

**‘AN EXTENSIVE MUSICAL LIBRARY’:
MRS CLARINDA WEBSTER, LRAM**

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There is a general perception that the lives led by middle-class women in the nineteenth and even early twentieth centuries were severely limited, confined to the drawing-room, or perhaps even to the schoolroom, if they were unfortunate enough to remain single. However, a couple of years ago, I wrote a blogpost about Elizabeth Lambert, the Yorkshire-born young woman who first catalogued the University of St Andrew’s copyright music collection in 1826.¹ Her contribution was far more significant than she could have realised, in terms of making that collection of music accessible to readers both within the university, and extramurally.

I recently came across another English-born woman who made a name for herself in Scotland. Coincidentally, both women were born in years of revolution. Whilst Elizabeth Lambert was born in the year of the French Revolution, Clarinda Augusta Webster (née Thomson) was born during the European Revolutions of 1848. Both moved to London in middle age: Elizabeth to marry, and Clarinda to start the next stage of her career back in her native city. With half a century between them in terms of their birth dates, their paths would not have crossed.

¹ Karen E. McAulay, ‘Mrs Elizabeth Williams’, *Scottish Music Publishers 1880-1950 (and Earlier Stationers’ Hall Research)*, 2019 <<https://claimedfromstationershall.wordpress.com/tag/mrs-elizabeth-williams/>> accessed 1 December 2021. Elizabeth Williams, maiden name Elizabeth Lambert, lived from 1789-1875.



*Fig 1: Clarinda Augusta Webster*²

Clarinda successfully forged a great career for herself, aided by her intelligence, abilities and upbringing, seizing opportunities on every side, and all this despite having to escape an abusive marriage, the description of which is harrowing today. She published books and music primers, founded not only a music school but also a school for young ladies in Aberdeen, and gave lectures on music pedagogy and composers – to name but a few of her achievements. Most significantly to the readers of the present journal, she undertook a survey of music provision in public libraries for the Library Association, in 1894, investigating the availability of music that could be freely borrowed by members of the public around the UK.

² Illustration from *Northern Figaro*, 14 May, 1887, with thanks to St Andrews University Library Special Collections.

'A First Class from Queen's College London, the highest certificate in Music that could be secured by a woman'³

Clarinda was born in Woolwich in 1848, the second child and only daughter of a Stirlingshire-born dental surgeon, Robert Thomson, whose own weaver father had moved to Kent when Robert was small.⁴ She had the good fortune to attend Queen's College, London, in Harley Street – a school founded in the year of her birth, and the first school to award educational qualifications to women. Clarinda qualified with first class honours.



Fig. 2: Queen's College Harley Street, Library

She had music lessons with Joseph McMurdie, an Oxford graduate composer of songs and vocal ensemble music, and author of a primer for juvenile pianists, a guide to music theory and figured bass, and a handbook for vocal classes. Advised by McMurdie to pursue a career in music, Clarinda became a church organist in London.

In 1869, Clarinda married William Webster, an Aberdonian journalist working in London. Living first in Brixton and then Herne Hill, they had three sons between 1872 and 1875, before moving to Aberdeen in about 1877,

³ Obituary, *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 29 March 1920.

⁴ Clarinda's father must have been proud of his Scottish ancestry, calling his sons William Wallace, Robert Burns and Walter Scott, whilst Clarinda would presumably have been named after the woman with whom Burns had a platonic relationship. Only Clarinda's brother Walter lived to adulthood.

where Clarinda was organist at St Clement's Parish Church. Their daughter Adnil was born the following year.⁵

Well-qualified, and well-informed, within two years Clarinda was giving a paper to the Aberdeen Branch of the Educational Institute of Scotland, on 'The Development of Music as a Popular Art during the last Two Centuries,' and arguing very strongly for the value of a musical education.⁶ This is the earliest record of this ambitious woman beginning to make a name for herself, and as it turned out, she would soon doubtless be thankful for her abilities.

Her husband William was an alcoholic, and the violent abuse that Clarinda suffered led to her leaving her husband by 1881, taking her four children with her. The census that year shows her living in a household headed by her widowed mother Selina, with Clarinda described as a 'Teacher of Music'.

'Unfailing, never-swerving energy and unabated enthusiasm to the teaching of Music'⁷

By 1883, her teaching practice was named as the 'Aberdeen Music School' at 48 Union Place. She advertised assiduously in the local press. Obviously, it is impossible to tell whether some of the longer announcements were self-composed or written by the press; for example, the *Montrose, Arbroath and Brechin Review* rhapsodised about the energy and care that went into her music teaching. We cannot know if this was self-praise!

