The Libraries at Calke Abbey

by Mark Purcell and Nicola Thwaite
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Contents

2 Note on Names
3 Preface
6 The Harpur-Crewes and their Library
   Introduction
   The Harpur-Crewes at Calke
   ‘Well-Stocked With Books in Every
    Department of Literature’
   The Eighteenth Century
   Decline and Fall
   The End
   Might Have Been
   The Books I
36 The Gardner Wilkinson Library
   Sir John Gardner Wilkinson and Egypt
   Later Career
   Sir John Gardner Wilkinson and Wales
   The Library
   The Books II
46 Suggestions for Further Reading
48 National Trust Libraries: Access and Issues
Note on Names

Calke was built – or at least rebuilt – for Sir John Harpur, 4th Baronet (1680–1741), when the family name was simply Harpur. In 1808 his descendant the 7th Bt, hoping to be elevated to the peerage (and wanting to emphasise his family’s distant connection with the dormant barony of Crewe of Steane), adopted the surname ‘Crewe’. Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Calke’s owners continued to use the surname Crewe, often in conjunction with their original surname, though without a hyphen: for example, Sir John Harpur Crewe, 9th Bt (1824–86) and Sir Vaucney Harpur Crewe 10th Bt (1846–1924). On Vaucney’s death the baronetcy became extinct and the estates passed to his elder daughter Hilda Mosley (1877–1949) and her husband Col. Godfrey Mosley. Only in 1961 did Hilda’s nephew Charles Jenney (1917–81), who had succeeded 12 years previously, adopt the surname ‘Harpur-Crewe’ (with a hyphen), which was also used by his younger brother, Calke’s last private owner, Henry Harpur-Crewe (1921–91).

In the text that follows, we have used the form of name which individuals themselves used, but when referring to the family, for sake of simplicity, we have used the name ‘Harpur-Crewe’.

Sir John Harpur, 4th Bt, attributed to Charles Agar (1699–1723)
Preface

The National Trust took over at Calke in 1985. In the same year the great book historian D.F. McKenzie (1931–99) gave the very first Panizzi Lecture at the British Library, named in honour of the great Victorian librarian Sir Anthony Panizzi (1797–1879). Though no-one knew it at the time, the books at Calke in fact included a copy of a now very rare pamphlet published in 1857, in which Panizzi had outlined his proposals for a new reading room for the British Museum Library – none other than the iconic Round Reading Room where Oscar Wilde, Lenin and Karl Marx would all work. But the connection with Calke goes further. Don McKenzie’s lecture, subsequently published as *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts*, has acquired a near-cult status: almost everything written about books and libraries since then has been influenced by it. His central thesis was that librarians and literary scholars needed to go beyond the traditional tasks of cataloguing books and editing their texts, and should start to think about them in a much broader context: in short to embark on a full-scale ‘historical study of the making and use of books’.¹

Walking through the ‘Hall of Destruction’ with its broken classical columns and ghostly photographs of dynamited mansions, many visitors wept at the enormity of what had been lost. In retrospect the exhibition came to be seen as a turning point, and within a decade ‘Heritage’ was back in fashion with a vengeance. One of the high points of the 80s heritage boom was the National Trust’s acquisition of Calke Abbey, a once great house and estate seemingly poised on the threshold of complete dissolution.2

But other forces were at work. From the early 1970s the National Trust’s Merlin Waterson and its new architectural historian Gervase Jackson-Stops (1947–95) were increasingly preoccupied with the future of Erddig, an equally decayed eighteenth-century country house in north-east Wales. When the Trust had taken over country houses in the 1940s and 1950s, its officials and their staff were often quite interventionist in their approach. At Springhill, a seventeenth-century house in Northern Ireland, many of the house’s nineteenth-century contents were ruthlessly clearly out in the late 50s. All evidence of gentility in mid-Victorian Ireland was eliminated and the principal rooms handed over to a Chelsea interior designer who was instructed to do up the house to make it look as if people were still living in it. At Petworth, in Sussex, the great picture collection had already been completely reorganised by the art historian (and closet Soviet spy) Anthony Blunt, in a way which was much admired at the time, but which largely obliterated the way Petworth had been when Turner’s patron, the 3rd Earl of Egremont, had lived there.3 But at Erddig Waterson saw to it that Trust visitors entered through the servants’ quarters, and he and Jackson-Stops embarked on a meticulous study of the Erddig archive, in a largely successful attempt to discover not only how the house and estate had evolved over many centuries, but how Erddig had been used by those who had lived there, both above and below stairs. The results were not published until 1980 (by then Upstairs, Downstairs had been running on London Weekend Television for nine years), but The Servants’ Hall was well received. Two years earlier another influential architectural historian, Mark Girouard, had published an even more groundbreaking book, Life in the English Country House, which found itself catapulted into the bestseller lists and has remained one of the most widely read books about country houses ever printed.4

The rescue of Calke was ultimately possible because the then Chancellor of the Exchequer, Nigel Lawson, was persuaded to make a one-off payment to the National Heritage Memorial Fund in his first budget in March 1984 (the fact that he was also the MP for the nearby constituency of Blaby was probably helpful as well). But despite the public clamour to save the house ‘where time had stopped’, not everyone was entirely convinced, and one sceptic even wrote to The Times to say, in effect, that Calke was full of junk and was not worth preserving.4 This provoked a sharp rejoinder from H.M. Colvin, the brilliant Oxford architectural historian and editor of The King’s Works, who had been working on the Harpur-Crewe archive for some years.5 And certainly Trust officials responsible for Calke became ever more conscious of its value as a social document, a house where every matchbox, every broken china pig, and every worn-out chintz chair cover told the story of the decline and fall of the country house in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. But one immediately striking thing on reading the files is that despite all the attention given to textiles, stuffed birds, pictures and decaying furniture, almost no-one seems to have paused to think about the books. Amazingly even Colvin (himself a great book collector) managed to write a whole chapter on ‘The Contents’ for the National Trust’s 1985 coffee-table book on Calke without breasting a word about them, though he did mention clothes, uniforms, a pair of Bronze Age swords, sundry wrecked musical instruments, and even the house’s Victorian fire extinguishers.6 Probably he so much took for granted that a historic library was an artefact of great cultural value that he did not even think to mention it; nonetheless, the Calke books went unmentioned. And in any case, the urgent necessity of saving Calke Abbey and its contents (and persuading Mrs Thatcher’s government that the rules needed to be interpreted

5 The Sunday Times, 4 March 1984.
with a little flexibility so that the National Trust could have the endowment it needed to run the place) trumped any other considerations.

In fact the Abbey contains two libraries with well in excess of 8,500 titles (and many more physical volumes). But despite the enormous effort which went into tidying up the Calke libraries and ensuring that many of the more fragile volumes did not simply fall to pieces, they attracted astonishingly little attention at the time. On the face of it, this seems rather surprising, as libraries had featured prominently in ‘The Destruction of the Country House’ exhibition. Indeed the published catalogue included a fascinating chapter on them written by the Cambridge librarian A.N.L. (‘Tim’) Munby (1913–74), while by the mid-1980s scholars such as D.F. McKenzie, drawing on work done in France in the ’50s and ’60s, were making great strides forward with a new academic discipline, ‘The History of the Book’. The subject had much in common with the work being undertaken in country houses by the new generation of architectural historians at around the same time. At Calke, perhaps, the problem was compounded by the sheer scale of the libraries, as well as the personal problems of the Trust’s then Libraries Adviser, John Fuggles (1949–2002), a clever and rather anarchic man much liked by his colleagues, but by the mid-1980s already battling with the serious drink problem which would force his premature retirement in 1991. But in fact the problem went rather deeper than that. During the course of the 1980s the Trust had acquired no fewer than 11 major country houses, between them containing tens of thousands of books. In some of these houses there were more books on the shelves than pictures, sculpture, furniture, bed linen, bicycles, clocks, musical instruments and silver put together. In the East Midlands alone, the great houses at Belton (acquired in 1984), Calke (1985) and Kedleston (1986) had getting on for 30,000 books between the three of them. This avalanche of print was far more than one person could even have contended with. The Trust had retained a Libraries Adviser to catalogue its books ever since the 1950s, but the old system of one man scuttling around the country in a shakily Morris Minor full of handwritten file cards was simply overwhelmed by events.

Of course the two libraries at Calke do contain substantial numbers of rare and unusual books – books which even in the age of ‘Google Books’ and the digital library, people might still wish to read for their texts. In point of fact there are more of these – far more – than anyone might have guessed when the Trust first became involved at Calke back in the 1980s. Words like ‘sociology’ or even ‘text’ were probably never much in vogue in the Harpur-Crewes’ little corner of south Derbyshire, but collectively the Calke books provide neither more nor less than a complete social history of a great estate over very nearly 300 years. Music, novels, big-game hunting, spiritual anguish, exotic travel, improving the estate, suing the neighbours, saying your prayers, learning Latin, catching rats, or choosing the upholstery: all life is there. Calke’s owners, the Harpurs, Crewes and Harpur-Crewes have become famous over the last 30 years as a dynasty of hereditary eccentrics, and it was this very eccentricity which kept the house and estate going against all the odds: a more conventional family would simply have sold up. But in a sense the odd bods are just part of the story. As Sir Howard Colvin astutely observed in his groundbreaking study of Calke in 1985, the history of rural England from the Norman Conquest to the First World War is largely a history of landed estates. The Calke books may not go back to the Norman Conquest, but for the last 300 years of that story they are a remarkable document. This is our attempt to tell their story for the first time.

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The Harpur-Crewes
and their Library

Introduction

The Library

Though books have never been centre-stage at Calke, there are over 8,500 of them in the house, the earliest an illuminated Book of Hours printed on vellum in Paris in around 1505. Only about 150 of the 8,500 were printed before 1700, and most of the books in the two libraries date from the eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The core of the collection is shelved together in the Library, originally designed by William Wilkins the Elder in 1805, and enlarged by the Derby architect Henry Isaacs Stevens, who heightened the bookcases to take still more books in 1841.9 But there are in fact Harpur-Crewe books scattered all over the house, some of them seen by visitors, and many others in behind-the-scenes stores (a survey carried out in 2001 came up with the figure of 6,947 books in the main family collection). These are extraordinarily varied, and all in all Calke ranks not only as one of the National Trust’s largest, but also one of the most interesting libraries. However, by contrast with nearby houses such as Chatsworth, Belton or Kedleston, Calke has never really produced a book collector in the sense of someone who systematically set out to acquire books selected on criteria based on age, importance or rarity. No-one at Calke ever collected medieval manuscripts, or Jacobean drama, Civil War pamphlets, Renaissance books, incunables (books printed before 1501), colour-plate books, or any of the things that British book collectors have been prone to accumulate.

There are certainly grand books on the shelves, and money was never an issue in what was historically one of the wealthiest houses in Derbyshire, but ultimately that was never really the point.

Generally speaking, successive generations of the family simply bought new or nearly-new books at the time that they were issued. It is this which today gives their library its special interest, since it is possible to plot the tastes, interests and peculiarities of successive generations over very nearly 300 years. Though the Calke libraries contain many fascinating, quirky and indeed beautiful books, their real interest comes from the sense of interaction between them and those who owned and read them.

In addition to the 6,947 family books, there are about another 1,570 in the completely separate and distinct Gardner Wilkinson Library, inherited in 1875. The National Trust does not own many books printed in Sarajevo, Dubrovnik and Alexandria, and not many more in Coptic or Ottoman Turkish, but most of what it does own are in the Gardner Wilkinson Library. Despite its apparently chaotic appearance, in its day this was the personal research library of a great (if now mostly forgotten) Victorian scholar – the best-selling author of *Manners and Customs of the Ancient Egyptians* (1841) – rich not just in Egyptology, but in books on antiquities, languages and all manner of sometimes exotic subjects. As a collection, it has little in common with the Harpur-Crewe Library. In fact all it really has in common is that both sets of books have ended up at Calke, and both not only reflect the lives of their owners, but are capable of turning up some real surprises.

