Three 18th-Century Lincoln Libraries

Elizabeth Anne Melrose

Lincoln in the early 18th century had 'no place of public assembly, no theatre, no newsroom, so far as is known no coffee house, no library save the cathedral library, and a few books in parish churches or vestries which were dignified by the name of parish libraries. Social gatherings were confined to private houses or the inns, some select and some otherwise.' This description by Sir Francis Hill in 1666 was an endorsement of the views of Thomas Allen who, a hundred years before, had contrasted the 'intellectual apathy' of 18th-century Lincoln with the awakening cultural aspirations of the city at the beginning of the next century. However, in a county town with an increasing population and a cadre of educated clergy, lawyers, and the medical profession centred in the upper city by the Cathedral, it would have been unusual if there had been as little intellectual activity in the 18th century as Allen had suggested. The number of provincial printers setting up to supply a countrywide demand for printed books and pamphlets was growing. William Wood, the earliest known printer in Lincoln, is said to have published a newsheet, The Lincoln Gazette, in 1728 and The Lincoln Journal in 1744. Printing and bookselling were connected, and by the second half of the 18th century Lincoln was showing signs of the widespread activity in the book trade already documented for other large towns. About 1762 Wood produced, for free distribution to his customers, a 124-page 'CATALOGUE OF A Large and Valuable Collection of Antient and Modern Books, many of them NEW and Elegantly Bound,' consisting of about 1,000 volumes. This catalogue could be obtained from booksellers in London, King's Lynn, and Stamford among other places. Rose & Drury of Lincoln advertised in the 1770s that they would 'Supply Gentlemen, &c (in the Town or Neighbourhood) with Magazines, London and County Newspapers, and all other Periodical Publications, Country Shopkeepers with Penny Histories, Songs, Patters, Children's Books, &c, &c.' As in other towns these enterprising booksellers' establishments could have become small centres of Lincoln culture where interested readers could discuss the second-hand folios, the octavo 'Geography, History, Voyages and Travels, &c—Odd Volumes ditto' supplied by Mr Wood & Son or the 637 varied titles offered by Rose & Drury.

Printed books and newspapers were more readily available, but they were not cheap. Pamphlets could cost up to 2s. 6d. each, and few people could afford large personal libraries. There was a need for collections of reading material that could be borrowed by the citizens who could not otherwise take advantage of the printed literature of the day. The climate of the time and probably the influence in Lincolnshire of the exceptional Gentlemen's Society of Spalding, which had an excellent book stock and library, encouraged an increasing demand for libraries that could cater to a variety of social classes with differing tastes and intellectual requirements. Evidence for 18th-century book clubs and libraries is often difficult to find. The survival of catalogues, meeting records, or newspaper advertisements can be quite fortuitous. However, the claim printed in c. 1814 that 'to a stranger it may seem surprising that Lincoln, the Capital of an extensive and flourishing County, should be almost the only Place of any Consequence destitute of such an Establishment. Several Towns in the County have long been able to boast of their Subscription Libraries, while Lincoln was indebted to the eleemosynary Aid of a Circulating Library, for the only Information its Inhabitants, and those of the surrounding Country could have recourse, either for Amusement or Instruction', is misleading. It ignores the Minster Library and the two late 18th-century newrooms that allowed access to current newspapers and periodicals. It also neglects evidence outlining the existence, in Lincoln, of two book societies, a subscription library and at least two circulating libraries for various periods before 1800. By contrasting an example from each of these three categories of institution concerned with collections of reading material to be lent out to their members, some more details of the social history of the inhabitants of 18th-century Lincoln can be uncovered. The strictures of Allen and Hill on Lincoln society can be modified.

The Lincoln Book Society was founded in 1758. Like other book clubs in the country it was an association of friends who indulged in a regular social meeting at which books would be chosen and borrowed for home reading. The aims of the Lincoln Book Society were set out in its rules and the outlines of its meetings were kept by various secretaries in fifteen ledgers, now in the Dean and Chapter deposit in the Archives at Lincoln Castle. A century after the inaugural meeting a brief notice announced, 'The Club expired this day after a languishing illness aged 101. Henry Williams, Pater. Ed. Farr Broadbent. Present at the