Clarinda clearly valued libraries, considering her own music school's 'extensive Musical Library for the use of the Senior Pupils' significant enough to mention in a newspaper advert in 1885, and again the following year, when she placed an advert in the Aberdeen Public Library Lending Department catalogue.⁸

Amidst all this activity, she had qualified with an LRAM from the Royal Academy of Music in 1884. The Aberdeen Post Office Directory informs us that she was also organist at St Paul's Episcopal Church between 1885-7, and 1887 also saw the publication of the first of her pedagogical works.

In 1889, Clarinda sued for judicial separation, alleging cruelty as far back as 1877. William counter-sued for divorce due to desertion; Clarinda's defence was that she had no choice considering his appallingly violent behaviour. The divorce went through, but Clarinda received no more than a sum towards legal costs. There seemed to be a recognition that William's illness – presumably his alcoholism – was the cause of his behaviour. He believed that Clarinda clearly could not live with him. However, the judge said he ruled that she was more than capable of providing for herself, for she had been the

⁵ William and Ralph Waldo were born in London, in 1872 and 1876. Alexander was born in Manchester, for reasons unknown, in 1874. (Adnil, born in Aberdeen in 1878, is a palindrome of Linda, as it happens!).

⁶ *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 12 January 1880.

⁷ *Montrose, Arbroath and Brechin Review; and Forfar and Kincardineshire Advertiser*, 23 December 1887

⁸ Aberdeen (Scotland) Public library., 'Catalogue of the Lending Department' (Aberdeen: University Press, 1886) <<http://hdl.handle.net/2027/njp.32101048250235>> accessed 3 December 2021.

Lady Principal of the Ladies College, Aberdeen since 1888, operating from 5 Bon Accord Square. This was the same address used for her music school by this time.

The Ladies College had high aspirations. With a Headmistress, Miss Eleanor G. Rice (of Newnham College, Cambridge), and 'a large staff of teachers and visiting masters', the school aspired to provide 'intellectual, technical and physical training of young ladies'. It continued operation until about 1891/1892, but after that, only Clarinda's music school still seems to have been in existence. She was also at this time the local representative for the London College of Music, her pupils often winning awards in those exams, and as though this wasn't enough, between 1891-5 she was also Professor of Pianoforte for Aberdeen's Free Church Training College.

Fate dealt her another blow with the death from scarlatina of her daughter Adnil in May 1891, a talented violinist aged only thirteen. Clarinda organised a sale and work and a concert to raise money towards a children's hospital bed in her memory. Professionally, she was as busy as ever, but still found time the following year to ensure that, as Adnil's executrix, she claimed what would have been her daughter's share of her paternal grandfather's estate. Clarinda's ex-husband died later in 1892.

Although she remained the Principal of the Aberdeen Music School until 1897/8 (the last listing in Aberdeen's Post Office Directory), Clarinda moved back to London in 1893, where she embarked on a career as performer as well as a music teacher.

Towards the end of that year, Sir John Stainer and Ebenezer Prout nominated her as a member of the Musical Association.⁹ She clearly attended meetings, for in 1896-7, she was mentioned in the *Proceedings* as having spoken at some length about women's education and progress in the music profession, after a talk by a Mr Cummings about 'Music During the Queen's Reign'. Clarinda objected that he had barely touched upon mention of ladies in music.

'During the Queen's reign they have made great strides in the musical profession [. . .]. Many [ladies] are exceedingly suitable for this field of work [elementary teaching] . . . In the Edinburgh University I understand that ladies sit side by side with gentlemen in the music classes and that they are working up for degrees [. . .] I hope that some day ladies will rank well as composers.'¹⁰

Mr Cummings retorted that he 'only had to deal with facts and could therefore not touch that point.' That year, she also wrote an article (see below) about Clara Schumann's father Friedrich Rieck's renowned teaching method. An English translation had been published by Hugo Krueger, a language teacher

⁹ Music librarians will know these names well, for Stainer's *The Crucifixion* and Prout's edition of Handel's *Messiah* were core choral repertoire for many years and are still known today.

