his majesty King George the Third.”<sup>66</sup> For Walker, these actions ultimately led to his 1794 trial for sedition, for which he was acquitted.<sup>67</sup>

Gatrell claims that the tone and membership of the MLPS prior to 1793 was “predominantly Dissenting,” and after 1793 this shifted to Tory-Anglican.<sup>68</sup> He argues that this came about as a direct result of the actions of the Association against Levellers and Republicans. In reality, however, this is an oversimplification of the issue. The political and religious make up of members was in fact more complex than Gatrell allows. Dalton, for example, was a Quaker and Walker was Anglican; and Percival, Ferriar and Walker remained in the society post-1793, with Percival as president. Likewise, Gatrell’s argument, that this shift occurred as a deliberate attack, is probably an exaggeration. Gatrell argues that the church and king group made a deliberate and concerted attack on the MLPS: “of the 34 people whom the loyalist society subjected to secret examination and marked out for possible prosecution [...] 13 were or had been members of the Literary and Philosophical Society.”<sup>69</sup> It was, he

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See also Archibald Prentice, *Historical Sketches and Personal Recollections of Manchester* (London, 1851).

<sup>65</sup> *ibid.* I have been unable to find the issue of the *Herald* in question.

<sup>66</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> The principle witness for the prosecution was an alcoholic man who was later prosecuted for perjury for his testimony after it was found that he had been bribed. See Walker, *op.cit.*, p.89.

<sup>68</sup> See Gatrell, *op.cit.*, p.33.

<sup>69</sup> *loc.cit.*



argues, an “infiltration.”<sup>70</sup> Similarly, Jennifer Mori claims that the loyalist association “in effect [...] closed down” the MLPS.<sup>71</sup> But the MLPS would be more accurately described as a moderate space with complex sympathies amongst its membership, with Cooper and his circle occupying the radical edge. The longevity and future successes of the society are testament to Mori’s exaggeration; clearly the society did not close down. But it appears to be true that the society suffered from the attack, particularly in regards to its need to tread carefully and avoid any overtly political content. Now more than ever, members were pressed to create a “value free” space, as Thackray has discussed. Indeed, the society’s output indicates that content shifted to value neutral topics which were careful to skirt controversy. Gatrell argues that, post-1793, the society “no longer speculated in political philosophy, but ceded primacy to scientific investigations represented at their best in the work of John Dalton. [...] By 1805 a new type of member was being admitted, Tory, High Church, politically respectable.”<sup>72</sup> He claims that the MLPS was “neutralised,” but this was not the case. It is unclear why he feels that the effects of the loyalist attack were felt after a period of seven years. It is also unclear why he pinpoints 1805 in particular. Percival died in 1804, so it could be argued that he managed to hold the centre ground against infiltrators turning the society into an explicitly Tory-Anglican group, but in fact George Walker succeeded his post as president; vice-presidents included Bardsley, Henry, and Edward Holme. Likewise, it does not follow that Dalton set the tone of the society because he was the most famous. While it is true that the number of literary topics published in the *Memoirs* does dwindle post-1804, it is unclear whether this was the case for papers presented at meetings.<sup>73</sup> But the fifth volume of *Memoirs*, published in 1802 and featuring papers presented between 1793 and 1801, bears out Lyell’s claim, with eleven out of the thirty-three papers focusing on non-scientific topics. What does appear to be the case, however, is that the MLPS took a more moderate stance following the activities of radicals like Cooper. So, rather than the society suffering a “neutralisation,” it is perhaps better described as a shift to

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<sup>70</sup> *loc.cit.*

<sup>71</sup> Jennifer Mori, *Britain in the Age of the French Revolution 1785-1820* (Oxon: Routledge, 2014), p.66.

<sup>72</sup> Gatrell, *op.cit.*, p.33.

<sup>73</sup> In 1805, five out of sixteen papers published in the *Memoirs* were on literary topics. In 1813, this dropped to two out of fifteen, and in 1819, two out of twenty-four.

moderation. The loyalist/radical polarisation of the early 1790s resulted in a space for moderate discussion within the MLPS. It had reverted to something closer to its earlier position, but now evangelical overtones of someone like Thomas Gisborne could be heard.

By the time the fifth volume of *Memoirs* was published in 1798, the high point of reform as explored in the third volume was well and truly past. This is exemplified in two papers, the first by evangelical Anglican Gisborne, the second by physician Samuel Argent Bardsley. Gisborne's 1796 paper "On the Benefits and Duties Resulting From the Institution of Societies for the Advancement of Literature and Philosophy" neatly illustrates the shift from a society that had begun to celebrate the free exchange of ideas, to one that was becoming more self-conscious about the mode of association.<sup>74</sup> Gisborne returned to the sort of model advocated by the MLPS founders over a decade earlier: men with a love of learning, he argued, would gain particular advantage from the sharing of knowledge. However, this was not the same tone of those earlier papers on taste. While emphasising the advantages of an education in the liberal arts, Gisborne's suspicion about the potential infidelity of scientists is revealing, and illustrates the "conservative challenge" that faced men of science after the crisis of the early 1790s.<sup>75</sup> For Gisborne, the advantage of literary and philosophical societies extended not just to the members, but to the entire fields of literature and the arts. "It may unquestionably be hoped that much light will be thrown on some of the various departments of literature," he argued, "[a]nd science has perhaps reason to look forward to still greater assistance from the same cause."<sup>76</sup> But Gisborne placed particular emphasis on the particular importance of rules and regulations, properly enacted, for the smooth running of societies:

If political contention and the spirit of ministerial or antiministerial attachment be suffered to embroil the periodical meeting; if local disputes and private animosities, instead of being mitigated by the concurrence of all the adverse parties in literary and philosophical pursuits, make use of the evening dedicated to those pursuits as an opportunity to vent their bitterness; if the

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<sup>74</sup> Thomas Gisborne, "On the Benefits and Duties Resulting From the Institution of Societies for the Advancement of Literature and Philosophy," in *Memoirs* 5 (1798), pp.70-88.

<sup>75</sup> Jan Golinski, *Science as Public Culture: Chemistry and Enlightenment in Britain, 1760-1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992), p.157.

<sup>76</sup> *ibid.*, p.81.

hours assigned to rational enquiry and debate be trifled away in discourse foreign to the avowed object of the association; if the discussion of subjects corresponding to its design be disgraced by acrimony and taunts, by scurrility and invective; these are not evils attached to the nature of the institution. They result from some defect in its code of internal regulations; or from the want of care and honest steadiness in the members to enforce the observance of the existing laws.<sup>77</sup>

Gisborne was clearly setting out the need for discussion to be free from political and religious controversy. In drawing attention to the need for rules he was, perhaps, warning members about the dangers of allowing a member like Cooper to elicit change. But tellingly, he reserved the most criticism for men of science:

There yet remains one subject, on which [...] it would be improper to be wholly silent. I allude to the charge not unfrequently alleged against philosophy; and against the institutions in question as encouraging philosophy: namely, that the philosopher is sometimes found to advance in the road to infidelity in proportion as he devotes himself to scientific researches.<sup>78</sup>

That Gisborne associated science with infidelity is another clear indication that Thackray's idea of science as value neutral was not the case, certainly in the 1790s. Gisborne was aware that *any* discipline could muster controversy; it was up to the society to make clear rules and enforce them properly, if it was to avoid conflict. It is likely that Gisborne's suspicion of scientific infidelity arose from Priestley. Given the society's earlier approval of Priestley, it must have been a particularly embarrassing association for the moderate section of the membership. In fact, Gisborne was not an ordinary member of the MLPS, but an honorary one; he resided in Derby, and was a member of the Derby Literary and Philosophical Society – the same one that published its sympathies with Priestley in 1793, a move that must have made Gisborne uncomfortable. Gisborne's most successful work was his *Principles of Moral Philosophy Investigated, and Briefly Applied to the Constitution of Civil Society* (1789), an evangelical attack on William Paley's *Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy*

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<sup>77</sup> *ibid.*, pp.82-83.

<sup>78</sup> *ibid.*, p.86.

(1785).<sup>79</sup> His *Enquiries into the Duties of Men in the Higher and Middle Classes of Society in Great Britain*, first published in 1795, went through six editions, and was “perhaps the age’s most popular guide to professional ethical behavior,” according to Porter.<sup>80</sup> The volumes explored the duties and rights of citizens, including the upper orders: the King, politicians, members of the armed forces, members of the legal profession, magistrates, and various other professions, including clerics, physicians, gentlemen of trade, and men of private means. In the section on the duties of physicians, Gisborne encouraged medical students to equip themselves with an all-round education, encompassing the classics, law, chemistry, botany, and natural philosophy. Students should spend their leisure time in the “perusal of well chosen books” on topics of “general information and of taste” which will “at once unbend and improve his mind.”<sup>81</sup> But Gisborne warned of the dangers of neglecting religious duties: “no studies, whether professional or of any other description, ought to be suffered so dare to encroach on higher duties, as to lead a young man into the habit of neglecting public worship, and the private perusal and investigation of the Scriptures.”<sup>82</sup> He instructed university professors to timetable hospital visiting hours on Sundays, so that students could attend church, and warned them of their responsibility in this regard: “if the Professors themselves set a pattern of inattention to the offices of religion; the example may train the pupils to habits which may affect their conduct during life, and ultimately lead them from neglect and indifference to infidelity.”<sup>83</sup> He warned readers about the dangers of atheism amongst physicians, warning several times about scepticism and the potential for infidelity.<sup>84</sup> Gisborne’s paper signalled a retreat from the sort of free exchange that came to be associated

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<sup>79</sup> Thomas Gisborne, *Principles of Moral Philosophy Investigated, and Briefly Applied to the Constitution of Civil Society* (London, 1789); William Paley, *The Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy* (London, 1785).

<sup>80</sup> Thomas Gisborne, *Enquiries into the Duties of Men in the Higher and Middle Classes of Society in Great Britain* (London, 1794); Roy Porter, “Thomas Gisborne: Physicians, Christians and Gentlemen,” in *Doctors and Ethics: The Earlier Historical Setting of Professional Ethics*, ed. Andrew Wear, Johanna Geyer-Kordesch and Roger French (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1993), p.254.

<sup>81</sup> Thomas Gisborne, *Enquiries into the Duties*, p.390.

<sup>82</sup> *ibid.*, p.390.

<sup>83</sup> *ibid.*, p.391.

<sup>84</sup> *ibid.*, pp.391; p.421; p.424.

with Cooper, and in one sense it marked a return to the amiable exchange envisaged by Percival in the early years of the society, albeit the explicit religiousness of Gisborne went further than Samuel Hall.

Only one further paper appears to have been given on a political topic following Percival's 1785 treatise on taxation. Bardsley's 1794 "Cursory Remarks, Moral and Political, on Party-Prejudice," explicitly warned against the discussion of party politics in polite conversation.<sup>85</sup> Bardsley's biography is similar to Ferriar's. Having studied medicine at Edinburgh and Leiden, he graduated in 1789, taking up a position as honorary physician at Manchester Infirmary in 1790. Possibly, like Ferriar, he was drawn to the town because of Percival. His position at the Infirmary was made possible because of the Infirmary revolution. As with Ferriar, Bardsley was interested in the treatment of fever, he joined the Board of Health when it was created in 1796 and published papers critical of the conditions of cotton mills. Like Ferriar, he argued for improved sanitation and ventilation. Additionally, Bardsley expressed an interest in literary topics. Though never published in the *Memoirs* he presented two papers, later published together in 1800, as *Critical Remarks on Pizarro, with Incidental Observations on the Subject of Drama*.<sup>86</sup> Sheridan's play, a melodrama about the Spanish conquest of Peru, was first performed in 1799, and was explicitly political. In his play Sheridan recycled several passages from his famous and impassioned anti-colonialist speeches to Parliament made eleven years earlier, during the impeachment trial of Warren Hastings, Governor-General of India. Performed only a year after the 1798 rebellion in Ireland, the play made explicit the comparison of colonial India with Ireland, and of Peru, but also reveals, as David Francis Taylor argues, "the primary importance of rhetoric *in*, and the rhetorical nature *of*, the play," in a very self-conscious manner.<sup>87</sup> The language of *Pizarro* represents, for Taylor, the most point at which "Sheridan-the-politician and Sheridan-

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<sup>85</sup> S.A. Bardsley, "Cursory Remarks, Moral and Political, on Party-Prejudice," in *Memoirs* 5 (1798), pp.1-27. The paper opens the fifth volume of *Memoirs*, providing an interesting counterpoint to the previous volume which had opened with Percival's paper. The difference between the two volumes is a reflection on the politics of the day; a period of only four years had brought a sea-change in attitudes to the engagement of political matters.

<sup>86</sup> S.A. Bardsley, *Critical Remarks on Pizarro, a Tragedy, Taken from the German Drama of Kitzebue, and Adapted to the English Stage by Richard Brinsley Sheridan. With Incidental Observations on the Subject of Drama* (London, 1800).

<sup>87</sup> David Francis Taylor, *Theatres of Opposition: Empire, Revolution, and Richard Brinsley Sheridan* (Oxford Scholarship Online, 2012), p.131.

the-playwright most entirely coalesce.<sup>88</sup> The style was not well received by Bardsley, who found the use of political rhetoric jarring, at times “palpably absurd”:

The Characters of the Peruvian Cacique, and blind Old Man, produce much dramatic effect; but the Manners of both are the reverse of Peruvian. The former, deeply skilled in Rhetoric, manages his tropes and figures with no small dexterity. He might be supposed to have studied Oratory in the Schools, and have been versed in the Christian code of Religion. Yet, as a Pagan Chief, he must be supposed to be wedded to the superstitions of his Country.<sup>89</sup>

The soliloquies are so drawn out it “fatigues the Attention, and lessens the Interest of the Audience.”<sup>90</sup> Bardsley complained about Sheridan’s use of prose instead of poetry, or “Prose run mad,” as he termed it, and quoted Beattie’s argument that in tragedy:

...the versification may be both harmonious and dignified, because the Characters are taken chiefly from High Life, and the Events from a remote Period; and because the higher Poetry is permitted to imitate nature, not as it is, but in that state of perfection in which it might be.<sup>91</sup>

Bardsley’s distaste for political rhetoric in the arts was articulated in his “Cursory Remarks, Moral and Political, on Party-Prejudice.” Bardsley argued that politics had no place amongst the learned: “the mind engaged in political subjects,” he stated, “draws erroneous conclusions; and thus blinds, confounds, and leads the judgement captive to its perverse inclinations.”<sup>92</sup> Sectarianism was decried by Bardsley with much hyperbole, variously described as “evil,” “malign,” “exciting detestation.”<sup>93</sup> Special care should be taken when educating children, he argued, to avoid “chaining down their minds to the opinions of party.”<sup>94</sup> Ultimately, he argued, “we should never lose sight of the just prerogatives, privileges, and rights of the different branches of the government,” the preservation of which “ought to be our sole aim and

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<sup>88</sup> *loc.cit.*

<sup>89</sup> Bardsley, *op.cit.*, p.32.

<sup>90</sup> *ibid.*, pp.38-39.

<sup>91</sup> *ibid.*, p.39-40. Bardsley quotes from James Beattie, “On Poetry and Music, as They Affect the Mind,” in *Essays* (Edinburgh, 1776), p.567.

<sup>92</sup> Bardsley, “On Party-Prejudice” p.2.

<sup>93</sup> *loc.cit.*

<sup>94</sup> Bardsley, *op.cit.*, p.8.

endeavour.”<sup>95</sup> Following on from a more general discussion, Bardsley continued with reference to the political atmosphere of the day: “Amidst the horrors and confusion of a revolution or a sedition,” he warned, “the voice of moderation and humanity will have little chance of being heard.”<sup>96</sup> While never explicitly attacking either radicalism or loyalism, and carefully avoiding the politics of the day, Bardsley’s paper illustrates just the sort of moderate space that members of the society were keen to cultivate. Both his paper on party politics, and his critique on the language of Sheridan’s highly rhetorical play, represent a retreat from the openly reformist influence seen earlier in the decade.

For the radicals, attempts to bring about any meaningful change through institutions such as the MLPS were, ultimately, unsuccessful, and Cooper and his circle began to recognise the fruitlessness of their efforts. In June 1796, the MCS complained in a letter to the LCS that “the people of respectability (if property begets respectability) do not step forward to support us in the cause we have undertaken to defend.”<sup>97</sup> The LCS responded:

We regret in common with the Friends of Liberty in Manchester, that men of Property will not come boldly forward and declare their detestation of the measure [and ?] pursued by the Present Administration [...] We look to the people, and the people alone rather than any administration now or in the future for that courage, unanimity, perseverance, and Courage which must ultimately triumph.<sup>98</sup>

The ideological polarisation that had occurred between loyalists and reformers made it increasingly difficult to navigate the kind of improvement which favoured amiable exchange. In their attempts to create a zone without politics, the members of the Manchester society, together with the middling class as a whole, began to push out the radical element from their sphere. The middle-class retreat from popular politics led radicals like Cooper to abandon efforts to affect change from that section of society. Instead, they found that they should focus on “the people, and the people alone.” Ultimately, in the face of repressive measures by the government, and the

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<sup>95</sup> Bardsley, *op.cit.*, p.9.

<sup>96</sup> Bardsley, *op.cit.*, p.10.

<sup>97</sup> British Library, Place Papers, Papers of the LCS, Add MS 27815 f.60.