Fig. 1 Original orders of the Lincoln Book Society, first meeting, 18 April 1758 (© Lincolnshire Archives Office)
Death. In fact, the Society struggled on for another few months before finally dissolving itself on 20 January 1860. The records list the members, book purchases and sales, and the notes on borrowing, especially in the first forty years of the Book Society's existence (after 1802 catalogue numbers rather than book titles were written into the borrowers' register, so the popularity of the book stock becomes more difficult to calculate). We can deduce that the eighteen original subscribers decided to have a fortnightly gathering at the White Hart or the Angel Inn in the upper city. The Chancellor and Subdean Reynolds were brothers and would have been well known to the other members, some of whom were also clergy attached to the Cathedral. At the meeting the circulation of a selected book stock was to be of equal importance to discussion and the drinking of tea or coffee. In the 'Account Book for the use of the Lincoln Society inaugurated Apr. 1758' it was noted that some items were purchased immediately: 'Bought for the use of the Society. 6 Coffee Cups 4s. 6d. A Coffee Pot 1s. 4d. 6 Coffee Cups 1s. 9d. 6 Tea Cups 2s. 6d. Copper Coffee Pot 2s. 6d. 11s. 4d.' The intention to create a library was also clearly given. Four of the six orders passed at the first meeting dealt with the management of the books. At each of the fortnightly meetings members could order their choice of titles on the agreement of the others. These books were then sent for by the Steward appointed annually to look after the society accounts. The Lincoln Book Society succeeded in giving its members the opportunity of reading a far wider range of publications than each would have normally bought on their own behalf. An important feature was that the great majority of the books were to be auctioned among the members, soon twice a year, thus benefiting those who wanted to add specific items to their own collections at reduced prices.

A subscription library differed from a book club in that it was open to a less exclusive membership, even including some of the wealthier representatives of the commercial middle class. Many subscription libraries had shares to be purchased by subscribers who would then have a vote in the management of the library and in the appointment of the committee. A librarian, often the bookseller whose premises were being used, would be chosen at an annual salary. Popular fiction was bought, but in the main subscription libraries were more scholarly and the more serious books were retained from year to year. One such library was the Lincoln Subscription Library founded in September 1786 with the Dean of Lincoln as President and Mr S. Simmons, bookseller, stationer and printer, in the important post of Librarian and Secretary. No refreshments were supplied in the Library Room hired from Samuel Simmons in the High Street. Although the Library committee had to meet on the last Saturday in every month, subscribers to the Library of Subscription Library could ask for books any day of the week except Sunday, between the hours of ten in the morning and eight at night. The motives for setting up the Library were not very different from those of the members of the Lincoln Book Society: 'To contribute to the Acquisition of Knowledge, an attentive Perusal of the best AUTHORS is necessary. But as few, except Men of Fortune, can afford to purchase a LIBRARY of useful and VALUABLE BOOKS; those in the middle Sphere of Life, are often left destitute of the Helps, necessary to the Attainment of SCIENCE and KNOWLEDGE … Since private LIBRARIES are not to be had without too great an Expense for People of moderate Fortunes, public Ones have been established in many Places, by which Subscribers have the Benefit of perusing the best Authors at an easy Expense, and by this Means, Knowledge is more generally diffused.' The prospectus stressed the importance of a library whose members were interested more in acquiring knowledge than in reading the latest romances, already available in the only libraries in existence in Lincoln. The subscription was offered 'to all Ranks of People, without Distinction of Age, Sex or Profession'. The Lincoln Subscription Library was to be an alternative to the exclusive membership of the Lincoln Book Society and to the frivolous bookstock of the Circulation Libraries. Simmons's association with the Lincoln Subscription Library did not last long. In March 1788 his business, which had been put into the hands of William Wood 'for the benefit of himself and his Creditors', was bought by William Brooke, another printer and bookseller. There was a high mortality rate in small businesses, but it may be that Simmons wished to retire. The Library does not feature in Brooke's advertisements in the Stamford Mercury informing the nobility, gentry, and the public of the changeover, but as William Brooke had been one of the original members of the Subscription Library, it may have continued to function.

Not all members of the public had education as their prime objective. Some wished to be amused by the very romances that the founders of the Lincoln Book Society and the Lincoln Subscription Library considered would 'tend rather to vitiate the taste than strengthen the Judgment, and to mislead the Imagination, than improve the Understanding'. These people turned to the circulating libraries, which by the 1750s were commonly a complementary part of a bookseller's business, attracting custom to the shop and providing a wide public with popular light fiction and sentimental novels. Subscriptions to these libraries could be paid in advance, but those unable to pay the fee could pay a small sum for each volume they borrowed. Advertisements in the Stamford Mercury tell us of two circulating libraries in Lincoln at this period. Little is known about R. Packharnis's Circulating Library in the Eastgate noted in 1789, but in 1793 Joshua Drewry inserted a fine notice about his library at his premises adjoining the Stonebow, Lincoln. He stated that it had been established some years previously. 'This Library, which has been progressively increasing for a Number of Years, is calculated to afford Amusement to every Class of Readers.' The last four words emphasised the point that this kind of library was open to anyone who could afford the charges. Although Joshua Drewry is mentioned in an 1806 Lincoln Freemen's list, there is no entry for him in White's 1826 Lincolnshire Directory. The latest advertisement in the Stamford Mercury for his library was in December 1794, but it seems likely that the business lasted somewhat longer. An Addenda to the Catalogue was printed and attached to the 1794 catalogue of library stock at Drewry's shop. This latter had also been amended, the increased charges being written in pen, so the catalogue must have been valid after the 1794 advertisement specifying the original prices.