¹⁰ *Proceedings*, Musical Association (1896-7).

and school principal active in Aberdeen in the 1870s. Clarinda may have come across Krueger's translation early in her teaching career.¹¹

Other aspects of her later life are noteworthy. She had already written a pamphlet for Novello about the operatic composer Lortzing, the funds from which were to support a monument in his memory in Berlin. She lived there between 1891 and at least 1902, researching Continental music and musicians.¹² She was back in England by 1905, for that November, she left aboard the *SS Majestic* from Liverpool to New York.

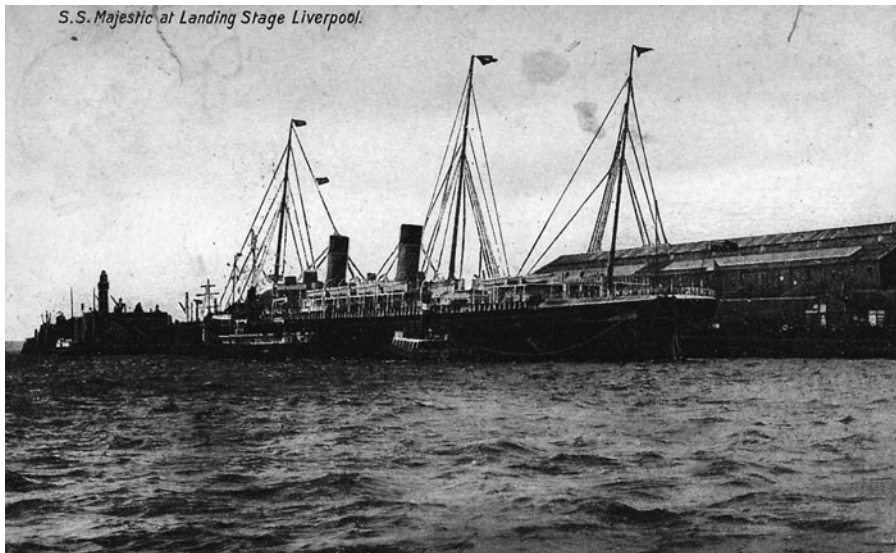


Fig. 3: SS Majestic, Liverpool

There, at the age of 58, she was registered as a summer sessional student at Cornell University in 1906, one of only three ladies from London that year. There were few enough non-American students in general for this to be quite remarkable. Cornell had admitted women to its courses since the 1870s, which may perhaps have made it attractive to Clarinda and her two lady compatriots.

¹¹ In 1870, Edward Karl Hugo Krueger was rector of the Aberdeen Young Ladies Institution for English and Continental Education at 250 Union Street. His wife Adele had been a pupil of Rieck's.

¹² She ceased to be listed as a member of the Musical Association after 1902, so we briefly lose trace of her from 1902-5.



Fig. 4: Cornell University Library

Probably by 1910, at latest by 1911, Clarinda was back in Britain. She published a little poetry book in 1910, and went on lecturing, performing and teaching at least until 1915.¹³

Intriguingly, in 1913, a journal entitled *The Vote: the Organ of the Women's Freedom League*, published an article about the Reform Bill. The page also listed donors to the 'Treasury: National Fund', including a donation by 'Mrs C. A. Webster.' Whilst there's no obvious evidence to link Clarinda to this organisation, what we know about her is consistent with such involvement.

Clarinda died at the age of 72 in Dulwich, on 27 March 1920. All three of her sons appear to have spent their adult lives in London - indeed, the eldest had moved down to Brixton before Clarinda moved south herself - so there would have been no further family left in Scotland. An obituary nevertheless appeared in the *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, reminding readers that her music school had achieved 'more than local fame for its systematic and thorough grounding and general instruction in the elements of theory and practical demonstration in music.'

Publications and Lecturing

Whilst resident in Scotland, Clarinda produced several pamphlets and educational materials, publishing the first in Aberdeen, and then simultaneously

¹³ Stock published a magazine, *The Private Schoolmaster: The Journal of the Association of the Principals of Private Schools* in the 1880s, which was possibly known to Clarinda.

in Edinburgh and London. Once she moved to London, she only used London publishers, with her *Child's Primer* also distributed by the extraordinarily prolific H. W. Gray Company in New York:

Handel. An outline of his life, and an epitome of his works (29 p.) (Aberdeen: A & R Milne, 1881), 29 p.

Webster's Groundwork of Music books 1 & 2 (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, and London: Simpkin, Marshall, and Co., 1887). 2nd edition 1890, 3rd edition 1892.

Webster's Music Copy Book (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1888) [Blank book]

Webster's Child's Primer of the Theory of Music (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1890.) Subsequently published by Novello in London, and the H. W. Gray Company in New York.