<sup>98</sup> British Library, Place Papers, Papers of the LCS, Add MS 27815 f.62.

threat of violence from loyalist mobs, radicals themselves retreated from public life, turning instead to “personal or private radicalism.”<sup>99</sup> Navickas tells of a “Thinking Club” which met to sit in silence in protest at the Two Acts.<sup>100</sup> This marked a symbolic and fitting resistance to the negative impact of the reaction to the French Revolution on associational culture. For radicals like Cooper, suppression of free speech was an assault upon the truth: as he articulated all those years previously, “*Magna est magna est veritas et praevalabit,*” truth is great and will prevail.<sup>101</sup> Unfortunately Cooper, as with many of his allies, chose instead to emigrate to America. The loyalists, argues Navickas, “almost achieved a kind of ‘cultural hegemony’ over politics in public and civic events by the 1800s.”<sup>102</sup> For the MLPS, the triumph of polite exchange over freedom of enquiry signalled the end of Cooper’s influence. Despite Gatrell’s assessment of the situation as an “infiltration,” it is more likely that the absence of political philosophy in the society’s *Memoirs* came as the result of liberal efforts to maintain a space for moderate discussion, and fear of reprisal for associating with radicalism. Although there was certainly nothing like a liberal consensus about the direction of the society, clearly liberals were in some sense united in their discomfort at Cooper’s outspokenness.

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<sup>99</sup> Katrina Navickas, *Loyalism and Radicalism in Lancashire, 1798-1815* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009), p.40.

<sup>100</sup> *loc.cit.*

<sup>101</sup> Cooper, *op.cit.*, p.176.

<sup>102</sup> Navickas, *op.cit.*, p.89.



## 4. The Literary Societies of Liverpool

The founders of the Literary and Philosophical Society of Manchester were keen to promote improvement via the collision of mind with mind. A careful balance had to be struck between friendly disagreement and acrimony, but as we have seen, this was a difficult thing to stage, particularly in the years following the French Revolution. In this chapter, I will turn to Liverpool, to analyse its associational culture and glean from its similarities and differences a fuller understanding of the eighteenth-century aspiration to improvement in the region. The different economic and political nature of Liverpool, compared with Manchester, meant that different pressures were at play in the staging of a polite sphere of intellectual improvement. Warrington lies roughly equidistant from Liverpool and Manchester; Liverpool was similarly influenced by that self-organising, improving ethos and conversational culture. Indeed, many of Liverpool's intellectual circles belonged to the same Warrington-Edinburgh network. This chapter will trace Liverpool's particular version of the transpennine Enlightenment. Although there were a number of short-lived societies there, the first Literary and Philosophical Society after the fashion of the MLPS was not instituted until as late as 1812, although there had been an attempt to set up such a society for useful knowledge as early as 1780. Several factors contributed to this belatedness, including the specific political pressures involved in the centrality of the slave trade to the towns. Furthermore, the very proximity of the town to Manchester meant that key figures had outlets there for their intellectual energies. This chapter will also explore the town's focus on art history and literature, which was more pronounced than in Manchester. The two key cultural texts produced by Liverpool in the eighteenth century were biographies of Lorenzo de Medici and Robert Burns.<sup>1</sup> Their authors, William Roscoe and James Currie respectively, were at the forefront of Enlightenment Liverpool in the period covered by this thesis.

Liverpool's role in the slave trade was a fundamental aspect of its identity, and shaped its cultural, political, and associational development in the eighteenth century.

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<sup>1</sup> William Roscoe, *Life of Lorenzo De'Medici, called The Magnificent*, 2 volumes (Liverpool, 1795); James Currie, *The Works of Robert Burns; with an Account of His Life, and a Criticism on His Writings*, 4 volumes (Liverpool, 1800).

Its location as a port town with key transport links to Lancashire, whose place in the cotton manufactures has already been explored, connected it to the network of improvement that stretched from Warrington to Edinburgh and beyond. The accumulation of wealth amongst an elite comprised mainly of merchants and bankers led to anxieties about the “immense shadow” cast by the slave trade, and prompted a “renaissance” in public arts, sociability and civic improvements.<sup>2</sup> From around mid-century onwards, institutions of polite sociability flourished, such as The Society for Promoting the Arts, established in 1769. Although it only lasted a few months, it was later revived in 1777. The painter Joseph Wright of Derby was a frequent visitor to the town, and exhibited his work there. As Jane Longmore argues, Liverpool’s wealthy inhabitants provided ample opportunity for commissions, of which Wright secured dozens - many from merchants with connections to the slave trade.<sup>3</sup> In the latter two decades of the eighteenth century, the town began to see an increase in the number of societies influenced by the transpennine Enlightenment, institutions established in order to share and disseminate knowledge which favoured participation and conversation as a means of improvement. A Philosophical and Literary Society was set up in 1780, and preceded the Manchester society by a year. It was short-lived, but provides a noteworthy example of an attempt to facilitate polite interaction between ideologically opposed members. After its demise, the Literary Society of Liverpool was created, which could be more accurately described as a coterie of friends who shared similar views. The Literary Society represented a retreat from the more public literary and philosophical societies, but its members would eventually attract the attention of the authorities in the political climate of the 1790s. Liverpool’s associational culture in the final two decades of the eighteenth century bears many similarities to that of Manchester and Newcastle, and indeed several of its key members belonged to that same network of improvement; but the first literary and philosophical society that could be said to be modelled after Manchester and Newcastle was not instituted until as late as 1812.

An early contributor to the eighteenth-century development of Liverpool’s cultural life was William Roscoe. Born in Liverpool, he remained there his whole life.

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<sup>2</sup> Jane Longmore, “The Urban Renaissance in Liverpool 1760-1800,” in *Joseph Wright of Derby in Liverpool* ed. Elizabeth E. Barker and Alex Kidson (New Haven: Yale UP, 2007), p.5.

<sup>3</sup> See Thomas Kelly, *Adult Education in Liverpool: A Narrative of Two Hundred Years* (Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 1960) p.11; Longmore, *loc.cit.*

He began his career as an attorney, but it soon became clear that he was unhappy in that role; as his son remarks in his biography, his true passion lay in literary pursuits. He had a network of friends, whose qualities were “an attachment to elegant literature, a love of study, a relish for the beauties of nature, and a heart capable of returning the warmth of friendship.”<sup>4</sup> One of these companions was William Enfield, whom he met at the Unitarian Chapel in Liverpool, where Enfield was minister between 1763 and 1770. Following Enfield’s move to Warrington in 1770, Roscoe regularly travelled there to attend open meetings, and thus became familiar with the ethos at Warrington which favoured participatory learning. Roscoe brought that ethos with him to Liverpool. In 1784, he revived the Society for Promoting Painting and Design. The society put on lectures, including those presented by Roscoe himself, such as “On the History of Art” and “On the Knowledge and Use of Prints, and the History and Progress of the Art of Engraving,” both delivered in 1785.<sup>5</sup> He found international fame for his biography of Lorenzo de Medici, first published in 1795. As Arline Wilson has shown, Roscoe’s portrayal of the union between culture and commerce in Renaissance Florence, and his hopes for Liverpool as the “Venice of the north,” eventually gained favour amongst the merchants of the town, but at the time it was published his abolitionist views were hugely unpopular.<sup>6</sup> By the turn of the century Roscoe had achieved a certain amount of respectability; his legacy continues to this day. In the 1780s and the first half of the 1790s, however, his position was more marginalised; the merchant elite “reject[ed] Roscoe, the Radical politician and abolitionist.”<sup>7</sup>

Perhaps the most influential figure in the sociable world of late-eighteenth century Liverpool was Roscoe’s friend, James Currie. Best known as Robert Burns’ biographer, he received his formative education in Edinburgh, where he moved in 1777 to study medicine, and although he was there earlier than John Ferriar, the two men shared many similarities in their education, networks, and eventual status as

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<sup>4</sup> Henry Roscoe, *The Life of William Roscoe* 1 (London, 1833), p.17.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, p.48.

<sup>6</sup> Arline Wilson, “The Cultural Identity of Liverpool, 1790-1850: The Early Learned Societies,” in *Transactions, Historic Society of Lancashire & Cheshire* 147 (1997), p.62.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, p.63.

“literary physicians.”<sup>8</sup> During Currie’s time at Edinburgh he most likely attended lectures in other subjects such as philosophy, rhetoric, and the belles lettres; both Hugh Blair and Adam Ferguson were professors there and Currie would most likely have attended their lectures.<sup>9</sup> He received the attention of William Cullen, who had also taught Percival. He was involved in Edinburgh’s associational world, having been a member of the Physico-Chirurgical Society, where he gave a paper on hysteria, published in the society’s dissertations; the Royal Medical Society, where he read two papers; and the Speculative Society, formed “For the Purpose of Improvement in Literary Composition and Public Speaking.”<sup>10</sup> In 1780, Currie sat on the Printing Committee of the Royal Medical Society, a highly respectable position previously held by both Thomas Percival and John Aikin, and one which marked them, according to Thornton, as “three of the most promising students in Edinburgh.”<sup>11</sup> Although the three men were members at different times, they would later become friends and associate with each other at Warrington. It is clear that both Currie and Percival’s involvement in these societies during their university years were a formative experience, inspiring in both men a keen interest in polite sociability which they would both take with them to their respective towns. After his graduation from Edinburgh, Currie settled in Liverpool in 1780, where he took up a position as a physician at the Dispensary. As M.J. Power notes, he “was exceptional in bringing from his education in Edinburgh a lively interest in philosophy and political economy as well as in medicine.”<sup>12</sup>

Not long after Currie’s arrival he helped to found the Liverpool Philosophical and Literary Society (LPLS), and he became immersed in the associational worlds of both Manchester and Warrington. When George Bell, a close friend of Currie from Edinburgh, settled in Manchester and joined the MLPS, the two would meet weekly in Warrington. According to Thornton, during Currie’s early Liverpool years:

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<sup>8</sup> Currie, *op.cit.* The work was in four volumes, and was first published in 1800. It received favourable reviews and there were several subsequent editions.

<sup>9</sup> R.D. Thornton, *The Entire Stranger, and Robert Burns* (Edinburgh and London: Oliver & Boyd, 1963), p.75.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*, p.81.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, p.85.

<sup>12</sup> M.J. Power, “The Growth of Liverpool,” in *Popular Politics, Riot and Labour; Essays in Liverpool History 1790-1940*, ed. John Belchem (Liverpool, 1992), p.33.

Sometimes with Roscoe or Heywood, sometimes alone, Currie rode to Warrington Academy to be with Bell and then together to listen to the younger Aikin's accounts of his study in surgery at Leyden and London, to George Walker's outpouring of a variety of knowledge with the most masculine understanding, or to Gilbert Wakefield's elegant learning.<sup>13</sup>

These were weekly meetings of what Thornton terms the Saturday Club of Warrington Academy, outlined in the thesis introduction.<sup>14</sup> Gilbert Wakefield, tutor at Warrington between 1779 and 1783, remembered the "delightful converse" between colleagues at weekly meetings.<sup>15</sup> He also recalls a second society formed at Warrington, with a more formal arrangement:

We once made an attempt to form another society at Warrington, merely literary, consisting of Dr Enfield, the present Dr Aikin, myself, and an assortment of the superior students: at which every member in his turn was to produce for discussion some composition in prose or verse, upon a subject of criticism, philosophy, or taste. I never relisht this sort of meeting, in which set speeches were expected; but was happy enough when conversation glided by a natural and unprepared course into a literary channel. We soon gave it up.<sup>16</sup>

Wakefield's preference for a smaller, more "natural" and close-knit meeting highlights the difficulties involved in facilitating an ideal type of improving conversation. For Wakefield, the formal practice of presenting a paper was too stilted, and spoiled the free flow of conversation. The same concerns would lead William Turner, years later, to form a smaller club within the Newcastle LPS, for the purpose of literary conversation, as the next chapter will explore. Turner himself wrote of a small group at Warrington led by Aikin in his history of the Academy, possibly the same one that Wakefield referred to:

[T]he advantages which the students derived from their tutor, were not confined to the lecture room: he had frequent small parties to drink tea with

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<sup>13</sup> Thornton, *op.cit.*, p.157.

<sup>14</sup> Thornton, *op.cit.*, p.156. George Walker was another member of the Warrington-Edinburgh network who brought his love of associational culture with him to every town he lived in: in Nottingham, he became involved in a literary society; in Manchester he joined the LPS, contributing several papers on literary topics, and eventually became president.

<sup>15</sup> Wakefield, *op.cit.*, p.229.

<sup>16</sup> Wakefield, *op.cit.*, pp.229-30.

him, when he was accustomed quite to unbend, and enter with them into the most free familiar conversation [...] his opinion of books, or of courses of reading on particular subjects, was asked and frankly given: sometimes [...] he took the lead in conversation, and himself pointed out books which might be read with advantage.<sup>17</sup>

These “small parties” celebrated by Turner were a clear departure from the traditional model of learning that favoured pronouncements from the pulpit. The participatory, informal, democratic model of learning that celebrated the free flow of polite conversation was spoken of fondly many years later by the tutors, pupils and guests who experienced it. This ethos was carried with its alumni to towns throughout the country where they settled. Warrington in one sense lay at the heart of the transpennine Enlightenment, with branches that stretched out to each society formed in the same spirit of improvement

Warrington was not only a place for literary conversation, but was regarded as a sort of middle ground between Liverpool and Manchester where controversial political discussion could take place, as a letter from Currie to Percival illustrates. Regarding the campaign against the Test and Corporation Acts, Currie wrote:

I wish very much a few of us had had a private meeting at Warrington to consider & conceit this business before this blazon in the public eye. - If you come to Warrington, I shall be happy to meet you at any time, though I must confess I should decline it if the business is in the hands of other men, whose zeal, however I may approve its honesty, has in it a degree of warmth not to say keenness, which I fear I could not approve, & which therefore I should not wish to encounter. I need not say I speak in confidence.<sup>18</sup>

Currie’s letter suggests that the Warrington meetings were intimate gatherings of trusted friends, who would work out tactics related to the campaign against the Test and Corporation Acts. In the MLPS, Percival always needed to negotiate a space which reformers shared with those who viewed their actions with suspicion; this negotiation became increasingly fraught as the political atmosphere became more polarised. The Warrington meetings that Currie refers in his letter to would come to

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<sup>17</sup> William Turner, *The Warrington Academy* (Warrington: Library and Museum Committee, 1957), p.20.

<sup>18</sup> “James Currie to Thomas Percival, 25 January 1790,” Liverpool, Liverpool Record Office, MS papers of James Currie, 920 CUR, 114.

be recreated in the more intimate gatherings of the Literary Clubs of Liverpool and Newcastle, covered in more detail later. In an earlier letter, from 1788, Currie wrote to praise the MLPS for its “judicious and spirited” papers criticising the slave trade, a topic which, together with parliamentary reform, Currie felt that he was unable to speak about publicly due to the situation in Liverpool.<sup>19</sup> In closing, Currie wrote: “My situation, as you may imagine, is delicate. Every thing I would say I cannot write.” He looked forward to meeting Percival in Warrington, where they could discuss matters freely: “I have longed to converse with you; and if you can foresee any circumstance that may call you to Warrington for an evening, long enough to give me notice in time, I should have much satisfaction in meeting you there.”<sup>20</sup> Later, in February 1790, a letter from Currie to Percival discussed the idea of sending delegates to a meeting in Warrington regarding the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts. Currie warned against “fiery zeal” and advocated instead “candour and moderation” in their discussions.<sup>21</sup> He mentioned the church and king club in Manchester, and his concerns about the possibility of a similar reaction in Liverpool: “What turn things may take here, I know not. A few days ago, there was no chance of the opposite party moving against us; but the example of Manchester, and the warmth diffused by the meeting there, may perhaps reach us.” Their response to a loyalist society, Currie argued, should be one of moderation; to “treat them with all respect.”<sup>22</sup> Later still, in 1791, Currie wrote to Percival following the “shocking outrages” in Birmingham. Referencing the controversy at the MLPS over the motion to publish a letter in support of Priestley, Currie wrote:

The accounts I received of the issue of the business you had the goodness to communicate to me, at your society, prevented me from troubling you farther, as the decided me against attempting any thing of the kind here. I must confess, I heard the decision at Manchester with great regret, as well as its consequences.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Qtd. in W.W. Currie, *Memoir of the Life, Writings, and Correspondence of James Currie, M.D. F.R.S.* 1 (London, 1831), p.50.

<sup>20</sup> *loc.cit.*

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, p.57.

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*, p.58.

<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*, p.69.

It was also at Warrington, according to Thornton, that Bell and Percival had announced and discussed their early plans for the establishment of the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society, but Thornton does not give a source, and the timeline of Bell's arrival in Manchester casts doubt on the claim.<sup>24</sup> Whatever the case, it was clear that Percival attended regularly and the possibility that he used these meetings to test out his ideas about the new MLPS was entirely likely, considering that it was at Warrington that the seed of associational culture had first been planted. In Aikin's *Memoirs* Lucy Aikin wrote of his regular meetings there with Haygarth, Percival, Bell, and Currie:

The position of Warrington enabled him to keep up an agreeable intercourse with his friends at Chester [...] it afforded similar or greater facilities with respect to his Manchester connections [...] and its station between this place and Liverpool gave him the advantage of the halfway meetings which often took place between the members of the medical profession belonging to these two populous and rising towns.<sup>25</sup>

As Aikin notes, and as chapter 2 explored, many of those involved in the Manchester society were medical men. Liverpool also had an infirmary, founded in 1743, which drew Edinburgh-educated middling class men, such as Currie, to the town.