Both the Lincoln Book Society and the Lincoln Subscription Library have left information about their members. The first Meeting Book of the Lincoln Book Society lists those who attended the inaugural meeting. Thereafter, at the subsequent fortnightly gatherings, the names of members absent or borrowing books were written down. These lists can provide a tabulation of the members and their attendance patterns. The original eighteen men on 18 April 1758 belonged to the gentry, the professional classes and the clergy. More work must be done to discover further details of the members whose brief entries of surname and initial have not always helped towards a positive identification, but of the eleven who have been traced three were men of independent means. W. Anderson is likely to be Sir William Anderson of the family at Manby. Mr Field is mentioned in the 1791 Lincoln Directory some years later under Gentry. There were six clerical members including Chancellor Charles Reynolds and his brother, Subdean George Reynolds. Gilbert Benet was the rector of St Peter at Arches and he
had married the daughter of a former mayor and sheriff of the city. Dr John Smith held livings around Lincoln. He lived in the Close in a house provided by the Dean and Chapter, and in 1747 he had published *Memoirs of Wool*, a work praised by Adam Smith. Dr Cecil Willis, though vicar of Holbeach, resided in the Close of Lincoln; he was a justice of the peace and as prebendary of St Martin in Dernstall, a canon of the Cathedral. Of the two medical practitioners Dr Robert Petrie was instrumental in establishing the County Hospital.18 The Lincoln Book Society never claimed to be anything other than a library and social club for a select band. Visitors could be brought to the meetings, but the rules defined the total number of subscribers. New members had to be proposed by an existing member. 'No one to be admitted a New Member unless proposed by a subscriber at a Meeting and approved by a Majority of the whole Number of Subscribers.' Only if a place became vacant through death or some other reason could a new member be elected by ballot. 27 Nov. 1786, Mr Bullen, by desire, is put upon the footing of an extra member. The following gentlemen proposed to fill up the vacancy—Mr Money, Capt Hare, Dr Fellows, Mr Hutton, Mr Foster—to be balloted for on Monday next Dec 11th.20 Attendances at the meetings of the Lincoln Book Society varied over the years. The October 1786 General Meeting was postponed once because of the inadequate attendance, but usually there were enough people present to maintain the momentum of the Society. New members were recruited and the sale of the library stock twice a year encouraged good attendances at the auctions. Over the years different categories of membership were promoted, such as 'Country Members' who were excused forfeits and 'Members when in Residence'. The dean, Sir Richard Kaye, was admitted as an honorary member of the Society at 10s. 6d., on the understanding that he would not take books until the other members had had their share.

A manuscript List of subscribers of the Lincoln Subscription Library also survives. This is a list of thirty-four names, three of which have been crossed off. It was probably compiled in 1786 just after the prospectus had asked that 'Those who wish to forward it [the Subscription Library] by becoming Subscribers, are desired to send their names to Mr SIMMONS, Bookseller, Lincoln.'22 The committee of thirteen, established in July 1786, was made up from the names on this manuscript list—with one exception, that of Mr John Ellison. A month later a notice in the *Stamford Mercury* states, 'Several Ladies and Gentlemen, having signified a Desire to have a SUBSCRIPTION LIBRARY in LINCOLN, opened to all Ranks of People, without Distinction of Age, Sex or Profession, established on liberal and general Principles, NOTICE is hereby given That a Subscription is now begun, and several Gentlemen have formed themselves into a SOCIETY...23 The original members were the neighbourhood gentry and middle-class Lincoln citizens, a wider section of society than the membership of the Lincoln Book Society. Also, use of the library did not depend on a closed ballot, only on the member's ability to pay the subscription. Ladies, like Mrs Lake, were admitted and permitted to vote by proxy so long as the proxy was a subscriber. Among the members were some of the wealthiest traders in the town. Of the names on the Subscribers' List twelve were gentry, seven come under the heading Traders &c., four belonged to the medical profession, three were clergymen and there were two lawyers. Richard Gibbons was a merchant, the son of a Lincoln alderman. His stage-wagons left the city each Sunday for London.23 William Brotherton was a hatter and hosier while John Straw and Charles Hayward appear as mercers and drapers. William Brooke and James Johnston were both in the book trade. The Revd John Caparn was a cleric associated with the church at Toft by Newton. The Lincolnshire gentry were represented by Sir Cecil Wray of Fillingham and the two Ellisons, Richard Ellison of Sudbrooke Holme and his son, the banker and country gentleman who became the Member of Parliament for Lincoln from 1796 to 1812. It may have been the intention of the founders to open the Lincoln Subscription Library 'to all Ranks of People', but those that joined were not without means.