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The Harpur-Crewes at Calke

Early visitors to Calke were fairly mixed in their reactions. In 1787 the historian Stebbing Shaw (1762–1802) was thoroughly underwhelmed. The house was ‘a large pile of a building, not very ancient, but in a low situation’. The editor of a slightly later guide to the delights of nearby Ashby-de-la-Zouch also commented on the house’s ‘rather secluded setting’, which he felt ‘excludes the view of the surrounding setting’, but conceded that the house itself was ‘a spacious, handsome building’. A visitor who came three years earlier, in 1828, was a little more enthusiastic, describing it as ‘a superb old mansion’, and praising the ‘good rooms’ and ‘noble saloon’ inside, though he added that ‘there is no ostentatious display of works of art, and the house is not a shew-house’. Derbyshire was a favoured haunt for early tourists, and Lizzie Bennet and Uncle and Aunt Gardiner, of course, were taken around Pemberley by the housekeeper in *Pride and Prejudice*, before unexpectedly running into Mr Darcy. But unlike Pemberley, or Chatsworth, or nearby Kedleston, Calke was not on the tourist trail. Even in the twentieth century there were people who had lived all their lives in neighbouring Ticknall who had never seen the outside of the house, let alone gone inside. Only very occasionally did a favoured few get in. In 1868, for example, an official deputation from nearby Melbourne called on Sir John Harpur Crewe (1824–86) to pay the town’s respects on the majority of Sir John’s 21-year-old heir Vauncey Harpur Crewe. Perhaps rather to their surprise they were invited into the house where they ‘enjoyed greatly an inspection of the extensive and beautiful collection of natural history objects’. But as recently as the 1960s the former Harpur-Creve agent Christopher Preston was absolutely mortified when having arranged for a rare private coach party to visit Calke, his group was abruptly refused admittance by the reclusive and unpredictable Charles Harpur-Creve (1917–81); fortunately the public-spirited owners of nearby Melbourne Hall saved the day and dispensed last-minute hospitality. A large part of the excitement when Calke first opened in the 1980s was simply that hardly anyone had ever seen the house. Not only had it been virtually inaccessible to visitors, but it was practically the only major country house in England which had never been written up in *Country Life* (the first article came out only in 1983).

Reactions to Calke’s owners were similarly mixed. An eighteenth-century commentator thought that Sir John Harpur (1680–1741), the rebuilder of Calke, was ‘possessed of a very amiable and excellent character’, but the Rev. William Bagshaw Stevens, Headmaster of Repton School, privately mocked his great-grandson Sir Henry Harpur (1763–1819) as ‘the isolated baronet’, ‘a jealous little’ man who would ‘not suffer any Man, Friend or Servant to see his Wife’, the former lady’s maid Nanette Hawkins. One senses that contemporaries did not know what to think was more disgraceful: that Sir Henry had married a lady’s maid, or that he had openly lived ‘in sin’ with her and fathered children out of wedlock. On the other hand, the son of ‘the isolated baronet’, Sir George Crewe (1795–1844), was generally approved of. By contrast his son Sir John Harpur Crewe (1824–86) was notoriously more interested in agricultural improvement than in people. When he died, a carefully worded obituary in the local newspaper noted that he ‘had not for many years taken much part in public matters’. Sir John’s son Vauncey (1846–1924) was more reclusive still, and when in the spring of 1887 the *Derby Mercury* told its readers that ‘Sir Vauncey Harpur Crewe and Lady Crewe were among the patrons’ of a local amateur dramatic production in Ashby, ‘but were prevented from attending’, many readers would correctly have read between the lines. Sir Vauncey, at just 41, was already becoming a misanthrope and a recluse. A Victorian landowner was, of course, expected to show a benevolent interest in the affairs of the surrounding countryside, and by failing to show his face in Ashby, and – more pointedly – missing the county meeting to mark Queen Victoria’s Golden Jubilee a couple of weeks later, Calke’s new owner was clearly failing to meet his social obligations. Vauncey may indeed have preferred to spend all his time at home at Calke with his gun, his vast collection of stuffed birds and animals and his gamekeeper Agathos Pegg, but in doing so he

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10 Stebbing Shaw, *A Tour in 1787 from London, to the Western Highlands of Scotland. Including Excursions to the Lakes of Westmorland and Cumberland, with Minute Descriptions of the Principal Seats, Castles, Ruins, &c. throughout the Tour* (London: Printed for L. Davis, [1788], p.27).
11 Derby Mercury, 1 January 1868.
12 Derby Mercury, 1 January 1868.
was breaking the rules of the unwritten social contract between landowners and their tenants, a contract which would soon be broken for ever by the cataclysm of the First World War. Calke’s long decline had begun.35

‘Well-Stocked With Books in Every Department of Literature’

The great exception to the family tradition of reclusiveness was Sir Vaucey’s grandfather Sir George Crewe (1795–1844). Sir George was a pious Evangelical who was wracked with guilt and a sense of his own unworthiness in the face of the Lord (his spiritual diaries make fascinating if sometimes rather depressing reading), but he took his responsibilities as one of the wealthiest men in Derbyshire extremely seriously.36 It is probably no accident that one of the most detailed descriptions of Calke – and the only one which mentions the library in any detail – dates from 1829, a decade after the 24-year-old Sir George had unexpectedly succeeded to the Calke estates in 1819. Despite his odd behaviour, George’s father, ‘the isolated baronet’, had spent a great deal of time and money doing up Calke, and the historian Stephen Glover’s published account gives a very vivid impression of the house (then still known as ‘Calke Hall’ rather than Calke Abbey) in its brief heyday:

The house is built of fine freestone, round a quadrangular court: it is large and elegant. In the centre of the south front, two flights of steps lead to the portico, the pediment of which is supported by four Ionic columns.

The hall or saloon communicates with the principal apartments, and is 46 feet in length, 31 in width, and 29 feet in height. The saloon is richly adorned with paintings, cabinets, &c., the former presenting numerous family portraits by eminent artists, and the latter containing an abundance of well arranged fossils, shells and other natural curiosities. To the right is the drawing room, the dimensions of which are 29 feet 9 inches by 20 feet 3 inches. This spacious room is elegantly furnished: the walls are adorned with landscapes and other works of art; and the sideboards are ornamented with vases of exquisite workmanship, and a costly Chinese pagoda carved in ivory. To the left is the breakfast room, which is 33 feet by 28 feet. These rooms are exactly half the height of the saloon, and with it occupy the southern front. On the east is the library, 44 feet in length and 19 feet in width. It is well-stocked with works in every department of literature.

Adjoining the library is the sitting-room of Lady Crewe, which is 17 feet 9 inches by 17 feet 6 inches. In this elegant apartment are some paintings by the old masters. The lower rooms consist of the private room of Sir George, and various other apartments. The upper storey contains handsome chambers connected by extensive passages and spacious anti-rooms. The principal bedchambers, &c. are upon the second storey, consisting of four suites of family apartments, seven smaller single rooms, school-room, nursery, and servants’ apartments.37

One of the most interesting things about all this is the way that it clarifies two rather important facts about the Calke library in its heyday. The first – which is still true today, though it is useful to be reminded of it – is that the Library was and is the second largest family room in the house after the Saloon. The second is that even in the 1820s Calke was still effectively divided into a series of self-contained apartments, just as it would have been 100 years earlier. There were comparatively few shared spaces, and again the Library was one of the most important of these. Whether the books were a shared resource as well is more problematic, and the question of who precisely was allowed to use the books in country-house libraries, and how this changed and developed over time, is a difficult one.

Only very occasionally do little scraps of evidence survive which imply that agents, chaplains, friendly neighbours from gentry backgrounds, and even senior household servants might have been allowed access to ancestral shelves. At Castleward in Ireland, for example, a Dublin clergyman was enticed north to County Down in 1774 to be incumbent of the estate.

35 Derby Mercury, 3 March 1886; 16 February 1887; 2 March 1887.
36 Sir George Crewe, Extracts from the Journals of Sir George Crewe of Calke Abbey, South Derbyshire, 1813–34 (Cromford: Scarthin, 1995).
church of Ballyculter with the promise of the loan of a decent horse and ‘a key to a large library from whence I might select any book I pleased’. At Erddig the library had a borrowers’ book in the 1770s, and Mrs Yorke’s lady’s maid, Betty Radcliffe, was among the borrowers; more than a century later there was a library borrowers’ book at Tyntesfield, in Somerset. 23

Were similar things happening at Calke? The truth is that we do not know but the fact that there is at least one book in the Calke library (Calke S.a.21) to this day with the ticket of the ‘Calke Lending Library’ is highly suggestive. Readers could sign out books ‘every Thursday at three o’clock’ and paid a subscription of a penny a month. The problem, of course, is that we do not really know whether these fleeting references to country-house books and borrowing were noting something which was out-of-the-ordinary, or a way of doing things which was so much taken for granted that most owners would never have dreamed of bothering to write it down. But Calke was a large estate, and the Harpur-Crewes took a paternalistic interest in their staff and tenants. Sir George, for example, attacked the 1834 Poor Law in print as ‘oppressive and unjust’. In line with his Evangelical beliefs he saw life as a ‘struggle between Self-Indulgence and Self-Denial’, deploiring the fact that many landowners chose self-indulgence. 20 By contrast, he and his wife funded a pair of schools for the inhabitants of Ticknall, in the early nineteenth century a substantial industrial settlement, with a railway, coal mining and lime kilns. 21 In addition Sir George’s agent William Smith was a man of some learning and education. No mere employee, he was regarded by his neighbours to be a gentleman, took an intelligent interest in the progress of his employer’s estates, and was an improving landlord in his own right, owning 490 acres at nearby Dishley 22: precisely the sort of trusted retainer who might have ridden over to Calke from his house at nearby Swarkestone to use the library.

As well as the books in the main library, many of the subsidiary apartments at Calke also contained bookcases and books, most of them presumably the personal books of the occupants. In 1821, for example, there were Bibles and prayer books in the suite which belonged to Sir George’s ancient and godly grandmother Lady Frances Harpur (d.1825), bookcases in Lady Crewe’s bedroom and sitting-room, and a pair of painted bookcases in Sir George’s own private study. In addition there was another Bible and a Book of Common Prayer in the Entrance Hall, no doubt used for the household prayers. 23 By 1845 books had spread still further, and there were fashionable novels and travel books in the Drawing Room, and still more bookcases in Sir George’s Billiard Room (were these really for sociable reading over cigars and brandy after dinner, or was there simply nowhere else to put them?), and in a school room on the first floor. More intriguingly still, there were 19 books in the Servants’ Hall, though unfortunately we do not know what they were. Whether they were cast-offs that no-one else wanted (as at Cragside, a late nineteenth-century industrialist’s house in Northumberland) or pious and improving books chosen by the servants’ employers (as at Felbrigg in Norfolk) must remain a matter for speculation; at Calke in Sir George Crewe’s time, probably they were the latter. 24

Sir George himself clearly spent a good deal of time in the elegant Neo-classical Library which had been created for his father, ‘the isolated baronet’, by the architect William Wilkins the Elder in 1805. His own publications, notably a pamphlet on the reform of the Game Laws published in 1834, suggests that if he was not conventionally well-educated (his eccentric father had packed him off to a private tutor in Suffolk, but had prevented him from going to university) Sir George was as well-read as he was high-minded. The Library could also be called on for other purposes; in 1830, for example, the 35-year-old Sir George waited up all night there while the family’s accoucheur Mr Godwin supervised the difficult birth of his daughter Isabel Jane. 25

The range of books on the shelves in Sir George’s era was already extremely varied, and the Library was well-organised, in 1819 arranged by subject (‘Miscellaneous’, ‘Divinity’, ‘Medicine, Surgery and Chemistry’, ‘Latin, Greek &c’, ‘French’, ‘Italian’), all split across 23 bookcases, much as today. 26 Some of these books were no doubt purchased in London: Sir Henry Harpur, ‘the isolated baronet’, seems to have preferred the fashionable bookseller Cadell & Davies in the second decade of the nineteenth

24 Sir George Crewe, A Word for the Poor, and Against the Present Poor Law as to its Principle and Practice (Derby: W. Rowbotham, 1843), pp1–2.
century, writing to them to demand everything from Sir William Gell’s *Pompeiana* (a best-selling description of the wonders of Herculaneum and Pompeii) through to novels. He also clearly kept abreast with current publications – presumably from newspapers or from periodicals like *The Gentleman’s Magazine* and the *Quarterly Review*, and grumbled about books published in parts when the individual issues of works he had subscribed to were late. More often, however, Harpur-Crewe books seem to have been bought nearer to home. Now and again this can often, however, Harpur-Crewe books seem to have issues of works he had subscribed to were late. 27 About books published in parts when the individual


28 Matlock, Derbyshire Record Office, D384/N/12.


30 *A Descriptive and Historical Guide to Ashby-de-la-Zouch*, p.150.

and country-house guides, but for the most part the word ‘myth’ is exactly the right word. In the first place, the majority of Calke’s owners are most unlikely to have wanted books for show or for reasons of conspicuous consumption for the simple reason that few outsiders ever got into the house. In any case an appreciable proportion of the Calke books were not kept in the main Library, but were in the private rooms of various members of the family. In the second place we have plenty of positive evidence of use. Even the reclusive Sir Vauncey liked to scribble in the margins from time to time. Sir George Crewe’s notes and inscriptions are more numerous still, and from time to time he also mentioned his reading in his diary. In 1815, for example, he noted he had ‘read today a very excellent sermon’ by the former Archbishop of Canterbury Thomas Secker (1693–1768), perhaps in the recently published six-volume edition which is still at Calke today. At about the same time he was also reading John Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, an important book for Enlightenment thinkers, in which Locke argued that human beings began with their minds a blank canvas, to be filled only gradually by sensory experience of the world. 31 His published works confirm that he was well-read, with Sir George quoting the philosopher and economist Adam Smith (1723–90), the Bible and various legal works, among several other texts. 32 And despite the existence of reading clubs and libraries in the area, all this points to the value of a well-stocked library in a big country house. As far back as 1739 the household at Calke got through something between 216 and 300 gallons of ale each month, and this was not bought in, but brewed on-site. 33 What was true of beer was equally true of books: self-sufficiency was important.