'Friedrich Wieck's Method of Teaching Music to Children', in *The Parents' Review* (1897), published in London by the Parents National Educational Union.

Albert Lortzing (London: Novello, 1901), pamphlet.

Rosalea: Poems in Prose (London: Elliot Stock, 1910)

Clarinda gave talks about Handel, Mendelssohn and Lortzing. George Bernard Shaw attended one lecture-recital at the Queen's Hall in Langham Place in London, but was so irritated by the length of her Mendelssohn talk that he left before the music began, declaring later that she had told him nothing that he did not already know. Her speaking engagements also addressed music appreciation, music teaching, the value of a musical education, or the importance of singing in sol-fa. In 1891, she became corresponding secretary to the Aberdeen branch of the Teachers' Guild of Great Britain and Ireland, and spoke of the necessity for this branch, since teachers of the 'upper classes' in Aberdeen had, hitherto, no society to support them in the way teachers of working class national schools were supported. Later, in London, she attended meetings of the Incorporated Society of Musicians, and participated in discussion after a talk by Mrs Curwen, the sol-fa supremo.

On other occasions, she spoke on behalf of the Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, also raising funds for a children's hospital in Shoreditch.

Music in the Free Libraries

Mrs Webster's musical activities are documented in newspapers, not to mention journals like the *Musical Times*, the *Musical News*, and the *Musical Association Proceedings*. Her teaching and publications were also well-advertised, and her lectures, performances or school events were noted in the local press. Whether she had learned about the importance of publicity from her journalist husband, or had an innate sense of its value – or, indeed, whether her second son Alick (Alexander) who also became a journalist, might have helped from time to time - the fact remains that it has been comparatively easy to trace her remarkable career over several decades. It is thanks to the availability of this data, largely via the *British Newspaper Archive* and *JSTOR*, that I have been able to explore the aspect of her work that will be of most interest to readers of *Brio*, namely her investigation into the provision of music in the country's free lending libraries.

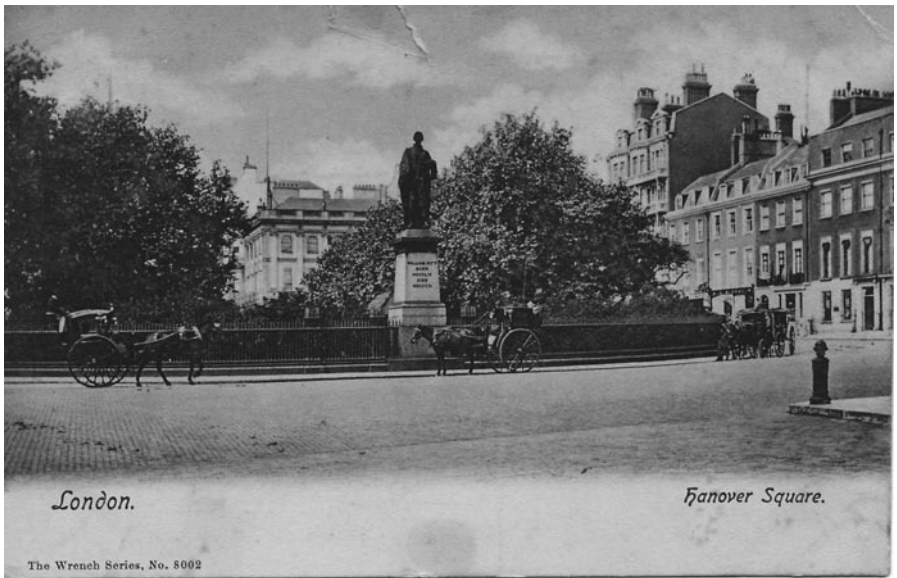


Fig. 5: Hanover Square, London

Clarinda's survey of music in free public libraries took place in 1894. The project was entrusted to her by the Library Association, and she reported her findings not only to a London meeting of the Association in Hanover Square, but also to the Incorporated Society of Musicians at the Royal Academy of Music on 28 April 1894. The latter meeting was chaired by Ebenezer Prout. Publications from as far afield as Cork, Aberdeen and Manchester, not to mention the more London-centric sources, picked out differing details of her survey.¹⁴

'The subject was fraught with difficulty, music being classed among the arts and sciences'¹⁵

She had set out to survey 300 free libraries, but discovered that it was difficult to obtain statistics, eventually hearing from 36 different librarian correspondents.

