**‘This Revolution in the Town’: Richard Champion and the early years of the Bristol Library Society[[1]](#endnote-1)**

**Abstract:**

This article explores the motivation of the founders of subscription libraries in the second half of the eighteenth century through the case study of Richard Champion – a Dissenter from a commercial background who was deeply immersed in the political and associational life of Bristol. Having been denied the opportunity to study at university, in setting up the Bristol Library Society in 1772, Champion was driven by a desire to acquire educational opportunities through association, as well as an ambition to improve Bristol’s reputation in the areas of arts and sciences. The library provided him with the political reading he needed to form close relationships with some of the leading politicians of the age, including Edmund Burke and the leaders of Burke’s parliamentary party: the Marquess of Rockingham and the Duke of Portland. The case of Champion illustrates the various purposes of subscription libraries as well as their promise and potential in transforming the lives of the middling sort in Georgian Britain.

**Key words:** Bristol; Richard Champion; Edmund Burke; subscription libraries; Whigs; Dissenters.

**Introduction**

Richard Champion (1743-91) is one of the better-known founders of the Bristol Library Society, but he has mainly been studied in relation to his position as Edmund Burke’s closest supporter in Bristol, or alternatively as a pioneering porcelain manufacturer.[[2]](#endnote-2) Evidence presented here indicates that Champion was one of the most important driving forces behind the library in its early years, despite not holding any office more specific than committee member. The case study of Champion illustrates what sort of people established subscription libraries, what their intentions were, and how transformative it could be for them. Champion was a Quaker from a commercial rather than an educated background, but with a strong personal interest in literature and learning.[[3]](#endnote-3) He was also politically active and heavily involved in urban associational life. As will become clear, he was motivated by local patriotism and a vision of civic improvement as well as his own intellectual interests. Through this case study, we see that subscription libraries could serve as a way of providing self-education and self-improvement for up-and-coming city merchants who had been denied the opportunity to study at university. It will be argued that the library gave Champion the political education and confidence needed to form close relationships with some of the leading politicians on the national stage at the time, which eventually helped him attain political office.

[Figure 1 near here]

**Richard Champion and the founding of the Bristol Library Society**

The Bristol Library Society, conceived at the end of 1772 and commencing its lending in the following year, was one of the most notable subscription libraries of the eighteenth century thanks to its large collection of surviving borrowing records.[[4]](#endnote-4) Though far from being the first subscription library in Britain – it was explicitly modelled on its predecessor in Manchester – it rapidly became an impressive one.[[5]](#endnote-5) It took over the premises of the old City Library in Bristol – originally established by Robert Redwood in 1613 – and was to last until 1871.[[6]](#endnote-6) The library’s institutional history has been studied along with the borrowing records of Samuel Coleridge and Robert Southey, who became members in the 1790s.[[7]](#endnote-7) Kathleen Hapgood has written about the strong links between the library’s leading members and local politics in Bristol.[[8]](#endnote-8) Members of the city’s Corporation showed up to the first public meeting of the library on 15 December 1772, including George Daubeny and John Merlott, who became committee members.[[9]](#endnote-9) Moreover, some of the library’s original associates eventually became members themselves of the Corporation, including Joseph Harford.

In addition to the Bristol Library Society’s committee minutes, borrowing records and catalogues, the article draws on Champion’s private correspondence and circumstantial evidence. The library features in two main instances among Champion’s surviving letters.[[10]](#endnote-10) After the first committee meeting, he wrote enthusiastically to a friend about the new project and its plans to ‘petition the Corporation for the Library house and the City Books’.[[11]](#endnote-11) The petition was successful. The preface to the 1774 library catalogue highlights that the Corporation had not only given the society access to the library room in King Street, but also ‘at a considerable expence have rendered it convenient for that purpose’.[[12]](#endnote-12) It also specifies that ‘Besides the Books contain’d in the following Catalogue there is in the same room a Collection of about 2000 Volumes belonging to the City.’[[13]](#endnote-13) The library’s own collection quickly became one of the most impressive of its kind and is believed to have consisted of 8,000 volumes by the 1820s.[[14]](#endnote-14) The membership grew from thirty members attending the first public meeting on 15 December 1772, to 161 members by 1785 and 296 members by 1823.[[15]](#endnote-15)

A letter from Champion to an unnamed correspondent in February 1774 gives the clearest indication of Champion’s deep involvement with the library and his high status among its founders and early members (see appendix one). From this letter, it emerges that Champion received more votes than anyone else at the election of the library’s committee with twenty-eight. Three other members received twenty-seven votes – all of them political friends of Champion. The result revealed a significant spread with seventeen votes as the lowest score for someone elected to the committee. These details are absent from the often rather cursory official minutes of the annual general meetings and the committee meetings. Moreover, in the same letter, Champion identified himself as one of six people who ‘caused…This Revolution in the Town’. The listed original members who met on 2 December 1772 were actually ten, but Champion may have had a smaller unrecorded meeting in mind.[[16]](#endnote-16)

Bristol prided itself as the second city in the empire at this time, although it was overtaken by Liverpool in size in the last decades of the eighteenth century. Bristol was primarily known for commerce – notoriously, the slave trade – rather than culture and literature. Daniel Defoe, for instance, in his *Tour thro’ the whole island of Great Britain* (1724-7), described Bristol as ‘the greatest, the richest, and the best Port of Trade in Great Britain, London only excepted’.[[17]](#endnote-17) This reputation persisted, but Champion went on to say that he hoped that the library revolution would make the city ‘as famous for a liberal cultivation of the Sciences as it is for the cultivation of Trade and Manufacture’ (see appendix one). Financial capital was clearly not sufficient for Champion and his co-founders, who sought to increase Bristol’s reputation in cultural capital.

Champion was a man of trade and manufacturing, but he also had political and intellectual ambitions, and was deeply involved in the associational life of the city, being the treasurer of the Bristol Royal Infirmary, a position which had been in his family from its founding in 1735.[[18]](#endnote-18) He was a merchant with close links to America, dealing in tobacco and sugar, a pioneering porcelain manufacturer, a Quaker and a political Whig.[[19]](#endnote-19) Bristol was a city in which Dissenters tended to be economically prosperous and politically influential. For instance, the Lewin’s Mead Unitarian Chapel alone boasted eleven mayors between 1754 and 1784, representing more than a third of the period.[[20]](#endnote-20) Several of the original members of the library were Dissenters, including Champion’s fellow Quakers Joseph and Mark Harford, along with Samuel Farr, John Prior Estlin, and Joseph Smith, and possibly others as well.

Like several of the other founding members of the library, Champion was a member of Bristol’s Whig Union Club and a close supporter and political ally of Burke, member of parliament for Bristol between 1774 and 1780. Besides Champion, Burke’s closest allies in Bristol comprised two other founding members, Joseph Harford and Joseph Smith, along with Paul Farr, brother of founding member Samuel Farr.[[21]](#endnote-21) Among his local supporters mentioned in a 1780 pamphlet were several other committee and library members, including Levy Ames, Richard Bright, John Fisher Weare, Benjamin Loscombe, John Merlott, Samuel Munckley, John Noble, Philip Protheroe and Samuel Span.[[22]](#endnote-22) Although most of the ten founding members were part of the same Whig tribe as Champion, the library quickly became a broad-church institution as notable Tories also showed up to the first public meeting of the library society on 15 December 1772 held at the Bush Tavern, where Whigs usually met. The early Tory members included the aforementioned Daubeny, who would later represent the city in parliament; Thomas Eagles, a prominent member of the local Tory club (the Steadfast Society); and William Barrett, author of *History and Antiquities of Bristol* (1789)*.*[[23]](#endnote-23)Despite the Dissenting orientation of the founding members, the library society built strong ties with the established clergy in the city, who were decisively Tory.[[24]](#endnote-24) Indeed, it invited the Bishop of Bristol to fill the symbolic role of President of the society, whilst the posts of Vice President and librarian were also held by Anglican clergymen. Even though Dissenters and clergymen clashed at many subscription libraries, and the Dissenters were sometimes pushed out, as at Birmingham and Leeds,[[25]](#endnote-25) the Bristol Library Society, at least in its early history, appears to exemplify the eighteenth-century ideology of politeness, as a space where political combatants could associate in relative harmony.[[26]](#endnote-26) As an illustration, the committee decided to order the sermons of the High-Church Anglican George Horne and the moderate Presbyterian and Scottish Enlightener Hugh Blair at the same meeting in 1780.[[27]](#endnote-27)