Incidentally, eight members of this Lincoln Subscription Library also belonged to the Lincoln Book Society. These included Dr Daniel Fellows who was elected Steward of the Book Society in 1788 and Mr Ellison, senior, who not only joined these two libraries but was also an original member of the County Newsroom and a Lincoln Book Club established in 1792. Others like Jephtha Foster tried unsuccessfully for election to the Lincoln Book Society. Those who were members of both the Lincoln Subscription Library and the Lincoln Book Society were gentry or belonged to the clerical, legal, or medical professions. None came under the heading Traders &c. and this reflects the select bias of the Book Society.

Membership of Drewry's Circulating Library is less certain since no customers' lists have been found. It is likely in a county town, however, that this library, like that of James Marshall of Bath, would have been patronised by a large section of the public from the gentry down to 'a motley population of a wide variety above the mechanic level'.24 The books stocked in the shop near the Stonebow to which customers would come to buy stationery, prints and
'Genuine Medicines' were available to anyone who could pay a 2d. borrowing charge per volume and to whom the catalogue of book titles appealed.

The three libraries were run very differently. Because it had a small exclusive membership, the Lincoln Book Society could be managed quite democratically. All decisions on the ballot elections, book purchases, and society regulations rested on the majority vote of the members attending a specific meeting and on the twice yearly General Meeting. Decisions were not taken without debate, as '7 Oct 1766, Memorandum... And that NO Book of the ( ) value shall be sent for by any person without the universal Approval of the Gentlemen at a Meeting. No this is incorrect' [this line is smudged out!], but the wishes of the majority were recorded. Book titles were suggested, agreed upon and immediately ordered from the Lincoln bookseller William Wood, who with his wife Ann signed many of the paid-up book accounts. From 1772, when a new book cost over 10s., the sponsor was expected to bid half the buying price at auction. Similarly when the purchase price was over £11s. 6d. the sponsor had to offer two-thirds of the price. This ensured that members did not propose expensive items unnecessarily.

The finances of the Lincoln Book Society were dealt with in various ways over the years, supervised by a Steward appointed annually from the members. In 1786, for example, the gentlemen paid 1s. entrance fee and an annual subscription of 5s. specifically earmarked for books. Country members paid 10s. per year. At each meeting, those attending would give 1s. for expenses and absentees were charged 6d. Those who did not come to the Dinner and General Meeting were fined an ordinary of 1s. 6d. Books kept overdue incurred a fine of 6d. per volume, and as usual this provided a source of income. On 17 July 1780 Mr. Twemly paid 2s. 6d. in fines for keeping The History of Edinburgh over due for five weeks. From this revenue and from the proceeds of the book auctions, the booksellers' accounts were settled. The landlord of the inn was paid 8d. for each tea provided. One shilling was given to the waiter and 6d. was required for the luxury of a fire. In 1780 it was only in the months of July and August that the fire was dispensed with. There were other incidental expenses as well. In March 1786 the accounts note that a Mr. Langley was paid 5s. 2d. for the books boxes, and six years later he was employed to make a cupboard in the club room in which the books could be stored rather than in the existing three boxes. Dr. Laycock was repaid 4s. 2d. in September 1786 for the binding of Cook's Voyages.

Books could be borrowed by proxy and even at times in between meetings. This became unpopular since it meant that members could not choose books in the order of seniority laid down at various times in the Meeting Books. A ruling in March 1781 that no books should be taken out except on the regular club meeting days tried to halt this practice. Dr. William Paley, the subdean of the Cathedral, became a member when in residence in January 1796. In recollections recorded later by his friend Henry Best we are given an interesting view of the Lincoln Book Society meetings at the turn of the century. 'There was a book club at Lincoln, the members of which assembled once a week, at tea-time, and after tea each one took books which he wished to read during the week following. The secretary said, 'Mr. Subdean, what books do you choose?' He, casting a look of doubt and disdain on the table covered with pamphlets and new publications, said, 'I will try not to take more than I can read; but one's eye is always bigger than one's belly on these occasions.' One of these evening, being unable to attend, he wrote me a note, desiring me to choose his books for him; giving me to understand that he rather inclined that they should be light reading... After selecting our books, we usually formed a party at whist... After whist, we entered into talk. Some-one, speaking of a very worthy man, a clergyman in the city, said that he was a Jacobite... and argument ensued."

