

Thomas Muir at Glasgow: John Millar and the University

Ronnie Young

Thomas Muir's career at Glasgow University has been viewed by many as a key influence upon his subsequent career and central in shaping his later role as reformer and 'father of Scottish democracy'. Much of that influence has been attributed to the charismatic teaching of John Millar (1735-1801), the leading Enlightenment thinker, protégé of Adam Smith, and Professor of Civil Law at Glasgow College from 1761 until 1800. Millar's lectures are often cited as the reason that Muir, who was originally planning to study Divinity, changed to become a lawyer, and Millar's political outlook – as constitutional Whig, champion of meritocracy, and active political player in the late Enlightenment public sphere – has also been considered a shaping context for Muir's own politics and the reformist-over-radical direction of the Society of the Friends of the People, of which Millar and Muir were members alongside Millar's own son John Millar Jr. In this essay, I will look at Muir's Glasgow career from his early years as 'gowned' student through his studies in Law with Millar, until the events that led to his withdrawal in 1785.

Early years at Glasgow College

Although biographers have agreed on the importance of Muir's time at University, not all concur on the dates of his attendance. The first published account of Muir's time at Glasgow by William Marshall in the *Glasgow Magazine* of 1795 records that Muir entered 'the gowned classes of Glasgow college, on the 10th October 1775, being then little older than ten years of age'.¹ Peter Mackenzie followed suit in his influential life of Muir in 1831, placing the year of entry at 1775.² In her biography, Christina Bewley notes that Muir entered the junior section of the University in 1777, that he turned to Divinity at his parents' urging two years later, and that he finally set his eye on the Bar 'after matriculating in April 1782'³ – dates followed in the Dictionary of National Biography.⁴ Michael Donnelly, for his part, claims that Muir entered University and attended the junior classes for five sessions before matriculating in 1777, after which he is said to have graduated in 1782 and then gained admittance to Millar's Law and Government class in 1783.⁵

Some of these details require clarification. That Muir started attending classes at the University at the young age of 10 is a reasonable proposition given that the entry age for University was much lower in the eighteenth century. Muir's own mentor John Millar was 11 when he first attended Glasgow College as student in 1746.⁶ Moreover, it was common for students to take classes before matriculating or not to matriculate at all, as matriculation was only a requirement for students in the Faculty of Arts who intended to graduate MA or those who wished to vote in the election of rectors.⁷ Matriculation did not have to take place in the first year of study, as attested by the records of students matriculating in classes other than Latin. While it would be possible for Muir to have studied at Glasgow for some two years before matriculating, University records show that Muir did in fact matriculate in 1777. The matriculation album for that year lists Muir under the heading 'Nomina Discipulorum qui hoc

anno intrarunt sub Praesidio Gul[ielmus]: Richardson L.H.P',⁸ meaning that the student named entered this year under the supervision of William Richardson, Professor of Humanity, who taught the first year class in Latin. Muir's entry consists of his signature in ink on parchment followed by the hand of the Clerk of Faculty⁹ detailing in Latin that he is the only son of James, merchant in the City of Glasgow: 'Thomas Muir filius unicus Jacobi Mercatoris in urbe Glasguensis'.¹⁰ (Fig.1)

Fig 1: Thomas Muir's signature and matriculation record. [image ordered]

Muir is also listed, alongside his nationality, on the graduation rolls of the University for 24 April 1782¹¹ (Fig.2), confirming that he did graduate Master of Arts that year.

Fig 2: Muir's graduation record. Glasgow University Archives. [image ordered]

To graduate MA in 1782, Muir would have undertaken five years of study from 1777. The normal pattern of study over the course of these five years was Latin for the first year, Greek for the second, in third year Logic, followed by Ethics and then Physics or Natural Philosophy in the final year, followed by examination in these subjects in order to graduate.¹² From 1777 to 1782, Muir would have studied in turn under Richardson, John Young, George Jardine, the renowned 'common sense' moral philosopher Thomas Reid, and, in his final year, John Anderson, the divisive Professor of Natural Philosophy whose actions against the University would later lead to Muir's eventual withdrawal as a student.