As we shall see below, Champion admired Burke as much as a man of letters as a politician. Champion was not himself without literary aspirations. In the 1774 election campaign, he wrote anonymously for Burke in the local press.[[28]](#endnote-28) Habitually despatching much of what he wrote to the fireplace, in the 1780s Champion finally published two political works in his own name, one of which was translated into French.[[29]](#endnote-29) His *Considerations on the Present Situation of Great Britain and the United States of America, with a View to Their Future Commercial Connections* (1784) was written against John Baker Holroyd, 1st Earl of Sheffield’s *Observations on the Commerce of the American States* (Dublin, 1783). Champion’s *Considerations* was first published anonymously, but his name appeared on the second, extended edition of this work. It was a forceful defence of free trade in a Burkean sense, as it implored Britain not to impede the economic development of America and instead seek to expand the commercial interactions between the two countries. Onboard the ship to America later in 1784 he began drafting his *Comparative Reflections on the Past and Present Political, Commercial, and Civil State of Great Britain,* which was eventually published in 1787. Much of the pamphlet was an exposition of the political creed of the Rockingham Whigs; in other words, a celebration of the aristocratic Whig system of politics under George I and George II and a denunciation of the so-called Court system of George III after his accession in 1760. It was highly indebted to Burke’s *Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents* (1770), but it also reflected his wider reading, with long citations from Burke’s nemesis Bolingbroke.[[30]](#endnote-30)

Champion had in fact pursued self-education throughout his life. As a Dissenter, he was formally excluded from the English universities in Oxford and Cambridge, and since he had to attend to his family’s merchant business, he was not sent to the Scottish or Dutch universities either, as was common among learned Dissenters. He therefore lacked the formal education of some of his fellow founding committee members, such as the Presbyterian Samuel Farr, who was educated at both Edinburgh and Leiden, and was elected as a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1779. Champion, by contrast, was sent to London at a young age to work as a merchant with his father – an emotionally difficult event for his sister Sarah Champion (later Fox), whose diary is a useful source for eighteenth-century Bristol.[[31]](#endnote-31)

Champion’s half-brother Joseph Champion was in fact been educated at Trinity Hall, Cambridge, where Dissenters could attend but could not receive degrees. (At Oxford, by contrast, Dissenters were completely excluded.) Even if Champion was enthusiastic about Joseph’s education, a degree of jealousy can be detected in his letters to his half-brother. As he wrote to Joseph in December 1769: ‘The situation in which you are placed, with the future plan of Life that is chosen for you, is a very judicious one. It is that which I was often promised, and so often disappointed. Be it your care to improve by it.’[[32]](#endnote-32) In the same letter we learn about Champion’s early and strong passion for literature and his studious habits:

There was no young person who ever had a stronger relish for literature than myself, and even at the age of *seven years* I had made a tolerable proficiency in Latin, in general *far beyond* my age, but when I was removed to London, a thousand things occurred to obstruct my progress. I have since had but few opportunities, many offices both in public & private Business, now falling off my tune. Yet I make use of what is in my power, and generally take an hour or two from the morning rising for the most part both summer and winter at six o Clock. This is of some use to me. But I propose to myself great advantages from your Studies. Write to me often and answer my Expectations.[[33]](#endnote-33)

Champion entertained views about how modern university education could be improved by paying more attention to the importance of eloquence – an opinion which may betray the influence of the pedagogical *Ancient History* and *Roman History* by the Jansenist Charles Rollin (1661-1741), which were popular in translations in eighteenth-century England.[[34]](#endnote-34) He wrote to his half-brother in 1770 suggesting that eloquence required liberty and had thus been extinguished in Rome after the fall of the Republic. In modern Europe, he believed that it had survived only in Britain, thanks to the liberty guaranteed by the mixed constitution. However, since British liberty was not ‘wholly unconfined, and very essentially differs from a democratical State, where Eloquence has always flourished in the highest perfection…We do not seem so fully acquainted with the sublimity of Expression, the impetuosity of argument [as Greece and Rome]’. He concluded: ‘We have the best Masters to follow [in the Roman Republic], and you are now in Situation, where by Industry and application, you may attain the highest proficiency.’[[35]](#endnote-35) Joseph later became Paymaster of the Forces in India, and published poems and essays, some inspired by Persian poetry with ‘Orientalist’ ambitions.[[36]](#endnote-36)

In 1771, Champion wrote to his correspondent Alice (Alicia) Witt: ‘Though I am Enough a Man of Business not to make it a Burthen yet I highly reject the want of opportunities to enjoy the superiour Employments of our rational faculties. I am much attached to Study, yet have never had the happiness to attend much to it’.[[37]](#endnote-37) Six months later in another letter to Witt, he expanded on the points he had previously made to Joseph:

I had from my Infancy the most eager bent to study, which to shew how subject every disposition of the human mind is to disappointment, was damped by a variety of unexpected circumstances & an introduction to the Busy Scenes of the World when the puerile had just succeeded the enfant age at once debarred from the juncture of the sciences. Thus has fortune deprived me of many intellectual Enjoyments… Yet I still Relish in the few hours I can devote to literary amusements[.][[38]](#endnote-38)

Learning was evidently a significant part of Champion’s life. As he put it in correspondence from the same year as the library was founded: ‘it must remain an incontestable fact that the more our knowledge is increas’d, the more our minds are expanded, and the more they are filld to receive the most noble Impressions.’[[39]](#endnote-39) In other words, it is clear that when Champion became involved in the founding of the Bristol Library Society later in 1772, he was not only interested in transforming and improving the intellectual outlook of his city, but also that of himself. The next section will analyse Champion’s borrowing habits after the library had begun its book-lending to show how he used the library’s catalogue to pursue self-education by way of reading political and historical works as well as the classics.

**Champion’s usage of the library**

The borrowing registers from Bristol Library Society begin on 23 August 1773.[[40]](#endnote-40) Champion made his first recorded borrowing on 30 August, and within one month he had checked out no fewer than ten books (see appendix two, which lists all of Champion’s borrowings). In total, he was to use the library fifty-seven times between 1773 and 1781. This did not amount to fifty-seven standalone books, since he often borrowed various instalments of multi-volume works, as well as the same volume more than once. The great majority of his loans occurred in the first five years of this period, with only one in 1778, none in 1779 and 1780, and one in 1781. There was also a long hiatus between September 1774, just before Champion became involved with Burke’s election campaign during which he did not even have time to correspond with his business associates, and April 1775.[[41]](#endnote-41) Fittingly, the second loan once he started using the library regularly again was Burke’s *Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents* (1770), which summarised the creed of the Rockingham Whigs.[[42]](#endnote-42) As already indicated, the key arguments of the *Present Discontents,* especially the importance of aristocratic Whiggism, andthe development of the ‘court system’ and the ‘double cabinet’ under George III, were crucial for Champion’s interpretation of politics and recent British history, which he wrote about in his *Comparative Reflections* (1787).[[43]](#endnote-43)