The Lincoln Subscription Library was run by a committee responsible to its subscribers at an annual General Meeting. It is probable that some of the first committee members were behind Simmons when he printed the prospectus proposing the library. Certainly the original List of Subscribers must have been enthusiastic. It is not clear when the Committee was elected but by 29 July 1786 an advertisement was drafted for the Stamford Mercury inviting more subscribers and announcing a General Meeting at the Library Room in the first week in August. At this meeting subscribers were to choose the library book stock. Almost simultaneously Simmons printed the Laws, Regulations &c. of the Subscription Library... including a list of the Committee headed by the President, the Dean of Lincoln, and appropriately, as Treasurer, Mr. Money. The regulations were very detailed, in contrast to the first rules of the Lincoln Book Society which had to be expanded on numerous occasions to cover succeeding eventualities. The by-laws of the Subscription Library have paragraphs dealing with the terms of admission, the transfer of shares, voting at meetings, the conduct of the General Meeting and of the Committee meetings for book purchase and borrowing and so on. Each of the twenty-nine rules is quite explicit. The subscribers chose the Committee and within the agreed regulations these thirteen persons controlled the day-to-day affairs of the Lincoln Subscription Library answering only to the shareholders at the General Meeting. The President or the Treasurer with another committee member could visit the Library at any time to report on the work of the Librarian who was expected to act as general secretary to the Library, to keep a borrowers' register and collect fines and to examine the stock for wear and damage. For this and for the use of a room at his business, coal and candles, Mr. Simmons was in the first year paid £10. Each subscriber could suggest one book a month, writing the title into a Suggestions Book that was considered at the monthly Committee meetings. The Librarian could ask to see a printed borrower's card before books were lent out, and not until the month old they had to remain on display in the library room. Far from having an order of seniority, books were lent out singly in strict order of application. No borrower could renew a title in any one year. Customers could reserve books or send for volumes outside library hours for a small charge. All this organization was paid for by the subscriptions, fines and the initial price of each proprietary share. Members subscribed one and a half guineas at first. Committee members were encouraged to keep up their interest by fines for non-attendance at Committee meetings and varying sums were charged from 1d. to 3d. on overdue books, depending on the size of the volume.

The regulations give a picture of the Library room with its fire and candle-light when necessary. The customers were not encouraged to linger reading the books—these had to be renewed home—but the latest periodicals and reviews seem to have been available. The pamphlets had strong paper covers with the titles inscribed on them and the books, with their titles on the spines, were half-bound, uncut and with their strings in them. Inside the books was a piece of paper showing the amount of time that book would be lent. Unlike the Lincoln Book Society whose collection was regularly auctioned, the Subscription Library only sold off its so-called ephemeral publications, pamphlets, novels, and plays. It was intended that the stock of serious literature would
accumulate for the benefit of the subscribers. It is a pity that no information has so far come to light to tell us whether the Library flourished according to these rules in practice, but Simmons's proposals for setting up the Subscription Library do indicate how it was hoped it would be managed.

Much has to be deduced about the running of Drewry's Circulating Library from his catalogue and from the advertisements in the Stamford Mercury. Drewry's brother was a well-established printer in Derby, and his son, Joshua, founded the Staffordshire Advertiser in 1795. Drewry himself had strong links with the bookselling and printing trade in these and probably other counties. His ambitious advertisements were full and appeared in the Mercury under the specific news from Lincoln rather than as a paragraph among the other advertisements. Setting up the library was possibly a business venture, another side to bookselling and printing and one which could be supported by these. The subscriptions were commercial. If a customer paid 1s. 6d. in one sum for the year, he paid less than the person who paid 1s. 6d. monthly. On the other hand, there was no admission fee and readers could choose whether they wished to join for one, three, six, or twelve months at varying rates. The 2d. charge for each book borrowed per week would make the terms attractive to people on lower incomes. Later, after the printing of his 1794 Catalogue of Books, Drewry increased the charges but, significantly, there was no mention that the 2d. rate was raised. For this the customer in 1794 had the choice of about one thousand volumes. The number of volumes does not, however, represent the number of titles as each part of two- and three-part works was enumerated separately. Even so the library was quite large. As Drewry advertised, 'The Proprietor hopes, by a constant Supply of New Books, to render it worthy of that extensive and marked Patronage it has hitherto received from the Ladies and Gentlemen in Lincoln, and the neighbouring Seats and Villages.'