**The Eighteenth Century**

The present Library at Calke dates from 1805, but this was not the beginning. For that we must go back more than a century earlier. The Harpur’s were descended from the Harpurs of Rushall, a fortified medieval manor house near Walsall in Staffordshire.
By the seventeenth century a branch of the family had settled at Swarkestone, on the banks of the River Trent a few miles north of Ticknall, where the remains of their great house still survive. By the end of the century, the Derbyshire Harpurs had acquired a baronetcy, and moved to Calke, the site of a former Augustinian Priory. At the time of the Dissolution, Calke Priory was no more than a dependency of nearby Repton Priory, but it is a reasonable assumption the monastery at Calke would have owned books at some point in its history. If it did, none has ever come to light; though by contrast, books do survive from many monastic libraries. Several even survive from monastic houses which were converted into country houses at the Dissolution and are today in the hands of the National Trust: Nostell Priory (now at Lampeter University and in Toronto), Canons Ashby (at Hereford Cathedral) and Lacock Abbey (two manuscripts survive, one of which is still at Lacock today).34 Probably, too, the Harpurs owned books at Swarkestone, and there is an outside chance that some of these are still at Calke today, though if so the fact is not immediately obvious.

On the other hand there are at least 14 books at Calke which clearly belonged to Sir John Harpur, 4th Bt (1680–1741), the builder of the present house, and about the same number which had belonged to his wife Catherine Crewe (1684–1745). Probably in fact the couple owned more books than this, and many may still be on the shelves today. It seems to have been customary for successive owners of Calke to paste their own bookplates on top of the bookplates of their predecessors. This apparently rather odd habit was surprisingly common in country-house libraries in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and in all probability bookplates belonging to Sir William and his wife are still hidden underneath the bookplates of their descendants.35 By the time of Sir John’s death in 1741 there seem to have been a decent number of books at Calke; not, perhaps, an enormous collection by later standards, but not insignificant either. Rather than being shelved together in one grand space, these books were split between at least two locations, with ‘a large deal bookcase’ in Sir John’s Study, a plain but comfortable-sounding room, which also contained ‘an old elbow chair’, and ‘6 old matted chairs’, a looking glass, fire-irons and shovel, a pair of tables and – more surprisingly – ‘a spinitt’ and ‘two globes with leathern cases’. Despite the apparent aura of shabby comfort, the globes in their covers must have struck a surprisingly up-to-date note in Sir John’s youth: a fitting adornment for the study of a man brought up during the Scientific Revolution. In addition the nearby Red Dressing Room had two ‘wallnuttree’ bookcases, each set atop a set of chest-of-drawers, one of them with glazed doors. It rather sounds as if these two pieces of furniture may have gone with another pair of bookcases in Sir John’s London house in St James’s Square, where there was ‘a small wallnuttree book case with glass doors and brass mouldings’ and ‘a wallnuttree chest of drawers with book cases on the top with a glass and brass mouldings’. (Another possibility is that these remarkably similar-sounding pieces of furniture were actually a single pair of bookcases which had migrated from Derbyshire to London in the short interval between the taking of the two inventories: we cannot be sure).36 It is not


36 Matlock, Derbyshire Record Office, D2375/294/8/5.
difficult to visualise what these bookcases may have looked like. They sound remarkably similar to those which belonged to the civil servant William Blathwayt (1649–1717) at Dyrham Park, bookcases which themselves closely resemble the set made for the diarist Samuel Pepys, now at Magdalene College, Cambridge. If these smart metropolitan connections seem too fanciful, it is perhaps worth remembering that Sir John Harpur had actually studied at Magdalen College, Oxford, arriving there as a 16-year-old boy in 1696, just seven years before Pepys bequeathed his library to his old college in Cambridge, and that he had been a pupil of the influential poet and essayist Joseph Addison (1672–1719). As late as 1889, when it was reported as stolen, an inscribed copy of Addison’s complete works was regarded as one of the great treasures of the Calke library.

The comparatively modest number of books at Calke in the early 1740s does not need a great deal of explanation. Living in the early years of the eighteenth century, the Harpurs were buying books at the tail end of a long transition between ‘intensive’ and ‘extensive’ reading, when many people moved from reading, marking, learning and inwardly digesting a small number of key texts (including, obviously, the Bible, and for men at least, the classics), rather than reading extensively through a large range of them. This, in itself, would provide a plausible explanation as to the apparently quite modest stock of books in one of the largest houses in Derbyshire: not that the Harpurs had ‘little use for books’ as an early National Trust guidebook suggested, but that they were operating in a culture when fewer books, but not necessarily less reading, was for many the norm. Indeed, the fact that rooms in the house contained ‘a reading stand upon a claw’ and ‘a wainscot reading desk upon a pillar & claw’ rather implies that reading was a normal activity – or at least that it was assumed that it might be. At any event, again it seems unlikely that books were just bought for show.

By 1748, at any rate, there was a library of sorts at Calke, described in detail in a recently discovered catalogue compiled in that year. It is difficult to draw many conclusions about how the books were arranged: quite possibly in the ‘Studdy & Clossett’ described in an inventory of that year, with its ‘walnutrie book caise, with sash doors & drawer’ (which may, indeed, have been one of those recorded back in 1741). But there were 399 books in total (88 folios, 163 quartos and 108 in smaller format), and their total value came to £169 15s 5d, a considerable sum. The available evidence suggests that some of these books may just have left Calke after the 5th baronet’s death, as it seems that his widow and her new husband, Sir Robert Burdett (1716–97), the owner of nearby Foremarke Hall, may have taken away some of Sir John’s personal effects after their marriage in 1753. But the picture is confused, and however things turned out, it seems clear that several dozen Harpur books at least did remain at Calke and passed to subsequent generations, as they are still on the shelves today.
Despite appearances, eighteenth-century Calke may have been less isolated than has sometimes been assumed. The 5th Baronet’s grandson, Sir Henry Harpur, 7th Bt (‘the isolated baronet’) shunned polite company, and his marriage to a lady’s maid seemed to contemporaries to be anything but respectable. But he was also well connected: a great-nephew of the 3rd Duke of Rutland, of Belvoir Castle, and the nephew of the 2nd Earl of Warwick. Another maternal uncle, Charles Francis Greville (1749–1809), was a famous man, an eminent botanist and antiquarian, a Vice-President and Fellow of the Royal Society, co-founder of the Royal Horticultural Society, and the owner of a renowned collection of minerals, which he kept in his house in Paddington Green. Greville’s uncle, in turn, was Sir William Hamilton (1731–1802), British Ambassador at the Court of Naples, famous as a collector of Greek vases, and a student of volcanoes, and especially of Vesuvius. The two men shared not only intellectual pursuits, but the favours of Greville’s long-term mistress, Emma Harte, who eventually married Sir William in 1791. When Hamilton died eight years later, Charles was his heir. In other words Sir Henry, despite his apparent isolation, operated on the fringes of a surprisingly fashionable metropolitan world.

Calke’s location within the charmed triangle of Birmingham, Lichfield and Derby was also important, and by the second half of the eighteenth century there was a great deal going on in this corner of the Midlands, with a circle of Enlightenment poets, scientists, musicians and literati moving between the three. Twelve miles away in Derby, Joseph Wright (1734–97) was painting his marvellous canvases of provincial gentry at play and conducting scientific experiments. Lichfield, 23 miles to the south west, known as the home town of both Dr Johnson and of the actor David Garrick, had its own very lively social scene, dominated by the poet Anna Seward (1747–1809) – ‘the Swan of Lichfield’ – and the Enlightenment physician Erasmus Darwin (1731–1802). The town’s fashionable salons and entertainments were played out against the background of the cathedral, its prosperous clergy and a flourishing musical scene organised by the former cathedral organist Dr John Alcock (1715–1806). Not far away, Josiah Wedgwood (1730–95) was at work in the Potteries, while Birmingham itself was already forging its reputation as the workshop of the world, and a centre of Enlightenment culture as well as of industry and manufacture.

Sir Henry Harpur was prevented from engaging with all of this by his own crippling shyness – often described as ‘eccentricity’, but recognised by some contemporaries for what it clearly was: a mental illness, which forced him to communicate even with his servants by letter. One sympathetic observer was completely clear that Sir Henry suffered from ‘a disease of the mind, which he is sensible of but cannot conquer’, but for all this ‘the isolated baronet’ does not seem to have been completely detached from external events, and he cannot have been unaware of the plays and concerts, the public debates, scientific experiments, and the house visiting which was going on all around him. Bound sets of theatre scripts in the Calke library, some of them marked up for performance, hint at family readings of fashionable plays: an obvious pursuit for a winter evening. But in fact, unexpectedly, ‘the isolated baronet’ appears to have enjoyed amateur dramatics. A neighbour noted with amusement in May 1793 that a married couple of his acquaintance had ‘gone to the Calk Theatricals’, and that Sir Henry played his part with great enthusiasm, coaxing his gouty legs into ‘Harlequin Agility’. ‘Odd enough that a man so shy in his own character should be so intrepid in an assumed one’, he mused. The Calke library also includes printed music by John Alcock of Lichfield though Sir John aimed higher and also owned music by more distinguished composers, including J.C. Bach and Haydn, and even approached Haydn via Charles Greville to commission a pair of military marches for the Derbyshire Yeomanry. The manuscript scores of Two Marches Composed by J. Haydn M.D. for Sir Henry Harpur Bart. (London, 1794) – together with the copperplates from which they were then printed – were one of the more unexpected finds when Calke and its contents were first investigated in the 1980s. As Sir Henry’s mother Frances Harpur correctly observed, ‘there is no bargaining with such eminent

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42 Charles Greville; Sir William Hamilton, ODNB.


Composers’, and the two short marches cost the substantial sum of 24 guineas. 46 But Sir Henry and his family were sufficiently interested in music for a separate catalogue of their scores to be compiled. It includes a wide-ranging selection of vocal and keyboard music, dances and, of course, military music for the band of the Derbyshire Yeomanry: until the current project to catalogue the Calke books has penetrated into the furthest recesses of the house, it is not clear how much of this still survives, but probably much of it does.47

Science was another interest, with both ‘the isolated baronet’ and his mother subscribing to copies of Abraham Bennet’s *New Experiments on Electricity* (Derby, 1789). Electricity was a fashionable enthusiasm of the period, and another eccentric Midland nobleman, the 5th Lord Leigh (1742–86), had owned a ‘lectrifying apparatus’ at Stoneleigh Abbey in Warwickshire back in the 1760s.48 Disappointingly, there is no sign that Sir Henry had anything similar. Bennet was a local man, the curate of the Derbyshire parish of Wirksworth, and the book was published by the Derby printer and bookseller John Drewy, so there may have been an element of cultural patronage and local pride at work.49 But if Sir Henry was the original owner of Giovanni Aldini’s *An Account of Some Improvement in Galvanism* (London, 1803), the subject may perhaps have been judged too hard, as many of the pages of the Calke copy have never been opened.