Champion’s book choices are intriguing, ranging from Thucydides to Raynal, though they were not all overly unusual in a comparative perspective.[[44]](#endnote-44) His favourite genre was history, which made up more than half of his total borrowings. Sixteen of his fifty-seven borrowings were histories of Britain.[[45]](#endnote-45) A further fifteen were other histories, starting with Alexander Dow’s *History of Hindostan* (1768)and finishing with the first volume of Edward Gibbon’s *Decline and Fall* (1776). Somewhat surprisingly, Champion did not borrow either David Hume’s *History of England* (6 vols., 1754-61) or William Robertson’s *History of the Reign of the Emperor* Charles V (4 vols., 1769), both of which were among the ten most borrowed books at the library between 1773 and 1784, with 180 and 131 loans, respectively.[[46]](#endnote-46) The most likely explanation is that he had read them prior to the opening of the library, and he may even have owned his own copies. He did, however, borrow George Lyttelton’s *History of the Life of Henry II* (1768)*,* which was also one of the most popular books at the library in the same period with 121 loans.[[47]](#endnote-47) Moreover, he checked out James Granger’s *Biographical History of Great Britain* (2 vols., 1769), which was borrowed forty-three times, as well Sir John Dalrymple’s *Memoirs of Great Britain* (2 vols., 1771-73)– the first volume three times and the second volume twice – which was very popular in the early part of the library’s history, with 30 borrowings between 1773 and 1775 and 39 in total up to 1784.[[48]](#endnote-48) Finally, he borrowed the first volume of Robert Henry’s *History of Great Britain* (6 vols., 1771-93) twice, in 1774 and in 1777. It was checked out 35 times in the same period.[[49]](#endnote-49) The fact that Champion borrowed the same history books several times could mean that he was sometimes too busy to finish them, but it might also mean that he re-read them as part of an intensive programme of self-study.

It is difficult to detect an ideological slant in Champion’s borrowings, at least in party-political terms. Granger was reputed to be a Whig, but James Boswell wrote to his fellow Tory Samuel Johnson:

I have, since I saw you, read every word of ‘Granger’s Biographical History.’ It has entertained me exceedingly, and I do not think him the *Whig* that you supposed. Horace Walpole’s being his patron is, indeed, not a good sign of his political principles. But he denied to Lord Mountstuart that he was a Whig, and said he had been accused by both parties of partiality.[[50]](#endnote-50)

From an English Whig perspective, Dalrymple and Lyttelton represented the full ideological spectrum in the genre of history. According to Colin Kidd, the Scot Dalrymple, without being Tory, maintained a critical distance from English Whiggism, in a similar vein to his countryman Hume.[[51]](#endnote-51) By contrast, the religious and political sceptic Hume wrote ironically to his friend Adam Smith about the Whig MP Lyttelton’s *History of Henry II*: ‘Have you read Lord Lyttelton? Do you not admire his Whiggery and his Piety? Qualities as useful for this World & the next?’[[52]](#endnote-52) Dalrymple’s *Memoirs of Great Britain* was controversial for the revelation of correspondence between Louis XIV and the Whig leaders Algernon Sidney and Lord Russell in 1678. These letters, from the French state archives, were printed in the second volume of the *Memoirs,* borrowed twice by Champion. They hadscandalised English Whigs, especially those on the reformist end of the spectrum.[[53]](#endnote-53) Champion – who had only very briefly associated with Wilkesite ‘radical’ Whiggism of the kind that found Dalrymple’s *Memoirs* offensive – is likely to have been intrigued rather than appalled. In short, Champion does not appear to have been party political in his choice of historians but was rather eager to read the most recently published histories in the 1770s.

Another important genre for Champion was travel literature and what we may call Enlightenment world history. It is noteworthy that he borrowed volume one of Raynal’s *History of the Settlements and Trade of the Europeans in the East and West Indies* in August 1777, having already borrowed and presumably perused the first two volumes of the library’s translated edition of the work during a busy week four years earlier. The reason for borrowing it again is likely to have been that Raynal had passed through Bristol that summer. Burke, who was well-connected with men of letters, put Raynal into contact with Champion, since the former was interested in visiting Britain’s commercial cities. Burke wrote to Champion on 18 June 1777:

The person who will deliver this [letter of recommendation] is one of the most curious men and the best authors of this Age. It is the Abbe Raynal, who has written the celebrated Histoire philosophique et politique des etablissemens Europeens aux Indes. Pray shew him, whilst he stays at Bristol, that attention, that his merit deserves, and that you are so well disposed to pay to merit wherever you meet it.[[54]](#endnote-54)

Burke returned to the subject three weeks later:

Abbe Raynal has been here; he will probably take Bristol in his way from the North to Portsmouth, for such is his Route. I have wrote by him to you, and to some others of our friends. Of course you will take care that he sees whatever is to be seen with you to advantage.[[55]](#endnote-55)

Since Champion’s letter books do not extend beyond 1775, and there are no letters from Champion to Burke in the Sheffield City Archives from this period, it has not been possible to verify whether Champion ever met Raynal, or whether Raynal met any of the other library members (note that Burke also wrote to ‘our friends’, which is likely to refer to Burke’s key political allies, including library members Joseph Harford, Paul Farr, and Joseph Smith). The fact that Champion borrowed Raynal’s famous book again just after the visit is supposed to have taken place suggests that they did meet, however.

As we learn from Champion’s letters to his brother cited above, as well as from several epigraphs in his *Comparative Reflections* (1787), Champion was a proficient Latinist with a keen interest in the classics. Whilst there are no Latin works among his borrowings, there are three Greek authors in translation: Thucydides, Xenophon, and Longinus, all translated by William Smith, Dean of Chester Cathedral. Champion was present at the committee meeting which ordered all three books in March 1774.[[56]](#endnote-56) Thucydides and Xenophon were borrowed thirteen and twelve times overall, respectively. By contrast, Longinus – whose *On the Sublime* (*Peri Hupsous*) was a precursor to Burke’s *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757) – was only borrowed six times between 1773 and 1784, with Champion’s three borrowings representing half of the total volume.[[57]](#endnote-57) In this respect, some of Champion’s borrowings were rather unusual, and shows that he may have used the library to pursue a curriculum like one from the universities that he had not been given the chance to attend.[[58]](#endnote-58) It also suggests that Champion proposed many of the books he himself wanted to read. He was also present at the two committee meetings in July 1774 which sent for Helvetius’s philosophical novel *The Child of Nature Improved by Chance* (1774) and Sully’s *Memoirs*, translated by Charlotte Lennox, both of which he borrowed.[[59]](#endnote-59) This hypothesis is strengthened by the fact that Champion did not attend all committee meetings, as will be discussed in the following section.

Although Champion’s borrowings are eclectic and reflect his broad interest in learning and Enlightenment literature, his interest in politics, which increasingly occupied him after the beginning of his connection with Burke, is conspicuous. His political role as an agent for Burke’s party connection, the Rockingham Whigs, presumably motivated him to read several interpretations of British history, which was arguably the most important genre of political writing at the time.[[60]](#endnote-60) It is also likely to have stimulated his interest in ancient Greeks such as Thucydides, who wrote about the history of the Peloponnesian war, and Xenophon, whose work treated ancient Greek institutions. Both were staple references in the eighteenth century and frequently cited in political works.[[61]](#endnote-61) Even more notably, Champion read the memoirs of two seventeenth-century giants of French politics, the Duke of Sully, who had been chief minister under Henry IV and Louis XIII, and Guy Joli*,* private secretary to Cardinal de Retz. Burke cited Sully’s memoirs in French in the *Present Discontents* to illustrate the ‘dreadful consequences’ of the ‘*system of* [royal] *Favouritism*’.[[62]](#endnote-62)Champion’s intimate knowledge of Burke’s text may indeed have stimulated his interest in Sully’s memoirs.