'The extent of the circulation of high-class music through this medium [. . .] has caused her much amazement, and, indeed, it is significant of much that Birmingham should last year have issued nearly 10,000 volumes of musical compositions . . .'¹⁶

The startling figures of nearly 10,000 music loans in Birmingham the previous year (1893), and about 8,000 music loans in Liverpool, were understandably the mostly widely reported. Although no full written report has yet been traced, Clarinda's results can be tabulated as follows:

¹⁴ A couple of shorter reports were identical, plainly from a press-release.

¹⁵ *Musical News*, 28 April 1894, reporting the Incorporated Society of Musicians (London Section) meeting.

¹⁶ *Manchester Evening News*, 13 June 1894.

Music in Public Libraries 1893/4

PLACE	ANNUAL MUSIC LOANS	COMPOSERS NAMED	OTHER INFORMATION
Birmingham	9, 619		
Cardiff	60 vols weekly (ie 3120)	Brahms, Dvorak, Greig, Moszkowski, Raff, Schubert & Schumann	'Remarkable collection of Welsh music' NB Brahms, Dvorak, Grieg and Moszkowski were still living.
Liverpool	8065		Library had music since opening in 1859, amongst other 'pioneering initiatives' eg books for the blind and freewinter lectures.
Sheffield			Library had music since opening. Now has 1500 volumes of music.
London: Camberwell and Minet			Collections said to be particularly good
London: Canning Town branch of West Ham		58 oratorios; 50 operas 98 volumes of instrumental music by Beethoven, Grieg, Mendelssohn, Rubinstein, Schubert and Schumann; 61 volumes of songs by Brahms, Dvorak, Franz and Gounod.	Librarian gave Mrs Webster copy of their catalogue. Again, note that Brahms, Dvorak and Grieg were still living, whilst Franz and Gounod had died only a year or so earlier.
London: Chelsea			Special music readers' tickets. Mrs Webster was given a copy of the music catalogue at the Library Association meeting.
London: Fulham	1283	181 volumes	Music is 'a separate class'
London: Hammersmith	1886	155 volumes	Music is 'a separate class'
London in general			Within the past six years, a total of about twelve London libraries now had music

The Library Association meeting on 11th June, reported in *The Library* vol.6 (1894), was an auspicious occasion, for it also marked the election of Andrew Carnegie as an ‘honorary member of the Association in recognition of his munificent benefactions to public libraries both in the United States and in Great Britain’.¹⁷

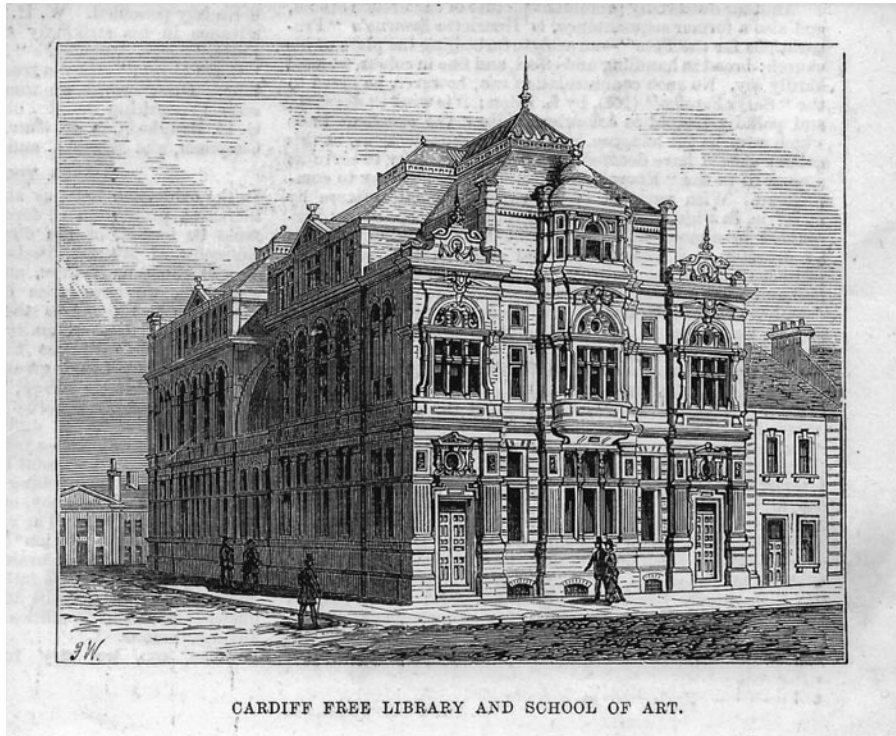


Fig. 6: Cardiff Free Library and School of Art

Clarinda’s own talk noted the particular popularity of music borrowing in the North of England, but also the increasing numbers of London libraries lending music.¹⁸ Highlighting the positive effect that free music borrowing was bound to have upon ‘public taste and culture’, she stressed that libraries needed a musician or group of musicians to advise them about suitable stock,