The books stocks of each of the separate libraries showed interesting variations. The Lincoln Book Society did not specify any restrictions on the type of books that could be ordered apart from the rule that sponsors must bid a certain sum at auction for their expensive books. This aside, in 1772 it was decided 'That a Meeting be held once a fortnight on Tuesday at the Angel, and that every member then present have a right, with the consent of the Society present, to order any Book to be sent for by the Steward...'. In the Meeting Books there is a note of the titles that were ordered in this way. These books also served as borrowers' registers, and the books that were to be put up for auction at the following General Meeting were listed along with their original prices. In the main, books that had been bought for the Society up to one General Meeting in March were sold at the next General Meeting in October. The books and pamphlets remained in the library for a minimum of just over six months and a maximum of a year. The names of those who bought were written down with their purchases and the amounts paid for them. Combining all these lists gives a clear picture of the library stock for each year. The popularity of certain titles can be ascertained by counting the number of times they were borrowed. Eighteenth century book prices can be examined — both the original prices of the volumes and the corresponding second-hand prices, though it should be remembered that these were auction prices arrived at among a very small group of people and might well have been lower than the market value.

In the first year of its existence the Lincoln Book Society Meeting Book mentions ninety titles. Although some of these titles cannot yet be positively identified, the subject matter of the books can be divided into very broad headings.

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The most popular single subject was that of the Estimate, accounts presented annually to Parliament showing the probable amount of expenditure on the several administrative departments for the current year. There were six books and pamphlets on the subject including the two-volume Brown's Estimate bought in April 1758 very soon after the inauguration of the Society and a pamphlet, Doubts (on the Estimate) occasioned by the 2nd volume of Brown's Estimate, which was borrowed eight times from the end of May 1758 to January 1759. This subject was a favourite of Dr Dymoke who was perhaps studying the subject seriously — or like others was he unable to return his books? He borrowed three of the titles at the General Meeting in October and was still in possession of them the next January. Sermons and addresses were in demand. Messrs Ward, Twyman, Neville, and Anderson all borrowed the Bishop of Oxford's Sermons among other titles. Up-to-date copies of the Monthly Critical Review were constantly in loan and the Theatrical Review was also available. Histories and biographies were popular. The Life of Sir Thomas More was borrowed by nine members in the second half of 1758. Rousseau was represented as was Swift. There was a marked lack of books on mathematics or physics, but less serious works were represented by titles such as Ode to the King of Prussia and [The] Upholsterer. A Farcce.

Apart from the Monthly Critical Review and the Theatrical Review many pamphlets and tracts were bought. Fifty-eight of the titles cost 2s. or under, a total of 64%, and fifteen of the titles cost 6d., a total of 16%. On the whole the pamphlets would have been recent publications and thus highly desirable to the membership. The highest price paid for a single work was 15s, for the Life of Erasmus.

From January 1786 to April 1787, a period also covered by a catalogue of books purchased for the Subscription Library, the Lincoln Book Society Meeting Book mentions 157 titles very similar in subject matter to the books ordered nearly thirty years before.

More periodicals were taken. Archaeologia, vol. 7 was sold to Mr Fardell for 17s. in the March 1786 auction and Young's Annals of Agriculture, often advertised in the Stamford Mercury, was also bought for the Library. Adaminson's work On Electricity (price 6s.) showed a new interest in scientific discovery, but sermons & addresses were still the most popular and pamphlet 'Letters to...' were enjoyed during the year and quickly sold at the sales. Comedy and poetry,
TERMS of READING.

1 d.

Subscription for one year, 10. 6 13. 9
half a year, 5. 6 7. 6
quarter of a year, 3. 6 4. 6
a month, 1. 6 2. 0

Subscribers are entitled to one volume per day.

Those persons who do not choose to become subscribers pay two-pence for each book, which they may keep a week; but if longer, 2d. a week till the book be returned.

* * * For the convenience of Ladies and Gentlemen residing in the Country, they may be accommodated with two or three sets at a time.
The basic categories are much the same as those of the Book Society, but there were differences. The scope was wider and the emphasis was slightly changed. Several clerics were subscribers to the Book Society whereas the Subscription Library included members of the middle class as well as professional gentlemen and gentry. It is not surprising that although sermons and addresses were still popular, they are in this catalogue outstripped by volumes of histories like the "History of Greece by the Rev. Mr. Gillies, or the History of Europe in five volumes and Leland's 'History of Ireland' in three volumes. There was less of an atmosphere of theology about the stock. Several works of reference were also obtained. Mr Boot, a surgeon, proposed the purchase of the "Encyclopaedia Britannica" in nine volumes, each of which must surely have fulfilled the pious wish of the founders that home reading must be "at once an elegant, pleasing, and useful Recreation in the Leisure-Hours of Men of Business."  