This politico-historical literature bolstered Champion’s political knowledge and acumen, which in turn gave him the required confidence to associate with the political and intellectual virtuoso Burke, as well as the aristocratic leaders of the Rockingham party. In the 1770s, Champion began a longstanding correspondence with the nominal leader of Burke’s party connection, Charles Watson-Wentworth, 2nd Marquess of Rockingham, as well as the party bigwig William Cavendish-Bentinck, 3rd Duke of Portland, who succeeded Rockingham as party leader after his sudden death in 1782. The formal and informal political education of all these men far surpassed Champion’s. Within a short space of time, however, Champion became confident in formulating his political opinions and analysis in lengthy letters to Rockingham and Portland, at the time of the American war and political crisis in Bristol and the British Empire.[[63]](#endnote-63) His political reading, reinforced by the library’s collection he helped set up, undoubtedly supported his endeavour to win the confidence of these Whig grandees. His relationship with Portland was so close that the Duke took responsibility for the education of Champion’s second son, Richard Lloyd, and brought the then eleven-year-old boy with him to Ireland when he was appointed as Lord Lieutenant in 1782.[[64]](#endnote-64)

The fact that there were no Latin works among Champion’s borrowings shows that they cannot be taken as the totality of his reading, and it is clear that he owned his own books as well. Indeed, he donated some of them to the Charleston Library Society after emigrating to South Carolina in 1784.[[65]](#endnote-65) Moreover, as the committee minutes indicate, the library room in Bristol was open for the perusal of books on site every morning between 9am and 2pm and every evening from 4pm to 10pm, apart from Tuesday evenings and Saturdays.[[66]](#endnote-66) This suggests that Champion may have read additional books in the library without checking them out. The next section considers Champion’s activity as a committee member, and highlights the links between the library and the Society of Merchant Venturers as well as Bristol’s members of parliament.

**Champion’s committee activity**

Since many of the minutes of committee meetings are brief, often impersonal, and deal primarily with the ordering of books, Champion’s committee activity is difficult to document in full. There are some notable instances, however. On 11 January 1774, Champion, together with the library’s secretary, took the lead in giving directions for the binding of the library’s Atlas and providing a stand for it.[[67]](#endnote-67) On 26 October 1773, Champion reported that the Society of Merchant Venturers had agreed to donate twenty guineas to the library society.[[68]](#endnote-68) Champion was a warden of the Merchant Venturers in 1772,[[69]](#endnote-69) and it was thus natural that he was responsible for the communication between the bodies. Building a strong relationship with the Society of Merchant Venturers was important for the success of the library society, since the library’s membership, like the city’s associational and civic life at large, was dominated by Bristol’s prominent merchants. The Society of Merchants contributed another twenty guineas in 1776, and an annual subscription of ten guineas after 1777, which continued into the nineteenth century.[[70]](#endnote-70) As a consequence, the Master, Wardens and Treasurer of that Society of Merchants were considered as honorary members of the library society.

On 11 January 1774, before the beginning of their friendship, Champion was present at the committee which sent for Burke’s *Philosophical Enquiry*.[[71]](#endnote-71) Ten months later, Champion wrote to Burke, whom he had not yet met, to invite him to stand as a Whig candidate for Bristol in the 1774 general election. The reason was that Champion and some of his Whig friends, including Joseph Harford, were discontented with the Court Whig candidate Lord Clare and the ‘radical’ Whig candidate Henry Cruger. In his first letter to Burke, Champion described his correspondent in glowing terms, if oddly in the third person, as

Indisputably the first literary Character in the Kingdom, he was a perfect Master of its commercial Interests. These joined to a true Knowledge of the Constitution, which he had for so many years supported with inflexible Integrity, he was the Man who would do Honor to the Cause, and whom even their Opponents must admire.[[72]](#endnote-72)

That Champion began by highlighting Burke’s literary reputation in this political context is noteworthy since it shows that he was as impressed with Burke as a man of letters as he was fascinated by his political resume.

After Burke had been elected with Henry Cruger to represent Bristol at the election in the autumn of 1774, the committee meeting of 15November 1774, at which Champion was present for the first time in two months, announced that Burke would follow the example of his predecessors, Matthew Brickdale and Lord Clare,[[73]](#endnote-73) and make a donation to the library. The minutes simply record Burke’s donation of twenty guineas, which made him an honorary member for life.[[74]](#endnote-74) It is likely, however, that Champion, possibly together with Harford, paid for Burke’s donation, since Burke bragged to his family that he had not spent a penny of his own during the election campaign. The donation was small beer in the grand scheme of things; the total costs of his election campaign have been estimated at £10,000.[[75]](#endnote-75) Although this is not recorded in the committee minutes, it is evident from the library’s catalogues that Burke also donated several of his own books to the library. The library’s first printed catalogue includes four asterisked donations from Burke: a quarto edition of Burke’s *Speech on American Taxation* (1775), and the octavo editions of his *Vindication of Natural Society* (1757), *Observations on a Late State of the Nation* (1769), and the *Present Discontents* (1770).[[76]](#endnote-76) That none of Burke’s later works, including his *Letter to the Sheriffs of Bristol* (1777), were donated to the library must be explained by the fact that Champion participated less in the library’s affairs as the 1770s wore on.

As indicated, the two previous MPs for Bristol, Clare and Brickdale, had also become members for life, underlining the close relationship between the library society and local politics. Brickdale, who had been harshly treated by the Bristol Whigs in the 1774 campaign and its aftermath, and was sometimes referred to as ‘little Matty’,[[77]](#endnote-77) had even donated his own respectable collection of books to the library.[[78]](#endnote-78) Interestingly, however, Burke’s fellow Whig MP after 1774, Cruger, whom Champion despised on account of his ‘radicalism’ and loose morality, never became a member for life and remained a regular member. In 1782, Cruger became an honorary member by virtue of his office as a Master of the Society of Merchants.[[79]](#endnote-79)

Champion managed to be re-elected to the committee at each annual general meeting until 1781, despite attending very infrequently towards the end of the period.[[80]](#endnote-80) When he attended a meeting on September 1780, it was his first appearance in nearly two years.[[81]](#endnote-81) But his behaviour was not unusual. Samuel Munckley, for example, was continuously chosen for the committee at the annual meetings, despite not attending any committee meetings for more than four years between October 1776 and November 1780. In fact, only a small number of the committee attended regularly. As was common in urban associational life at the time, initial enthusiasm often waned. In Champion’s case, the pattern is clear. After having attended frequently in the first couple of years, his attendance declined sharply in the second half of the 1770s. After Burke’s election in 1774, Champion’s political activities increased. Moreover, the interruptions in trade due to the American War caused him considerable economic distress. This combination explains Champion’s decreasing rate of committee attendance (as well as his borrowings).

**Office and emigration**

Many of Bristol’s merchants faced economic difficulties during the American war and that was also the case for Champion. He opposed the war vehemently both for personal reasons and as a supporter of Burke and the Rockingham Whigs, who positioned themselves as the friends of America in parliament. Champion tried to sustain his business by sending his porcelain to America via indirect routes.[[82]](#endnote-82) However, in August 1778, his Bristol porcelain factory was placed in administration, which is believed to have contributed to his exclusion from the Society of Friends.[[83]](#endnote-83) In 1781, he tried to set up a new porcelain factory in Staffordshire, but he eventually sold his patent. In November that year, he left Bristol for Newcastle-under-Lyme in Staffordshire, but events would bring him to London only six months later. In April 1782, when the Rockingham Whigs returned to government for the first time since 1766, Champion was rewarded for his loyalty by being named joint deputy to Burke, who was appointed as Paymaster General. Rockingham died after three months in office, however, and Champion resigned with Burke and many other Rockinghamites who refused to serve under Shelburne, the new Head of the Treasury. Champion re-entered government with Burke in the Fox-North Coalition in April 1783, but before the end of the year, George III brought down the coalition after Fox’s East India Bill.

Champion’s period in government, and his relationship with Burke, ended ingloriously. As a result of his financial difficulties, Champion borrowed money from someone who had been under indictment when Burke as Paymaster General reinstated this lender to office. Burke was furious because it looked as if he had done a dishonest favour to Champion.[[84]](#endnote-84) Champion’s precarious situation made him take up a project he had considered since at least 1780:[[85]](#endnote-85) emigration to America. Burke never corresponded with Champion after his emigration, as he stressed in a letter in 1791, although his close friend and collaborator William Burke did.[[86]](#endnote-86) At the end of 1784, Champion settled in Camden, South Carolina, became a naturalised American citizen and served briefly in the state assembly.[[87]](#endnote-87) Before leaving Britain, Champion terminated his relationship with the Bristol Library Society. Ahead of the annual general meeting in March 1784, the committee noted that he had transferred his share in the library to Orton Smith.[[88]](#endnote-88) As an émigré in America, Champion was a delegate to South Carolina’s Constitutional Convention in 1790, and he sent his *Considerations on the Present Situation of Great Britain and the United States of America* to the first president of the United States, George Washington.[[89]](#endnote-89) Shortly afterwards in 1791, he died in America at the age of 48, one year after the death of his wife.

