National Airs in Georgian British Libraries

**1. TITLE SLIDE.** Have you ever looked at a really old folk-song book in a library, and wondered how it got there? The routes onto library shelves are as varied as the routes you and I took to get here today. It could have been purchased new or second-hand, been gifted by a benefactor - or even acquired from another library.

**2. TODAY’S TALK.** However, for nine British libraries in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, there was another route, enshrined in law. I’m going to tell you about the traditional songbooks that ended up in these particular libraries ... and, focusing on two libraries in particular, I’ll share what we know about the early library users and custodians, and why these collections are so significant.

**3. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND.** Copyright legislation enacted in Queen Anne’s time provided a short period of copyright protection for authors and publishers, and introduced the concept of legal deposit. All UK publishers had to register their publications at Stationers’ Hall, and to this day publishers are legally obliged to deposit copies in designated legal deposit libraries. Technically, music was included from the outset, although it took legal challenges in the 1780s before it was finally clarified that music, despite being engraved rather than typeset, was still entitled to the same protection as books.

By 1836, the whole process was resented by publishers, and causing considerable frustration to the university libraries. Resented, because the publishers objected to supplying free books to so many libraries, and frustrating for the libraries who felt it was an uphill struggle to get their entitlement. What’s more, the university libraries really only wanted the kind of books that would be useful to their scholars, but the legislation also entitled them to anything else that was printed, from ladies’ diaries to commercial labels, and schoolbooks to music scores. Yet music wasn’t even a university subject in those days. The legislation entitled the libraries to all kinds of music – and the music publishing trade was flourishing, so there was a lot of it!

Finally, bowing to complaints from the publishers, an official commission set out to find out how the legal deposit system was working in libraries. In 1836, the Library Deposit Act stripped most of the universities of their entitlement, and library book grants were implemented instead. The universities who lost their entitlement now had the opportunity to buy the books that they needed.

**4. NINE COPYRIGHT LIBRARIES DIAGRAM** This slide shows you the situation prior to 1836.

**5. TODAY’S LEGAL DEPOSIT SYSTEM** Nowadays, publishers are required by law to provide legal deposit copies to the British Library and just a few other national and university libraries (shown here). Electronic deposit is preferred - just as well, considering the miles of shelving required! The British Library automatically receives everything – the others have formally to request items.

**6. UNIVERSITY OF ST ANDREWS** About three years ago, an academic at the University of St Andrews got in touch with me. She had been working with a small singing group, and invited me to a lunchtime concert showcasing some music that they had been trying. She wondered if I had come across the library’s Copyright Music collection – all 400+ bound volumes of it – and suggested I might be interested in exploring it. Most of the volumes were bound compilations of single pieces of sheet music, but sometimes just a few fatter volumes were bound together. In the early 19th century, someone had taken some care to collate piano music, songs, instrumental music etc into workable volumes.

Over the next year or so, I looked at some of the music volumes, and also the documentation about the collection, along with a handwritten catalogue from 1826, and thousands of pages of loan registers.

I transcribed half a century of music loan data, from 1801-1849. Professors and students borrowed for their own use, but professors could also borrow books and music for their friends. I traced which bound volumes went out most often, what they contained, and who borrowed them – professors, their male friends, not to mention clergymen or retired military men, and unmarried or married ladies. Unmarried ladies – perhaps very young women – borrowed more than married women in the first couple of decades, but then the pendulum swung the other way. Maybe there were societal changes, or perhaps the young women had married and were still borrowing under their new names.

Libraries didn’t always request everything that had been recorded in Stationers’ Hall. Neither did they keep everything, particularly the ephemeral material. One would imagine that sheet-music was low down the list of priorities! The University of St Andrews’ library committee regularly inspected the latest consignment from London, putting materials into categories that would be dealt with in order of priority, and bundling up the least significant materials. Despite this, the University of St Andrews kept an enormous amount of music, beginning to bind it in big folio volumes from 1801 onwards - it was certainly appreciated by music-lovers locally.

**7. ALBYBN’S ANTHOLOGY** So, for example, Alexander Campbell published the first book of his *Albyn’s Anthology* in 1816. It was logged as having been received at St Andrews from Stationers’ Hall in June 1817, was borrowed once before it went to be bound, and was bound with two other vocal scores by 1821 at the latest.

Much of St Andrews’ legal deposit music is now catalogued online, though some of the earlier material remains unlisted except in Miss Lambert’s catalogue notebooks of 1826. Looking through those notebooks, it was clear that a lot of Scottish material was kept – perhaps even more Scottish-influenced music (such as Scottish themes and variations) - than music originating from Scottish publishers. Interestingly, though, there were more Scottish songs than Scottish fiddle tune collections.