When the MLPS was established in 1781, Currie was elected as an honorary member. He travelled there frequently until Bell's death in 1785, and gave three papers in total. Two were medical, his "Essay on Hypochondriasis" and a translation of Bell's "De Physiologia Plantarum," and the third was an obituary of Bell, with whom he was close.<sup>26</sup> "Memoirs of the late Dr Bell" was read in 1784 and published in the second volume of *Memoirs*. A reviewer for the *Monthly* complained that the topics covered by Currie's medical papers were "uninteresting to strangers, and have a tendency to degenerate into fulsome panegyric," but that Currie had nevertheless

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<sup>24</sup> Thornton, *op.cit.*, p.157. Thornton's inclusion of Bell as a founding member of the Manchester society is contradicted by Currie in his "Memoirs of the Late Dr Bell," in *Memoirs* 2 (1785), pp.381-93. According to Currie, Bell arrived in Manchester in March 1781, some two months after its foundation, and "was admitted as a member into your Society, soon after his arrival." See p.386.

<sup>25</sup> Lucy Aikin, *Memoir of John Aikin, M.D* (London, 1823), p.96.

<sup>26</sup> "Essay on Hypochondriasis" was not published in the *Memoirs*, but was later published in W.W.Currie, *op.cit.*, pp.434-49; James Currie, "A Translation of Dr. Bell's thesis, De Physiologia Plantarum," in *Memoirs* 2 (1785), pp.394-419.



“executed the task that was imposed on him in a way that does much honour.”<sup>27</sup>

Furthermore, the inclusion of Bell’s “De Physiologia plantarum” was unfavourably received:

We cannot help thinking the Society have, on this occasion, deviated somewhat from the plan we imagined they had chalked out for themselves, and have acted with rather less dignity than was becoming so respectable a body, by making themselves the editors of translations of works already published; for the republication of a thesis can scarcely be classed among original works.<sup>28</sup>

The reviewer was unhappy with the inclusion of an unoriginal work and felt it incongruent with the founders’ original aims. In the preface to the first volume of *Memoirs* Percival had assured the reader that the society’s published output would be marked by “novelty, ingenuity, or importance”; the *Monthly* reviewer had apparently come to expect that papers would be original.<sup>29</sup>

Roscoe was also elected as honorary member to the MLPS in 1784. He submitted a paper “On the comparative excellence of the sciences and arts,” which was read before the society in March 1787, and published in the third volume of *Memoirs*.<sup>30</sup> It was also published some years later in the *Annual Register* for 1791, indicating the topic’s continued appeal.<sup>31</sup> The paper provides an interesting insight into Roscoe’s attitudes to sciences and the arts, and serves as a useful comparison with the other Manchester papers on taste. Roscoe began by stressing the importance of a broad education, warning against the dangers of becoming too immersed in any one branch of science. An overemphasis on science, he argued, is “injurious both to our improvement and happiness,” and that instead we would be better served by taking in an “enlarged and general view of our nature and destination.”<sup>32</sup> Roscoe’s argument, that one must take the “enlarged and general view,” echoed those earlier

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<sup>27</sup> *Monthly Review* 75 (1786), p.415.

<sup>28</sup> *loc.cit.*

<sup>29</sup> *Memoirs* 1 (1785), p.ix.

<sup>30</sup> William Roscoe, ““On the Comparative Excellence of the Sciences and Arts,” in *Memoirs* 3 (1790), pp.241-260.

<sup>31</sup> William Roscoe, “On the Comparative Excellence of the Sciences and Arts,” in *Annual Register* 33 (1795), pp.397-405.

<sup>32</sup> Roscoe, *op.cit.*, p.241.

Manchester papers, particularly those by Barnes, on taste and the division of labour. It would similarly be brought up years later, by Enfield in the Newcastle LPS. Roscoe expressed particular concern about the corrupting influence of luxury on morals: “what is more common than to suffer the laudable desire of acquiring independence to degenerate into an eagerness for accumulating riches, without a reference to any further end. But can we avoid pitying the man who employs his time gilding the frame, when he should be finishing the picture?”<sup>33</sup> As discussed in chapter 1, the question of the relationship between taste and its effect on morals was pertinent to members of the MLPS, who were keen to develop their emerging middle-class cultural identity in a rapidly expanding town central to the cotton trade.

That Roscoe was similarly occupied with questions of taste and morals is unsurprising. His own town was experiencing a similarly vast increase in wealth. Roscoe argued that man’s faculties can be divided into three categories: the moral sense, the rational, and the sentimental. For Roscoe, the sciences could be defined as the improvement of the first two categories; the arts came from the pleasures gained from the sentimental; and improvement was the exercise of all three together. To neglect improvement, he argued, would lead to decay, and “it is therefore the duty of every rational being, to make this improvement the first object of his attainment.”<sup>34</sup> Roscoe likened the mind to a tablet, “which is to contain, in eternal colours, the picture of his future life; and, like a skilful artist, [man must] observe what requires his first attention, and what are only secondary objects of his regard.”<sup>35</sup> The study of natural philosophy was criticised, a surprising argument to have made in the presence of the Manchester society, whose devotion to the natural sciences was clear from the outset:

Shall we, with the ill-timed application of the pretended philosopher, persist in the solution of a mathematical problem, whilst the house burns down around us; or suffer shells and feathers to attract our notice, whilst our happiness and our misery hang yet in the balance, and it remains in the power of our utmost exertion to throw an atom into the scale?<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> *ibid.*, p.243.

<sup>34</sup> *ibid.*, p.245.

<sup>35</sup> *ibid.*, p.242.

<sup>36</sup> *ibid.*, p.249.

Perhaps in light of the Henry's promotion of chemistry and technology at the Manchester College, Roscoe's paper was a warning about the dangers of neglecting the humanities. Roscoe seems to have been articulating fears about the prospect of improvement becoming too dominated by the sciences. The arts, he argued, serve "to act upon our affections and passions [...] and to regulate, correct, and harmonize them," and it thus "becomes therefore a part of our duty no less essential, than the improvement of many of the sciences, or the cultivation of our rational powers."<sup>37</sup> Roscoe attempted to rank the importance of the arts against the sciences with some difficulty - he conceded that moral philosophy ought to take precedence, and possibly several branches of natural philosophy, "but that [the arts] are invariably to be postponed to the study of nature, in all its branches cannot be allowed."<sup>38</sup> The feelings that arose from "the contemplation of heroic actions, whether by the pen or the pencil," were "of great importance to the advancement of virtue and the improvement of human life."<sup>39</sup> Roscoe's paper concluded with the caveat that he spoke in general terms, and did not mean to detract from the efforts of those who presumably made up a large part of his audience: "I by no means would be thought to detract from the characters of those men, who have employed their time and talents even to the exclusion of others; and by arriving at eminence in them, have extended the bounds of human knowledge, and smoothed the way for future travellers."<sup>40</sup>

The essay was not well received by reviewers after it was published in the society's *Memoirs*. An anonymous reviewer in the *Analytical* remarked:

[T]hough he admits that the obligations of mankind, to such characters as devote themselves to the public good, on subjects which have little or no connection with the promotion of virtue, are great; yet he appears to think, that the general mass of mankind ought to prefer the secret consciousness of a proper discharge of the duties of life, to that popular approbation which attends the successful exertion of ability.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> *ibid.*, p.258.

<sup>38</sup> *loc.cit.*

<sup>39</sup> *loc.cit.*

<sup>40</sup> *ibid.*, p.260.

<sup>41</sup> "Memoirs of the Literary and Philosophical Society of Manchester," in *Analytical Review* 9.3 (March 1791), p.266.

A letter to his wife, Jane, during a trip to London in April 1791 gives some insight into Roscoe's regret at publishing the paper: "I was at Johnsons yesterday [...] Fuseli attacked me on my *Manchr. Essay* of which he had seen a slight in the Analytical Review - he says it is unworthy of me, & wonders I would write on such a subject & it is to be sure *a damned thing*, & I would give *a finger* it had not."<sup>42</sup> In her reply Jane assured him that Fuseli's attack was "the offspring of petulance & revenge" and that his forthcoming Lorenzo de Medici biography "shall arise & establish yr fame - away with the idea of wanting abilities."<sup>43</sup>

Back in Liverpool, the first society that could be considered part of the transpennine Enlightenment was the LPLS, instituted on 1 December, 1780.<sup>44</sup> The printed rules share many similarities with the MLPS.<sup>45</sup> Meetings were weekly. Officers, a president, two vice presidents, and a secretary were elected by ballot, for a term of six months. At the society's institution there were 30 members, with a diverse range of religious and occupational backgrounds.<sup>46</sup> As with the Manchester society, the nearby Infirmary played a key role in the associational culture of the town. Of the members for which there is some biographical information, at least six were associated with the hospital: Currie and Jonathan Binns, also Edinburgh-educated, were doctors; Thomas Avison and Stephen Bromley were apothecaries; John Lyon and Henry Park were surgeons.<sup>47</sup> The remaining members came from a diverse range of professions, and reflect the nature of the town. Schoolmasters, a captain, a banker, a mariner, surveyors and architects, a watchmaker, several merchants, and two

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<sup>42</sup> "William Roscoe to Jane Roscoe, April 4, 1791," Liverpool, Liverpool Record Office, MS Roscoe Letters and Papers, 920 ROS, 3506.

<sup>43</sup> "Jane Roscoe to William Roscoe, April 9, 1791," LRO, 920 ROS, 3509. Two years later, Roscoe remarked to Jane in a letter that his "*Manchr Essay* is blacked as it deserves *in an.r* review, & this you may suppose does not tend to put me in better humour. I can be satisfied without reputation but I hate to be ridiculous." "William to Jane February 6, 1793," LRO, 920 ROS, 3513.

<sup>44</sup> Thornton remarks that the Philosophical and Literary Society shared apartments with the Society for Useful Knowledge. However, as both societies met on a Saturday at 7pm, both featured the same members, and both named Thomas Nicholson as secretary, it is more likely that they were one and the same. See R.D. Thornton, *James Currie, The Entire Stranger, and Robert Burns* (Edinburgh and London: Oliver & Boyd, 1963), p.164.

<sup>45</sup> "Laws of the Liverpool Philosophical and Literary Society," Liverpool, Liverpool Record Office, Holt and Gregson Papers, MS 942 HOL, 10, 489.

<sup>46</sup> "A List of the Members," LRO, 942 HOL, 10, 491.

<sup>47</sup> John Gore, *Gore's Liverpool Directory* (Liverpool, 1781).

dissenting ministers made up the membership. In religious terms, there was similar diversity, with Unitarians mixing with Quakers and Anglicans.<sup>48</sup> None of the members listed in the LPLS appear to have been pupils or tutors of the Warrington Academy.<sup>49</sup> However, the ethos and self-organising spirit central to Warrington was undoubtedly influential in the founding of the LPLS, considering Currie's strong links to the transpennine Enlightenment as discussed earlier. In terms of political ideology, the members were also split; while Currie was a prominent abolitionist, Matthew Gregson was a vocal supporter of the slave trade. Thus, the difficulties that had been faced by Percival in the staging of a society free from rancour were even more acute for Currie, considering the huge diversity in members' sympathies. The rules stated that "No subject of partial politics or religious controversy shall be introduced," an unsurprising negotiation given the diversity of political and religious sympathies.<sup>50</sup>

As with the Manchester society, members could suggest a subject which would have to be ratified by the officers before discussion the following week. The committee therefore maintained careful control of the society's discussion topics in order to ease the flow of conversation. The LPLS left the suggestion of topics entirely open-ended, merely "some philosophical or literary subject." Meetings took place at the society's apartments on Leigh Street, and variously at members' houses. Among the Holt and Gregson papers at the Liverpool Record Office are several printed and handwritten invitations to meetings at various locations: Dr Binns's Church Street; Mr Twemlow's no.11 Union street; Mr Green's Temple street, and an extraordinary meeting at the society's apartments in Leigh street.<sup>51</sup> The first president was Currie, the vice presidents Thomas Avison and William Rathbone, and the secretary was Thomas Nicholson. Though many of Roscoe's friends were involved in this society, Roscoe himself does not appear to have been. Thornton thinks this strange, but perhaps, since it was also known as the Society for Useful Knowledge, he preferred

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<sup>48</sup> Currie was a Unitarian, Rathbone was a Quaker (although he would become a Unitarian later), and Rev George Gregory was a curate at St Peter's church. Rev Henry Barton was a chaplain at the Anglican St Paul's Church.

<sup>49</sup> *Dissenting Academies Online: Database and Encyclopedia*, Dr. Williams's Centre for Dissenting Studies.

<sup>50</sup> "Laws of the Liverpool Philosophical and Literary Society," LRO, 942 HOL, 10, 489.

<sup>51</sup> LRO, 742 HOL, 10, various items including 497; 501; 503; 505.

instead to focus his attention on the fine arts.<sup>52</sup> Surviving invitation cards in the archives reveal the titles of papers given at meetings, but nothing of their content. The papers covered a mixture of improving topics, such as on practical politics, moral philosophy, and applied science.<sup>53</sup> Rathbone contributed a paper titled “Some reflections on the dispositions to contain diversions generally deemed inconsistent with humanity and benevolence.” In September 1782 Currie gave a paper on “The Influence of Climate on Human Nature”; the same topic was revisited by the Reverend Barton seven months later in his paper on “The Influence of Climate on National Customs.” The rule forbidding discussion of religious and political topics appears not to have been strictly adhered to, with papers appearing on topics such as “On Government,” and “Remarks upon Laws, Police, & Government, and Hints at Reforming Sundry Defects.” Other papers such as “On the Human Mind” and “On Taste” suggest a concern with the kind of medico-philosophical topics popular at Manchester.<sup>54</sup> The LPLS was, however, short-lived, and was dissolved on the 20th September 1783, only three years after its foundation. In a letter sent the following month, the president informed members that, at a meeting: “it was agreed that the said Society be dissolved. This conclusion was submitted to with regret by some of the members; but the almost total want of zeal and attention in the large number seemed to leave no alternative.”<sup>55</sup> Thornton’s claim, that this lack of enthusiasm was most likely due to the rule banning discussion of politics and religion at meetings, is not borne out by a comparison with the societies at Newcastle and Manchester, both of which banned controversial topics and neither of which were forced to close for that reason.<sup>56</sup> Currie was, by this time, no longer president of the LPLS, and was in fact already in the process of setting up a new society.

The Literary Society, probably formed late in 1783 or early in 1784, was founded by Currie, together with the Rev. John Yates, Roscoe, Rathbone, Rutter,

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<sup>52</sup> Thornton, *op.cit.*, p.164.

<sup>53</sup> LRO, 942 HOL, 10, various papers 507 through to 565.

<sup>54</sup> LRO, 942 HOL, 10, 497 & 515.

<sup>55</sup> LRO, 942 HOL, 10, 567. At this point Currie was no longer in office. The president was probably either John Baines or Jonathan Binns.

<sup>56</sup> R.D. Thornton, *James Currie, The Entire Stranger, and Robert Burns* (Edinburgh and London: Oliver & Boyd, 1963), pp.164-165.

William Shepherd, and William Smyth.<sup>57</sup> Currie evidently had clear aspirations for the society's role and function, delivering an address upon his election as president "on the objects of such societies, and on the mode of best conduct of their proceedings."<sup>58</sup> Meetings were fortnightly, rather than weekly, suggesting perhaps that Currie felt the previous society had met too frequently to maintain sufficient enthusiasm for members. As with the previous society, the meetings were informally situated in various members' homes. The group was small; in 1792 there were only fourteen members.<sup>59</sup> In a letter to Captain Graham Moore in 1792, Currie gave an account of the society. It was "very agreeable [...] We discuss politics, subjects of taste, science &c. before supper, in a regular kind of conversation; and, after supper, we laugh and talk at large."<sup>60</sup> Currie's "regular kind of conversation" indicates a smooth flow of conversation unhindered by contention, but not overly regulated. The Literary Society resembles more an intimate club of likeminded friends than the more formal MLPS and, later, Newcastle Literary and Philosophical Society, and harks back to the Warrington society favoured by Wakefield. The structure of the Liverpool society meant that they did not have to deal with the sort of negotiations between members that were necessary in institutions like the literary and philosophical societies in Manchester and Newcastle. Of the structure, Currie wrote:

We have no written papers, unless any members chooses to write; but we have a president, and a sort of regular conversation, so that every man is heard to an end. This scheme was mine, and it succeeds wonderfully. I like it, because it admits of getting near the bottom of things, and it ensures fighting at close quarters, which I have a relish for.<sup>61</sup>

Currie's "relish" in "fighting at close quarters" suggests that the collision of mind with mind was easier to stage in a smaller group who all agreed on a fundamental level. At the MLPS Anglicans and dissenters generally co-operated in the name of improvement, with occasional moments of tension when religious and political

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<sup>57</sup> For an account of the society, see Thornton, *op.cit.*, pp.164-66; see also W.W. Currie, *Memoir of the Life, Writings, and Correspondence of James Currie, M.D. F.R.S.* 1 (London, 1831), pp.64-65. Two of Currie's papers were later published in his biography.

<sup>58</sup> Currie, *op.cit.*, p.64.

<sup>59</sup> Thornton, *op.cit.*, p.142.

<sup>60</sup> "James Currie to Graham More, February 19, 1792," qtd. in W.W. Currie, *Memoir of the Life, Writings, and Correspondence of James Currie, M.D. F.R.S.* 2 (London, 1831), p.141.

<sup>61</sup> *ibid.*, p.142.

differences came to the fore, as was also the case at Newcastle. For Currie, there was safety in the intimacy of the group, which allowed for the sort of interaction advocated by Percival. Members could disagree on topics without the fear of the conversation descending into hostility.