On the other hand Sir Henry’s father, Sir Harry Harpur, 6th Bt (1739–89), does seem to have been somehow involved in the invention of the ‘Polygrapher’, a useful machine for making multiple copies of letters, developed by none other than Erasmus Darwin, who, somewhat surprisingly, appears to have been a regular house guest at Calke in the late 1780s. Darwin had acted as a point of contact between Calke and Josiah Wedgwood when Sir Harry wanted tiles for a fashionable new dairy back in 1774, but he may also have been providing medical advice.50 Certainly, his cultural activities must have been familiar enough to Sir Harry and his family, as the Calke library still contains a copy of the works of Linnaeus published at Lichfield in 1787 under the auspices of the city’s Botanical Society. The society’s three members included Darwin, the book’s publisher John Jackson and the Derbyshire landowner Sir Brooke Boothby (1744–1824), who welcomed Rousseau to Ashbourne in 1766.51

None of these activities would have come cheap, but Calke was a rich estate, and in 1812 an informed observer reckoned that ‘the isolated baronet’ was worth £25,000 a year: two-and-a-half times the annual income of Jane Austen’s Mr Darcy (*Pride and Prejudice* was issued in 1813). So both Sir Harry and his son Sir Henry could well afford to indulge their tastes and foibles. Sir Henry, in particular, certainly did so, even to the extent of keeping a pack of hounds while being too shy to go out hunting, and dining alone in great state ‘at a table covered for several persons’.52 But alongside his other cultural and social activities, and indeed his expensive oddities and foibles, it seems clear that one of Sir Henry Harpur’s major legacies to his successors was a magnificent library, housed in a splendidly up-to-date Neo-classical room, and packed with interesting, important and improving books of all kinds. What is more, the library was not only large, but it was methodically run and well-organised, habits which despite what was to happen subsequently – and perhaps surprisingly – were to continue into the nineteenth century.53

Sir Harry Harpur Crewe, 6th Bt (1739–89)

46 Catalogue no. 16; H.M. Colvin, *Calke Abbey, Derbyshire: A Hidden House Revealed*, p.54. For the original manuscripts (one an autograph), copperplates, printed impressions and correspondence on the subject, see Matlock, Derbyshire Record Office, M2375/287/1–38.
47 Matlock, Derbyshire Record Office, D2375M/287/38.
53 There are several catalogues and booklists from the reign of ‘the isolated baronet’, but the largest and most impressive is now Matlock, Derbyshire Record Office, 2375M/272/3.
Decline and Fall

Despite the foibles of earlier generations, the rot set in at Calke (certainly figuratively and probably literally) with Sir Vauncey Harpur Crewe, who succeeded to the estates in 1886. But the library did not cease with him. In fact it expanded. Vauncey has become famous – one might almost say infamous – as the frenzied collector of geology and especially taxidermy on a truly heroic scale. The sheer extent of the mania comes into even sharper relief when one remembers that the stuffed birds and animals seen at Calke today represent only a small part of his original collection, and that even more glass-cased specimens were sold after his death. Excess butterflies alone ran to some 412 lots when Sir Vauncey’s surplus lepidoptera were sent for auction in 1924. It is difficult and perhaps pointless to try too hard to analyse Vauncey’s motives, but to twenty-first-century sensibilities his odd behaviour – the reluctance to communicate or engage with other people, the desire to hoard and to organise, the hiding in Calke woodlands with his gamekeepers to avoid unwanted visitors, and the single-minded and relentless pursuit of his chosen obsessions – all point to a man well along the autistic spectrum.

Vauncey’s pet enthusiasms were not by any means bizarre or unusual among Victorian landowners. His father Sir John Harpur Crewe was regarded as ‘a skilful and accomplished ornithologist’, while his near relation Henry Harpur Crewe (1828–83), Rector of Drayton Beauchamp in Buckinghamshire, also collected birds, insects and butterflies on a prodigious scale, and engaged with them at a scholarly level some way beyond his wealthier cousin. Henry Harpur Crewe’s near neighbour Lionel Walter Rothschild (1868–1937) assembled an even more prodigious collection of taxidermy at Tring Park. What was curious about Sir Vauncey Harpur Crewe was not his schoolboy infatuation with natural history, but the sheer oddness of his behaviour.

His bizarre persecution of family members (Vauncey expelled his daughter Airmyne from Calke for smoking in her room, and demolished nearby Repton Park round the ears of his cousin, John Edmund Harpur Crewe) was by any standards extremely strange, and contrasts sharply with his apparent popularity with his tenants and outdoor workers. His obsession with keeping fires lit, ostensibly a matter of providing suitable ventilation for his collections, clearly went considerably beyond the rational. Had he lived a century later, Sir Vauncey might, perhaps have been diagnosed with Asperger’s Syndrome or Obsessive Compulsive Disorder. It is difficult to say whether all this was exacerbated by his home education, or whether this was itself the consequence of his family’s desire to keep a perhaps rather odd child out of the public eye. Certainly the manuscript ‘Natural History of Calke and Warslow’ which the 12-year-old Vauncey compiled in 1858 does seem to suggest that the oddness and the obsessions started quite early. What is certainly true is that Vauncey’s considerable wealth allowed him to turn his back on the outside world, and to create his own crazed kingdom behind the park walls. It was less a question of refusing to accept the modern world than of failing to notice that it existed. ‘How completely he is losing or rather has lost all position in the County’, grumbled his elderly Aunt Isabel in 1904. ‘It vexes me terribly … he does not seem to know how to behave like a gentleman’.

At any event, his collecting encompassed printed matter quite as much as glass cases full of specimens. Sir Vauncey bought large numbers of books, fairly ordinary books on fairly ordinary subjects, certainly, but also grander books on his favourite subjects: natural history, geology, shooting, egg collecting, ornithology and so on. In 1889, for example, he bought a copy of British Birds and Eggs in half morocco, for a not inconsiderable £7 7s, from Barkers, a traditional bookseller for Calke, though Sir Vauncey’s collecting was sufficiently serious that he clearly could not and did not rely on local booksellers, and his surviving papers include sales catalogues of ornithological libraries. But in fact some of the grander bird books at Calke seem to have come into the library somewhat earlier: the splendid plate books of the ornithologist and taxidermist John Gould (1804–81) are obvious cases in point. The same

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55 Derby Mercury, 10 March 1886; Salmon, The Aurelian Legacy, pp.381–2.
56 Matlock, Derbyshire Record Office, D2375/222/1.
58 Matlock, Derbyshire Record Office, D2375M/97/1.
may have been true of the Calke copy of John James Audubon’s *Birds of America* (1827–38) – among the largest, the most spectacular (and now financially the most valuable) books ever published. But even more striking, at least en masse, are the enormous numbers of mid- to late Victorian books in publisher’s cloth, most of which were clearly acquired by Sir Vauncey and contain his bookplate. It seems unlikely, however, that Vauncey was much of a reader, and it comes as a considerable surprise to discover that his father-in-law was Evelyn Philip Shirley (1812–82), of Ettington Park, Warwickshire, and Lough Fea, County Monaghan, one of the great Victorian bibliophiles, who assembled exceptionally fine libraries in both his English and Irish properties.59

**The End**

A significant part of Sir Vauncey’s natural history collection was sold by his executors after his death in 1924. The enormous quantity of material still in the house today in itself gives some impression of the sheer scale of the collection in its original form.60 The sales also included some of the books, though in point of fact it is far from clear quite how many of the 1,956 lots set out in a catalogue issued by the London booksellers Bernard Quaritch Ltd in 1924 actually came from Calke, and how many came from other libraries. The single greatest loss was the Calke copy of Audubon’s *Birds of America* (lot 1190), which sold for £890. Its whereabouts are currently unknown, though it is presumably in a library somewhere in the United States. It would be interesting to know how and where Sir Vauncey kept the huge double elephant folio bindings.61

Sir Vauncey outlived his eldest son Richard Harpur Crewe (1880–1921) by nearly three years. In life, Richard had enjoyed surprisingly harmonious relations with his cranky father, perhaps because he had inherited an estate at Hemington from an uncle in 1905, visiting Calke only occasionally. In death, many of his possessions found their way back to Calke, including a considerable number of books. The volumes on motor-cars, submarines, skiing and international power politics give a tantalising glimpse of the brave new world that might have invaded Vauncey’s kingdom had his elder son lived.62 But in fact Richard’s premature death ensured not only Calke Abbey’s survival as a mid-Victorian time capsule, but also the slow inexorable decay of the house, and, ultimately, the end of the estate as the private, closed world which it had been for much of the previous 200 years. From 1924, Richard’s sister Hilda was the chatelaine of Calke, a pious, well-meaning woman, admired by her land agent, but evidently rather other-worldly, and with hardly more of a grip on the modern world than her eccentric father. The reduced circumstances of the post-war world led to the reduction of the indoor staff from 27 to about half a dozen, and even the sale of parts of Sir Vauncey’s collections could not fill the gap in the finances.63 Hilda’s marriage brought yet more books to Calke, in the form of the library – or at least part of it – from Rolleston Hall, the nearby house of her husband’s family, the Mosleys.

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**Might Have Beens**

During the last 15 years of the nineteenth century, and the first 60 or 70 years of the twentieth century, British landed estates and country houses went under in enormous numbers. All over the country (and even more in neighbouring Ireland) landowners who had ruled the local roost for hundreds of years found themselves faced with ever-increasing taxation, unpayable bills and a slow but inexorable loss of social prestige and political power. Quite apart from the economic pressures, many owners were happy to accept they were living an archaic lifestyle which no longer suited either them or their families, and that it was necessary to retrench to survive. For others, the death of a cherished heir in the mud of Flanders, or the occupation of a once-great house by the military during the war against Hitler were the catalysts which led to the steady dissolution of the old order. Elsewhere, it was a matter of servants, or rather the lack of them. At Kedleston, for example, a dynamic new houseman was appointed in the 1960s, and was astonished to find that the great house had been operating on a skeleton staff for decades, and that despite its grandeur it was in a shocking state of decay and squalor. Quickly making himself indispensable, within a short while he ended up as butler and general factotum, a rapid promotion which would have been inconceivable in Edwardian times, but was possible 50 years later, when able staff were often either unaffordable or unobtainable.64

Despite the size of the estate, Calke was in many ways a very ordinary country house that turned into an extraordinary survival because of the oddity of its owners. Had the Harpur-Crewes been less wealthy and rather less other-worldly, both house and estate would surely have vanished as so many others did. It takes little imagination to see the felling of trees in the park, the ploughing up of the fields for wartime agriculture, open-cast mining in the garden in the ’40s and ’50s, the light industry sprouting round the park gates, the auctioneer’s tent in front of the house, and the bare patch of ground where the Abbey had once stood. The very best family portraits might have ended up in America, the stuffed birds and animals either in a junk shop, or perhaps on a bonfire. The more mundane furniture might have made it into the antiques trade, and the grander pieces perhaps to a local museum or the V&A. As for the library, the crucial question in this counterfactual history would have been when it was broken up. If had been in the ’40s, the comparatively small number of really grand books might have gone for auction as ’the property of a lady’, and some of the more ordinary eighteenth-century books might have found their way into the trade, but many of the thousands in Victorian publisher’s cloth would have had a more uncertain fate. On the other hand, if the dissolution had come a little later, the growing enthusiasm for Victorianana of all kinds – for books stoked, of course, by Michael Sadleir’s seminal bibliography of XIXth Century Fiction (1951) – would surely have had quite an impact. Many of Calke’s books would have sold very readily, though a fair number would probably not have made it into a formal sale catalogue, which would consequently have provided only a partial record of what had once been on the shelves. At any event, such books as were sold would have been scattered, severing their connection both with the place and with one another; ultimately the great value of the Calke libraries is that they have remained in situ, and they seem to be almost entirely intact. Books sublime and ridiculous, important and trivial, mainstream and unexpected – all stand cheek-by-jowl on the shelves, a fascinating witness to a not-so-very-distant, yet now very remote past.

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64 Roy Adams, Tantrums and Tiaras: Twenty-Five Years in Service at Kedleston Hall (Derby: Derby Books, 2010).
The 4th baronet is the earliest member of the family whose books can still be identified at Calke. His bookplate – in the ‘Early Armorial’ style which was in vogue from around 1695 to 1720 – survives in at least nine books and his inscription in around five more. A similar number of books have been identified with the inscription of Sir John’s wife, Catherine Crewe (1682–1745). It is worth noting that books with their inscriptions often contain the bookplates of the couple’s son or grandson, and it is therefore likely that the provenance of other books at Calke acquired by Sir John and Lady Harpur is hidden by these later plates.

