

The Borrowers of the Leighton Library, by Jacqueline Kennard

Amongst the Leighton Library's manuscript archives are borrowing records for much of the eighteenth century and the early nineteenth century which detail who borrowed which books from the Leighton Library, and when. The earliest of these (1699-1745) are recorded in the Dunblane Kirk Session Minutes. Separate borrowing registers document borrowings for the years 1725-43, 1780-1840 and 1815-33, with borrowings from 1828-42 recorded in the library's Matriculation Book. Borrowers sometimes recorded biographical information alongside their name, noting, for example, their occupations and hometowns. Such information provides a fascinating insight into the borrowing demographic of the Leighton Library.



1: Borrowing page of Mr John Stirling, preacher in Dunblane, the Leighton's main borrowing register. University of Stirling Archives, Leighton MS 27, Register of borrowings from the Leighton Library, May 1780-1833 and 1840, p.133.

The Leighton Library was built on Robert Leighton's bequest that his books be made available "for the use of the clergie." Although intended only for Dunblane's ministers, the earliest borrowing register suggests that non-ministers were borrowing from the library at least as early as 1702, when William Ross, "governour to the Laird of Gardens children," borrowed from the Leighton Library on 13th January of that year. Indeed, these earliest borrowing records show that the library was used by church ministers but also a merchant, lawyer, schoolteacher, vintner, bolt maker, army officer, farmers and landowners. The first female borrower from the library seems to be Margaret Douglas in 1709, possibly a relative of Robert Douglas (d. 1746), the librarian at the time. In 1734, library regulations and record-keeping practices were tightened. It was thence formalised that anyone could borrow from the library but for a subscription fee of at least half a crown each (two shillings and

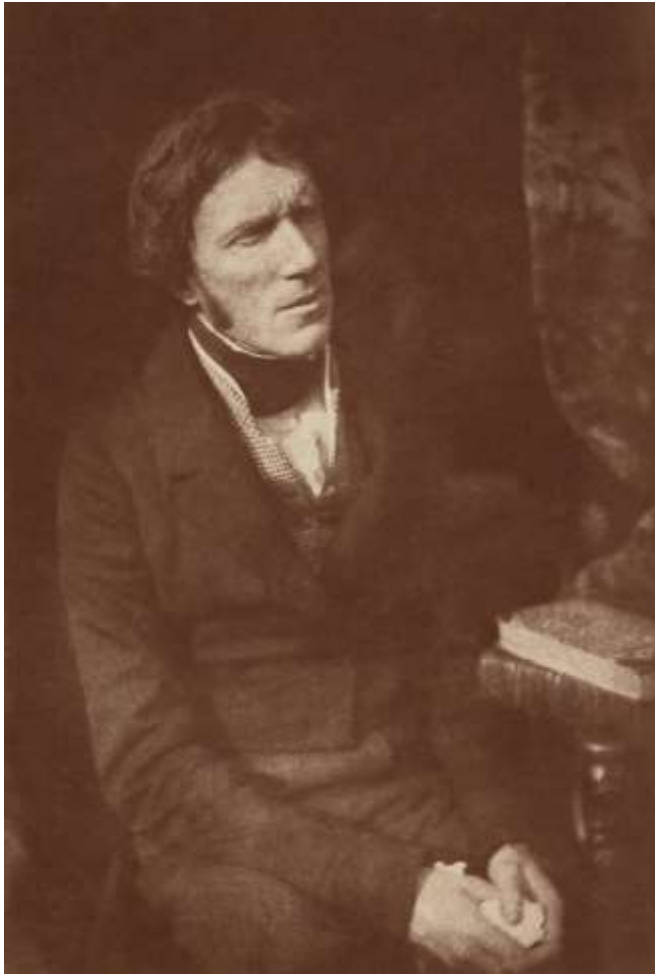
sixpence).¹ The first to matriculate was Sir James Campbell of Aberuchill (1723-1812), who paid £3 on 31 October 1734.