¹⁷ Andrew Carnegie’s first UK library was Dunfermline Carnegie Library in Scotland, opened 1883. He continued to fund numerous libraries until his death in 1919, and the trust continued some library funding beyond that date.

¹⁸ Library Association, ‘The Library Association Record. Season 1893-4. The Last Monthly Meeting . . . 11 June 1894. [. . .] Mrs Clarinda A. Webster, LRAM, Principal of the Aberdeen Music School, Read a Paper Entitled “Music in the Public Libraries”’, *The Library*, 6 (1894), 229.

rather than leaving selection to a local amateur or music publisher. The above tabulation indicates that both Cardiff and Canning Town itemised a good proportion of contemporary composers in their responses, with Cardiff also commended for its Welsh music provision.

The names of six librarians posing questions or making observations after her talk were recorded. All but one had either published or were about to have library catalogues published. Frank James Burgoyne, Librarian of Lambeth, had catalogued both Norwood and Durning Lending Library, also writing about village libraries, library architecture, and a report on the Brixton and Stockwell Library. Charles J. Courtney, of Lambeth Borough would later publish a catalogue of the collection of works relating to the county of Surrey contained in the Minet Public Library, jointly compiled with William Minet himself. Edward Foskett, Librarian of Camberwell Libraries, had catalogued Livesey Lending Library. Lawrence Inkster, of Battersea Public Libraries, had published a catalogue of the lending library, and would later publish a catalogue of juvenile material, and a readers' guide. John Henry Quinn, from the London Borough of Chelsea, who gave a copy of his music catalogue to Mrs Webster, would in 1895 publish his catalogue of science, technology and art books in the Central Library.¹⁹

In short, the overall picture is one of optimism, enthusiasm and diligence in establishing public library services which would not only serve, but also uplift their borrowers. As it happens, none of the librarians known to be present were in Carnegie buildings, but it is plain that the general growth of public libraries in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was considerable - a municipal effort for the public good. In compiling her report, Mrs Clarinda Augusta Webster, LRAM, has opened a window allowing us to see that music library provision occupied a significant role in these efforts.

Over and above this, however, an exploration of this remarkable woman's life demonstrates that she made the most of her good education, and seized every opportunity to forge a career which was, in many senses, well ahead of her time.

REFERENCES

British Newspaper Archive: <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>

JISC Library Hub Discover: <https://discover.libraryhub.jisc.ac.uk/>

JSTOR: <https://www.jstor.org/>

National Library of Scotland Digital Gallery: <https://digital.nls.uk/>

¹⁹ Two of the catalogues – those of Brixton and Stockwell, and the Minet collection – were in fact published by Aberdeen University Press, as had been the Aberdeen public library catalogue some years earlier.

Abstract

Although there has been the perception that middling-class women's lives were confined to domestic circles, there are plenty of examples that directly challenge this idea. The late Victorian Clarinda Augusta Webster ran a music school and a school for young ladies. She escaped domestic violence, overcame personal tragedy, and created a highly successful career first in Aberdeen and then in London. She published, gave talks, was active in professional circles, and travelled both to Europe and America. She also conducted a ground-breaking survey on music library provision in late nineteenth century Britain, delivering her findings to the Library Association. This article celebrates the sheer determination of a talented woman to make the most of her skills and create opportunities for advancement. It also demonstrates the perceived importance of music in wider late Victorian life.

A Fellow of CILIP and the Higher Education Academy, Karen is a Performing Arts Librarian and postdoctoral researcher at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. Her research combines musicology with cultural, library and book history. Karen worked on the AHRC-funded HMS.scot and was Principal Investigator for the 'Claimed From Stationers' Hall' network. Her book, Our Ancient National Airs: Scottish Song Collecting from the Enlightenment to the Romantic Era (2013), was followed by chapters in Understanding Scotland Musically (2018) and Music by Subscription (2022).