When the 5th baronet commissioned his bookplate in the 1740s, bookplate fashions were moving from the formal ‘Jacobean’ style (named for its resemblance to late seventeenth-century woodwork) to the asymmetrical ‘Chippendale’ style, typically featuring angled shields and natural-looking foliage. The 5th baronet’s mantle bookplate therefore seems relatively outdated with its symmetrical shield and cloth mantling, and perhaps suggests a certain indifference to fashion.
The Nobleman and Gentleman’s Director and Assistant, in the True Choice of their Wheel-Carriages (London, 1763)
This work is an extremely rare survival, with only two other copies recorded in the English Short-Title Catalogue. Despite its visual appeal to modern eyes, it was not for show but a functional book of designs for coaches – ‘being a work of universal use, not only to gentlemen, but coach-makers and spring-makers’ – and was apparently used by the family as a practical manual: there are notes on harnesses and pencil modifications on plates 28 and 35. The designer of the carriages has not been identified, but the plates have been attributed to a French émigré engraver, Ignace Fougeron after a M. Meillian or Meillan. The publisher A. Webley and his partner, Henry Webley, specialised in practical design books for architects, carpenters, cabinetmakers and similar tradesmen. The family apparently had the book bound locally by Barker of Ashby-de-La-Zouch; it may, indeed, have been bought from them.

The Nobleman and Gentleman’s Director and Assistant, in the True Choice of their Wheel-Carriages (London, 1763)
Plate 30 shows an engraving of a rather more sedate covered carriage, drawn to scale.

The Nobleman and Gentleman’s Director and Assistant, in the True Choice of their Wheel-Carriages (London, 1763)
This engraving has modifications drawn in pencil and costs in figures for a ‘phaeton and harness’ noted alongside, which probably indicates that the family were considering purchasing something similar. Phaetons were the contemporary equivalent of a sports car: fast, open carriages, highly sprung on four oversize wheels, drawn by one or two horses. Modifications were also made to a similar sporty carriage on plate 28, but we do not know whether the Harpurs bought either or both.

Robert Smith, The Universal Directory for Taking Alive and Destroying Rats, and all other Kinds of Four-Footed and Winged Vermin (London, 1768)
Rats and other vermin were a constant problem on country estates, so the market for this book – intended for the gentleman, farmer and warrener – must have been considerable. Vermin was a wide-ranging term: it includes not just rodents, but larger mammals, such as foxes, feral cats, badgers and otters, and birds of prey and carrion. Little is known of the author, who describes himself as: ‘Rat-Catcher to the Princess Amelia’, although later editions indicate that he lived in Turnham Green and died before 1786. Princess Amelia (1711–86), second daughter of George II, was ranger of Richmond Park and owned a country house at Gunnersbury Park near Hounslow.
Robert Smith, *The Universal Directory for Taking Alive and Destroying Rats, and all other Kinds of Four-Footed and Winged Vermin* (London, 1768)

The plates in this work showed practical traps for catching the animals, alive in this case. Figure 1 shows the trap set and awaiting its victim. In figure 2, the rat has been caught and is being removed into a cage. Rats would be taken alive not for humane reasons, but in order to set them against dogs for sport.

John Howard (1726–90), *An Account of the Present State of the Prisons in England and Wales* (Warrington, 1777)

Howard’s interest in prison reform may have been sparked by his own experience after his capture by French privateers in 1756, although he only became seriously involved after his appointment as High Sheriff of Bedfordshire in 1773. This is an abridged edition of his first work – *The State of the Prisons in England and Wales* – which is credited with introducing the practice of single cells for prisoners, and includes detailed accounts and plans of prisons he had visited, with suggestions for improvements to the physical and mental health of prisoners.

Howard visited prisons throughout Europe and died from typhus contracted during a prison visit in present-day Ukraine. His work is continued to the present day by the Howard League for Penal Reform.

John Philip Kemble, *The Farm House* (London, 1789)

Annotations in books often give us an insight into how they were used by their owners. Here the cast list for a comedy is marked up in pencil with the names of those playing various roles: ‘HH’ (playing ‘Modely’) stands for Sir Henry Harpur, the 7th Bt (1763–1819), so this was probably a performance at Calke. It is tempting to imagine this as rather like the private theatricals held in Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park* (1814). At any event it shows that Sir Henry, nicknamed ‘the isolated baronet’, was not quite as shy as has sometimes been supposed.

Ordinary’ books rarely make it into exhibition catalogues, but a great many of the books at Calke were, in their day, very ordinary indeed: pamphlets, cheap reprints, ephemeral publications, plays and other odds and ends. The works of the actor-manager John Philip Kemble, brother of the more famous Mrs Siddons, were hugely popular in their day. Apart from this copy at Calke, there are only two copies of this edition of *The Farm House* in libraries in the United Kingdom: in the British Library in London, and the Bodleian in Oxford.
**John Smeaton (1724–92), A Narrative of the Building and a Description of the Construction of the Edystone Lighthouse with Stone (London, 1791)**

Smeaton's design for a stone lighthouse, inspired by the shape of an oak tree. It was built of dovetailed granite blocks and hydraulic lime, a pioneering mortar which set underwater and was a forerunner of Portland cement.

**John Smeaton, A Narrative of the Building and a Description of the Construction of the Edystone Lighthouse with Stone (London, 1791)**

The ‘father of civil engineering’, John Smeaton built the third lighthouse on the Eddystone rocks in south-west England, which was hugely influential in the development of lighthouse design. Built between 1756 and 1759, it survived until 1877, when it was dismantled and rebuilt on Plymouth Hoe.

**John Smeaton, A Narrative of the Building and a Description of the Construction of the Edystone Lighthouse with Stone (London, 1791)**

The first Eddystone lighthouse was built by Henry Winstanley. He was killed when it was destroyed in the Great Storm of 1703, which caused major damage to buildings, forests and ships and killed several thousand people. The second lighthouse (not shown) was built in 1709 and burnt down in 1755.
South ELEVATION of the ORIGINAL LIGHTHOUSE,

Built upon the EDYSTONE ROCK, according to the first Design of Mr. Winstanley.

Taken from a Perspective Point, drawn at the Rock, by Sussell Johnston, Printer — Signed by the Author of the.
Thomas Bewick (1753–1828), *A General History of Quadrupeds* (*Newcastle, 1790*)

Bewick’s *Birds* is perhaps the best-known of his works, but it was preceded by *Quadrupeds*, which has equally charming wood engravings, with text by his partner Ralph Beilby. It was their first great commercial success, quickly running through several editions. The title page of the first edition here has a wood engraving of a stag drinking from a waterfall; the motto on the stone can be translated as ‘All good comes from above; God’s works are wonderful’.

This book, part of a wide-ranging collection of natural history at Calke, bears the inscription: ‘George Harpur’s book given to him by the Earl of Warwick July 21st: 1804’. George Greville, 2nd Earl of Warwick (1746–1816), was a Fellow of both the Society of Antiquaries and the Royal Society, and the maternal uncle to the nine-year-old George Harpur, later Sir George Crewe, the 8th Bt.

John Alcock (1715–1806), *Harmonia Festi or a Collection of Canons; Cheerful & Serious Glee’s & Catches for Four & Five Voices in Score* (*Lichfield, 1791*)

John Alcock, who was apprenticed to the blind organist John Stanley in London, was a Vicar Choral (singing man) at Lichfield Cathedral for 56 years. For several years in the 1750s he was also organist and master of the choristers there, but his attempts to improve the cathedral’s music stirred a rumpus among his most indolent colleagues, which he described in a semi-autobiographical novel *The Life of Miss Fanny Price*. He composed instrumental and church music as well as the various glee collected here, which contain handwritten continuo notation in some pieces.

Eighteenth-century publications were frequently issued by subscription, either because they were luxurious and expensive and the publisher needed the capital to commission luxuries like copperplates for lavish illustrations, or (as in this case) because they were essentially local productions aimed at a limited market. Either way the down-payment would have helped with the cash flow. Two of the five copies bought by ‘the isolated baronet’, survive in the library at Calke, both in their original ‘temporary’ grey paper wrappers. Although never bound, they were eventually placed into a nineteenth-century spring binder, with the label: ‘E.J. Wilson, maker, London’. This appears to have been part of a nineteenth-century attempt to tidy up the library, as there are several uniform binders containing similar unbound music.
William Wilkins (1778–1839), *The Antiquities of Magna Graecia* (Cambridge, 1807)

Magna Graecia, or Greater Greece, was the name given to Greek colonies in southern Italy, founded from the eighth century BC. Perhaps unexpectedly, this work is not from the Gardner Wilkinson collection: Sir Henry Harpur, the 7th Bt, appears in the list of subscribers, indicating its wider interest for learned gentlemen. It contained landscapes and views of classical monuments – such as the Temple of Concord at Agrigento in Sicily – printed in bistre, a brownish ink made from soot.

Wilkins made use of his knowledge of antiquity as a leading architect in the English Greek revival: his classically inspired buildings include Downing College Cambridge, University College London, the National Gallery and the National Trust’s only working theatre, in Bury St Edmunds. His father, William Wilkins the Elder, made his name as a theatre designer, and also designed the library at Calke Abbey for ‘the isolated baronet’ in 1805.
Rudolph Ackermann (1764–1834), The Repository of Arts, Literature, Commerce (London, 1810)

Ackermann, originally from Saxony, was a successful carriage-maker, who later turned his hand to publishing; he specialised in books with hand-coloured plates, particularly topographical prints or satire, working with artists such as Thomas Rowlandson (1756–1827) and W.H. Pyne (1769–1843).

This monthly magazine, published from 1809–28, acted as a catalogue for the fashions of the time, whether in furniture, home decoration or the latest dresses: many of these products could be supplied by the Ackermann firm. As well as numerous plates, some coloured, it often contained pasted-in fabric samples for clothes, upholstery or crafts. This plate from the 1810 volume shows papers recommended for use in the fashionable pastime of fancy-work, here recommended to ladies as ‘an innocent and amusing occupation, which daily affords such abundant scope for new inventions … [as] fire-screens, card-racks, chimney ornaments, boxes, picture-frames’. The rooms of many country houses will have been filled with such decorated items.

Rudolph Ackermann The Repository of Arts, Literature, Commerce (London, 1810)

Fashions for men and women were illustrated in the Repository with accompanying descriptions which would allow subscribers to order something similar from their tailor or dressmaker. Costumes were generally pictured with the model standing to show the full effect, but for this opera costume, it was apparently important to make an impact even while seated in your box. The description is worth reproducing in full as it indicates that accessories and hair were felt to be as important as the dress itself:

A round robe of white or coloured crape, imperial net, or muslin, with white satin bodice, trimmed with gold or silver, or a border of small flowers. A wrapping mantle of fawn-coloured satin, trimmed entirely round with swansdown. Necklace, ear-rings, and bracelets of pearl. Hair in dishevelled curls, confined with a diamond comb, and ornamented with a Persian wreath of blended pearl and amethysts. – Slippers of fawn-coloured satin, with silver clasps. Opera fan of carved amber.
Rudolph Ackermann. *The Repository of Arts, Literature, Commerce* (London, 1810)

This circular revolving bookcase is reminiscent of a Chinese pagoda, although topped with a classically inspired lamp. Described as an ‘ingenious and elegant contrivance’, it appears likely to be rather unstable when fully shelved, but the writer helpfully notes that it could be used to keep selected books close at hand to avoid those ‘occasions of literary research and reference, on which the floor and tables of the library are, from necessity, strewed with the works referred to’.

The bookcase was made by the fashionable Regency furniture-makers, Morgan and Sanders of the Strand. Examples of their metamorphic library chairs – which featured in another issue of *The Repository* – can still be seen in several of the Trust’s libraries, including the great libraries at Belton and Saltram.
Although Calke was allowed to decline from the 1880s, in earlier periods the Harpers had been noticeably smart and up to date when it came to interior design. Picture books like Pyne’s *History of the Royal Residences* were useful sources in this regard. They could also fire the imaginations of those interested in history and antiquities, and indeed for today’s readers they can be invaluable in providing information about lost buildings and lost interiors.