**Conclusion**

Did the library revolutionise Bristol, as Champion had hoped? A self-styled ‘Bibliophile’ in the *Bristol Memorialist* (1823)was rather scathing of the library’s collection: ‘It is impossible to glance even cursorily, through the Catalogue, and not be struck with the number of unimportant and trifling books that are contained in it, or without noticing the absence of some of the most valuable works of which our literature boasts.’[[90]](#endnote-90) But the biggest flaw of the library, according to the same anonymous author, was the exclusion of non-proprietary members. ‘Bibliophile’ proposed the admission of annual subscribers who would ‘be permitted to share in the perusal but not in the property of the books’ for the lower fee of one guinea rather than eight guineas as an admission fee and one and a half guineas per year. However, even that would only be ‘a partial improvement’, and a free, public library would be even better, the anonymous author argued. ‘Bibliophile’ referred to Manchester, where Humphrey Chetham founded what is sometimes considered to be the first ‘public library’ in 1653, although of course it was not a public library in the modern, state-funded sense.[[91]](#endnote-91) Crucially, the author reflected increasing recognition by the 1820s of the need to provide library facilities for those who could not afford the fees of subscription libraries, including the famous mechanics institutes.[[92]](#endnote-92)

Notwithstanding ‘Bibliophile’s’ later criticism, it is evident that the Bristol Library Society revolutionised the reading habits of Champion and many of his like-minded friends. This gave Champion the requisite intellectual confidence to form connections not only with Burke but also with the leaders of his party connection, Rockingham and Portland, and to write and publish pamphlets in his own name.[[93]](#endnote-93) His relationship with Burke and the Rockingham Whigs helped him attain political office at the national level, albeit briefly and in a minor role. It is likely that Burke had Champion in mind when he said in his *Speech on Fox’s East India Bill,* delivered in December 1783 before they fell out, that he had ‘known merchants with the sentiments and the abilities of great statesmen’.[[94]](#endnote-94)It is especially plausible since Champion had been one of his few supporters in the merchant community in Bristol who had stood by Burke in 1778 when he argued for the easing of Ireland’s trade restrictions.[[95]](#endnote-95) Regardless, we can safely conclude that the case study of Champion and his papers effectively illustrate the purposes of subscription libraries as well as their promise and potential in transforming the lives of the middling sort in Georgian Britain.

**Appendix 1: Letter about the 1774 annual general meeting[[96]](#endnote-96)**

To [unnamed]

8 February 1774

It will give you pleasure to hear that the first of our annual meeting at the Library has turned out to every ones satisfaction and promises to be a valuable acquisition to the Town[.]The meeting yesterday was full and the election conducted in an agreeable manner[.] The seraching [*sic*;searching?] was as follows in the first list except where marked[:]

R. Champion 28

Thomas Farr 27

W Barrett 27

Mr Marlot [Merlott] 27

Mark Harford 26

Joseph Harford 25

Sam[uel] Farr MD 26

George Daubeny 25

John Ford 24

John Plomer MD 24

Elected this year[:] Rich[ard] Bright 24

John Peach 24

Sam[uel] Monkly 24

John Deverell 23

Thomas Eagles 23

Revd. Mr. Estlin 20

John Noble 19

Elected this year Rev. W[illiam] Lee 17

but the Revd. Mr Camplin who was in last year will it is expected be in his place as he had the next n. and Mr. Lee will decline. The Bishop President and also the Rev. Dr. Casberd continued Vice President and Mr. W. Buller Secretary.

I have highly pleased [*sic*] with this Institution the more so because [a city] for Commerce and Dirt so renowned is as remarkable for its want of Literature. It is now about twelve months since we first agreed upon this plan of a public library. we were in number about half a dozen who first caused / if I may express myself in such a manner / this Revolution in the Town, for I may fain[[97]](#endnote-97) call it one and I hope I may live to see Thistol [Bristol] as famous for a liberal cultivation of the Sciences as it is for the cultivation of Trade and Manufacture. The Disposal is at the Discretion of the Committee who meet once a fortnight to take into consideration the Books which are ordered by any of the Subscribers who have a Book alotted them for the purpose. There is Entrance money paid / besides annual Subscription / which is to increase in proportion of the value of the Books. We have an excellent Library in King Street[,] a handsome Building of a very elegant Elevation. The Librarian is a Clergyman of the Town who attends every day at stated hours when the Library is open to the subscribers.

I know you heartily join me in my wishes for the prosperity of this undertaking and will readily forgive me for this taking up your time and attention[.] I am &c.