Despite its reluctance to expose itself to the same sort of publicity as the MLPS – or perhaps because of it - the Literary Society came under far more pressure as a result of the repressive atmosphere of the 1790s. Many of the members of the Literary Society were also members of the Friends of Peace and the Liverpool Constitutional Society, including Roscoe, Currie and Rathbone. As Navickas has shown, reformers' fears increased in 1795 when they clashed with loyalists at a public meeting.<sup>62</sup> Roscoe and his circle became far more circumspect after the incident; Roscoe stopped discussing political matters in his correspondence and a scrapbook kept by Rathbone detailing meetings and dinners contains no reform material after 1795.<sup>63</sup> Their fears may have spelled the end of the Literary Society, although since it was more a collection of close friends than a formalised institution, meetings may well have continued. According to Thomas Kelly the society was disbanded around 1794, but it is more likely that the society was officially dissolved in order to avoid drawing attention to itself, continuing to meet on a more informal basis.<sup>64</sup> In a draft letter to the Marquis of Lansdowne, probably written in 1792, Roscoe recounted the fate of the society:

I have for upwards of 10 yrs been a member of a little society of abt. a dozen persons [...] who have during that time met in rotation at each others houses. The object of our meeting was merely literary but suspicion has for some time gone abroad abt. us & I have good reason to believe we have been thot. of importance enough to be pointed out to government by the coll.s of the customs here—some of us having openly appeared on the late address has I believe completed the business & in the present state of things we have thot. expedient to suspend our future meetings.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Katrina Navickas, *Loyalism and Radicalism in Lancashire, 1798-1815* (Oxford: OUP, 2009), p.38.

<sup>63</sup> *loc.cit.*

<sup>64</sup> Thomas Kelly, *Adult Education in Liverpool: A Narrative of Two Hundred Years* (Liverpool, 1960), p.12.

<sup>65</sup> "Copy letter from William Roscoe to Marquis of Lansdowne, c.1792," LRO, 920 ROS, 2343.



Fears of loyalist reaction would have been intensified by Currie's exposure as the author of an anti-war pamphlet by the pro-slavery loyalist George Chalmers.<sup>66</sup> Currie had published *A Letter, Commercial and Political, Addressed to the Right Honorable William Pitt, in Which the Real Interests of Britain in the Present Crisis Are Considered* pseudonymously in 1793. The following year, Chalmers, who had met Currie only twice before, revealed Currie to be the author of the pamphlet. Currie had planned to publish a new edition of the pamphlet in 1795 under his own name, but political circumstances, such as the suspension of Habeus Corpus, and press restrictions, deterred him from doing so.<sup>67</sup>

The Literary Society probably existed for almost a decade, from 1783/4 to 1792. The society was likely to have been an informal and more fluid group than Kelly and W.W. Currie suggest, a small, tightly-knit group of friends who met at each other's houses, rather than the more formalised and public institution in Manchester. In this regard, the Liverpool society more closely resembled the Lunar Society than the MLPS, with both societies avoiding publicity of any kind. As his correspondence with Percival reveals, Currie was cautious about making his politics public, advising moderation and voicing concerns about the possibility of a loyalist reaction like that in Manchester. In his letter to Moore from February 1792, Currie gives examples of some of the society's topics of discussion:

Last night we discussed, "The best mode of educating women;" the night before, "The poor laws, and the interests of the poor." Before that, "Whether one or two houses of legislation are preferable in the construction of a free government." Previous to that, "The influence of Rousseau's writings on the taste and morals;" and on the evening preceding, "Certain rules established by Dr. Franklin, about sixty years ago, on forming a literary club, which has terminated in the Philosophical Society of America."<sup>68</sup>

As with the MLPS, the Literary Society placed an emphasis on improvement and morals, but the Liverpool society could afford to be more frank about political topics.

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<sup>66</sup> James Currie, *A Letter, Commercial and Political, Addressed to the Right Honorable William Pitt, in Which the Real Interests of Britain in the Present Crisis Are Considered* (London, 1793); Currie was revealed as the author of the pamphlet by George Chalmers in his *Estimate of the Comparative Strength of Great-Britain, During the Present and Four Preceding Reigns* (London, 1794).

<sup>67</sup> W.W. Currie, *op.cit.*, p.206.

<sup>68</sup> "James Currie to Graham More, February 19, 1792," *op.cit.*, p.141.

An examination of the papers given before the society, not published until after Currie's death, reveals that within the close-knit group of friends, the topic of politics was not shied away from. Several of these papers were reproduced by Currie's son in his biography. The first, "Sketch on the Subject of the Division of Legislative Powers," was read before the society in January 1792.<sup>69</sup> Unlike so many other societies in the period, at the Literary Society religious and political topics were considered acceptable; the paper presents the case for parliamentary reform in no uncertain terms. While he praised Britain's system in which the legislative, executive, and judicial powers are separated, Currie advocated a further split in the legislature. The people, he argued, "should divide it between two, requiring every proposed law to be examined by both, to be concurred in by a majority of both, and finally ratified by the executive."<sup>70</sup> Currie's argument reflects similar ideas of republicanism being circulated in America and France, and which echo Paine's sentiments in the *Rights of Man*.<sup>71</sup> In this light, it is evident that Currie's previous appeals to moderation were concerned only with the public face of reformism. His frankness in this paper suggests that the Literary Society was never intended to be a public institution, but a closed group of friends with the freedom to discuss such topics. Thus, in this group, Currie did not share the same concerns as Percival about maintaining an atmosphere of moderation amongst men with polarised views. The same tensions were absent from Currie's group because they could be more accurately described as an informal coterie. Ironically, though, it appears as though this was its downfall. Though their privacy afforded them the freedom to discuss politics, this same privacy may have given them the air of conspirators to outsiders.

In another paper read before the society in March 1792, Currie explored the nature of language and rhetoric in the political milieu.<sup>72</sup> Currie argued in "On Eloquence" that oratory and reason are "essential to representative government."<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> James Currie, "Sketch on the Subject of the Division of Legislative Powers" *Memoir of the Life, Writings, and Correspondence of James Currie, M.D. F.R.S.* 1, ed. W.W. Currie (London, 1831), pp.506-508.

<sup>70</sup> *ibid.*, p.508.

<sup>71</sup> Thomas Paine, *The Rights of Man: Being an Answer to Mr. Burke's Attack on the French Revolution* (London, 1792).

<sup>72</sup> James Currie, "On Eloquence," in *Memoir of the Life, Writings, and Correspondence of James Currie, M.D. F.R.S.* 1, ed. W.W. Currie (London, 1831), pp.508-14.

<sup>73</sup> Currie, *op.cit.*, p.511.

Rejecting the idea that “the common people” are unable to understand reason, he celebrated the restraining and improving influence of reason, and held up Thomas Paine as a spokesman for the present day: “Let Demosthenes speak for antiquity, and Thomas Paine for our own times.”<sup>74</sup> Eloquence, he argued, was to be celebrated and encouraged because it would be through the communication of sentiments and knowledge that change would be inspired:

In estimating the advantages of eloquence, let us not forget the still happier influences it is likely to produce, when not one but many nations shall be free. The reverberation of thought, the rivalship of sentiment, but more especially the rapidity with which moral notion will be communicated, and knowledge diffused; these promise advantage to the race of man that cannot be calculated.<sup>75</sup>

Currie held up the press as the means by which political change would be enabled, calling it “the instrument that moves the world.” In a passage which evokes the collision metaphors used by Percival, Turner and Watts, Currie looked forward to a time “when representative assemblies shall be generally established,” that would “serve as watch-towers erected on corresponding eminences:- a blaze kindled in one will produce a corresponding flame in all, and knowledge will circulate with the rapidity of light.”<sup>76</sup> Unlike those other visions of improvement via collision, however, Currie’s was written in far more revolutionary terms; improvement, for Currie, was implicitly linked with reformism.

In a third paper presented to the Literary Society, Currie returned to the same topics of improvement and taste that had occupied the MLPS members a decade earlier. In “Effects of the Different Branches of Cultivation of Mind on the Individual,” read in November 1793, Currie explored questions of taste and education, and how they relate to the virtue of the individual.<sup>77</sup> Currie provided a sketch of three different characters: the mathematician, the metaphysician, and the poet. Each character, he argued, constitutes reason, passion, and imagination, to varying degrees, and a “sound mind” will constitute each of these faculties in proportion. Echoing the

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<sup>74</sup> Currie, *op.cit.*, p.512.

<sup>75</sup> Currie, *op.cit.*, p.513

<sup>76</sup> Currie, *op.cit.*, p.514.

<sup>77</sup> James Currie, “Effects of the Different Branches of Cultivation of Mind on the Individual,” in W.W. Currie, *op.cit.*, pp.516-21.

Manchester essays, Currie argued that it was necessary, for a “sound mind,” to improve upon all aspects of one’s character. All parts must work equally towards the whole. He concluded:

It is common in education to endeavour to find out the bias of a child, and to encourage it. This practice I should be disposed of to reverse. If I found a young poet in my family, I would do my best to make him a mathematician; if I had a young mathematician, I would cultivate his taste for poetry as far as nature would permit, convinced that a due proportion of the different faculties of mind is that which is best calculated to make the individual virtuous and happy.<sup>78</sup>

For Currie, the moral sense emerged from a careful balance between reason, passion, and the imagination. Unlike Hall, Currie was unconcerned with the role of religion; instead, mutual sympathy was the primary basis for morality.

Due to the private nature of the Literary Society, compared with the MLPS, it is difficult to know much more about the content of the meetings. It may even have survived through this period, contrary to Roscoe’s assertion: in a letter from around 1796, Roscoe’s son mentions that he attends a Literary Society.<sup>79</sup> We don’t know for certain if it completely closed down, or whether it remained intermittently in play as Roscoe’s son suggests. It is clear, in any case, that the Roscoe circle continued to meet and discuss literary matters on an informal basis. In 1801, Thomas De Quincey, then aged seventeen, became acquainted with the group during a stay in Everton. He later wrote in scathing terms about a meeting he attended at the house of his neighbour, Mr Clarke, in *Tait’s Magazine* in 1837.<sup>80</sup> Present were Clarke, Roscoe, Currie, Shepherd and others:

Here I had an early opportunity of observing the natural character and tendencies of merely literary society - by which society I mean all such as, having no strong distinctions in power of thinking or in native force of character, are yet raised into circles of pretension and mark by the fact of

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<sup>78</sup> Currie, *op.cit.*, p.521.

<sup>79</sup> “W. Stanley Roscoe to William Roscoe, c.1796,” LRO, 920 ROS, 4210. “At 3 I go to dine with Mrs Barswell & in the evening go to the Literary Society you see therefore how fully *my time* is occupied.”

<sup>80</sup> Thomas De Quincey, “Mr De Quincey, and the Literary Society of Liverpool in 1801,” in *Tait’s Edinburgh Magazine* 4 (1837), pp.337-40.

having written a book, or of holding a notorious connexion with some department or other of the periodical press. No society is so vapid and uninteresting in its natural quality, none so cheerless and petrific in its influence upon others.<sup>81</sup>

Roscoe, wrote de Quincey, was “simple” and “feeble”; Shepherd “a buffoon” with “grotesque manner and coarse stories.”<sup>82</sup> But he reserved the most disdain for the poetic efforts of the Liverpool men:

...it was secretly amusing to contrast the little artificial usages of their petty traditional knack with the natural forms of a divine art - the difference being pretty much as between an American lake, Ontario, or Superior, and a carp pond or a tench preserve [...] the most timid and blind servility to the narrowest of conventional usages, conventional ways of viewing things, conventional forms of expression, marks the style.<sup>83</sup>

De Quincey was profoundly influenced by the recently published *Lyrical Ballads*, a “grand renovation of poetic power [...] a new birth in poetry,” and the classical style of Roscoe’s poetry was, to him, staid in comparison, a throwback to a bygone era, but it’s not clear that the Roscoe circle didn’t actually admire Wordsworth, as Daniel Sanjiv Roberts has shown.<sup>84</sup>

If this was a period when the associational hopes of the Liverpool group were in abeyance, their appetite for improving sociability did not disappear. Even when he removed to Bath for his health between 1804 and 1805, Currie took the opportunity to become involved in the associational life there, and his correspondence provides a useful point of comparison about the different models of societies. In a letter to Roscoe, Currie described a thrice-weekly meeting “for the purpose of ‘conversation’”:

I have as yet attended one only, that at Dr Haygarth’s. You go about seven, & stay till half past nine. There are tea & coffee handed round, and you converse on what ever may occur. It is certainly an easy and agreeable mode of society, but as there is no President to keep order, & no subject fixed on before hand,

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<sup>81</sup> *ibid.*, p.338.

<sup>82</sup> *ibid.*, p.339.

<sup>83</sup> Thomas De Quincey, “Autobiography of an English Opium-Eater. Literary Connexions or Acquaintances,” in *Tait’s Edinburgh Magazine*, 4 (1837), p.71.

<sup>84</sup> *loc.cit.*; Daniel Sanjiv Roberts, *Revisionary Gleam: De Quincey, Coleridge, and the High Romantic Argument*, (Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 2000), p.77.

there is a want of unity & I should suppose a danger of dullness. There were 15 or 16 persons sitting round the fire.<sup>85</sup>

Currie's criticisms are specific enough to assume that his point of comparison was the Liverpool Literary Society, and imply that Currie's society had a more formal procedure. His criticism contrasts with Wakefield's preference for a relaxed discussion group without the formality of a paper given beforehand. For Currie, literary conversation was best stimulated by at least some formal structure. He also attended at least two meetings of the Bath Literary and Philosophical Society, where he found himself at odds, ideologically speaking, with the other members. Writing to Roscoe to appeal for help with his expertise on the subject at hand, Currie expressed his disapproval at the political opinions expressed by the society:

The paper at the last meeting was the character of Machiavelli which one of the members has endeavoured to white-wash. The subject is adjourned to next Thursday, and I mean to attend - I wish you would tell me what I ought to say on this subject if I speak at all [...] Pray let me hear from you on these particulars & on the general character & morals of the extraordinary man: & write as soon as you can, that I may make a figure at the Bath Literary Society.<sup>86</sup>

At Bath Currie met with Sir Richard Clayton. Clayton was a fellow of the Society of Antiquaries, and in 1780 had married Ann White, daughter of the Manchester surgeon Dr Charles White. Clayton was an honorary member of the Manchester society, and in 1787 had presented a paper titled "On the Cretins of the Vallais," which was published in the third volume of the society's *Memoirs*.<sup>87</sup> At Currie's second meeting of the Bath Literary and Philosophical Society he enquired as to why Clayton was not in attendance, being, as he observed, "one of the literati here," and was surprised to learn that he had been "black-balled as a democrat in the year 1797, and that the society had originated in a very narrow set."<sup>88</sup> Expressing some

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<sup>85</sup> "James Currie to William Roscoe, December 19, 1804," LRO, 920 ROS, 1107.

<sup>86</sup> "James Currie to William Roscoe, February 17, 1805," LRO, 920 ROS, 1108. As Thornton observes, when William Wallace published this letter he suppressed the parts where Currie appeals to Roscoe for help. See R.D. Thornton, *James Currie, The Entire Stranger, and Robert Burns* (Edinburgh and London: Oliver & Boyd, 1963), p.362.

<sup>87</sup> Richard Clayton, "On the Cretins of the Vallais," in *Memoirs* 3 (1790), pp.261-73.

<sup>88</sup> "James Currie to William Roscoe, February 17, 1805," LRO, 920 ROS, 1108.

sympathy towards Clayton, he remarked to Roscoe: "I cannot find that poor Sir Richd Clayton finds a place among them - he called often, and was very kind to me - but he is not popular."<sup>89</sup> After attending two meetings of the society, He reported:

I went no more near them;- tho' they were abundantly civil;- but formal & stupid;- and not suited to the habits of one bred up among our fierce & unruly crew[...] they do not I find amalgamate kindly; and tho' all nominally members of the society I mention, they do not give it regular attendance.<sup>90</sup>

It appears that, for Currie, a society consisting of "abundantly civil" members was not conducive to the atmosphere to which he had become accustomed at home in Liverpool. The "fierce and unruly crew" to which he alludes indicates a dissatisfaction with the sort of exchange of ideas more concerned with polished conversation and agreeable polite company than with the frictional mode of exchange discussed in previous chapters. But the sort of friction favoured by Currie could never have occurred in a space such as the MLPS, containing such a range of men with different political and religious sympathies. As Percival had found, a large and public institution always needed some degree of moderation and negotiation in order to maintain itself as a space which could a wide range of members. Currie's experience of the Bath LPS highlights that, despite the veneer of apoliticality propagated by such societies during the period, tensions were never far from the surface.

In the group around Currie and Roscoe, there was much the same appetite as sustained their friend Percival's group to set up the MLPS, but they pursued a different course. Perhaps because of the proximity to Manchester, perhaps because of the power of the corporation in Liverpool, the Literary Society was a private association of like-minded friends, rather than the public institutions at Manchester and Newcastle. As a result, the society at Liverpool was able to discuss political subjects with far more freedom, and without the need for careful negotiation. The reactionary measures it faced during the turbulent period of the French Revolution highlights, too, the difficulties faced by those who wished to engage in a mode of social interaction that was neither too polite, as the case with the Philosophical and

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<sup>89</sup> *loc.cit.* James Losh notes in a diary entry from 1813: "My old acquaintance, Sir Richard Clayton, is very little changed, since we lived a good deal together 14 years ago at Bath, except that his spirits do not seem so good as they used to be, owing probably to the embarrassments in which his own follies have involved him." James Losh, *The Diaries and Correspondence of James Losh Vol.1, Diary 1811-1823*, ed. Edward Hughes (Durham: Surtees Society, 1962), p.24.