Most great houses had a chapel, but none was anything like as grand as St George’s Chapel, Windsor, an independent building of cathedral dimensions associated since its foundation with the Order of the Garter. Religious buildings were of course just as much subject to changes of fashion as any other, and this plate shows the chapel in the aftermath of its late eighteenth-century restoration for George III. The altar painting and windows shown here were relatively recent additions by Benjamin West (1738–1820); along with many of George III’s alterations, they were subsequently swept away in the reign of Queen Victoria.

W.H. Pyne was a skilled watercolourist and lithographer who did a great deal of work for Ackermann. But in this case he commissioned a team of skilled artists to produce the 100 lavish aquatints to accompany the text, which he himself wrote. Illustrated books on this sort of scale were a risky business, and *The History of the Royal Residences* (issued in 25 parts) was a financial disaster.

This plate of the medieval kitchen at Windsor Castle was drawn by James Stephanoff; other artists who worked for Pyne included Charles Wild and the French émigré A.C. Pugin, father of the great Gothic revival architect. The Windsor kitchen largely survived the 1992 fire and is still used when there are state banquets.

Hudibras the Younger, *Sultan Sham and his Seven Wives* (London, 1820)

The Caricature Room at Calke, created around 1790, has walls covered with satirical prints by artists such as Rowlandson, Gillray and Cruikshank. It is thought that pictures were still being added in the 1820s, but perhaps fortunately this book was not in the house at that date, so its satirical frontispiece of George IV by John Lewis Marks was not removed to add to the decoration. It is bound in a volume of satirical pamphlets which was acquired in 1906 by Colonel Godfrey Mosley (1863–1945) of Rolleston Hall, husband of Hilda, née Harpur-Crewe (1877–1949), who inherited Calke in 1924. The publisher, William Benbow, was a prolific producer of popular anti-Regent literature and pro-Caroline in the disputes with her husband, who became king in 1820.
**Derby Musical Festival (Derby, 1828)**

A programme for a concert at All Saints’ Church, from a volume containing seven concert programmes for the Derby Musical Festival and Derby Triennial Festival, 1828, held in aid of the local infirmary. Sir George Crewe, 8th Bt is listed among vice-presidents of the Festival, which may account for the ornate binding of red morocco and marbled paper. The social importance of this festival for the local area is shown by the survival at nearby Hardwick of another collection of 1828 festival programmes, indicating that the Duke of Devonshire also supported the concerts.

**John Jebb (1775–1833), Sermons on Subjects Chiefly Practical (London, 1838)**

Like plays and pamphlets, sermons were an important part of any country-house library, useful for whiling away the time, read for pleasure as a literary genre, but above all a vital form of spiritual exercise in a profoundly religious age. The sermons of the Irish bishop John Jebb have probably not been much read in the last 150 years, but they were popular in their day, as these markings in the hand of the pious Sir George Crewe, 8th Bt, show.

The taxidermist and ornithologist Gould is perhaps best-known for his lithographed folio bird books, all published in parts by subscription. He realised the potential in the little-known wildlife of Australia and collected material for books on birds and mammals while on an extended family visit from 1838–40. Gould’s wife, Elizabeth, had trained in lithography in order to produce the plates for his early works, but she died of puerperal fever soon after their return to England, so Gould turned to Henry Constantine Richter (1821–1902) for this spectacular three-volume work. It was one of his least successful in attracting subscribers but was valued by zoologists for its clear depictions of Australian fauna.


When this image was first published, the wombat had only been known to Europeans for around 50 years and was still a mysterious creature. Gould comments in his accompanying text on the difficulty of keeping up with the latest discoveries:

> An interval of eighteen years having passed away between the commencement and termination of the present work, there may be some instances in which opinions expressed in years gone by now require modification. When I published the reduced figures of this animal, I remarked that it was uncertain whether there was more than one species of the genus Phascolomys. I now, in 1863, feel confident that there are three, if not four, quite distinct wombats …

*Phascolomys wombat*, drawn here from a specimen in the Zoological Society of London, has since been reclassified as the common wombat, *Vombatus ursinus*. 
The koala bear (*Phascolarctos cinereus*) was described by Gould as found only in the south-east of Australia, largely nocturnal, very slothful during the day and very difficult to detect in the thick foliage of the Eucalyptus trees.

His awareness of the effect of mass European immigration on the native species and of the importance of recording them seems remarkably prescient, although he was fortunately too pessimistic when he noted ‘Like too many others of the larger Australian mammals, this species is certain to become gradually more scarce, and to be ultimately extirpated’.


The son of a royal gardener, the taxidermist Gould was appointed in 1828 to the museum of the new Zoological Society of London. In 1837 he provided vital evidence for Darwin’s theory of island speciation when he correctly identified several different Galápagos specimens as finches with variations in their size and beaks. A collection of Himalayan birds at the Society’s museum inspired Gould to publish his first illustrated work, which led – over nearly 60 years – to the production of 50 large folio volumes, covering much of the world and generally regarded as the only serious rivals to John James Audubon’s *Birds of America* (1827–38).

The books were published in parts by subscription, to cover the huge costs involved in printing the plates, which are lithographs with hand-colouring. This five-volume work (367 plates issued in 25 parts) was Gould’s penultimate production. 750 copies were produced, of which Calke appears to have subscribed to two: one for Sir John Harpur Crewe and a second for his wife Georgiana (1824–1910); only one copy survives in the library today.

The images – usually taken from dead specimens – are beautifully drawn, yet highly accurate. Gould was author, publisher and collector of the specimens, but he did not produce the plates himself: instead his sketches were worked up and transferred to the lithographic stones by other artists, such as his long-term collaborator H.C. Richter. This book included
many images of nests and young birds, which perhaps excused the repetition of birds previously featured in Gould’s *Birds of Europe* (1837). The plate shown here – long-tailed tits (*Mecistura caudata*) – includes the nest, described by Gould:

> Wonderful, indeed, is the architectural skill displayed by the Long-tailed Tit in the construction of its closely felted nest, so warmly lined with feathers, and externally spangled with lichens. If closely inspected, it will be found that the glaucous side of the lichens are always placed to the light, whereby the exterior is rendered still more beautiful.

**William Makepeace Thackeray (1811–63),* Vanity Fair* (London, 1848)**

In common with many nineteenth-century novels, Thackeray’s classic satire on Regency England was initially serialised in parts – from January 1847 to July 1848 – before being issued in book form. The Calke copy of the first edition of 1848 was evidently bought locally by the 9th Bt, as it has the bookseller’s ticket of Rowbottom in Derby. This was the first work issued under Thackeray’s own name and featured his humorous illustrations; the appeal to the caricature-loving family at Calke is obvious.

**Paul Belloni du Chaillu (1831–1903), *Explorations and Adventures in Equatorial Africa* (London, 1861)**

Calke has excellent collections of nineteenth-century books on travel and exploration, including this account of an African expedition by a French-American anthropologist, who was the first non-native to confirm the existence of gorillas. He became a popular public speaker, although sometimes accused of exaggerated traveller’s tales.

One of the glories of the library at Calke is its holdings of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century books in their original publisher’s bindings, often in excellent condition. This type of binding appeared increasingly from the mid-nineteenth century, as mechanisation made it easier to produce them cheaply on a large scale, and attractive bindings quickly became an additional marketing tool, designed to catch the eye of the browser. The bindings – produced by specialist companies such as Leighton Son & Hodge, Bone & Son or Westleys – are generally of cloth in a rainbow of colours, embossed with gilt decoration or coloured images representing the contents of the book. In addition, books often contain advertisements or publisher’s catalogues. In many libraries, such books were rebound in ‘higher status’ morocco or half-calf and marbled paper, often removing the marketing material, but Calke’s copies survive as issued, adding to their interest for social and book trade historians. This original publisher’s binding, with its gilt gorilla, is typical of many at Calke.

Henry Morton Stanley (1841–1904), *In Darkest Africa: or the Quest, Rescue and Retreat of Emin, Governor of Equatoria* (London, 1890)

The journalist Stanley is best-known for his 1871 journey to find the missionary David Livingstone, whom he famously claimed to have greeted ‘Dr Livingstone, I presume’. But Stanley also made several other journeys in Africa and this is his account of one of the last major European expeditions into the interior.

Equatoria was part of Sudan, which had been cut off after the fall of Khartoum to the Mahdists. The expedition had the avowed aim of rescuing the German governor, Eduard Schnitzer, known as Emin Pasha, but was confused by several other objectives, including furthering the interests of the Belgian King, and led to much criticism of Stanley in Britain, particularly from anti-slavery organisations.

This copy is in its original pictorial cloth binding, and has the monogrammed bookplate of Sir Vauncey Harpur Crewe, 10th Bt.
The Libraries at Calke Abbey


Calke had always been known for fossils and taxidermy, but during the long and eccentric reign of Sir Vauncey Harpur Crewe the house became crammed to the gunnels with stuffed birds and animals, while the shelves of the library were overrun with books on natural history and field sports. Some of these had relevance to the upkeep of animals on the estate, while others dealt with more exotic wildlife in other continents. This fairly typical work, containing Sir Vauncey’s bookplate, is dedicated to the Scottish game bird the capercaillie, which is the largest member of the grouse family. Interestingly, significant portions of the book have unopened pages. If earlier generations at Calke seem to have read quite widely round the library, Vauncey evidently did not necessarily open books even on his pet subjects.


Some of the twentieth-century books at Calke seem jarringly different from the rest of the collection; they are often marked with a book label bearing the simple legend ‘RFH Crewe’ indicating that they were acquired by Sir Vauncey’s eldest son Richard Harpur Crewe (1880–1921), who died in his father’s lifetime. Books such as this manual of car engineering hint at the modern world which might have invaded Vauncey’s eccentric empire had Richard lived, covering subjects such as skiing, U-boats, wireless and the *Titanic*, aeroplanes, international politics, and the First World War.


This English translation of the autobiography of the German fighter ace, ‘the Red Baron’, was published shortly after the author’s death in battle in April 1918 (without permission from Germany, of course). Richard Harpur Crewe clearly bought it soon after publication as it is signed ‘R.F.H. Crewe June 1918’.
The Libraries at Calke Abbey

The Gardner Wilkinson Library


Calke is unique among National Trust houses in having not one, but two completely separate and historically distinct libraries. In addition to the main family collection, mostly housed in the library on the first floor, there is another library on the second floor. Rather smaller than the Harpur-Crewe library – but with nearly 1,600 books still not a small library – it is the personal collection of the nineteenth-century Egyptologist and antiquarian Sir John Gardner Wilkinson (1797–1875). Previously kept in Wilkinson’s house on the Gower Peninsula in south Wales, it was bequeathed by him to Sir John Harpur Crewe, 9th Bt.

When the Trust took over at Calke, Wilkinson’s books were still in the room which had housed them since Victorian times, many of them scattered across the floor in great disorder. Calke’s last private owner, Henry Harpur-Crewe, was well aware of the history of the library, and knew that it was important, but unsurprisingly this did not translate into action: the Gardner Wilkinson Library was not sold or discarded, but neither was it looked after. Since then the Trust has done a lot of conservation and some tidying up, but always trying to respect the chaos and clutter of unrestored Calke, which was acquired precisely because it was such an evocative example of a once great estate in the final stages of collapse and decay. But this has been at a certain price for the library. Though its books are no longer in imminent danger of falling to pieces, getting out some of the larger volumes can be a major operation. And the clutter and apparent disorder tends to mask the fact that the Gardner Wilkinson Library is a remarkable collection, packed with interesting, unusual, even unique things, and a remarkable window into the life and career of one of the great intellectual figures of Victorian England. Its history is in one sense a part of the history of Calke in decline, but at the same time the books have a history of their own – a fascinating, exotic and sometimes surprising one.

Sir John Gardner Wilkinson and Egypt

John Gardner Wilkinson (always known as ‘Gardner’) was born in Buckinghamshire just eight years after the start of the French Revolution. It was this same Revolution which ultimately brought Egypt to the attention of European travellers, principally because of Napoleon’s military expedition to the Middle East between 1798 and 1801. In military terms the venture was something of a disaster: Nelson smashed the French fleet at the Battle of the Nile in August 1798, and shortly afterwards the soon-to-be Emperor abandoned his beleaguered troops to return to Paris and plot his rise to supreme power. On the other hand its cultural impact was enormous, opening up the Nile Valley to Enlightenment travellers who were already intrigued by reports of the wonders of

Not all of the books are in the showroom; some are stored elsewhere.