It is unfortunate that no borrowing records survive to tell us how many times customers asked for these weighty volumes. Dr Fellowes sponsored a General Atlas priced £1 12s. 0d. and Mr Wright suggested the two folio volumes of Johnson's Dictionary. Books of travels were in demand. "Cavallari's Travels in the East," "Cavallari's Travels in Syria & Egypt," "Cavallari's Travels in the East," and "Cavallari's Travels in Syria & Egypt" were noted. Although there were three subscribers on the original membership list who were doctors, fewer books were bought on medicine than on the physical sciences. Mr Johnson proposed a two-volume work on Electricity by Cavello and Dr Fellowes put his name to a book on Astronomy by Bonnycastle, price 4s. 6d. The poetry of Cowper was bought and Gibbon, Fielding, Lord Chesterfield, and Shakespeare were all represented. Even works by women writers were featured. Mr Wright, who with Mr Boot must have joined at the General Meeting, proposed Madam Genlis's "Tales of the Castle" and Dr Cookson, a committee member, asked for Mrs Montague’s book "On the Genius and Writings of Shakespeare."  

As for pamphlets, in comparison with the Lincoln Book Society, only 15 titles in the Catalogue of the Subscription Library cost 2s. or under, so the percentage, 10% of the book stock, was much lower. There was less necessity for members of this library to consider the cost of items they suggested. There was no rule about bidding at auction as in the Book Society regulations and many multi-volume works were obtained. The books were mostly quite up to date. Where the authors of these titles can be checked with the British Museum Catalogue, the evidence shows that the books purchased were published around 1786 and 1787.  

From the lists of the Lincoln Book Society and the Subscription Library for 1786, 270 titles in all, one might have expected more duplication than did appear. Even though the subject matter of both libraries was broadly the same, only ten books were common—titles like John Disney’s "Memoirs of Dr Sykes" and the Memoirs of Baron de Tott. There were works by Priestley and Cavello in each library but they were different. Naturally both libraries took the "Monthly and Critical Review." This lack of duplication points up the choice of published material available to book lovers and to libraries at this period.  

Whereas fiction was not entirely ignored by the Lincoln Book Society or the Subscription Library, it was not their main priority. In 1794 Dr Cookson treated himself to a three-decker novel, "Hermon & Anna," price 9s. at the Book Society auction. The 1786 catalogue of the Subscription Library contained four works of fiction but this was all. In contrast, Dreyry's Circulating Library provided the eager middle class with histories and romances. From the thirty-two pages of Dreyry's "Catalogue," let alone the fifteen pages of the Addenda, 1284 such items are listed. About 70% of the stock in the catalogue belonged to this category. The stim-
ulus that Circulating Libraries gave to publishing at this time and the encouragement offered to romantic novelists is reflected in the number of two-part and three-part novels that have been listed; *Evelina*, or the History of a Young Lady’s Entrance into the World (3 volumes), *Fruitless Repentance*, or History of Kitty Le Fevre (2 volumes), *All’s Right at Last* (2 volumes), and *Love in a Cottage* were examples of these. There were at least thirty-two titles in the alphabetical order under ‘History of...’—an 18th-century indication of a romance, as the History of Betsy Thoughtless.

However, Drewry’s library catered for more serious-minded readers at the same time. There did not appear to be any sermons or political tracts in the style of the Book Society but a customer could have selected no. 561, *Mental Improvement for a Young lady on her Entrance into the World*, or no. 562, *Miscellaneous Selection of Religious and Moral Quotations in Prose and Verse*. Works on travel included *Barrow’s Collection of Voyages* vol. 2, containing the Voyages of Dampier, Lord Anson, Ellis and others... also including the History of Alexander Selkirk, who was found on an uninhabited island. (This is the person who has been rendered famous by M. de Foe under the name of Robinson Crusoe) and Cook’s Last Voyage. History was represented by the History of Germany and Howard’s History of the Reigns of Edward and Richard II among other titles. Shakespeare’s Tempest and Troilus and Cressida were offered along with *Dramas for the Use of Young Ladies, Memoirs of the 45 first years of the Life of Lachington, bookseller, and Ovid’s Art of Love*.

It was Drewry’s intention that ‘In order to render the LIBRARY as extensively useful and entertaining as possible, every new Publication of Merit will be selected...’. In order to keep the custom of ‘public society’ and to entice people to use his commercial library he offered a wide spread of subject matter as well as amusing or sentimental fiction. He was careful to add... ‘Care will be taken to suppress immoral Writings or those which tend to corrupt the Manners of the rising Generation.’