**Appendix 2:   
Richard Champion’s borrowings at the Bristol Library Society, 1773-81.[[98]](#endnote-98)**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Date taken out | Author | Book title | Volume | Date returned |
| 30 Aug 1773 | Sir John Dalrymple | *Memoirs of Great Britain and Ireland, from the dissolution of the last Parliament of Charles II. until the sea-battle off La Hogue* (1771). | 1 | 6 Sep 1773 |
| 31 Aug 1773 | Alexander Dow | *History of Hindostan, translated from the Persian of Ferishta* (1768). | 1 | 6 Sep 1773 |
| 6 Sep 1773 | Dalrymple | *Memoirs of Great Britain* | 1 | 7 Sep 1773 |
| 7 Sep 1773 | Dow | *History of Hindostan* | 2 | 13 Sep 1773 |
| 14 Sep 1773 | Dow | *History of Hindostan* | 3 | 16 Sep 1773 |
| 16 Sep 1773 | Abbé de Raynal | *History of the Settlements and Trade of the Europeans in the East and West Indies* (1773). | 1 | 21 Sep 1773 |
| 21 Sep 1773 | Raynal | *European Settlements* | 2 | 23 Sep 1773 |
| 23 Sep 1773 |  | *Voyage to South America* | 1 | 27 Sep 1773 |
| 27 Sep 1773 |  | *Voyage to South America* | 2 | 28 Sep 1773 |
| 28 Sep 1773 | John Hawkesworth | *An account of the voyages undertaken by the order of His present Majesty for making discoveries in the Southern Hemisphere, and successively performed by Commodore Byron, Captain Wallis, Captain Carteret, and Captain Cook, in the Dolphin, the Swallow, and the Endeavour drawn up from the journals which were kept by the several commanders, and from the papers of Joseph Banks, esq* (1773). | 1 | 4 Oct 1773 |
| 6 Oct 1773 | Hawkesworth | *Voyages…* | 2 | 8 Oct 1773 |
| 11 Oct 1773 | Hawkesworth | *Voyages…* | 2 | 12 Oct 1773 |
| 12 Oct 1773 | Hawkesworth | *Voyages…* | 3 | 19 Oct 1773 |
| 21 Oct 1773 | Dalrymple | *Memoirs of Great Britain* | 1 | 21 Oct 1773 |
| 11 Nov 1773 | Dalrymple | *Memoirs of Great Britain* | 2 | 25 Nov 1773 |
| 16 Dec 1773 |  | *Archaeologia* | 1 | 2 Jan 1774 |
| 6 Jan 1774 |  | *Archaeologia* | 2 | 22 Jan 1774 |
| 8 Mar 1774 | *Louis Antoine de Bougainville* | *Voyage around the World* (1772 [1771]). | N/A | 29 Mar 1774 |
| 15 Apr 1774 | James Granger | *Biographical History of England* (2 vols., 1769). | 1 | 26 Apr 1774 |
| 26 Apr 1774 | Granger | *Biographical History of England* | 2 | 2 May 1774 |
| 2 May 1774 | Dalrymple | *Memoirs of Great Britain* | 2 | 27 May 1774 |
| 26 May 1774 | George Lyttelton | *History of the Life of Henry II* (2 vols., 1768) | 1 | 30 May 1774 |
| 30 May 1774 | Lyttelton | *Henry II* | 2 | 2 June 1774 |
| 1 June 1774 | Grose | *Antiquities of England and Wales* (1747). | 1 | 6 June 1774 |
| 8 June 1774 | Lyttelton | *Henry II* | 3 | 21 June 1774 |
| 9 June 1774 | Nugent | *Life of Cellini* | 1 | 13 June 1774 |
| 14 June 1774 | Nugent | *Life of Cellini* | 2 | 17 June 1774 |
| 20 June 1774 | Grose | *Antiquities of England and Wales* | 2 | 27 June 1774 |
| 27 June 1774 | Lyttelton | *Henry II* | 4 | 4 July 174 |
| 5 July 1774 | Lyttelton | *Henry II* | 6 | 8 July 1774 |
| 7 July 1774 | Robert Henry | *History of Great Britain* (6 vols., 1771-93). | 1 | 11 July 1774 |
| 15 July 1774 | Thucydides | *History of the Peloponnesian War*, translated by William Smith (2 vols., 1753). | 1 | 1 Aug 1774 |
| 1 Aug 1774 | Thucydides | *History of the Peloponnesian War.* | 2 | 8 Aug 1774 |
| 8 Aug 1774 | Xenophon | *History of the Affairs of Greece,* translated by William Smith (1770). | N/A | 10 Aug 1774 |
| 9 Aug 1774 | Longinus | *On the Sublime*, translated by William Smith (1770). | N/A | 23 Aug 1774 |
| 23 Aug 1774 | Longinus | *On the Sublime.* | N/A | 20 Sep 1774 |
| 1 Sep 1774 | Helvetius | *The Child of Nature Improved by Chance* (1774). | 1 | 5 Sep 1774 |
| 5 Sep 1774 | Helvetius | *Child of Nature* | 2 | 12 Sep 1774 |
| 5 April 1775 | Longinus | *On the Sublime.* | N/A | 18 April 1775 |
| 4 Oct 1775 | Edmund Burke | *Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents* | N/A | 10 Oct 1775 |
| 19 Dec 1775 | Louis Aubery du Maurier | *Lives of the Princes of Orange* |  | 3 Jan 1776 |
| 9 Jan 1776 | Guy Joli | *Memoirs of Guy Joli* | 1 | 11 Jan 1776 |
| 11 Jan 1776 | Joli | *Memoirs of Guy Joli* | 2 | 12 Jan 1776 |
| 12 Jan 1776 | Joli | *Memoirs of Guy Joli* | 3 | 23 Jan 1776 |
| 25 Jan 1776 | Duke of Sully | *Sully’s Memoirs,* translated by Charlotte Lennox(6 vols., London, 1763). | 1 | 30 Jan 1776 |
| 30 Jan 1776 | Sully | *Sully’s Memoirs* | 3 | 6 Feb 1776 |
| 7 Feb 1776 | Sully | *Sully’s Memoirs* | 4 | 9 Feb 1776 |
| 9 Feb 1776 | Sully | *Sully’s Memoirs* | 5 | 15 Feb 1776 |
| 15 Feb 1776 | Sully | *Sully’s Memoirs* | 6 | 26 Feb 1776 |
| 20 Feb 1777 | John Knox | *Historical Journal of the Campaigns in North America* (2 vols., London, 1769). | 1 | 4 March 1777 |
| 4 Mar 1777 | Knox | *Knox’s Journal* | 2 | 14 March 1777 |
| 19 Mar 1777 | Knox | *Knox’s Journal* | 3 | 18 April 1777 |
| 29 May 1777 | Henry | *History of Great Britain* | 1 | 30 June 1777 |
| 12 Aug 1777 | Raynal | *European Settlements* | 1 | 25 Aug 1777 |
| 13 Nov 1777 | Edward Ives | *A Voyage from England to India* (London, 1773). | N/A | 5 May 1778 |
| 3 Nov 1778 | Edward Gibbon | *The History Of The Decline And Fall Of The Roman Empire* (6 vols., 1776-89). | [1] | 30 Nov 1778 |
| 22 June 1781 | John Burgoyne | *State of the Expedition from Canada* (London, 1780). | N/A | 12 July 1781 |