Personal information from Martin Drury, successively Historic Buildings Secretary and Director-General of the National Trust, 1973–2001.
Ancient Egypt. European scholars had long known about these, but few had been there – western travellers were not necessarily welcome in Egypt – and the details were often confused and sketchy, derived as often as not from classical authors like Herodotus, and from Baroque scholars like the Jesuit priest Athanasius Kircher (1601–80), learned, but preoccupied with hermetic and occult interpretations of the land of the Pharaohs. Even in the early nineteenth century, it was still widely believed that hieroglyphics were magical symbols, pregnant with power and hidden meaning, rather than a script which might be read like any other, while some of Egypt’s most famous monuments had not been seen by outsiders since late Roman times. The Napoleonic expedition had been accompanied by a *Commission des Sciences et des Arts* of 167 technical experts, whose members made a number of important archaeological discoveries, most famously the Rosetta Stone, dug up in the Nile delta in 1799. Inevitably the Commission’s activities became tangled up in the wider struggle for European hegemony between Britain and France, and many of its finds were ultimately seized by British troops: the Rosetta Stone, for example, was placed in the British Museum in 1802. On the other hand, the French interest in Egypt continued, and despite continuing Anglo-French rivalry, it was Gardner Wilkinson’s French contemporary Jean-François Champollion (1790–1832) who finally cracked the riddle of hieroglyphics, publishing the inscription on the Rosetta Stone in 1822.

It was against this background, and just months before Champollion went to press, that the 25-year-old Gardner Wilkinson first found his way to Egypt in November 1821. The child of a well-to-do clerical household – his father John Wilkinson was a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries – Wilkinson was educated at Harrow School and Exeter College, Oxford. Like many young men of his generation, he celebrated the end of the Napoleonic wars, and the protracted exclusion of British travellers from much of continental Europe, by setting out on a extended Grand Tour. When Wilkinson reached Italy, events then took a curious turn. Like many British travellers, Wilkinson came into contact with the great classical scholar Sir William Gell (1777–1836), a notable authority on Roman antiquities, the friend of Byron and Sir Walter Scott, and the author of the best-selling *Pompeiana* (1817–32), the most famous and popular English guide to Herculaneum and Pompeii. Wilkinson and Gell became friends, and the older man persuaded Wilkinson that there was original and important work waiting for an ambitious and fit young antiquarian, and that the place to do it was not southern Italy, but Egypt.

Wilkinson lived in Egypt for 12 years, travelling widely around the country, venturing deep into the desert, and as far south as Nubia, excavating, drawing, learning Coptic and Arabic, transcribing hieroglyphics, and corresponding with other pioneers in a new but expanding field. Much of this was possible because of the tyrannical rule of Egypt’s modernising Khedive Muhammad Ali (nominally a vassal of the Turkish Sultan, but in practice an independent ruler), a great friend of Egypt’s tiny European community, who routinely exacted the most fearsome retribution against any infractions of his rule. Gardner Wilkinson became a prominent member of the British community in Egypt, setting up house in Cairo with his friend James Burton, and the two young men adopted the dress and lifestyle of Ottoman gentlemen. They ate Turkish food with Turkish table manners and as the portrait by Henry Wyndham Phillips at Calke shows, they dressed in fine Turkish clothes, affecting moustaches and turbans. ‘He is dressed as a Turk and looks much like one’, noted an acquaintance in 1824. The two men took local custom even further, and were waited on by Egyptian servants. Other needs were seen to by two slave girls purchased in Cairo. Both of them were discarded by their respective purchasers when their overnight services were no longer required, though Gardner Wilkinson’s friends gossiped that he had gone so far as to get himself circumcised so as pass himself off as a Muslim when his concubine told him that infidels were not permitted to own Muslim slaves. Unsurprisingly, the episode was one which the respectable Victorian scholar Wilkinson became did not care to dwell on. By the 1820s, slavery of any kind was becoming completely unacceptable to

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68 Quoted in Thompson, *Sir Gardner Wilkinson and his Circle*, p.45.

The Libraries at Calke Abbey

Later Career

Wilkinson left Egypt in June 1833 with every intention of returning. Initially he maintained his interest, encouraged by John Murray, who published his *Topography of Thebes and General View of Egypt* (1835) and *Manners and Customs of the Ancient Egyptians* (1837). He was also interested in modern Egyptian affairs, as shown by his *Three Letters on the Policy of England towards the Porte and Mohammed Ali* (1840); his library contains other pamphlets on this subject and on the projected Suez Canal. Murray also commissioned him to produce the Egyptian handbook in his celebrated series for travellers, which led to Wilkinson’s first return visit in 1841. But over time, although he retained an interest in matters Egyptian and continued to publish and advise the British Museum on purchases until his death, other subjects began to take much of his attention.

He was feted on his return to London and joined societies and clubs – among them the Royal Society of Literature, Royal Geographical Society, the Oriental Club, the Athenaeum – where he could mix with the great and good of the day.71 In 1839, Wilkinson’s achievements in Egypt were recognised with a knighthood. One of the interesting features of his library is the survival of numerous presentation copies, some containing pasted-in queries or information. One good example is a presentation copy of Sir Charles Lyell’s *The Geological Evidences of the Antiquity of Man*, which contains 12 letters or copies of letters between the two men, discussing matters such as the date of the decay of Memphis and Heliopolis, the position of the Nile and the history of Egyptian bricks. In 1851 Wilkinson served as a juror for the Ottoman section of the Great Exhibition: he proudly pasted into his copy of the official catalogue both the letter from the Ottoman ambassador to Great Britain informing him of his nomination, and the letter from Prince Albert which accompanied his commemorative medal.

Wilkinson began to travel widely in Britain and Europe and developed a strong interest in eastern Europe. He had first visited the area round Split (Croatia) as part of his return tour from Egypt in 1841 and he was interested, of course, in the antiquities of

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71 Jason Thompson lists at least 22 societies in Europe and America in *Sir Gardner Wilkinson and His Circle*, footnote to p.167.
in the region – as shown by his acquisition of Adam’s Ruins of the Palace of the Emperor Diocletian at Spalatro in Dalmatia (1764) – but his library also demonstrates an interest in its language, popular culture and natural history, and he corresponded with scholars working in the area such as Francesco Carrara (1812–54). Wilkinson’s Dalmatia and Montenegro was published by John Murray in 1848, with a German translation in Leipzig the following year.

Unusually, his library also contains a dozen Maltese publications from the late 1830s and 1840s, including periodicals (probably from his 1841 trip to Egypt), a Maltese dictionary and an Arabic grammar. Malta was a stopping point on the journey between Italy and Egypt, and Wilkinson had published there his Materia Hieroglyphica (1828) and Extracts from Several Hieroglyphical Subjects, Found at Thebes (1830). He clearly maintained contact with acquaintances there – several of the books are the gift of the diplomat Lovelace, of the companion of his friend Lady Llanover. The Lucas (1822–81), younger Cambrian subject, and by 1869 he became vice-president of the numerous articles, pamphlets and letters on the contains local life in Wales, where he became keenly interested in while working on a projected volume of Greek vases, Lord Byron. Wilkinson’s library contains two manuscript poems and a letter by Lovelace (1815–52), daughter of the Countess Byron: his 1837 edition of Byron’s works contains manuscript notes on his attendance at her funeral at Newstead, with details of the burial of Lord Byron.72 But Wilkinson suffered a breakdown while working on a projected volume of Greek vases, and from this point he began to spend much of his life in Wales, where he became keenly interested in local history and archaeology. His library contains numerous articles, pamphlets and letters on the subject, and by 1869 he became vice-president of the Cambrian Archaeological Association.

In October 1856, Wilkinson married the much younger Caroline Catherine Lucas (1822–81), the companion of his friend Lady Llanover. The marriage was happy: Caroline seems to have been as intellectually curious as her husband, with interests particularly in natural history. The library contains several books which have her inscription, or notes by her with the initials ‘C.C.L.’ or ‘C.C.W.’, including the detailed scientific investigation of Thomas William’s article ‘On the Blood-proper and Chylaqueous Fluid of Invertebrate Animals’, inscribed ‘Miss Lucas with the authors best regards’. Wilkinson obviously encouraged his wife and in 1858 she published Weeds and Wild Flowers: Their Uses, Legends and Literature. Another interesting item in the library is an album of cuttings of woodcuts and engravings of British butterflies, presumably assembled by Caroline reusing a binding from Gardner Wilkinson’s days as a volunteer with the West Middlesex Rifles. They settled in Tenby and, after some time, took a lease on Brynfield House, a modest-sized country residence near Reynoldston on the Gower. Wilkinson’s many enthusiasm at this time included learning the violin and wood carving: the fireplace he carved for the house can now be seen in the entrance hall at Calke.

Wilkinson began to suffer from ill health and his work gradually declined. In 1875 he was visiting Calke when he became dangerously ill. After several months, he took an ambulance carriage to return home, but died en route at Llandovery in October 1875. He had willed that his papers should be kept at Calke in perpetuity and they were sent to the house along with his library and various artefacts. But most of Gardner Wilkinson’s collection of antiquities went to Harrow School, which he had attended more than half a century earlier. The intention seems to have been to encourage the boys in the study of history, and the school lodged the exhibits in its library. However, by 1885 there were complaints that the collection was being ‘scandalously neglected’, and it had to be entirely reorganised. A catalogue was published in 1887.73 Meanwhile his widow Caroline made attempts to publish several of his manuscripts, but met with little success. After his death, she left Brynfield to live with her relatives in Llandovery, where she is buried with her husband.

72 Wilkinson’s library contains two manuscript poems and a letter by Ada Lovelace, along with a presentation copy of her translation of Menabrea’s Sketch of the Analytical Engine Invented by Charles Babbage.

The Library

Wilkinson clearly had a library in his London house, although no catalogue survives. Brynfield, although satisfactory in most respects, had no space for a library, so Wilkinson was forced to build one. He designed a large room, with bookshelves and cabinets for his collections. The 1866 catalogue of his library survives and is now deposited in the Bodleian Library in Oxford. It lists not just the titles held, but also books borrowed and loaned, desiderata and even includes a sketch of the bookcases and cabinets. Though the surviving books are not numbered, nearly all contain Gardner Wilkinson's bookplate, which he drew himself. This, together with the catalogue, means that it would be possible to reconstruct in some detail the arrangement of the library at the time of his death in 1875. In addition to ordinary printed books, Gardner Wilkinson also collected pamphlets. These were bound up in volumes, usually arranged roughly by subject, but with some general volumes covering more miscellaneous material.

All order was lost when the books were moved to Calke. Photographs taken when the National Trust took over the house show the books shelved randomly, packed onto shelves not just two deep, but with books standing on top of other books. Others were piled on the floor, onto which part of the ceiling had collapsed. The current showroom preserves an idea of this chaos, but many of the books have been removed to a store room. Currently there is no ordered arrangement of these books, which stand as randomly as they were found. However, with the books now catalogued online it is possible at last for researchers to investigate his library for the first time in more than 130 years.

The Books II

Ces Presentes Heures a Lusaige de Romme (Paris, 1505?)
This Parisian Book of Hours is the oldest book at Calke. It was printed on vellum to increase its resemblance to a manuscript, an impression reinforced by its hand-coloured initials and full page illustrations. ‘Books of Hours’ were for daily devotions and included prayers and readings for different hours of the day. This first image shows St John preparing to drink the poison given to him by Aristodemus (from the Life of St John in The Golden Legend).

The cult of the Virgin Mary was an important part of the medieval church and the Hours of the Virgin provided a daily structure for lay worship. Prayers were provided for each of the eight canonical hours: Matins, Lauds, Prime, Terce, Sext, None, Vespers and Compline; each section was illustrated with images from the Virgin’s life, Christ’s infancy and the Passion. Shown here is a Nativity scene of the Holy Family in the stable, which generally introduces Prime in the Hours of the Virgin.

**Ces Presentes Heures a Lusoige de Romme (Paris, 1505?)**

Nothing is known of the early provenance of the Book of Hours, but it came to Calke with the library of Sir John Gardner Wilkinson, who seems to have used this remnant of a hand-drawn map as a bookmark. Wilkinson studied the history of eastern Europe, but his interest centred particularly on modern Croatia and so the map – which now shows only Russia – may originally have covered a much larger area. His travels and studies led to the publication of *Dalmatia and Montenegro* in 1848 and his library still contains works printed in or relating to Croatia, including a rare 1703 Italian publication in Serbo-Croat.
Giovanni Pietro Bellori (1613–96), *Veteres Arcus Augustorum Triumphis Insignes* (Rome, 1690)
The painter and antiquarian Bellori was perhaps best known for his *Vite de' Pittori, Scultori et Architetti Moderni* in which he promoted classical idealism.