2: James Tannock, 'Anne MacVicar, Mrs James Grant of Laggan, 1755-1838.', painting, c. 1815, © National Galleries Scotland.

Most of the Leighton's recorded borrowings cover the period 1780 to 1840, where 306 borrowers are recorded as making over 6,700 borrowings from the library, with History, Travel and Theology the three most popularly borrowed genres. Church ministers were amongst the most regular users of the library, and account for seven of the top ten most active borrowers. Of these, the most prolific borrower was the Rev. Robert Stirling (1765-1817), minister of Dunblane between 1795 and 1817, who made 423 borrowings between 1792 and 1810. The most prolific female borrower was Lady Isabella Sinclair (d. 1829) from Newton, Dunblane, who made a staggering 55 borrowings within two years, between 1809 and 1811. Other borrowers of note include the 10th Earl of Moray (1771-1848), the author and poetess Anne Grant (1755-1838), the industrialist James Smith of Deanston (1789-1850), the famed African explorer James Bruce of Kinnaird (1730-94), the botanist and surveyor of India Dr Francis Buchanan-Hamilton (1762-1829), the lawyer and later MP for Stirlingshire Henry Home Drummond (1783-1867) and the correspondent and writer John Ramsay of Ochertyre (1736-1814).

¹ This was later raised to half a guinea (ten shillings and sixpence) in 1757 and lowered to five shillings in 1789.



3: David Octavius Hill & Robert Adamson, 'Henry Home Drummond, 1783-1867.', photograph, c. 1843, © National Galleries of Scotland.

From 1815, the Leighton Library offered a temporary subscription of two shillings and sixpence per fortnight to visitors to Dunblane who travelled to drink from mineral waters discovered at Cromlix, a couple of miles north of the town (incidentally discovered by librarian William Coldstream's son, Alexander Coldstream). It is likely that these so-called 'Water Drinkers' frequented the Leighton Library upon return from their morning walk to the springs. Their borrowings are recorded in the Leighton Library's Water Drinkers Register, an invaluable resource for uncovering rich details about the tourists to Dunblane's spa town, including where they were from, where they lodged in Dunblane, their occupations, the length of their visit, return visits, families, and their reading tastes.

Many Water Drinkers travelled from Edinburgh or Glasgow, but some came from as far as Aberdeenshire, Belfast, and London. These visitors represent a professional class of borrower, who had the luxury of time and money for travelling. Borrower occupations include members of the gentry, military, ministers, professors, a teacher, a provost, and a writer to the signet (i.e. a lawyer). Almost half of the Water Drinkers were women, a particularly high proportion compared to other libraries of the period.

Notable Water Drinkers include John Alston (1780-1857), Provost of Glasgow between 1820 and 1821, William Patrick (d. 1861), Writer to the Signet and landowner of Roughwood near Beith, and William Cairns (d. 1848), Professor of Logic, Belles-Lettres and Rhetoric at the Belfast Institution, whose *Treatise on Moral Freedom* was published in 1844. One borrower, Dr John Murray (1778-1820), Professor of Chemistry from Edinburgh, analysed the mineral springs when they were

first discovered. He borrowed from the library in 1814, donating “two Vols Chemistry” to the library instead of paying a subscription fee. His *Analysis of the Mineral Waters of Dunblane and Pitcaithly* (1814) is recognised as the source of the spring’s widespread fame. He visited the Leighton Library two more times, in 1815 and 1817.



4: John Graham-Gilbert, 'John T. Alston (1780-1857)', oil on canvas, 1832, © Glasgow Museums Resource Centre.

At the time when the Water Drinkers were using the library, however, local interest in the Leighton Library was dwindling, likely due to the poor condition of the building itself as well as a lack of novelty in the library collection. From the mid-1820s, only a few Water Drinkers were still borrowing from the library, and library use in general steadily dropped until 1842, when the last borrowing recorded was by Mr Reid from Kippenrair on 19 January of that year.