The situation with the Scottish fiddle collections is an interesting one. Before I go further, I should explain that it is possible to go and inspect the registers at Stationers’ Hall, and they were microfilmed some years ago; a few libraries hold sets of microfilms. An enormously expensive online package of digital images of these registers, has recently been published, but the cost is prohibitive. However, there’s a useful book, edited by Michael Kassler, listing all music registered at Stationers’ Hall between 1710-1818. There are copies in a number of university libraries and it’s also available electronically. The last 18 years of Kassler’s inventory come from a slightly different source, so a few pieces may not be listed – *Albyn’s Anthology* isn’t, for a start - but it’s still hugely useful. For me, the most frustrating thing is that it stops in 1818, leaving me with nothing that covers 1819-1836, the year of the Library Deposit Act.

But, to get back to the fiddle music, here’s an interesting thing: even allowing for the fact that only a small percentage of publishers actually obeyed the law and registered their books and music, very few fiddle tune books were registered. I know from an earlier research project that loads of fiddle tune books were published in Scotland during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and nearly all of them had something like “Entered at Stationers’ Hall” clearly printed on their title page. **8. “ENTERED AT STATIONERS’ HALL”.** What was going on?

An American scholar called Nancy Mace has suggested that publishers only registered the books that they thought likely to need copyright protection. It’s also a commonly-held assumption that the magic words “Entered at Stationers’ Hall” seem to have been printed almost as a deterrent, even when the music was unregistered! Why else would Niel and Nathaniel Gow’s collections have the protective phrase printed on the title page, but only a minority of them actually appear in Kassler’s Stationers’ Hall listing?

At any rate, not many Scottish fiddle tune collections were registered, and this might explain why hardly any appeared in St Andrews’ Music Copyright Collection. Interestingly enough, the quadrille, a new early 19th century arrival on the scene, is well-represented in the collection. I traced one professor and the male friend of another professor, borrowing dance instruction books!

National song collections were, however, very popular. Traditional musicians today seldom come across Edinburgh publisher George Thomson’s epic Scottish song collections, with their words by Robert Burns and musical arrangements by Haydn, Beethoven and the now-forgotten Kozeluch. The scores come complete with violin and cello lines, intricate introductions and codas, and optional separate scores for the instrumentalists. Even at the time of writing, Thomson complained to Beethoven that his settings were too difficult for the young ladies of Edinburgh, whilst Robert Burns objected to having to write anglicised texts. Play these songs to a folk session now, and there would probably be a riot! They are beautifully crafted art-songs in their own right, but in an unfamiliar idiom – often with complex harmonies that disregard the original modality. “Johnnie Cope” amuses me every time I encounter it, for this very reason. **9. Beethoven’s Johnnie Cope**

Nonetheless, these books literally flew off the shelves in Georgian St Andrews, as did Thomson’s Welsh and Irish collections. Moore’s *Irish Melodies* were also popular, both as poems and in musical settings by Stevenson and Bishop. There was also enthusiasm for the exoticism implied in the poet Byron’s “Hebrew Melodies” and the musical settings by Isaac Nathan. There was very little genuinely authentic Jewish music amongst them!

As for *Albyn’s Anthology*? It’s an important collection, containing Highland, Lowland and Borders tunes. Campbell made two tours to collect tunes, one to the Highlands and Islands in 1815, publishing his first book the next year. He made a shorter trip subsequently to the Borders, resulting in a second volume, published in 1818. You could say he was Scotland’s first ethnomusicologist. The words were an assortment of old and newly-written lyrics, some in Gaelic, but Campbell really wasn’t that good at writing piano accompaniments, and struggled to deal with modalities other than major/minor. To this day, the collection is regularly referenced, but I doubt if anyone performs them with the accompaniments that Campbell provided. I’ve made a number of arrangements of my own, making new settings for the old tunes. As I mentioned, Volume One of *Albyn’s Anthology* was bound with two other books, to make vol.296 – Thomson’s Scottish Airs vol.5, and his Welsh Airs vol.3. My guess is that these other editions account for the volume’s popularity! Between 1821-1849 it was borrowed fifteen times by professors, twice more by their friends, and once by an unmarried lady. Of course, we don’t know who used the music once a professor had taken it home – it could have been for family use.

Today, the book merely contains the Welsh airs – there’s no trace of the others. Never make the mistake of assuming things don’t fall apart, get lost, moved about, re-bound, or a combination of these. Furthermore, I found no evidence of St Andrews ever having the second volume at all!