1. This work was supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (grant number AH/S007083/1). I presented previous versions of this paper at the State Library of New South Wales in Sydney, Australia, the History of Libraries seminar at the Institute of Historical Research in London, and the University of Liverpool’s Eighteenth-Century Worlds seminar, all in 2020, as well as at the annual conference of the British Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies (BSECS) in 2021. I would like to thank everyone who participated at these events, especially Simon Burrows, Sophie Jones, Matthew Sangster, and Mark Towsey. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. For Champion’s political career, see P. T. Underdown, ‘Burke’s Bristol Friends’, *Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society*, no. 77 (1958), 127–50; idem, ‘Edmund Burke, the Commissary of his Bristol Constituents, 1774-1780’, *English Historical Review,* no.73 (1958), 252-69; idem, ‘Henry Cruger and Edmund Burke: Colleagues and Rivals at the Bristol Election of 1774’, *The William and Mary Quarterly*, no. 15 (1958), 14-34; I.R. Christie, ‘Henry Cruger and the End of Edmund Burke’s Connection with Bristol’, *Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society*, no. 74 (1955), 153-70; Ernest Barker, ‘Burke and his Bristol Constituency’, in idem, *Essays on Government* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, second edn., 1951); G. E. Weare, *Edmund Burke’s Connection with Bristol, from 1774 till 1780* (Bristol: W. Bennett, 1894). For his career in commerce and manufacturing, see R. Dowling, ‘Richard Champion of Bristol, merchant and porcelain manufacturer’, *Transactions of the English Ceramic Circle*, 20 (2008), 369–74; J. V. G. Mallet, ‘Cookworthy's first Bristol factory of 1765’, *Transactions of the English Ceramic Circle*, no. 9 (1973–5), 212–20; F. S. Mackenna*, Champion's Bristol Porcelain* (Leigh-on-Sea: F. Lewis, 1947); Hugh Owen, *Two Centuries of Ceramic Art in Bristol* (Bristol: Bell and Daldy, 1873); Kenneth Morgan, *Bristol and the Atlantic Trade in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Walter E. Minchinton, ‘Richard Champion, Nicholas Pocock, and the Carolina Trade’, *The South Carolina Historical Magazine,* no. 65 (1964), 87-97; idem, ‘Richard Champion, Nicholas Pocock, and the Carolina Trade: A Note’, *The South Carolina Historical Magazine,* no. 70 (1969), 97-103. See also Rebecca Starr, *A School for Politics: Commercial Lobbying and Political Culture in Early South Carolina* (Baltimore, MA: John Hopkins University Press, 1998), esp. chs. 3-4 and G. H. Guttridge (ed.), *The American Correspondence of a Bristol Merchant, 1766-1776: Letters of Richard Champion* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Publications in History, 1934)*.* [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. The best biographical sketch is Deborah M. Olsen, ‘Richard Champion and the Society of Friends’, *Transaction of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society*, no. 102 (1984), 173-95. For the importance of Dissenters in the history of eighteenth-century subscription libraries; see Frank Beckwith, ‘The Eighteenth-Century Proprietary Library in England’, *Journal of Documentation*, no. 3 (1947), 81-98, at 83, 84-5. Crucially, Joseph Priestley was involved in the foundation of the subscription library at Leeds in 1768 and the re-organisation of the same at Birmingham in 1781. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. These records are held by the Bristol Central Library. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Bristol City Archives, MS. 32079 (153): Minute book of the annual general meetings of the Bristol Library Society, 2 December 1772 to 25 March 1870, f. 1v. (Hereafter referred to as AGM 153.) [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. John Latimer, *The Annals of Bristol in the Seventeenth Century* (Bristol: William George’s Sons, 1900),52; idem, *The Annals of Bristol in the Eighteenth Century* (Bristol: Printed for the author, 1893), 403-4; idem, *The Annals of Bristol in the Nineteenth Century* (Bristol: W&F Morgan, 1887), 425-6. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Kathleen Hapgood, ‘Library practice in the Bristol Library Society, 1772-1830’, *Library History,* no.5 (1981), 145-53; idem, *The Friends to Literature: Bristol Library Society 1772-1864* (Bristol: ALHA Books, 2011); Paul Kaufman, *Borrowings from the Bristol Library, 1773-1784: A Unique Record of Reading Vogues* (Charlottesville, VA: Bibliographical Society of the University of Virginia, 1960); George Whalley, ‘The Bristol Library Borrowings of Southey and Coleridge, 1793-8’, *The Library*, s5-IV (1949), 114–132. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Hapgood, *The Friends to Literature: Bristol Library Society 1772-1864,* 4. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. AGM 153, f. 2r. For a contemporary list of the Bristol Corporation, see *The Bristol Poll Book, being a List of Persons who Voted at the General Election for Members to Serve in Parliament for the City and County of Bristol, begun at the Guildhall of the said City, Friday, October 7, 1774* (Bristol, 1774), i-ii. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Alas, very few of Champion’s letters after 1775 have survived, most of them to Burke and his family members, and the Marquess of Rockingham, held at Sheffield City Library, and to the Duke of Portland, held at the University of Nottingham. Champion’s letter books at the Bristol Archives and New York Public Library hold none of his letters after 1775, although there are indications that they have once existed. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Champion to James Dallaway, 20 December 1772, Bristol Archives, Richard Champion Letter book 38083(3), f. 332. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. *A Catalogue of the Books Belonging to the Bristol Library Society, to which are prefix’d the Rules of the Institution and a List of the Subscribers, 1774* (Bristol, n.d.), 3. (Hereafter *1774 Catalogue*, although it is evident that it was printed later than 1774). [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Ibid., 4. This was comparable to the case of New York, where several collections were held at City Hall; see Sophie Jones, ‘“Very Useful as well as Ornamental”: Social Libraries in Early American Communities’ in this issue. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. *The Bristol Memorialist* (Bristol, 1823)*,* 206. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. *A Catalogue of the Books, belonging to the Bristol Library Society: to which are prefixed an Account of the Institution of the Society, and its Rules & Regulations* (Bristol, 1814), v-vi (hereafter *1814 Catalogue*); *The Bristol Memorialist*, 205. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. AGM 153, f. 1r. The additional nine members listed were: John Peach, John Ford, Mark Harford, Joseph Harford, William Buller, Dr. Samuel Farr, Dr. Abraham Ludlow, Rev. John Prior Estlin, Joseph Smith. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Daniel Defoe, *Tour thro’ the whole island of Great Britain* (3 vols., 1724-7), 2:54. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. Champion to James Dallaway, December 1768, Bristol Archives, Richard Champion Letter book 38083(2), f. 109; George Munro Smith, *A History of the Bristol Royal Infirmary* (Bristol: J. W. Arrowsmith, 1917). [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. See note 1 and Morgan, *Bristol and the Atlantic Trade in the Eighteenth Century,* 181, 197. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. James E. Bradley, *Religion, Revolution and English Radicalism: Non-Conformity in Eighteenth-Century Politics and Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 77. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. Underdown, ‘Burke’s Bristol Friends’. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. *A Speech of Edmund Burke, Esq. at the Guildhall, in Bristol, Previous to the late Election in that City* (London, third edn., 1780), 68. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. For Daubeny and Eagles’s involvement with the Steadfast Society, see, e.g., Bristol Archives, SMV/8/2, f. 135. For Barrett’s identification as a High-Church Tory, see Rosemary Sweet, *The Writing of Urban Histories in Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 204. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. At the 1774 election, the Tory candidate Matthew Brickdale received forty-four votes among the established clergy, despite coming third overall in the contest, behind the two successful Whig candidates, Henry Cruger and Burke, who received eight and six votes respectively from Church of England clergymen. See *The Bristol Poll Book (1774),* iii-iv. There were indeed reports that the anti-Whig clergymen walked in procession to the polls to vote against Burke; see Weare, *Burke’s Connection with Bristol,* 48-9, 77. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. See K. A. Manley, ‘Jeremy Bentham has been Banned: Contention and Censorship in Private Subscription Libraries before 1825’, *Library & Information History,* 29 (2013), 170–81. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. For the culture of politeness applied to eighteenth-century subscription libraries, see David Allan, Politeness and the Politics of Culture: An Intellectual History of the Eighteenth-Century Subscription Library’, *Library & Information History,* 29 (2013), 159-69. [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. Bristol City Archives, MS. 32079 (154): Minute book of the committee, 5 December 1772 to 17 March 1789, f. 154. (Hereafter referred to as CM 154*.*) [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. Weare, *Edmund Burke’s Connection with Bristol,* preface. [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. Champion, *Réflexions sur l'état actuel de la Grande-Bretagne, comparativement avec son état passé, tant politique que civil, & sur son commerce, accompagnées de quelques pensées touchant l'émigration. Par Richard Champion, ... Traduit ... par M. Soulés* (Paris, 1788). On these works, see Max Skjönsberg ‘Richard Champion and the Rockingham Whigs: The Aristocratic Politics of a Bristolian Quaker-Merchant in the Age of the American Revolution’, *English Historical Review* (forthcoming in 2022). [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. Champion, *Comparative Reflections on the Past and Present Political, Commercial, and Civil State of Great Britain* (London, 1787), 17, 53. [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. *The Diary of Sarah Fox Nee Champion, 1745-1802 (*Bristol: Bristol Record Society, 2003). [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. Bristol Archives, Richard Champion Letter book 38083(2), f. 293. [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. Ibid., ff. 295-6. [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