<sup>90</sup> "James Currie to William Roscoe, February 17, 1805," LRO, 920 ROS, 1108.

Literary Society, nor too combative or radical. Towards the end of the century, however, this began to change with the establishment of the Athenaeum. Around 1795, discussions began regarding the new institution. The original idea was inspired by a visit to Newcastle, as recalled by Dr. Rutter in 1829:

[T]he late Mr. Edward Rogers of this town, a gentleman well known, and very highly and deservedly respected, happened to be at Newcastle-upon-Tyne, and was much struck with an establishment which he had seen there, upon a plan somewhat similar to the Athenaeum, but more comprehensive in its objects; and on his return, he mentioned to the late Mr. Thomas Taylor and me, how desirable it would be to form a somewhat similar establishment here.<sup>91</sup>

This was the Newcastle Literary and Philosophical Society, the subject of the following chapter. The NLPS prioritised, from its beginning, the foundation of a library, but tensions emerged around the extent to which improvement could be facilitated through books alone, with one member expressing concerns that the society had become merely a repository for books. The insular nature of the Liverpool Literary Society, and subsequent emergence of the Athenaeum as its centre of associational culture, indicates that conversation was a difficult thing to stage in a town with sharp ideological polarisation. Rutter argued that the Athenaeum was “productive of much good” in the town, and that the society helped to allay political differences amongst the members:

At no other period has party-spirit raged with more vehemence; yet the establishment of the Athenaeum, whilst it promised to provide the inhabitants with such literary resources as they had not before possessed, had the effect of bringing into active co-operation, for a common object, a number of gentlemen, whose opinions on political subjects widely differed; and who, greatly to their honour, laid aside all differences, and acted together with the utmost harmony.<sup>92</sup>

The period after the abolition of the slave trade marked a new period in Liverpool life, in which political differences had reached a peak. After some of the divisions had had time to heal, there was a renewed opportunity for the town to engage in the sort of interaction that promoted amiable exchange. As Wilson has shown, this period saw

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<sup>91</sup> Qtd. in W.W. Currie, *Memoir of the Life, Writings, and Correspondence of James Currie, M.D. F.R.S.* 1 (London, 1831,) p.485.

<sup>92</sup> *ibid.*, p.487.



the adoption of Roscoe as a cultural icon by the town's merchant elite. The Literary and Philosophical Society of Liverpool, established in 1812, would come to exemplify this new mode of social interaction, one which resembled the MLPS far more in its maintenance of a moderate space free from political and religious controversy. That this came far later than the societies at Newcastle and Manchester appears to stem from the extreme polarisation of the town's elite, centred around the slave trade. As Currie's letters to Percival reveal, reformers were afraid to stand out in the repressive political climate of the 1790s. The earlier confidence felt by Manchester's reformers in the 1780s was part of the reason for the foundation of that society, but Currie had not shared this confidence. Instead, he gathered a close-knit group of friends about him, with whom he could speak freely on political and literary matters without the danger of hostility. As the next chapter will explore, in Newcastle Turner set about his own version of Percival's vision, and faced his own set of pressures on the Percival model of association.

## 5. The Newcastle Literary and Philosophical Society

This chapter examines the foundation and early years of the Newcastle Literary and Philosophical Society (NLPS), instituted in 1793. It explores the relationship of the NLPS with the society at Manchester and what this can tell us about some of the wider issues raised in previous chapters. It examines, in particular, the tensions between notions of politeness and the vigorous exchange of ideas, and the difficulties faced by members in their attempts to create and maintain a space free from religious and political acrimony. The fact that a fuller manuscript archive survives at the NLPS allows us a deeper insight into the day to day workings of that society, and offers us a better understanding of the tensions that were beginning to build as a result of external political contexts which put pressure on the model. The committee minutes and recommendations book, for example, illuminates a large range of issues, from the role of women in the society to the purchase of controversial books for the library. Although these materials help throw light on the situation in Manchester, the chapter will also respect the specificity of Newcastle's position within the transpennine Enlightenment, a network that reached from Manchester to Liverpool and Newcastle, with links to Scotland and beyond. Although at its inception the society's founders paid tribute to the influence of the MLPS, it was by no means a mere imitation. Despite important similarities, in many respects the society at Newcastle was distinct from Manchester, adapted to local conditions but following the ethos set out by Thomas Percival, which favoured free exchange within polite boundaries. Although the Manchester society had expressed interest in such topics, they had never been of primary importance there. Newcastle was one of the first of a number of literary and philosophical societies to be established in the wake of Manchester, and in many ways the Manchester society could be considered its predecessor. The Newcastle society's founder, William Turner, was well aware of the activities of the MLPS, being an honorary member and having links with some of its members; his project at Newcastle can therefore tell us something about what he felt worked and what he felt didn't work about Percival's associational model. Moreover, the Newcastle society emerged during the period of political polarisation in the 1790s, which in many regards restrained the reformist energy that had driven Manchester forward in the

late 1780s and early 1790s, under the influence of men like Thomas Cooper and John Ferriar.

Turner was born into a family with strong Unitarian connections. From an early age, he experienced the strongly networked dynastic relations between ministers and their families.<sup>1</sup> Born in Wakefield in 1761, his father was William Turner, Unitarian minister at Wakefield. Turner senior was friends with Joseph Priestley, then minister at Leeds, where he had moved from Warrington in 1767.<sup>2</sup> Turner junior went to study at Warrington Academy in 1777 aged 16 and was taught theology by John Aikin. The Turner and the Aikin families were close: in 1769 Anna Letitia Aikin - later Barbauld - visited William Turner and his family, while she was on vacation with the Priestleys. She presented the young William with a gift of an ivory pocket book, on the leaves of which were written a poem. Joanna Wharton suggests that Barbauld's gift served doubly as a symbol of friendship, and of improvement and mental influence.<sup>3</sup> The blank leaves of the book could be written on and then erased, but the impressions upon the mind would be permanent. Barbauld's message read:

[...] Yet, should kind Heaven your opening mind adorn,  
And bless your noon of knowledge as your morn;  
Yet, were your mind with every science blest,  
And every virtue glowing in your breast [...]<sup>4</sup>

Her foresight proved to be well founded, and was confirmed many years later when Turner published the poem as part of her obituary for the *Newcastle Magazine* in 1825.<sup>5</sup> Arguably, Turner's childhood impressions would have strengthened his commitment to the improving ethos that Unitarians brought to the literary and philosophical societies across the region.

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<sup>1</sup> Rev. William Turner's son, William, would later follow in his father's associational footsteps, becoming both a member of the Yorkshire Philosophical Society and the Literary and Philosophical Society in Halifax. See Derek Orange, "Rational dissent and provincial science: William Turner and the Newcastle Literary and Philosophical Society," in *Metropolis and Province: Science in British culture, 1780-1850*, ed. Ian Inkster and Jack Morrell (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1983), p.223.

<sup>2</sup> Priestley writes that, at Leeds: "I was particularly happy in my intercourse with Mr. Turner, of Wakefield." Joseph Priestley, *Memoirs of the Rev. Joseph Priestley* (London, 1809), p.61.

<sup>3</sup> Joanna Wharton, "Inscribing on the Mind: Anna Letitia Barbauld's 'Sensible Objects,'" in *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 35:4 (2012), p.536.

<sup>4</sup> Anna Letitia Barbauld, "Verses written on the Leaves of an Ivory Pocket-Book, &c.," in William Turner, "Mrs Barbauld," in *The Newcastle Magazine* 4.4 (April 1825), p.185.

<sup>5</sup> William Turner, "Mrs Barbauld" *Newcastle Magazine* 4 (1825), pp.182-86, 229-32.

Following Aikin's death, it was decided that Turner should finish his final year of education at Glasgow University, which he attended from 1781 to 1782 to study divinity. He thus followed a path to the Scottish universities that was well-worn by the English dissenters. In 1782, Turner was appointed minister of Hanover Square Chapel in Newcastle, where he would remain until his retirement in 1841. It would be easy here to draw comparisons with the founder of the MLPS, Thomas Percival, who had also been educated at Warrington and then Edinburgh University, eventually settling in Manchester, but it is unclear how close Percival and Turner were personally. Although they had both attended Warrington Academy, Percival had left sixteen years before Turner's enrolment. The two did, however, did have many mutual friends; Priestley and Aikin, for example. Turner's reputation at Warrington earned him the recognition of honorary membership of the Manchester society in 1783.<sup>6</sup> A committed historian of the transpennine Enlightenment, Turner's respect for the older Percival is clear in his "Historical Account of Students Educated in the Warrington Academy," published in the *Monthly Repository* in 1814.<sup>7</sup> Turner described Percival as an "excellent physician, elegant writer, and most amiable man," praising both his regular attendance at church and the agreeable attitude to religion in his writings.<sup>8</sup>

Turner looked upon the Manchester society with admiration, declaring it "eminently serviceable to that flourishing town" by "leading the attention of several of its members to pursuits connected with the improvement of its extensive manufactures."<sup>9</sup> He belonged to the same intellectual network as its founders. As well as Percival, Turner knew Thomas Barnes from his days at Warrington. He had given a paper at the MLPS, "An Essay on Crimes and Punishments," in March 1784, which appeared in the second volume of *Memoirs*.<sup>10</sup> In the paper, Turner argued that the purpose of punishment should be the prevention of future crime, rather than

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<sup>6</sup> Stephen Harbottle, *The Reverend William Turner: Dissent and Reform in Georgian Newcastle-upon-Tyne* (Northern Universities Press, 1997), p.35.

<sup>7</sup> William Turner, "Historical Account of Students Educated in the Warrington Academy," in *The Monthly Repository of Theology and General Literature* 9 (April 1814), pp.201-205, 263-68.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*, p.201.

<sup>9</sup> *Plan of the Literary and Philosophical Society of Newcastle upon Tyne* (Newcastle, 1793).

<sup>10</sup> William Turner, "An Essay on Crimes and Punishments," in *Memoirs* 2 (1785), pp.293-325.

retribution, and that punishment should not be disproportionate. He presents the case for capital punishment, but only if it is used sparingly in the most extreme cases. He criticises historical examples of its overuse, such as for “stealing a swan, breaking down a cherry tree, letting out the water of a fish pond,” and so on.<sup>11</sup> Turner’s paper reveals the influence of his former tutor’s views on criminal reform. Quoting from Aikin’s *Ethical Lectures*, Turner recounts the following illustration of the absurdity of the law when there is a discrepancy between the moral and the legal:

In one of the midland counties of England, not so many years ago, an unnatural son hired a bravo to murder his father. In consequence of the old man’s death, a proclamation was issued out, offering a reward to any one who would discover the offender, and a pardon to any accomplice who was not the immediate murderer. The son informed against the person whom he had himself hired, and, upon his conviction and execution, claimed and obtained the pardon and the reward.<sup>12</sup>

Aikin himself was closely associated with the movement for prison reform, having helped John Howard with his work in Warrington. In a letter to Barbauld, Aikin described his involvement with Howard: “I have the pleasure of seeing him every day, being his corrector and reviser and so forth.”<sup>13</sup> This was in 1777, the year Turner began his studies under Aikin, so it was entirely likely that Turner had some contact with Howard. Promoting rehabilitation over punishment was typical of the ethos of the Warrington diaspora, who were deeply invested in the idea of improvement. Prisons were an object of reforming zeal that made men and women the focus of a discourse of improvement centred on the moral and physical environment. Turner made the connection explicit between prison reform and the self-improvement advocated by the founders of the literary and philosophical societies when he called for England to “humanize our civil institutions,” an action which he likened to “the same reputation for humanity and public spirit, which it justly merits for the encouragement it affords to improvements in the arts and sciences.”<sup>14</sup> The same zeal for improvement could be seen in the reforms at the medical institutions of

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<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, p.323.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*, p.302.

<sup>13</sup> Lucy Aikin, *Memoir of Dr John Aikin* (London, 1823), p.42.

<sup>14</sup> Turner, *op.cit.*, pp.323-24.

Manchester, which had been driven forward by Ferriar and Percival, building on the work of Aikin and Haygarth, to name but a few of the region's medical reformers.

Turner brought with him to Newcastle the "self-organising virus of knowledge association" that had been picked up in Warrington and Manchester, but the Newcastle society was by no means a straightforward attempt at emulation.<sup>15</sup> Manchester's output was, by the end of the 1780s, increasingly a mixture of medical papers - due to the large proportion of members connected with the nearby Infirmary - and investigations into scientific topics relevant to cotton manufacture, as well as moral philosophy and literary topics. There was also an emphasis on the education of men destined for careers in commerce and the manufactures, fittingly for the town which lay at the heart of the Industrial Revolution. Manchester was, at this time, in the process of transition from a provincial town to an industrial city, and the aims and interests of the MLPS represented a belief in the benefits to society of the drive to improvement. Although the Newcastle society placed much the same emphasis upon improvement, the circumstances which led to the formation of the society were very different to those at Manchester. As David Stewart has shown, numerous factors placed it within the context of a wider network and a "city growing in cultural confidence."<sup>16</sup> Its status as a port town, its geographical position between Edinburgh and London, and its various cultural institutions such as the Theatre Royal and Assembly Rooms all contributed to the emergence of the NLPS. Turner's focus for the new society was on local issues, such as agriculture, antiquarianism and the development of the coal industry. As Stewart argues, the improving ethos of the society and its emphasis on local issues placed it squarely within the development and cultural progress of the town.<sup>17</sup> In addition to the MLPS, Turner drew inspiration from other societies. As far back as 1789 Turner was showing an interest in the way different societies were run. Minutes from the local Philosophical and Medical Society show that Turner had requested to see their introductory paper read at the society's institution; they complied on the condition that he not allow anybody else to see it.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Jon Mee and Jennifer Wilkes, "Transpennine Enlightenment: The Literary and Philosophical Societies and Knowledge Networks in the North, 1781-1830," in *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 38.4 (December 2015), p.602.

<sup>16</sup> David Stewart, "The End of Conversation: Byron's *Don Juan* at the Newcastle Lit & Phil," in *The Review of English Studies*, New Series, 66.274 (2014), p.324.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*, p.325.

<sup>18</sup> See Orange, *op.cit.*, p.209.

This suggests that Turner was aware of models for at least one society other than Manchester, in addition to the models advocated by Priestley in his *History and Present State of Electricity* and experienced by Turner in Warrington.

As with Manchester, the NLPS began life as weekly informal meetings amongst a group of friends for the purpose of intellectual conversation. At a meeting in 1792, it was suggested by Turner that Newcastle would benefit from a society which gathered to discuss literary and scientific topics. From this initial suggestion the idea quickly gathered pace. Turner was requested to draw up a plan for the society, which was published as "Speculations on the Propriety of Attempting the Establishment of a Literary Society in Newcastle."<sup>19</sup> The pamphlet was circulated and discussed, before the NLPS was formally instituted. The initial meeting, on 24 January 1793, was held at the Assembly Rooms. A committee was formed and a general meeting was set for the following Thursday at the Dispensary, in order to consider a plan. The committee was also to meet separately the day before each general meeting.<sup>20</sup> On 7 February the plan was submitted and the society formally established. Members were invited to converse on "Mathematics, Natural Philosophy, History, Chemistry, Polite Literature, Antiquities, Civil History, Biography, Questions of General Law and Policy, Commerce and the Arts."<sup>21</sup> At the first regular meeting on 7 March, Turner set out his vision for the society in a paper titled "Further Observations and Hints on the leading objects of the Society; and on the conduct of its members," which was closely related to the "Speculations" and would eventually become the *Plan of the Literary and Philosophical Society of Newcastle upon Tyne*.<sup>22</sup> In his plan, Turner demonstrated a keenness for local improvement above all else, specifying in detail several topics which he believed would benefit the town.

Six potential topics were identified to be of particular interest to Newcastle. The first, reflecting Newcastle's geography, was coal and lead: the origin and chemical properties, the thickness and nature of strata, the nature of fissures, improvements in machinery, the health of workers, and the investigation of ore, were all given as

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<sup>19</sup> Orange, *op.cit.*, p.210.

<sup>20</sup> "At a meeting," Newcastle, Literary and Philosophical Society of Newcastle upon Tyne, Hedley Papers 1, MS.

<sup>21</sup> *Plan of the Literary and Philosophical Society of Newcastle upon Tyne* (Newcastle, 1793).

<sup>22</sup> Orange, *op.cit.*, p.210.

examples of areas for potential research.<sup>23</sup> The second topic, “how far the country is still *improveable*,” focused on the advancement of agriculture, inland navigation, and the analysis of local mineral waters. The third topic Turner suggested was less practical, but it did reflect the encouragement of a sense of civic pride. “The *romantic scenery* which is every where found in [Newcastle], especially on the banks of the Tyne, and the other rivers, will furnish a variety of subjects, for the *pencil*, and for the lover of *picturesque description*. With these the Society may hope to be occasionally entertained.”<sup>24</sup> Despite Turner’s hope for discussions covering a broad range of disciplines, however, polite literature was never given the same attention as it was by the MLPS. Anthony Quinton suggests that it wasn’t until James Montgomery gave six lectures on the British poets in 1836 that the society concerned itself with polite literature, although this is not borne out of an examination of its papers.<sup>25</sup> Literary papers did appear, such as two by Enfield, both of which are explored in more detail later in the chapter. Indeed, Turner’s inclusion of “literary” in the society’s name suggests his intention from the start that literary topics should be encouraged. In addition, his plan invited members to give papers on topics including polite literature and the arts. Orange suggests that the “literary” describes its character, rather than its content: “a group, probably small in number, which received verbal and written communications and undertook to consider them with calmness and good humour.”<sup>26</sup> Orange’s suggestion, then, describes the sort of space devoted to rational and improving conversation that Percival favoured. The “literary,” according to this judgement, denoted the society’s place within the transpennine Enlightenment, whose connections and correspondence with others, including with other societies, was at least as important as the conversations held within its rooms. But this downplays the society’s interest in literature, as shown by some of the surviving papers, and the choice of books they purchased. Orange places too much emphasis on the society’s scientific interests at the expense of the literary.