Drewry as a bookseller would be aware of the sensibilities and wishes of his public. Suitable writers were deemed to be the many women novelists as Mrs Robinson, Isabella Kelly, and Charlotte Smith alongside Addison, Fielding, Gibbon and Rousseau—authors represented in the Lincoln Book Society and the Lincoln Subscription Library. Light fiction was the mainstay of this circulating library but it covered a wider variety of subjects and more serious works than has been credited in the past to these establishments.

In 1810 Adam Stark wrote, ‘In Literature and Science, Lincoln has, of late years, made some attempts at improvement; though, comparatively speaking, it is still in a very backward state.’ A study of these three 18th-century libraries in the city shows that this view is not the whole picture. There were initiatives in the town, limited though they may have appeared to 19th-century commentators. In Lincoln, as in other towns throughout the country, there was a trend towards greater reading and an increasing demand for printed books. These libraries provided small centres of social culture, serious literature, and works of up-to-date interest and knowledge. The Book Society was aimed at a small elite membership whereas the Subscription Library catered for a wider middle-class society. The Circulating Library was the most popular of all in the real sense of that word, offering volumes of all kinds of subjects to its customers as well as the desirable novels and adventure stories. A demand for easily obtainable printed material increased in this period. A vast reading public emerged, especially in the middle and lower-middle classes, resulting in attempts to set up libraries in the 19th century. New prospects were opening up and in this climate of expanding horizons the Lincoln Book Society, Simmons’s Lincoln Subscription Library and Drewry’s Circulating Library all played a part in the social history of the city.

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NOTES

5 Loxe & Drury, *Catalogue of books* (c. 1773), Advert on back endpaper.
6 William Wood & Son, *Catalogue The oldest publication date for a book noted in this catalogue is 1725* (p. 105) and the most recent is 1762 (Addenda to the Catalogue, p. 124 6c).
7 Printed letter sent to Mr Brooke re proposed establishment of Lincoln Subscription Library (c. 1814), p. 1.
8 The uphill County Newsroom was instituted in 1786. A less successful City Newsroom was founded seven years later downhill so that more Lincoln citizens could keep up with the events of the war with France.
10 L.A.O.D.C.LIB I/1, f. 1.
11 Samuel Simmons, *Pr. To the Ladies and Gentlemen of the City and Neighbourhood of Lincoln* (proposals for setting up the Subscription Library) (1786) (p. 1-2).
12 Samuel Simmons, *pr. ibid., p. 2.
13 Lincoln, Rutland, & Stamford Mercury, 8 February 1788, p. 2, col. 3.
14 ibid., 7 March 1788, p. 3, col. 3.
15 Samuel Simmons, *pr. op. cit., p. 2.
16 Lincoln, Rutland, & Stamford Mercury, 25 December 1789, p. 2, col. 3.
17 ibid., 13 September 1793, p. 3, col. 4.
18 Biographical details from J. W. F. Hill, *op. cit., and various indexes at L.A.O.
20 ibid., 1/1, f. 36.
21 Samuel Simmons, *pr. op. cit., p. 3.
22 Lincoln, Rutland, & Stamford Mercury, 11 August 1786, p. 2, col. 3.
25 L.A.O.D.C.LIB 1/3, f. 28
26 Henry Best, *Personal & Literary Memorials*, 1829, pp. 174-5, J. W. F. Hill mistakenly states that the book club mentioned in these pages was that founded in 1792, the Monthly Dinner Book Club. Paley and Best were not members of this club, but of the Lincoln Book Society. Paley belonged from 1796 until his death in 1805 and Henry Best had been a visitor at a meeting in 1794 but joined in 1797 and remained a member until 1800 (in spite of becoming a Roman Catholic in 1798). He was steward in 1798-9. His father, another Henry Best, was a residentiary canon and belonged from 1738 to his death in 1782.
27 Lincoln, Rutland, & Stamford Mercury, 4 August 1786, p. 2, col. 4.
28 Joshua Drewry, Catalogue of Joshua Drewry’s Circulating Library at his shop, ... (1794).
29 Lincoln, Rutland, & Stamford Mercury, 12 September 1794, p. 3, col. 3.
30 L.A.O.D.C.LIB 1/1/4, f. 127.
31 Samuel Simmons, *pr. op. cit., [p. 1.]
32 Drewry, *op. cit., 1794, & Addenda. This figure is the last in a running total. It must be read with care as the Catalogue gives numbers to every volume excepting collections, whereas the Addenda does similarly until number 1054 when numbers are assigned to titles only, no matter how many parts.
33 Lincoln, Rutland, & Stamford Mercury, 13 September 1793, p. 3, col. 4.