I’ve told you about the St Andrews collection at some length because its supplementary archival documentation makes it rather special. However, since analysing the borrowing records, and investigating some of the names that cropped up, I’ve started up a research network to investigate what happened to the whole UK’s Georgian legal deposit music collections: the network is called “Claimed From Stationers Hall”. (Anyone can join – I’ll share details at the end of my talk)

**10. STATIONERS HALL – BRITISH LIBRARY.** When I started looking at the national scene, I soon realized that there is no one-size-fits-all pattern.

If you have research access to the British Library, then their collection is the most complete. When legal deposit first started, the library was the Royal Library, which then became the British Museum Library, until it finally became the British Library that we know today. As a reference library, the books were never borrowed, but anything that was registered under legal deposit, is available for consultation by following the correct procedures for registering as a reader. And it’s all catalogued online. Indeed, Kassler’s inventory gives the British Library shelfmark for most items listed, or occasionally a shelfmark in another library for the rare occasions when an item couldn’t be traced in the BL.

Oxford’s Bodleian Library and Glasgow University Library have excellent collections, the vast majority catalogued online. However, Cambridge University Library – which may have almost as many holdings – doesn’t have everything catalogued, whilst the National Library of Scotland – which started life as the Advocates Library in Edinburgh – has a paper-slip catalogue, accessible only by appointment or by making a reference request. It’s also hard to tell which music arrived by legal deposit. Music in the early nineteenth century Advocates Library was somewhat disorganised!

Some libraries were more discerning about what they kept. Oxford and Cambridge responded to the parliamentary commission with a list of items that they had chosen not to keep, and you’ll be surprised by some of their decisions: novels by Jane Austen and a piece by Beethoven appeared on that list! Cambridge also rejected *Albyn’s Anthology*, and a collection by Alexander Campbell’s rival, Simon Fraser, whose *Highland Airs* also appeared in 1816, also deciding not to keep poetry by the West of Scotland’s renowned Robert Tannahill. Meanwhile, the Universities of Aberdeen and Edinburgh certainly sold some music, and the other London library – the theological Sion College – sold stock when it fell on hard times, later transferring anything of value to Lambeth Palace. There’s very little music.

**11. EDINBURGH REID SCHOOL OF MUSIC / HANS GAL**. Most recently, I’ve been looking at legal deposit music at the University of Edinburgh, making some unexpected discoveries. Edinburgh has had an endowment providing for a Professor of Music since the mid-nineteenth century, though formal lectures didn’t start until later on. Their Reid Music School – endowed by General Reid – had its own library, and in 1939, this was reorganised and catalogued by Hans Gal, an exiled German musicologist during the Second World War. Gal’s published catalogue didn’t index every single popular song in the collection. Again, it’s hard to make positive identifications of much legal deposit music; it involves comparing binding styles and looking for identifying book stamps that either mention Stationers’ Hall, or indicate early arrival into the library collection.**12. BOOKSTAMPS**

Whilst I was looking at some of the Edinburgh volumes which do appear to be of the legal deposit survivors, I noticed that whoever curated this collection in earlier times seems to have favoured certain categories of music, such as pedagogical material – manuals for how to improvise accompaniments over a figured bass, for example. This would have had an obvious usefulness when it came to teaching music theory, so maybe it survived because the first Reid Music professors foresaw this value. Another category was items commemorating events of national significance: there are piano pieces to commemorate Napoleonic battles, complete with drumrolls and fanfares (Hans Gal despised these); and anthems composed to mark the deaths of Charlotte Augusta, Princess of Wales, who died in 1817, and of her grandmother Queen Charlotte, wife of George III, the following year.

Most interesting to us here today, are the collections of national songs. Whether via the legal deposit route or otherwise, the curators of the Reid Music collection made a point of keeping significant collections.

**13. KITCHINER – CORONATION TICKET**. One volume which did arrive via legal deposit, was an 1823 English songbook, Kitchiner’s *The Loyal and National Songs of England* - and its partner volume, *The Sea Songs of England*. The *Loyal and National Songs*, plainly judged significant at the time, is also held at St Andrews, Aberdeen, Glasgow, Oxford, Cambridge and the British Library. The contents are not what we’d consider national songs today – songs by British composers such as Blow, Morley, Purcell, Croft, Arne, Dibdin, and including “God save the King”, and “Rule, Britannia” – national in the sense of patriotic, but in no sense traditional songs. Published two years after George IV’s Coronation, and dedicated to the monarch, Kitchiner provides a lavish title page, the top engraving of which is an exact copy of a Coronation ticket to Westminster Hall, with the only details changed being the words in the little ovals, “Loyal and National” “Songs of England”. [see slide.] The combination of a new edition of national songs, patriotism and the commemoration of a significant national event would presumably have made this volume irresistible to whoever was curating music at this time! Sadly, the collection was not well-reviewed when it appeared, as is evident in William Ayrton’s first issue of a new music magazine, *The Harmonicon*, that same year. Kitchiner was praised for his patriotism rather than his musicality or musical knowledge.