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<sup>23</sup> *Plan of the Literary and Philosophical Society of Newcastle upon Tyne*, pp.5-6.

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*, p.8.

<sup>25</sup> Anthony Quinton, “The Society 1793-1993: A Barometer of Cultural Change,” in *Lit & Phil Bicentenary Lectures 1993* (Newcastle: The Literary and Philosophical Society of Newcastle upon Tyne, 1994), p.200.

<sup>26</sup> Orange *op.cit.*, p.212.



Returning to Turner's plan, the fourth topic of interest was on local antiquities, and referred to the nearby Hadrian's Wall as a rich source of study. The fifth topic was that of adding to the history of Newcastle, with particular regard to commerce and the manufactures.<sup>27</sup> Turner's focus on local history, as with Aikin's, was representative of the self-conscious attempt of dissenters to assert themselves as a cultural authority, to cement their reputation within their respective towns. The final topic suggested by Turner was the biography of eminent local men suggesting, again, a desire to celebrate local concerns and to raise the profile of the town. The plan also suggested a possible source of interest as "*classical* illustrations, enquiries into *ancient manners, customs, &c. &c.*" and hoped that members "may reasonably entertain of being regaled with specimens of *eastern literature* ; which is daily becoming more and more important in a commercial view, and which appears to be fraught with various beauties, both of sentiment and diction."<sup>28</sup> Turner recognised the benefits of cultural exchange that had been made possible by the expansion of trade. But, as with the earlier papers on taste at the MLPS, there was a sense of apprehension about the potential corrupting nature of wealth. An improving institution like the NLPS, Turner felt, would be advantageous "to *our* youth in *particular*," and could "obviate the many *temptations* arising from the *great degree of leisure*, which seems, from whatever cause, to attend the trade of this port."<sup>29</sup>

Despite its distinctively local flavour, the plan was striking in its similarity to Percival's preface to the first volume of *Memoirs*, which emphasised improvement through the collision of mind with mind. Turner's plan reads:

Among the various causes of the rapid advancement of science, which has taken place in modern times, the institution of Philosophical Societies is one of the most obvious and important. Men by their united labours accomplish undertakings far superior to the efforts of individual strengths; and this is particularly the case with intellectual pursuits. 'Knowledge, like fire, is brought about by collision'; and in the free conversations of associated friends many lights have been struck out, and served as hints for the most important

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<sup>27</sup> *Plan of the Literary and Philosophical Society of Newcastle upon Tyne*, p.9.

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*, p.11.

<sup>29</sup> *loc.cit.*

discoveries, which would not, probably, have occurred to their authors, in the retirements of private meditation.<sup>30</sup>

As detailed in the introduction to this thesis, in both cases the idea of knowledge production as a collision between two minds can probably be traced back to Isaac Watts's 1741 influential *Improvement of the Mind*.<sup>31</sup> All three men recognised improving role of intellectual discussion. But while a certain amount of disagreement and friction were to be encouraged in order to "polish" one's ideas, the avoidance of political and religious topics, as Turner recognised, was necessary in order for discussion to stay within the boundaries of politeness. The dramatic metaphor of free discussion invoked by all three men was, however, often at odds with the idea of politeness that in reality Percival and Turner favoured. Turner may well have been aware of the difficulties the Manchester society had been facing over politics, such as the controversy over the Priestley address and the ensuing resignations, an event that had occurred only two years earlier.

Turner did not look only to Manchester as a model for maintaining this balance. James Anderson, editor of the *Bee*, criticised the Manchester society in a letter to Turner in 1793. Anderson perceived the MLPS as being dominated by eminent members, a factor he warned would suppress new and exciting discovery:

Where men of high literary character constitute the leading members of such a society, a want of energy is usually the consequence. This is the case with the Philosophical societies of London, Edinr. and Manchester in an eminent degree; and wherever that languor prevails, the real ends of such an institution are frustrated. I give this hint, that in the beginning you may try to guard against this evil in your society.<sup>32</sup>

Anderson castigated the "uninteresting" tradition of learned society members "dryly reading a paper" and receiving polite applause from the audience, lending credence to Nicholson's contention that the Manchester society "had difficulty in getting good meetings." Robert Owen's anecdote of the meeting he attended in which Ferriar presented his paper "Of Genius" would also suggest that eminent members had the

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<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*, p.11.

<sup>31</sup> Isaac Watts, *The Improvement of the Mind*, (London, 1741).

<sup>32</sup> "James Anderson to William Turner, 18 June 1793," Newcastle, Literary and Philosophical Society, MS Correspondence Book 1.

potential to dampen debate.<sup>33</sup> Anderson's letter celebrated the sort of conversation that prioritised "freedom, restrained only by the rules of politeness."<sup>34</sup> He argued that collision of that sort was best achieved by encouraging the participation of young members. His letter demonstrates a keenness to learn from the experience of Newcastle's predecessors in optimising the collision of minds which societies such as Manchester and Newcastle were so keen to promote. In July 1793, *The Bee* carried an announcement of the formation of the new society.<sup>35</sup> The society, Anderson wrote, had a plan "so liberal, as cannot fail to be attended with beneficial effects to society."<sup>36</sup> He argued for an associational model based upon amiable exchange without political or religious bickering: "Happy it is for those communities in which men, instead of wrangling about politics or controversial divinity, which only tend to sour the mind, and to estrange men from one another, cordially unite together with a view to the advancement of science, and the general dissemination of useful knowledge."<sup>37</sup> As Stewart notes, in Newcastle, the free exchange of ideas was encouraged, but there was also an awareness that conversation needed to be carefully controlled.<sup>38</sup> As Jon Mee has traced, Anderson's idea of improvement still incorporated the political as late as 1793.<sup>39</sup> *The Bee* carried letters from the Society of the Friends of the People in 1792, and Anderson defended his editorial decision by arguing for the prioritisation of free speech: "as fire is struck out by the friction of certain bodies so truth frequently shines forth amidst the collisions and jarrings of opposite opinions and sentiments."<sup>40</sup> Anderson's sentiments, in this regard, were shared by Cooper, with both men advocating the prioritisation of truth and freedom over the sort of polite

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<sup>33</sup> Francis Nicholson, "The Literary and Philosophical Society 1781-1851," in *Manchester Memoirs* 68.9 (August 1924), p.105; Robert Owen, *The Life of Robert Owen. Written by Himself* 1 (London, 1857), p.38.

<sup>34</sup> Anderson, *op.cit.*

<sup>35</sup> "Literary Intelligence," in *The Bee, or Literary Weekly Intelligencer* 16 (1793), pp.26-36.

<sup>36</sup> *ibid.*, p.26.

<sup>37</sup> *loc.cit.*

<sup>38</sup> Stewart, *op.cit.*, p.326.

<sup>39</sup> See Jon Mee, "The Buzz about the *Bee*: Policing the Conversation of Culture in the 1790s," in *Before Blackwood's: Scottish Journalism in the Age of Enlightenment*, ed. Alex Benchimol, Rhona Brown, David Shuttleton (Pickering Chatto, 2015), pp.63-74.

<sup>40</sup> Qtd in Mee, *op.cit.*, p.72.

discourse favoured by the likes of Percival. However, as Mee has shown, Anderson's decision to publish a series of letters by J.T Callender, later published together as *The Political Progress of Britain*, attracted controversy, and led to Henry Dundas rounding up those involved in an attempt to find the author, who had published under a pseudonym.<sup>41</sup> The incident likely led to the *Bee's* demise, and forced Anderson to accept the idea of improvement which excluded politics, rather than favour the freedom of ideas, in much the same way that the events of 1791 had forced the Manchester society to do so.

Turner appears at first to have shared Anderson's concerns about the dimming of debate by eminent members, by encouraging younger members to become involved in the society. He saw the smaller provincial societies as a sort of training ground in which younger members would learn the art of debate and use their acquired skills to move on to more eminent societies: "Might [societies] not serve as nurseries, to train up useful members for the larger and more important associations?" This would be done, he argued, "by encouraging in our youth a love of literature, and an ambition to distinguish themselves among the members of these societies."<sup>42</sup> Turner's vision was borne out by the inclusion, in the society's rules, of a class of younger members: "in order to encourage a taste for literature in the younger members of the community, it be allowed to any Member to introduce a young person, between the ages of seventeen and twenty-one."<sup>43</sup> Young members were not liable to a subscription fee, but, ironically, they were barred from the ensuing discussion, being ordered to withdraw from the room following the reading of a paper. Other attempts to widen participation included the introduction, in 1799, of a new class of "reading members."<sup>44</sup> This allowed use of the library but not access to meetings. Notably, women were eligible for inclusion in this class. Although Ruth Watts rightly points out that Turner's inclusion of women in the society was an important step forward, she somewhat overstates their involvement, since they were effectively barred from active participation, being unable to vote or attend general

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<sup>41</sup> *ibid.*, p.73.

<sup>42</sup> *Plan of the Literary and Philosophical Society*, Literary and Philosophical Society of Newcastle upon Tyne (Newcastle, 1793), p.3.

<sup>43</sup> *ibid.*, p.16.

<sup>44</sup> *A Historical Sketch of the Transactions of the Literary and Philosophical Society of Newcastle upon Tyne* (Newcastle: Literary and Philosophical Society, 1807), p.1.

meetings.<sup>45</sup> There was little take up in the new class of women in the early years, with only one female member in 1801 and two in 1804.<sup>46</sup>

As with the society at Manchester, Turner felt that in order to facilitate the smooth exchange of ideas, the discussion of politics and religion must be excluded. Of course, by 1793 it was clear from events in Manchester that the kind of improvement that included politics was likely to attract the wrong sort of attention. This was not without some reluctance on Turner's part, however, who later came to regret his decision in a letter to the society's committee in 1807:

When it was determined, by the original Institution of this Society, that the introduction of questions relating to Religion and British Politics should be prohibited at the Monthly Meetings, it was not without a deep regret that subjects so nearly connected with the most important interests of mankind could not generally be discussed without exciting those unfriendly sentiments which are inconsistent with the spirit of Christianity. Experience, however, seemed to justify the exclusion.<sup>47</sup>

Turner would have been aware, of course, that events in Manchester had forced the society to abandon any association it had with politics. In Manchester, Percival had begun partly to join in with the spirit of reform, but Cooper's push to prioritise the free exchange of ideas and the ensuing events at the turn of the 1790s had led to a sharp retreat. Moderation and polite conversation free from political rancour won out over Cooper's ideals of freedom of speech, and by 1793 Turner would have been more aware of these dangers than Percival had been in 1781. In these polarised conditions, the Newcastle society found itself haunted by its past. The NLPS was moved, in 1798, to publicly disavow any connection with a short-lived society with connections to radicalism. The Philosophical Society had been founded in 1775, lasting around three or four years, but although it had ceased to exist before the foundation of the NLPS, the latter society was forced to take action after the *Annual Register* for the year 1792 (published in 1798) had carried the following extract from

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<sup>45</sup> Ruth Watts, *Gender, Power and the Unitarians in England, 1760-1860* (London: Routledge, 2013), pp.66-67.

<sup>46</sup> Asa Briggs, "The Foundation and Subsequent Role of the Society," in *Lit & Phil Bicentenary Lectures 1993* (Newcastle: The Literary and Philosophical Society, 1994), p.15.

<sup>47</sup> "William Turner to The Committee 25 June 1807," Newcastle, Literary and Philosophical Society, MS Correspondence Book 1.

“The Rights of Man, as exhibited in a Lecture, read at the Philosophical Society at Newcastle, &c.”:

Hence it is plain, that the land or earth in any country or neighbourhood, with everything in or on the same, or pertaining thereto, belongs at all times, to the living inhabitants of the said country or neighbourhood in an equal manner. For, as I said before, there is no living but on land and its productions, consequently what we cannot live without, we have the same property in, as in our lives.<sup>48</sup>

The NLPS were alarmed that such sentiments might be mistaken for having been read at their own society. In 1799, the local press, the *Gentleman's Magazine* and the *Monthly Magazine* all carried a statement that “the society had no existence at the period there alluded to, and that it has always been one of its unbroken regulations, to avoid the discussion of any topics connected with religion and politics.<sup>49</sup>

There were other reasons to be nervous about any association with the former society in this period of political unrest. The Philosophical Society had at one point carried, by a majority of two, a motion that a republic would be of “more real advantage to the government” than a monarchy.<sup>50</sup> A former member, the radical Thomas Spence, had argued in a pamphlet for the abolition of the monarchy and private property. In November 1775, Spence published a lecture he had given at the society on “the real rights of man” without the society’s permission, for which he was expelled. He moved to London and was imprisoned for distributing Paine’s *Rights of Man*. But despite such attempts to distance themselves from the Philosophical Society, Orange suggests that several of the NLPS members had been members of the former society in their youth, and that this fact was well known in Newcastle.<sup>51</sup> Thus, Turner’s decision to ban politics was necessary in order to try and avoid the society coming under suspicion, not least because of his dissenting connections.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Orange, *op.cit.*, p.208; “The Rights of Man, as exhibited in a Lecture, read at the Philosophical Society at Newcastle, &c.,” in *Annual Register* 2 (1798), p.152.

<sup>49</sup> See, for example, “Provincial Occurrences,” in *Monthly Magazine* 7 (1799), p.415.

<sup>50</sup> For an account of the Philosophical Society see Derek Orange, *op.cit.*, p.208.

<sup>51</sup> *loc.cit.*

<sup>52</sup> The Philosophical Society had been all too aware of the difficulties around balancing good debate with politeness. A paragraph in their printed rules warns that meetings “too frequently degenerate to drinking clubs, and [...] become schools of sedition and infidelity. In order to avoid becoming a drinking club, “meetings of this society are held in a private house,

Despite the political pressures surrounding the society, Turner could draw on his network of associates for input from beyond the region. Enfield, tutor of languages and the belles lettres at Warrington during Turner's time there, contributed papers to the NLPS. His "Essay on the Cultivation of Taste, as a Proper Object of Attention in the Education of Youth," read at a meeting in April 1793, drew on the same topics of taste and education, and their place within the context of a rapidly expanding town, as those at the Manchester society.<sup>53</sup> In his paper, which was later published as a pamphlet, Enfield criticised the traditional pedagogic style which focused on rote learning, and advocated a liberal education of the sort encouraged at Warrington. Enfield encouraged a greater emphasis on the advantages of an education in literature and the arts:

That important period of human life, in which the future *man* is to be formed, hath been fitted up with studies, which have had no other object than to furnish the head with stores of learning and science; as if our whole business and our whole enjoyment consisted in *thinking*, and nature had designed us neither to *feel* nor to act.<sup>54</sup>

He complained that a large proportion of boys' education was "wasted" in the "irksome labour" of grammar, logic and abstract speculations, when it would be better spent on *improvement* of the sort advocated by Henry, Barnes and de Polier:

Perhaps nothing would more effectually contribute to the improvement of education, than the establishment of this principle, as a general maxim, --That to *cultivate the Taste*, and *form the Heart*, is at least of *equal* importance, as to *exercise the understanding and judgement*.<sup>55</sup>

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and every sort of liquor absolutely excluded." In order to avoid sedition and infidelity, the rules state that any topics must be decided by ballot, giving the members "an opportunity to reject any subject, which might lead to arguments, too freely and incautiously calling in question, the fundamental principles of religion or good government." Newcastle, Literary and Philosophical Society, Hedley Papers 1.

<sup>53</sup> Jon Mee and Jennifer Wilkes, "Transpennine Enlightenment," p.405; William Enfield, *An Essay on the Cultivation of Taste, as a Proper Object of Attention in the Education of Youth* (Newcastle, 1818).

<sup>54</sup> Enfield, *op.cit.*, p.3.

<sup>55</sup> Enfield, *op.cit.*, p.4.

For Enfield, “profound learning” was of little use in the “common intercourse of polite or friendly society.”<sup>56</sup> Rather than easing the flow of conversation, it instead rendered man “a disagreeable companion,” as it would lead him to become contemptuous and pompous. To acquaint him with “works of Taste,” on the other hand, would “furnish him with materials for conversation” and “render him generally acceptable” in general society.<sup>57</sup> Ultimately, Enfield encouraged an education in taste because of its positive effect on morals. The moral sense would “scarcely fail of acquiring strength” from the “agreeable exertions” spent appreciating poetry and art.<sup>58</sup> He emphasised that he was not discouraging an education in grammar, logic, etc., but was rather extolling the benefits of an all-round education that took account of the arts in addition to the sciences. In this sense, Enfield agreed with Barnes, that education ought to have a wider focus, not specialise in any one particular field.

A second paper by Enfield, presented to the society in November 1793, asked “Whether There Be Any Essential Difference Between Poetry and Prose.” The paper was later published in the *Monthly Magazine*.<sup>59</sup> Daringly, given the period in which it was given, Enfield situated his paper within the “present age of bold examination” and argued that “the same free spirit which has stript Royalty of its divine right” could be “allowed to step out of the path of politics into the path of literature.” Enfield perceived that the poet had come to occupy a position of lofty arrogance, separate from the people, a comparison he drew with the alienation of the politician from the needs of the people. He asked “whether that spirit of monopoly, which has been so injurious to Civil Society, has found its way into the World of Letters.” He complained that poets had:

...conjured up a wall of separation between themselves and other writers. Fancying the inhabitants of this concentrated inclosure a privileged order, they have been accustomed to look down, with a kind of senatorial haughtiness, upon the prose-men, who inhabit the common of letters, as a vulgar, plebeian herd.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Enfield, *op.cit.*, p.10.