This collection of plates – engraved by Pietro Santi Bartoli – illustrated the triumphal arches of ancient Rome, including some known only through their depiction on ancient coins.

Gardner Wilkinson’s library is a very wide-ranging collection which was certainly not confined to Egyptology or even wider archaeology, but includes a vast array of subjects, including classical antiquities and literature, eastern Europe, natural history, geology and a large collection of varied contemporary pamphlets from dentistry, through the Great Exhibition to theology.

Giovanni Pietro Bellori (1613–96), *Veteres Arcus Augustorum Triumphis Insignes* (Rome, 1690)
A roundel from the Arch of Constantine, one of the latest triumphal arches in Rome. The arch was erected in 315, to commemorate Constantine the Great’s victory over the rival emperor Maxentius in 312. Some masonry was reused from earlier monuments, and this bear hunt is one of eight roundels – all scenes of hunting or sacrifice – now thought to date from Hadrian’s reign (117–138).
**Giovanni Pietro Bellori (1613–96), Veteres Arcus Augustorum Triumphis Insignes (Rome, 1690)**

A panel from the north face of the Arch of Constantine, showing the *adlocutio*: the emperor is motivating his troops before the campaign.

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Wood’s study of the Roman ruins of Palmyra and its companion volume *The Ruins of Balbec* (1757) were hugely influential in the development of classical architecture in Britain and America. They were published in several editions, in both English and French translation, and became useful source books for architectural features, with their influence seen in the work of architects such as Robert Adam. Adam, who met Wood in Rome in the 1750s, later produced his own survey of a group of monumental Roman ruins: the palace of Diocletian at Spalatro (now Split) in Croatia.

Wood and his collaborator James Dawkins spent five days recording the buildings in Palmyra (in modern Syria) before moving on to Baalbek (ancient Heliopolis) in Lebanon. Their works on both cities contained measured plans and accurate drawings of the ruins, accompanied by a neutral text. Wood’s friend Walpole praised them thus: ‘But of all the works that distinguish this age, none perhaps excell those beautiful editions of Balbec and Palmyra ... The modest descriptions prefixed are standards of writing: The exact measure of what should and should not be said, and of what was necessary to be known.’

The Calke copy contains the text in English and French. Plate 46, shown here, illustrates a detail (Base, capital and entablature) from a building identified only by its partial Latin inscription (Inscription 27 in the text); plates 44 and 45 show the same building in plan and façade.

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We have no information on when Gardner Wilkinson acquired this grammar, but a knowledge of Coptic – the last form of the indigenous language of Egypt – would have been vital for his work in Egyptology; it is closely related to Late Egyptian which was written in Hieroglyphic script. Although superseded by Egyptian Arabic after the late seventeenth century, Coptic remains the liturgical language of the Coptic Church. The notes shown alongside are in Gardner Wilkinson’s hand and contain Coptic script: an adapted Greek alphabet, with additional symbols from Demotic Egyptian to represent sounds not present in Greek.

Scholtz was a German clergyman who developed an interest in the Egyptian manuscripts held in Berlin (where he was court preacher), encouraged by his brother-in-law, the theologian and early Coptic scholar Paul Ernest Jablonski (1693–1757). Scholtz revised the Lexicon Aegyptiaco-Latino of La Croze (1661–1739) with the assistance of his pupil, Charles Godfrey Woide (1725–90), and this was published by the Clarendon Press in 1775. Woide then edited Scholtz’s manuscript for this grammar – originally in four volumes – adding notes and a section on the Sahidic dialect before its posthumous publication. In 1782, Woide was appointed assistant librarian at the British Museum, and later took charge of the Hebrew and Arabic manuscripts there. Woide’s work must have been influential on Gardner Wilkinson and his circle of friends at the BM, such as Samuel Birch and Reginald Stuart Poole, but he died too soon for there to be any direct connection.

Désiré Raoul-Rochette (1789–1854), Peintures Antiques Inédites (Paris, 1836)

Reproduction of a classical relief mosaic depicting Hope in the Greek style, believed to come from the ancient city of Metapontum (southern Italy). In 1836 it was in Naples – along with its companion piece, a mosaic of Hermes/Mercury – in the collection of Giuseppe Capecelatro (1744–1836), former Archbishop of Taranto and a cultured figure who corresponded with many of the great European intellectuals.

Gardner Wilkinson had wide interests in history and archaeology and maintained many links with antiquarians throughout Europe; his library is rich in association copies, often with tipped-in letters. But although he had many interests and probably acquaintances in common with the French archaeologist Raoul-Rochette, there is no evidence here of a personal connection.
Samuel Birch (1813–85), *Select Papyri of the Hieratic Character in the British Museum* (London 1841–60)

This work contains lithographed facsimiles of Egyptian papyri, with introductory text by Samuel Birch and Edward Hawkins of the British Museum’s Department of Antiquities. Wilkinson recommended and aided the BM’s purchase in 1857 of the Abbott papyrus reproduced in volume 2, which gives an important account of tomb robberies under the twentieth dynasty (c.1100 BC). The museum had, however, rejected his previous recommendation that they buy the full Abbott collection.

Birch became one of the first British Egyptologists and published a revised edition of Wilkinson’s influential *The Manners and Customs of the Ancient Egyptians* in 1878. He never visited Egypt, despite Wilkinson’s recommendation that it was essential for a full understanding of the subject.
Despite the enormous literature on British country houses, there is surprisingly little in print about country-house libraries, and there is, as yet, no comprehensive book on the subject. More recent National Trust guidebooks usually include something on libraries and are worth watching out for; older editions (or guides to houses where small visitor numbers mean that guides are less frequently reprinted) often say little or nothing. Guides to privately owned houses are, with a few notable exceptions, even worse, and indeed in many grand private houses historic libraries are in the private apartments of the owners, and are not seen by visitors at all. Mark Girouard’s now classic _Life in the English Country House_ (New Haven: Yale, 1978) makes more than passing mention of libraries, and should be read by anyone interested in any aspect of the country house, but after more than 30 years, parts of it inevitably have been superseded by more recent research, much of it only available in specialist journals, in published conference papers, or in massive and extremely expensive surveys like _The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain_ (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998–) and _The Cambridge History of Libraries in Britain and Ireland_ (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). For most of us, these are books which have to be consulted in libraries, but they are worth the effort. My own _The Big House Library: Books in Ulster Houses_ (Swindon: National Trust, 2011), provides some detailed history on the Trust’s libraries in Northern Ireland. While not directly relevant to libraries in England, Scotland and Wales (in Ireland there were state-sponsored land reforms in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and estates like that at Calke were broken up), it may nevertheless provide food for thought for anyone investigating a country-house library in Great Britain. For libraries in Wales, Thomas Lloyd’s essay ‘Country-House Libraries of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries’, in Philip Henry Jones and Illuned Rees, _A Nation and its Books: A History of the Book in Wales_ (Aberystwyth: National Library of Wales, 1998) is excellent, and asks many of the questions which English researchers might wish to pursue on their side of Offa’s Dyke. There is also useful material in J.T. Cliffe, _The World of the Country House in Seventeenth-Century England_ (New Haven: Yale, 1999).

On interiors, Gervase Jackson-Stops, _The English Country House: A Grand Tour_ (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1984) is useful and contains marvellous pictures (especially useful for libraries which are not accessible to visitors). It is not too difficult to get hold of second-hand, but on the other hand it says virtually nothing about the books which are, ultimately, the point of a library, and not a great deal more about what country-house libraries were for and how they functioned. There is more useful material (again difficult to get hold of) in auction catalogues, at best with useful historical descriptions of libraries being sold. Inevitably these tend to concentrate on the grander end of the market, rather than on the social history of libraries – like that at Calke – which have never been packed with jaw-dropping treasures, but which still have much to teach us about life on a landed estate between the seventeenth century and 1914. Similar criticisms might be aimed at Gervase Jackson-Stops (ed.), _Treasures Houses of Britain: 500 Years of Private Patronage and Art Collecting_ (New Haven: Yale, 1985), the catalogue of a blockbuster exhibition at the National Gallery of Art in Washington DC, where the books illustrated are mostly at the most rarefied end of the spectrum: interesting and beautiful, certainly, but not typical.

Nicolas Barker’s _Treasures from the Libraries of National Trust Country Houses_ (New York: Grolier Club, 1999), issued to celebrate the successful conclusion of the Campaign for Country House Libraries run by the Trust’s US affiliate, the Royal Oak Foundation, is much better in this regard, and contains a far wider range of books selected from 38 Trust properties. The accompanying essays are useful as well. Interested readers who find it impossible to get hold of a copy of what is now rather a rare book can, fortunately, find out even more online. The Trust’s libraries catalogue is online (Copac.ac.uk), and at the time of writing contains detailed information on about 200,000 books; abbreviated versions of the catalogue records are also visible in the National Trust Collections website http://www.nationaltrustcollections.org.uk/. The National Trust homepage on Copac also includes a gazetteer of libraries, while the Trust’s PDF bibliography, updated regularly, lists publications on individual properties.

A trio of books by David Pearson can be warmly recommended: his _Books as History: the Importance of Books Beyond their Texts_ (London: British Library, 2008) does precisely what it says on the title page, and is a compelling and essential read for anyone wanting to think about books as historical artefacts and material culture. _Provenance Research in Book History_ (London: British Library, 1994), and _English Bookbinding Styles, 1450–1800_ (London: British
Library, 2005) go a stage beyond, and are essential reading for anyone handling early books for the first time.

Finally, on Calke itself, the essential work is, of course, H.M. Colvin’s *Calke Abbey: a Hidden House Revealed* (London: National Trust, 1985). Always perceived as an introductory text, it was issued without footnotes, but the more detailed study which Colvin seems to have envisaged was never published. With the Calke archive now in the safe hands of the Derbyshire Record Office, the chief frustration, therefore, is the near impossibility of cross-referencing information in the printed text against the original documents from which it was derived. If Colvin’s text deals with the particular, David Cannadine’s *Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* (New Haven: Yale, 1990) gives the big picture, dwelling not on the minutiae of leaking roofs and eccentric owners, but examining in detail how British landowners progressively lost political power, wealth and social prestige in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.
The National Trust is responsible for more than 160 libraries, which between them contain well in excess of a quarter of a million books. The very first Trust library (1907) was at Coleridge’s Cottage; the greatest is perhaps the superb collection of Renaissance books at Blickling Hall in Norfolk. Most of the Trust’s major country houses contain an important library, with outstanding collections assembled between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries at Kingston Lacy, Lanhydrock, Charlecote, Wimpole, Belton, Kedleston, Felbrigg, Saltram, Wallington and Tyntesfield, among many others. But many of the smaller houses contain important things, and there are books and libraries in properties other than country houses: a unique early farmers’ library at Townend in the Lake District, books for factory workers at Quarry Bank Mill in Styal, and even the odd piece of memorabilia in the two Beatles houses in Liverpool.

For years the Trust was often criticised for treating its libraries as wallpaper. There was a lot of truth in this, but many of the problems were down to money. Only in the 1970s was the Trust able to appoint its first full-time librarian (for a collection which even then was well over 200,000 books!), and today online catalogues, good photographs and even display cases are all very expensive. On the other hand, from the late 1960s Trust staff started to take a serious interest in looking after its libraries. With hindsight it was probably better that the conservation started a generation ahead of cataloguing and public access, frustrating though that was for researchers at the time. By the second decade of the twenty-first century things have moved on to an extent which would have been almost unbelievable only 20 years ago. In excess of 200,000 books are now described in detail on Copac (copac.ac.uk), the United Kingdom’s national online catalogue, and the Trust’s libraries are now major contributors to the English Short Title Catalogue (estc.bl.uk), the joint Anglo-American project which aims to create a complete and definitive online record of all copies of pre-1801 British books in public collections worldwide. A small team of library specialists scurries around the country advising property teams, planning the next cataloguing project, speaking to visitors, room guides and specialist groups, and helping with loans and exhibitions. There is a thriving National Trust Libraries Facebook Group (rapidly becoming a key resource for those interested in the history of libraries: new group members are very welcome), a growing range of paper publications, and of course blogging and tweeting. More remains to be done – more exhibitions and more digitisation are obvious things – but slowly the Trust’s libraries are coming back to life.