Although early nineteenth century national songs like any of those I’ve already mentioned, aren’t often performed today, it is fascinating to trace how repertoires have changed and developed, and to look at the revealing introductions – what in literary terms is called the **paratext** – which set these collections in context. Kitchiner, in 1823, is far from alone in displaying patriotism for a country which was victorious in the Napoleonic Wars, and gaining global influence. Moreover, the often-expressed idea that England had no national music, was like a red rag to a bull. Kitchiner was at pains to stress that,

**14. KITCHINER’S PREFACE**

**“while the Welsh, Scotch and Irish Airs and Songs have been collected and preserved, - those of England have been so much neglected! – that some have even said, ”*the English have no National Songs.*” The MUSICIANS OF ENGLAND, have been equal to her POETS! and not inferior to those of any Country.” This first Number …[will prove] “*no Nation in the World has half so many Loyal, nor half so many National Songs*.”**

I looked at a slightly earlier songbook in Edinburgh, Thomas Moore’s *A Selection of popular national airs*, of 1818. Moore’s opening advertisement begins like this:-

**15. THOMAS MOORE’S PREFACE**

**“It is Cicero, I believe, who says “natura ad modos ducimur;” and the abundance of wild, indigenous airs, which almost every country, except England, possesses, sufficient proves the truth of this assertion.”**

Oops!

Bound with Moore’s *Selection*, I found Charles Baron Arnim’s *A Selection of German National Melodies*, dating from 1814-1816, and another book of the same era called *The Russian Troubadour.* Both are also in St Andrews.

**16. ARNIM**. Arnim supplies a whole Dissertation “On National Music”, and yes, there it is again. **“England may perhaps be said not to possess any national music at all. […] there exists another reason which explains the absence of national music in them: it is, *they have no leisure to exhale their character in songs.*”**

William Chappell was still striving to disprove this shocking allegation, several decades later! Kitchiner was probably quite correct in stating that the Celtic nations had been quicker off the mark in collecting and promoting their national song heritage.

I might add as an aside that prefaces, introductions and even apparently insignificant footnotes are every bit as noteworthy in fiddle tune collections – you only have to look at the Gow collections of Scottish dance-tunes to find a wealth of detail about their views on authenticity and tune provenance. Since, I’ve focused on songbooks today, I’ll leave discussion of that for another time!

Meanwhile, Edinburgh’s Reid Music Library – now incorporated into the main library and gradually being catalogued online – also held other items that I had noted as popular in St Andrews, such as Nathan’s *Hebrew Melodies*, and Bunting’s *Ancient Music of Ireland –* not to mention other items that may or may not have been acquired under legal deposit, such as R A Smith’s *Scotish Minstrel.*

They also kept later, post-legal deposit collections including the epic, and long-lived *Songs of Scotland,* edited by George Farquhar Graham and published by John Muir Wood*.* Indeed, one particular classmark seems to have been entirely dedicated to national melodies of various kinds, both vocal and instrumental. I haven’t yet established when category “X” was created – but it certainly demonstrates a concern to collect this particular repertoire and keep it together.

**17. A PATCHWORK PATTERN.** In this presentation, I’ve tried to demonstrate the patchwork pattern of the surviving Georgian legal deposit music collections, highlighting some of the most significant features that have emerged from my research. In one sense, these collections came together almost as an accident of fate – libraries were entitled to the music, and some libraries curated the music more assiduously than others. Because of the apparently haphazard way in which music was registered at Stationers’ Hall – or not – even the most complete legal deposit collections do not represent all that was published in the UK in any particular year, which has led to a somewhat random assortment of music, both high- and lowbrow, vocal or instrumental, for all the popular performing idioms of the day.

**18. VALUE**. When all is said and done, the true worth of these early national tune collections is three-fold. In the first instance, because they have been preserved, we can trace the historical development of whatever kind of music most attracts us, and, secondly, in many cases there are several surviving copies around the country. Lastly, these books have immeasurable value in helping us to get inside the minds of those original compilers and collectors, and to understand what they considered important.

For these reasons, I hope you’ll agree that we owe a debt of untold gratitude to the original instigators of the concept of legal deposit, who can have had little idea of the potential scale of what they had initiated! Thank you. **19. FURTHER READING**