<sup>57</sup> Enfield, *loc.cit.*

<sup>58</sup> Enfield *op.cit.*, p.11.

<sup>59</sup> William Enfield, “An Enquiry Whether There Be Any Essential Difference Between Poetry and Prose,” in “Papers Read,” 1.8, Newcastle Literary and Philosophical Society. The published version featured in *Monthly Magazine* 2.6 (July 1796), pp.453-56.

<sup>60</sup> Enfield, *op.cit.*, p.453.



Enfield wished to “pull down the wall of separation” between the poet and the people. He argued that prose could be considered equal to poetry in many respects: both used to communicate ideas, both a descriptive art, and both imitate nature. Considering the context in which Enfield presented the paper, only eleven months after the execution of Louis XVI, it was a brave analogy to draw. It was the same topic that would be revisited by Wordsworth several years later, in his preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, when he defended poetry as the “spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” using the “real language of men.”<sup>61</sup> The NLPS obtained a copy of *Lyrical Ballads* soon after its publication, suggesting that members may have seen it as relevant to their project. The same topic was also covered in the MLPS by Barnes in his paper “On the Nature and Essential Characters of Poetry,” and Ferriar attempted to disprove the “literary superstition and metaphysical mysticism” of the poet in his paper “Of genius,” as discussed in chapters 1 and 2 respectively.<sup>62</sup>

Despite the occasional foray into literary matters, however, the society’s mainstay was its focus on local concerns. As John Baillie, member of the NLPS and author of *An Impartial History of the Town and County of Newcastle upon Tyne* noted, Newcastle was “a situation peculiarly well adapted” for such an institution, not only for its particular geological situation, but also its locale. Baillie felt that Newcastle’s situation offered an “extensive commercial intercourse” which “furnishes the curious enquirer with the opportunity of carrying on an extensive literary correspondence, and of collecting from every country its important or interesting productions.”<sup>63</sup> In much the same way that Manchester’s particular locale, geography, and transport links situated the town at the “heart of this vast system,” to return to Aikin’s phrase, so too did Newcastle’s, as Baillie identified. Baillie was a Presbyterian minister at the Carloli Street congregation in Newcastle, suspended for inappropriate behaviour due

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<sup>61</sup> William Wordsworth, “Preface,” in *Lyrical Ballads* (London, 1800). See also Mee and Wilkes, *op.cit.*, p.605.

<sup>62</sup> John Ferriar, “Of Genius,” in *Illustrations of Sterne: with Other Essays and Verses* (London, 1798), p.272; Thomas Barnes, ““on the Nature and Essential Characters of Poetry,” in *Memoirs* 1 (1785), pp.55-71.

<sup>63</sup> John Baillie, *An Impartial History of the Town and County of Newcastle upon Tyne and Its Vicinity: Comprehending an Account of Its Origin, Population, Coal, Coasting, & Foreign Trade, Together with an Accurate Description of All Its Public Buildings, Manufactories, Coal Works, &c.*, (Newcastle, 1801), pp.288-89.

to his “convivial habits” in 1784, and ending up in debtor’s prison.<sup>64</sup> After a stint in Scotland he returned to Newcastle in 1789, where he took up writing to support himself, and in time made his name as a respected historian. His *History* spans a period of over a thousand years, between antiquity and the present day, and was the third such history of the town to be published in the eighteenth century, coming after Henry Bourne’s 1736 *The History of Newcastle upon Tyne: Or, the Ancient and Present State of That Town*, and John Brand’s 1788 *The History and Antiquities of the Town and County of the Town of Newcastle upon Tyne*.<sup>65</sup> With only a difference of thirteen years between Baillie’s and Brand’s publications, Baillie attempted to justify this new history in his introduction: “most authors unhappily fall into one of these extremes, either of obscure, uninforming brevity, or minute, tedious, and unimportant details.”<sup>66</sup> Brand’s history, argued Baillie, was full of “old, musty grants, written in uncouth, unclassical Latin,” and, priced at two guineas, too expensive for many readers; Baillie wanted his history to be available at a quarter of that price.<sup>67</sup> Since Brand’s history, he argued, there had been a “vast increase of trade, manufactories, iron-founderies, new streets, and magnificent buildings, by which Newcastle is enriched and adorned”; new archeological discoveries had been made “by the recent digging up of the vast fossa, or ditch, of the Roman wall, from near Byker to Wallsend, curious discoveries have been made of arms, altars, bones of sacrificed animals, and other pieces of antiquity.”<sup>68</sup> Perhaps more significantly, however, was Baillie’s connection with the NLPS. Baillie was a member of the society, and Turner was on the list of subscribers to his *History*. As with Aikin in Manchester and Roscoe in Liverpool, Baillie’s focus on local history was an expression of civic pride that was common

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<sup>64</sup> Thompson Cooper, “Baillie, John (1741-1806),” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

<sup>65</sup> Henry Bourne, *The History of Newcastle upon Tyne: Or, the Ancient and Present State of That Town*, (Newcastle, 1736); John Brand, *The History and Antiquities of the Town and County of the Town of Newcastle upon Tyne*, (Newcastle 1788).

<sup>66</sup> Baillie, *op.cit.*, p.v.

<sup>67</sup> *ibid.*, p.vi. Despite his criticisms, however, Baillie quoted freely from them: “As we hereby candidly acknowledge, that we have made free with such sentiments in the works of Messrs. Bourne, Brand, and others who have written upon this town [...] we will not, therefore, trouble our readers with references to the pages, &c. of these gentlemen’s works.” p.viii.

<sup>68</sup> *ibid.*, p.vi.

amongst dissenters as a means by which they could assert their place as a cultural authority in their respective towns, a phenomenon explored by John Seed.<sup>69</sup>

As Aikin had done in his *Description of a Journey*, Baillie drew attention to the society's location within a network that stretched from Scotland and over the Pennines through to Manchester and beyond. Indeed, the class of honorary members was intended to strengthen this network. The society was also keen to include the prestigious Royal Society in their network. In 1794, the Reverend Joseph Brand wrote to the NLPS on behalf of the President of the Royal Society, Joseph Banks, to express his desire to foster a connection between the two societies:

Sir Joseph Banks having signified to me yesterday how much He approves your new Institution at Newcastle and what great things may be justly expected in such a Situation, towards the Improvement of Natural History. I could not help expressing my wishes, that for so good a purpose there should be some Connection formed between your and the Royal Society of London, and that if he would permit me, I should take the Liberty of desiring his Brother President, to whom I had the honour of being known, to propose his being elected an honorary member. Sir Joseph said he would think himself extremely flattered by such a distinction.<sup>70</sup>

Other honorary members of the NLPS included John Aikin, Matthew Boulton, William Enfield, James Losh, Henry Moyes, Thomas Percival, Joseph Priestley, and later, in 1803, James Beattie.<sup>71</sup> It is worth noting that the politics associated with several of those names – particularly Priestley – did not deter the society from electing them as honorary members. Considering the political tensions at this time – these were all, barring Beattie, elected in 1793 – this was a bold move by the society. Like the MLPS, the society at Newcastle was keen to foster links with other countries. The list of honorary members from 1793 contains members from as far away as St Petersburg and New South Wales. Thomas M. Winterbottom, a physician originally from South Shields, who had emigrated to Sierra Leone, was also an honorary member. In a letter dated March 1794, from Free Town, Sierra Leone, Winterbottom expressed his

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<sup>69</sup> John Seed, *Dissenting Histories: Religious Division and the Politics of Memory in Eighteenth-Century England*, (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2008).

<sup>70</sup> "Joseph Brand to NLPS, January 11, 1794," Newcastle, Literary and Philosophical Society, MS Correspondence Book 1.

<sup>71</sup> See NLPS, Hedley Papers, vols.1-2.

anticipation of sharing local knowledge with the society, and even hinted at the advantages to be gained by a similar society being founded in Africa:

My Situation here affords me indeed great Opportunities for Observation in my own Profession [...] You very justly observe that Africa is almost entirely unknown; a few Years however will I am convinced throw great light, not only upon its Geography but also upon its natural Productions, & no doubt succeeding Ages will feel themselves as much indebted to the Sierra Leone Company for their researches in the Natural History of Africa, as in the present age every Friend to Humanity does, for their attempt to restore it to a state of Freedom & Civilization [...] the Period may not be far distant when the learned World will be astonished with the acute researches of an African Society.<sup>72</sup>

It is unclear to what extent Winterbottom continued his correspondence with the Newcastle society, but he stayed in Sierra Leone for seven years, and in 1802 published two successful works based on his experiences there: *Medical Directions for the Use of Navigators and Settlers in Hot Climates* and *An Account of the Native Africans in the Neighbourhood of Sierra Leone, to Which Is Added an Account of the Present State of Medicine Among Them*.<sup>73</sup> Baillie noted in 1801 that though the society had not been as successful as was originally hoped in its proposal for a full investigation of coal, “yet many valuable communications have been read at the monthly meetings of the society, which have greatly contributed to the information and entertainment of its members; and some of them, by subsequent publication, to the instruction of the public at large.”<sup>74</sup>

Whereas the Manchester society had decided to publish their best output in the *Memoirs*, the Newcastle society had no formal publication plan in place. The society opted instead to disseminate its output through ties it chose to maintain with various established publications. Individual papers were published in the periodical press, such as the *Monthly Magazine*, the *Oeconomist*, and Anderson’s *Edinburgh*

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<sup>72</sup> “M. Winterbottom to NLPS,” Newcastle, Literary and Philosophical Society, MS Correspondence Book 1.

<sup>73</sup> Thomas M. Winterbottom, *Medical Directions for the Use of Navigators and Settlers in Hot Climates* (London, 1803); *An Account of the Native Africans in the Neighbourhood of Sierra Leone, to Which Is Added an Account of the Present State of Medicine Among Them* (London, 1803).

<sup>74</sup> Baillie, *op.cit.*, p.293.

periodical the *Bee*.<sup>75</sup> The *Monthly Magazine* was one of the most widely read literary journals in the country, running from 1796 to 1843, with a circulation of about 5000 copies by 1797.<sup>76</sup> For the first ten years it was edited by John Aikin, whose close family connections with Turner have already been discussed. As discussed in chapter 1, Manchester's success was partly bolstered by the reputation generated by its *Memoirs*. There were, however, disadvantages to this model. It is possible that the Manchester society had focused its energy on the production of its *Memoirs* at the cost of securing a permanent building and library for itself, although the existence of the well-established Chetham's Library meant that a new library was not as important in Manchester as it was in Newcastle. In forging connections with the national periodical press, Newcastle was able to ensure as wide a circulation of its published articles as possible, while at the same time ensuring that financial contributions would go towards its much-anticipated library, rather than an initial outlay on the publication of a periodical that was not guaranteed to turn a profit. Of course, on the other hand it may have been the case that papers read before the society were not necessarily written for the society. Enfield's paper, for example, may have been sitting in a desk drawer until the NLPS offered him an opportunity to gain circulation for his ideas. In any case, the society decided not to burden itself with the expense and possible disputes around a formal publication like the *Memoirs*. The Manchester society had originally committed to send a volume "regularly [...] to the press, every second or third year," but readers had five years to wait between the second and third volumes, indicating that the society ran into unforeseen difficulties in producing a regular publication.<sup>77</sup>

A more original outgrowth of activities associated with the NLPS was The *Oeconomist, or Englishman's Magazine*, a cheap periodical, priced 2d, that ran monthly for two years, from January 1798 to December 1799.<sup>78</sup> In certain regards this could

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<sup>75</sup> Anderson was an Honorary Member of the MLPS. In a paper read to the society in 1796, he proposed the development of a universal character. The chief advantage, he argued, would be the "opening of a free literary discourse of all nations." Anderson had confidence in his proposal: "I am convinced, if the gentleman who has begun this investigation can be induced to continue [...] this will prove to be, if not one of the greatest discoveries, at least one of the most useful literary improvements of the present age" James Anderson, "On a Universal Character," in *Memoirs* 5 (1798), pp.89-101.

<sup>76</sup> William St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004), p.573.

<sup>77</sup> See *Memoirs* 1, p.vii. *Memoirs* 2 was published in 1785 and 3 was published in 1790.

<sup>78</sup> *The Oeconomist; or, Englishman's Magazine* 1 (January 1798).

be read as an attempt to disseminate the principles and structures of the NLPS to a broader audience. The periodical was aimed at mass distribution, with the optimistic claim to be “sold by all the booksellers in Great Britain,” or so its front page boasted. It was edited by Thomas Bigge and James Losh, both members of the Newcastle society, and published in Newcastle. Bigge had been a member of the NLPS since 1795, and was friends with Losh and Turner. He read a paper at the society in 1802 on a plan for establishing a lectureship in chemistry or natural philosophy in Newcastle, and he seems to have been closely involved with plans for the New Institution, a matter to which I will return later in the chapter. Losh was a Unitarian barrister from Cumberland, who had graduated from Cambridge in 1786.<sup>79</sup> He had radical sympathies, and had visited Paris in 1792. After some time spent in London, health problems associated with the pressures of his political life forced him to spend time in Bristol and Bath, where he became acquainted with Coleridge, Southey and Davy. He also joined Wordsworth, whom he had met some time in the early 1790s in London. The two had dined on several occasions at Godwin’s house. According to Losh’s diaries, the Bristol group met up regularly for walks and conversation. He enjoyed listening to their poetry and discussing politics. Each member of the group had admired the early stages of the French Revolution.<sup>80</sup> When Losh moved to Newcastle in 1799, he joined the NLPS. Edward Hughes’ claim that Losh was the society’s “real creator” rather unfairly ignores Turner’s instrumental role in the establishment and first six years of the society’s existence.<sup>81</sup> Nevertheless, Losh was an influential member, and his statue still stands in the NLPS today. The primary focus of Losh’s paper, the *Oeconomist*, was agricultural improvement, and focused particularly on the idea that poor relief was best served by middle-class benevolence. Articles like “On the Importance of the Middle Ranks of Society” lauded the role of the middle class.<sup>82</sup> The NLPS also showed signs of subscribing to this vision of middle class benevolence. The December 1797 issue of the *Monthly Magazine* carried a notice

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<sup>79</sup> My account of Losh comes from Jeffrey Smith, *James Losh: His Ideas in Relation to His Circle and His Time* (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Northumbria, 1996), and Edward Hughes, “Introduction,” in *The Diaries and Correspondence of James Losh* 1, ed. Edward Hughes (Durham: Andrews & Co, 1962).

<sup>80</sup> Smith, *op.cit.*, p.36.

<sup>81</sup> Hughes, *op.cit.*, p.xii.

<sup>82</sup> “On the Importance of the Middle Ranks of Society,” in *Oeconomist* 1 (January 1798), pp.5-8.

publicising the society's commitment to poor relief: "From a statement lately presented to the Literary and Philosophical Society, in Newcastle, it appears, that the sum raised for the support of the poor of that town, from September, 1796, to September, 1797, amounts to 10,000l.<sup>83</sup>

In addition to agricultural and civic improvement, *The Oeconomist* demonstrated a concern with intellectual improvement. In November 1799, the periodical carried an article titled "On a Plan of Reading," in which the author, W.D, proposed a reading list which covered topics on "Mathematics and Geometry, Natural Philosophy, Chemistry, and Natural History, Logic and Metaphysics, Theology, Moral Philosophy, Trade, Commerce, and Economical Polity, English Government and Law, Geography, Chronology, History, and Criticism and Polite Literature."<sup>84</sup> The author argued that the suggested books would encompass a broad-ranging education which, if read, would dispense with the need for a university education altogether. It would "soon render a person, who cannot afford, or otherwise has not an opportunity of, a college education, equally well, if not better, qualified than three-fourths of men bred at an university."<sup>85</sup> The author suggested that the whole range of books could be purchased for not more than sixteen or twenty pounds which, if a large group were to club together, would allow the poor to access an education that would otherwise be unattainable: "two or three, or ten or twenty, neighbours, who are able to read and write [...] may club their mites, and by a well-chosen set of books found a college in every township, and bring home the advantages of an university education to every cottage fire-side."<sup>86</sup> Education, the author argued, was no longer the preserve of the rich, and by clubbing together to purchase books, a decent education was attainable by almost anybody:

Science is now no longer a mystery, or learning a trade monopolized by a few pedants. The art of printing has opened the book of knowledge, and the treasures of wisdom and beauties of literature are become accessible to all who have a little leisure, some common sense, and, at first setting out, a little steady, persevering application. At a future opportunity, a few hints on the

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<sup>83</sup> "Provincial Occurrences," in *Monthly Magazine* 4 (December 1797), p.487.

<sup>84</sup> "On a Plan of Reading," in *Oeconomist* 2 (November 1799), pp.328-29.