34. See Karen Green, *Catharine Macaulay’s Republican Enlightenment* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2020), 16. [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
35. Bristol Archives, Richard Champion Letter book 38083(3), ff. 39-44. [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
36. *Envy* (London, 1776), *The Progress of Freedom* (London, 1776*), Poems, Addressed to Mrs. Champion, by her Affectionate Husband* (Calcutta, 1786), *Poems. Imitated from the Persian* (London, 1787), and *Essays, Characteristic of the Persian Poetry: with Notes and Illustrations* (Calcutta, 1790). [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
37. Ibid., f. 238. [↑](#endnote-ref-37)
38. Ibid., ff. 279-80. [↑](#endnote-ref-38)
39. Ibid., f. 280. [↑](#endnote-ref-39)
40. *1814 Catalogue,* v. [↑](#endnote-ref-40)
41. Henry Kent for Richard Champion to Messrs Willing Morris & Co, 22 October 1774, in Guttridge (ed.), *American Correspondence,* 33. [↑](#endnote-ref-41)
42. Max Skjönsberg, *The Persistence of Party: Ideas of Harmonious Discord in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021)*,* ch. 10. [↑](#endnote-ref-42)
43. Skjönsberg ‘Richard Champion and the Rockingham Whigs’. [↑](#endnote-ref-43)
44. On this, see especially Simon Burrows, ‘The Common Cosmopolitan Reading Culture of Eighteenth-Century Europe and North America: New Digital Perspectives’ in this special issue of *Library & Information History* (2021). [↑](#endnote-ref-44)
45. For the importance of the genre of history in this period, see Mark Towsey, *Reading History in Britain and America, c.1750-c.1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019). [↑](#endnote-ref-45)
46. The accumulated figures are taken from Kaufman, *Borrowings from the Bristol Library,* 122, but his study does not record the identity of the borrowers. This is now being rectified by the University of Liverpool’s AHRC-funded ‘Libraries, Reading Communities and Cultural Formation in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic’ project ([c18librariesonline.org](https://t.co/JDhCY1kT8Y?amp=1)), which is digitising all the records of the borrowers and borrowings at Bristol in the eighteenth century, along with other subscription libraries in Britain, Ireland and America. This project is discussed in Burrows, ‘The Common Cosmopolitan Reading Culture of Eighteenth-Century Europe and North America: New Digital Perspectives’, and in the introduction to this issue. See also Mark Towsey, ‘Book Use and Sociability in Lost Libraries of the Eighteenth Century: Towards a Union Catalogue’, in *Lost Books: Reconstructing the Print World of Pre-Industrial Europe*, ed. Flavia Bruni and Andrew Pettegree (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 414-438. [↑](#endnote-ref-46)
47. Kaufman, *Borrowings from the Bristol Library,* 122. [↑](#endnote-ref-47)
48. Ibid., 38, 34. [↑](#endnote-ref-48)
49. Ibid., 39. [↑](#endnote-ref-49)
50. James Boswell, *The Life of Samuel Johnson* (2 vols., London, 1791), 2:97-8. [↑](#endnote-ref-50)
51. Colin Kidd, *Subverting Scotland’s Past: Scottish Whig Historians and the Creation of Anglo-British Identity, 1689-*c.*1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993). [↑](#endnote-ref-51)
52. David Hume to Adam Smith, 14 July 1767, *The Letters of David Hume* (2 vols., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011 [1932], 2:150. [↑](#endnote-ref-52)
53. See, e.g., *Observations on a Late Publication Entitled ‘Memoirs of Great-Britain, by Sir John Dalrymple’, in which Some Errors, Misrepresentations, and the Design of that Compiler and his Associates are Detected* (London, 1773). [↑](#endnote-ref-53)
54. Burke to Champion, *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke,* ed. Thomas W. Copeland et al. (10 vols., Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1958–1978),3:353. [↑](#endnote-ref-54)
55. Burke to Champion, ibid*,* 364-5. [↑](#endnote-ref-55)
56. CM 154, f. 37. [↑](#endnote-ref-56)
57. Kaufman, *Borrowings from the Bristol Library*, 53, 57, 101. [↑](#endnote-ref-57)
58. Many of these works were very popular among students at the University of Glasgow around this time. See Matthew Sangster, Karen Baston and Brian Aitken, Eighteenth-Century Borrowing from the University of Glasgow (Glasgow: University of Glasgow, 2020), <https://18c-borrowing.glasgow.ac.uk>. [↑](#endnote-ref-58)
59. CM 154, ff. 46-7. [↑](#endnote-ref-59)
60. Towsey, *Reading History in Britain and America, c.1750-c.1840*; Ben Dew, *Commerce*, *Finance and Statecraft: Histories of England, 1600-1780* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018); Philip Hicks, *Neoclassical History and English Culture: From Clarendon to Hume* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1996). [↑](#endnote-ref-60)
61. See, e.g., David Hume, *Essays, Moral, Political and Literary,* ed. Eugene F. Miller (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 1987), 22-3, 88, 95-6, 134, 257, 321-3, 332-4, 394, 401-3, 408-9, 411, 418, 420, 422, 427-33, 435-36, 452. [↑](#endnote-ref-61)
62. Edmund Burke, *Pre-Revolutionary Writings,* ed. Ian Harris (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 120-1. [↑](#endnote-ref-62)
63. Skjönsberg ‘Richard Champion and the Rockingham Whigs’. [↑](#endnote-ref-63)
64. Owen, *Two Centuries of Ceramic Art in Bristol,* 261-2. [↑](#endnote-ref-64)
65. George Washington and Dixon Wecter, ‘An Unpublished Letter of George Washington’, *The South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine*, no. 39 (1938), 151-6, at 154. [↑](#endnote-ref-65)
66. CM 154, f. 33. [↑](#endnote-ref-66)
67. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-67)
68. CM 154, f. 24. [↑](#endnote-ref-68)
69. Latimer, *The History of the Society of Merchant Venturers of the City of Bristol* (Bristol: J. W. Arrowsmith, 330. [↑](#endnote-ref-69)
70. *1814 Catalogue,* iv. [↑](#endnote-ref-70)
71. CM 154, f. 30. [↑](#endnote-ref-71)
72. Champion to Burke, 1 October 1774, *Burke Correspondence*,3:46. [↑](#endnote-ref-72)
73. CM 154, ff. 6, 7, 33. [↑](#endnote-ref-73)
74. CM 154, f. 53. [↑](#endnote-ref-74)
75. F. P. Lock, *Edmund Burke* (2 vols., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999-2006)*,* 1:471. [↑](#endnote-ref-75)
76. 1774 Catalogue, 19, 22. [↑](#endnote-ref-76)
77. Weare, *Edmund Burke’s Connection with Bristol,* 36. See also James Thistlethwaite, *The Tories in the Dumps: or, the Lamentation of Matty, to his friend Ned* (Bristol, 1775). [↑](#endnote-ref-77)
78. CM 154, f. 13; ‘A Catalogue of Mr. Brickdale’s Books’, in *1774 Catalogue*. [↑](#endnote-ref-78)
79. *A Catalogue of the Books Belonging to the Bristol Library Society, to which are prefix’d the Rules of the Institution and a List of the Subscribers, 1782* (Bristol, 1782), 8. [↑](#endnote-ref-79)
80. AGM 153, f. 13r.  [↑](#endnote-ref-80)
81. CM 154, ff. 120, 164. [↑](#endnote-ref-81)
82. Morgan, *Bristol and the Atlantic Trade in the Eighteenth Century,* 25. [↑](#endnote-ref-82)
83. Olsen, ‘Richard Champion and the Society of Friends’, 176. [↑](#endnote-ref-83)
84. Burke to Champion, October 1784, *Burke Correspondence,* 5:172-3. [↑](#endnote-ref-84)
85. Champion to Portland, 4 Oct 1780, University of Nottingham, PwF 2758. See also Champion, *Comparative Reflections,* ch. 1. [↑](#endnote-ref-85)
86. *Burke Correspondence,* 6:374-5; William Burke to Champion, 11 November 1788, Wentworth Woodhouse Muniments, Sheffield City Archives, Bk P/1/2148P. [↑](#endnote-ref-86)
87. *ODNB.* [↑](#endnote-ref-87)
88. CM 154, f. 245. [↑](#endnote-ref-88)
89. Washington and Dixon Wecter, ‘An Unpublished Letter of George Washington’. [↑](#endnote-ref-89)
90. *The* *Bristol Memorialist,* 206. [↑](#endnote-ref-90)
91. Ibid., 210. See Towsey and Roberts (eds.), *Before the Public Library.* [↑](#endnote-ref-91)
92. Mark Towsey and Kyle B. Roberts (eds.), *Before the Public Library: Reading, Community, and Identity in the Atlantic World, 1650-1850* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 4-5; David Allan, *A Nation of Readers: The Lending Library in Georgian England* (London: British Library, 2008), pp. 194-5. For working-class reading in the early decades of the nineteenth century, see David Vincent, *Bread, Knowledge and Freedom: A Study of Nineteenth-Century Working Class Autobiography* (London: Europa, 1981); Jonathan Rose, ‘Rereading the English Common Reader: A Preface to a History of Audiences’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, no. 53 (1992), 47-70. [↑](#endnote-ref-92)
93. On this, see Skjönsberg ‘Richard Champion and the Rockingham Whigs’. [↑](#endnote-ref-93)
94. *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke,* ed. Paul Langford et. al. (9 vols., Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970-2015), 5:387. [↑](#endnote-ref-94)
95. See *Two Letters from Mr. Burke to Gentlemen in the City of Bristol, on the Bills Depending in Parliament Relative to the Trade of Ireland* (London, 1778). See also the correspondence between Burke, Champion and other Bristolian merchants in volume three of *Burke Correspondence.* [↑](#endnote-ref-95)
96. Richard Champion letter book, 1773-1775, New York Public Library n.f. [↑](#endnote-ref-96)
97. Manuscript unclear; this could also be ‘fair’. [↑](#endnote-ref-97)
98. Borrowing records held at the Central Library, Bristol. Names and spelling have been normalised. [↑](#endnote-ref-98)