<sup>85</sup> *loc.cit.*

<sup>86</sup> *loc.cit.*

plan and conduct of a book-club may perhaps be acceptable to some readers of the *Oeconomist*.<sup>87</sup>

These plans were expanded in the following issue, published in December 1799. In "Hints of a Plan for a Book-club" the author expounded the importance of learning and improvement: "the improveability of the rational faculties of man is that which, more than anything else, distinguishes him from the brute creation [...] one generation of beasts does not improve on the experience gained by another."<sup>88</sup> As Isaac Watts had warned in *Improvement of the Mind*, man cannot learn from books alone; rather, his thoughts must be challenged by the collision of mind with mind. For the author of "Hints of a Plan," too, it is "frequent opportunities of social intercourse" which set men apart from animals. In advanced societies, indeed, even the illiterate are "beings far superior to the wild inhabitants of the waste" because of the advantages of social intercourse. The author, however, suggests a plan of temperance; if only the poor could spend their money on books, rather than on alcohol: "thirty neighbours, each debarring himself of a weekly tankard of ale [...] may, in a twelvemonth, put themselves and families in possession of an able tutor and agreeable companion in the judicious choice of a common library."<sup>89</sup> Various different models of book societies are criticised by the author:

Some book-societies annually divide their libraries; the aim in this case seems to be but to bind a certain number of individuals to allow each other the perusal of their new books. Others, whose object is recent publications, at the year's end sell the old that they may have more money to buy new: while some again retain a part and sell a part at stated periods, shewing that they deliberately choose books not worth keeping [...] These are schemes of very limited advantages indeed.<sup>90</sup>

A set of rules are proposed: that subscribers should receive one share in the library after a certain amount of time and money given, that anybody may receive any number of shares, with proportionate advantages except in voting, and that "no sex or age above [*so many years*] shall be a disqualification for a member." No member

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<sup>87</sup> *ibid.*, p.329.

<sup>88</sup> "Hints of a Plan for a Book-Club," in *Oeconomist* 3 (December 1799), p.350.

<sup>89</sup> *ibid.*, p.351.

<sup>90</sup> *ibid.*, pp.351-52.



should have more than one vote, and votes should be given by ballot. There should be an annual general meeting, at the first of which members should elect a secretary and a committee, the latter of which should meet quarterly to administrate the purchase of books.<sup>91</sup> The plan set out by the *Oeconomist* would prove, however, to be more complex in practical terms than its advice admitted. Far from being an innocuous repository of books, as its members found, the library of the Newcastle society became the site of numerous controversies which threatened to disrupt the institution.

One of the distinguishing features of the Newcastle Society was its very early interest in establishing a library. Whereas the Manchester society had been content with its room at the back of the Cross Street Chapel for several years, and unconcerned with having its own library, Newcastle stated from its inception that this was one of its goals. At a meeting on 10 December 1793 a committee was appointed to outline a plan for establishing a library.<sup>92</sup> Meetings of the committee were to be open to any ordinary member. The Committee's report reiterated the original resolution, ten months previously, that one of the main goals of the society was the establishment of a library, "for the use of its Members upon all the allowed subjects of discussion at its stated monthly Meetings." It is possible that there was no need for a public library in Manchester: Chetham's Library, for example, had been a central feature of associational life for over a hundred years. The same pressures that induced the Newcastle's society to ban discussion of politics and religion at its meetings also were also evident in the library's inclusion of books deemed controversial. In May 1796, the following was inserted in the society's book of recommendations by Robert Doubleday and William J. Rayne:

We conceive the introduction of books of religious controversy to be contrary to the spirit of that part of our institution that relates to collecting a library, and thinking, the committee have, in a few instances, deviated (unguardedly we presume) from that principle we recommend to their attention, the propriety of keeping it in future view [...] we request that such books as are of that description may be disposed of.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> *ibid.*, p.353.

<sup>92</sup> See "Proceedings Relative to the Establishment of a Library," Hedley Papers 1.

<sup>93</sup> See "Recommendation Book," Hedley Papers 1.

Doubleday and Rayne identified the offending books, following “an attentive perusal of the catalogue,” as David Hume’s *Essays*, Ralph Cudworth’s *Intellectual System* and William Paley’s *Evidences of Christianity*. The committee responded to the request by ordering:

That the librarians be empowered to lay aside books which they judge improper for further circulation, till the next meeting of the committee; or, in the case of new books, to take such measures as appear to them most proper for their preservation.<sup>94</sup>

This occurred at the height of political fervour, but the subject would come up again a little over a decade later, when Turner became concerned that controversial books were finding their way into the library. In a letter from June 1807 to the committee, he reiterated the society’s policy on books:

it has never been the practice to introduce into the Library by purchase any books on questions relating to Religion, particularly to religious Controversy, unless in a few cases where such books made but a small part of the works of eminent Authors.<sup>95</sup>

Turner informed the committee that “A Book of Controversy, written by a confessedly eminent and excellent Person, has been this week presented to the Society by a very respectable Member.”<sup>96</sup> He proposed that members had a chance to peruse two pamphlets in answer to the offending book, or if they were to be withdrawn, then so must the book. I have been unable to discover neither the identity of the book nor the respectable member to which Turner refers.

Unlike the society at Manchester, whose list of books consisted largely of scientific texts, the NLPS did not shy away from their inclusion of literary texts and periodicals.<sup>97</sup> The society was keen to include poetic works, including *Lyrical Ballads*, which was acquired soon after its initial publication. Coleridge’s *Fears in Solitude* and Southey’s *Poems* also appeared; but the society stopped short of including novels, none of which appeared in the library even as late as 1826. Its catalogue of periodicals such as the *Critical Review*, *Monthly Magazine* and *Monthly Review*

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<sup>94</sup> *loc.cit.*

<sup>95</sup> “William Turner to The Committee, June 1807,” Correspondence Book 1

<sup>96</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> See “Catalogue of the library of the Literary and Philosophical Society of Newcastle upon Tyne,” Hedley Papers 1.

indicated a desire to keep abreast of the broader literary culture. Biographies of Aikin and Enfield, and transactions of various societies such as the Royal Society and the Highland Society of Scotland, represented the Newcastle society's place within the larger network of improvement that encompassed Scotland to Warrington. Various works were held by members of societies that feature in this thesis, such as Currie's *Life of Burns*, two chemistry papers by Thomas Henry, Roscoe's *Life of Lorenzo de Medici*, and Charles White's *On the Regular Gradation of Man*.

In 1798, Turner began to follow Barnes' footsteps in establishing a series of public lectures. As reported in the society's published proceedings, Turner read a paper titled "Some Observations on the Propriety of Attempting the Introduction of Courses of Lectures on Subjects Connected with the Happiness of Mankind as Members of Society."<sup>98</sup> At the conclusion of the paper the society resolved to contact Dr. Garnett, who was professor of Natural Philosophy and Chemistry at Anderson's Institution in Glasgow. He was invited to deliver a series of Lectures the following summer. The plan, however, never reached fruition, due to the death of his wife, and it would be another four years before the New Institution was founded. In 1802, a second drive was led by Thomas Bigge, whose paper *On the Expediency of Establishing a Lectureship in Newcastle on Subjects of Natural and Experimental Philosophy*, which Turner followed with his *General Introductory Discourse on the Objects, Advantages, and Intended Plan of the New Institution for Public Lectures on Natural Philosophy*, set out a new plan, which was successful this time.<sup>99</sup> Turner was appointed President of the New Institution, and remained in the position until 1833. It was, however, a source of contention within the society. Between 1808 and 1809 a huge dispute arose which Leucha Veneer claims "threatened to tear the society apart."<sup>100</sup> In 1808, Turner received a letter, signed "Mentor," criticising the Institution as a drain on the society's resources: "The Institution is considered as a heavy burthen upon the Society, and means are now taking to prevent the funds from being diverted from the original

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<sup>98</sup> *Sixth year's report of the Literary and Philosophical Society of Newcastle upon Tyne* (Newcastle, 1799).

<sup>99</sup> See Derek Orange, "Rational dissent and Provincial Science: William Turner and the Newcastle Literary and Philosophical Society," in *Metropolis and Province: Science in British culture, 1780-1850*, ed. Ian Inkster and Jack Morrell (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1983), pp.213-14.

<sup>100</sup> Leucha Veneer, *Practical and Economic Interests in the Making of Geology in Late Georgian England* (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Leeds, 2006), p.128.

course, in the purchase of unnecessary or useless machines, expensive printing jobs, &c.”<sup>101</sup> Mentor’s letter initiated a dispute that lasted over a year, and provided a significant challenge to the society’s role as a gentlemanly space free from rancour. Since the society’s inception members had taken great care to avoid controversy in the society’s meeting rooms by banning discussion of politics or religion, and members had similarly shown apprehension over the inclusion of certain books. But the biggest threat to the society’s future came from Turner’s wish to connect the society with the New Institution. This ungentlemanly dispute was made public too; pamphlets were published and letters featured in the local press. Orange sees this dispute as a manifestation of tensions between Turner’s idea of the society as a place of literary discussion, and the development of the library, in a binary opposition: “The controversy of 1808 and 1809 must [...] be seen as setting lectureship against library, the ‘philosophical’ allegiance of the Society against the ‘literary.’”<sup>102</sup> But this is an oversimplification of the issue, which was more about the role of engaged discussion within the society than a conflict between the arts and the sciences.<sup>103</sup> The dispute was a sign of tensions about the extent to which improvement could be achieved through active participation, harking back to Watts’ concern, promoted by Percival and Turner, about the passivity of book reading and the dangers of not having one’s ideas challenged. The Institution was a far cry from the collision of mind with mind that Turner had celebrated in the vision for the society that he had set out a decade earlier, when he had argued that many discoveries would be made “which would not, probably, have occurred to their authors, in the retirements of private meditation.”

It was precisely this tussle between active participation and passivity that led, in 1813, to the formation of a smaller club within a club for the purpose of literary conversation, called the Literary Club. The society’s prioritisation of its library led to anxieties about the best way forward for the role of improvement that favoured the collision of mind with mind. Orange claims that the library was the “cuckoo which ousted the parental eggs,” and the foundation of the Literary Club within the NLPS

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<sup>101</sup> See Hedley Papers, 4. Derek Orange identifies “Mentor” as Ralph Beilby, a fellow committee member who was “by no means unfriendly to Turner.” Orange, *op.cit.*, p.216.

<sup>102</sup> Orange, *op.cit.*, p.218.

<sup>103</sup> See Mee and Wilkes, “Transpennine Enlightenment,” p.606.

would seem to suggest that the same concerns were shared by Turner and Losh.<sup>104</sup> Losh described one of their meetings as a “pleasant rational evening and such as one that promises profit and amusement hereafter.”<sup>105</sup> Paradoxically this attempt to facilitate “free and friendly conversation” was achieved only by creating a smaller, more private and exclusive group. There are echoes, here, of Liverpool’s Literary Society, which could be more accurately described as a private coterie of friends than a public, formal institution. In Manchester, too, Owen described the committee of the MLPS as a sort of club within a club, different from the formal monthly meeting that sometimes struggled with active participation. Turner and Losh’s retreat into a more private, exclusive group highlights the problems inherent in the model of association that Percival had struggled with in Manchester: the trade-off between politeness and the spark of conversation. In Newcastle, it was an issue that was never fully resolved. Many years later, in 1844, R.M. Glover regretted that “our Society has now become little more than a large reading club.”<sup>106</sup>

The Newcastle Literary and Philosophical Society was distinct from the Manchester society, and adapted to local conditions. At the heart of the project, however, was the same drive to improvement through the exchange of ideas within polite boundaries. Controversies such as the pushback against the New Institution and the setting up of the Literary Club reveal the cracks in this model, on which the political atmosphere of the 1790s put increasing pressure. Ultimately the fact that the society survived, and still exists today, shows that these tensions did not collapse the model. Turner, as with Percival, managed to successfully navigate the society through the stormy waters of the 1790s, but not without making compromises. Nor, indeed, did the difficulties end post-1800.

The library of the NLPS was the site of enormous controversy following the publication of Byron’s *Don Juan* in 1819.<sup>107</sup> The text was ordered by a majority decision of the committee, but then an outcry led to a second vote which went against

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<sup>104</sup> Orange *op.cit.*, p.214.

<sup>105</sup> James Losh, *Diaries*, p.34.

<sup>106</sup> R.M. Glover, *Remarks on the History of the Literary & Philosophical Society of Newcastle upon Tyne* (Newcastle, 1844), p.9.

<sup>107</sup> For a full account of the incident, see David Stewart, “The End of Conversation: Byron’s *Don Juan* at the Newcastle Lit & Phil,” in *The Review of English Studies*, New Series, 66.274 (2015), pp.322-41.

the decision. The vote then turned to the entire membership, who overwhelmingly rejected the book. Stewart describes the society's reaction, which spilled out into the press, as "oddly perplexed outrage": a "remarkable series of public meetings, furtive private meetings, articles in newspapers, poems, broadsides and two votes, one of which ended with loud 'huzzas'" culminated in the ban, and two members "came close to duelling."<sup>108</sup> This remarkably ungentlemanly dispute was a far cry from the polite conversation first envisioned by Turner in 1793. Stewart suggests that the dispute highlights a split between the possible direction of cultural conversation in the period: between those who represented Enlightenment ideals of free and open conversation, and those who represented the defence of religious morality. *Don Juan* was controversial, he argues, because the poem "evaded both the defenders of intellectual liberty and the condemners of immorality," and this in turn reflected the changing cultural attitude to literary conversation.<sup>109</sup> Morality, by this time, had begun to overtake the Enlightenment drive for improvement. What the *Don Juan* controversy shows is that, despite cracks in the model of associational culture through the polite exchange of ideas, the model continued post-1800. Conversational culture was not always an easy thing to negotiate, but for Turner, Percival and Roscoe, the drive to improvement was worth fighting for, even if it came at the cost of a certain amount of compromise.

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<sup>108</sup> *ibid.*, p.321.

<sup>109</sup> *ibid.*, p.341.

## Conclusion

Towards the end of writing this thesis I visited Chetham's Library in Manchester for a final look at the Cambrics Scrapbook, a wonderfully rich collection of handbills and broadsides collected from the area in the eighteenth century, many from around the period of the French Revolution. Nestled amongst the various ballads and squibs was a satire against the resolutions of the Manchester Constitutional Society, "Manchester Reformation Society, Instituted April 1791."<sup>1</sup> The goal of the society, it argues, is to destroy the Establishment and allow anarchy to reign: "the People in every Market Town have the right of devoting at their pleasure, the Necks of our Monarchs to the Block." The broadside specifically targets Thomas Cooper's *Tracts Ethical, Theological and Political*, which had been published in the same year: "this Society refers to two Essays on Moral Obligation, and on Materialism, not long since published, with some other tracts."<sup>2</sup> The author attacks Cooper's text for various arguments he made, concluding with: "That what is called the Soul is a quality of the Brain, exists and is destroyed with it." These papers, as Cooper noted in his book, had first been given at the Literary and Philosophical Society.<sup>3</sup> The explicit conflation of Cooper's philosophical and scientific views on materialism with his political radicalism was likely to have caused great discomfort for members of the MLPS during a period of increasing political polarisation. It was a stark warning that the society was being watched. By July 1791, just three months later, the loyalist backlash would reach its peak in the destruction of Joseph Priestley's laboratory, and the reverberations would be felt throughout the country. For the MLPS, this would mark the end of Cooper's influence; the radical fringe was pushed out in the name of moderation.

Thomas Percival's project had always been to encourage the collision of mind with mind in the name of improvement. "Physics and the belles lettres" were, to the society's founders, both jointly involved in this process. But Percival had always been ambivalent about the relationship between the free exchange of ideas and the boundaries of politeness. Men like Cooper and John Ferriar tested those boundaries, and found themselves chafing against the rule prohibiting politics and religion. They

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<sup>1</sup> Manchester, Chetham's Library, Cambrics MS, 109, 2

<sup>2</sup> *loc.cit.*; Thomas Cooper, *Tracts Ethical, Theological and Political* 1 (Warrington, 1789).

<sup>3</sup> Cooper, *ibid.*, pp.vii-viii.

seem to have been more concerned perhaps than Percival with the sort of exchange that valued freedom of speech over politeness. The pressures put on the society's associational structure by the French Revolution and the reaction against Joseph Priestley's influential model of improvement via voluntary association and unlimited discussion, ultimately led to the demise of Cooper's influence and the end of the reformist wave that crystallised in volume 3 of *Memoirs*.

In Liverpool, James Currie found that the ideal model of improvement was in a small, private group of friends, more in common with Priestley's Lunar Society than the public institution of the MLPS. Currie valued the sort of interaction that led him to describe his friends as "our fierce and unruly crew," something far easier to stage among a group of friends than Percival's project, in which reformers would always have found themselves watching their step in the presence of Tory-Anglican members like Charles White or Alexander Eason. Ultimately, however, Currie's model could not prevent itself being the object of political suspicion. Instituted only weeks after the execution of Louis XVI, in Newcastle, William Turner was acutely aware of the problems with the MLPS. He faced another concern that bedeviled all the larger societies, that is, the difficulty of maintaining genuine interaction between members. One solution, perhaps also a form of insulation from external threats, was to retreat into a club within a club. Robert Owen gives a glimpse of the Manchester committee acting in this way in 1793. In Newcastle, Turner and James Losh found that literary conversation was far easier to stage in a smaller group via the literary club they set up in 1813. Despite all these struggles, however, Percival's model was a success at least in the sense that it survived the tumultuous period of the 1790s, produced many imitators in the region, and eventually gave rise to literary and philosophical societies throughout the country. But, as the Newcastle controversy over *Don Juan* illustrates, even after 1815 improvement through voluntary association and free discussion continued to be contested.



## Abbreviations

LCS – London Corresponding Society

LPLS – Philosophical and Literary Society of Liverpool

MCS – Manchester Corresponding Society

MRS – Manchester Reading Society

MLPS – Literary and Philosophical Society of Manchester

NLPS - Literary and Philosophical Society of Newcastle

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Manchester, Chetham's Library, Cambrics Scrapbook.

Manchester, Chetham's Library, Crossley Collection.

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