For Muir, entry to the University in the late 1770s would not exactly be entry to an unfamiliar world. The College was then situated on Glasgow's High Street just up the street from the property in which Muir's family lived at the time. In the late eighteenth century, the High Street was still very much the heart of an expanding mercantile centre, although the colonial trade in such commodities as tobacco that had increased the City's prosperity throughout the century was about to take a significant downturn with the onset of hostilities with the American colonies.¹³ As a civic space, it was dominated by the Cathedral and the University, which stood on the junction where College Street (completed nine years after Muir withdrew from Glasgow) meets High Street. As shown in John McArthur's map of Glasgow dating from the time Muir was student there (Fig.3), the University stood on extensive grounds, where, in addition to the College building itself, there was the newly constructed Professor's Court (or 'New Court') where professors such as John Millar lived, a 'physick' garden linked to the teaching of medicine and botany, Blackfriar church, and gardens leading out to the east towards an observatory.

Fig 3: Detail from John McArthur's 1778 Plan of the City of Glasgow, showing the Old College and grounds off the High Street.

Though there was a traditional civic distinction in Glasgow between 'town' and 'gown', made flesh by the requirement that students in Arts such as Muir wear a distinctive scarlet gown,¹⁴ and though tensions between the two often surfaced, as in the John Anderson affair that led to Muir's withdrawal, there was nevertheless a certain closeness between the mercantile and the scholarly spheres.¹⁵ Merchants such as James Muir sent their sons to the College to complete their education. Muir entered the College of Glasgow as a fairly typical student and matriculated for a first-year class in which he was just another of the thirty-seven sons of Glasgow City and surrounding areas. The fifty-two students matriculating for Richardson's Latin class that year all hailed from Scotland (with the exception of one James

Maxwell, a merchant's son from Maryland), the bulk from the West, with concentrations from Lanark and Ayr. By far the majority of Muir's classmates were, like himself, the sons of merchants or of fathers involved in trades, crafts and manufactures, again with a large proportion from the City itself; other than that, Muir's first-year classmates included four 'sons of the manse', five from military families, and, to a lesser extent, the offspring of clerks and magistrates, farmers and weavers.¹⁶ Muir thus entered a relatively open education system, affordable as it was to the children of the lower ranks as to the sons of prosperous local merchants such as Muir – for whom a career in the Church was a reasonable expectation – or to someone of the stature of James Maitland, the future reformer and 8th Earl of Lauderdale, who matriculated in order to vote in the election of rector that year.¹⁷ Some students were very poor, arriving with a sack of meal to tide them over, and were granted customs relief by being exempt from 'the ladel' taken from every sack brought into the burgh.¹⁸

The composition of Muir's first-year class sees the University serving primarily the local area, but students matriculating in later stages of their studies came from farther afield. Matriculation in the first year was not a requirement, and the majority of students who matriculated for Reid's fourth-year class in Ethics that year were from Ireland, leaving their farms to arrive together in groups of two or three from County Down, Tyrone, Antrim, and Donegal. We know of Muir's later links with Ireland, but the College was a popular destination for Hibernians, particularly those of the Presbyterian faith, who made up around a third of Glasgow students in the late eighteenth century.¹⁹ Moreover, future United Irishmen were among Muir's contemporaries. Sinclair Kelburn, the Presbyterian preacher later imprisoned for his involvement with the Irish volunteers, was studying at Glasgow when Muir entered the first-year Latin class.²⁰ Dr William Drennan (1754-1820), the physician, poet and leading member of the United Irishmen with whom Muir would later correspond, had graduated MA from Glasgow just a few years before Muir started attending.²¹ While it would be a stretch to say that political bonds were forged at this early stage in Muir's life, yet the pervasive background noise of Presbyterianism, with a theology that upheld the electoral rights of parishioners, may have helped nurture inclinations towards reform.

Most commentators note that Muir's early years at University were relatively undistinguished, and little record of this time exists. He gains a minor mention in connection with the College prize-giving ceremony of May 1779, where he was awarded a prize 'for good behaviour during an attendance of two Sessions in the public Class' for Humanity – a meagre honour, far below the prizes for essays and for elocution, and a laurel he had to share with another seven students.²² Yet, if his early years were marked only by mediocrity, the education offered to him at Glasgow was anything but. The University was in many ways dynamic and forward looking. The 'regent' system, whereby students were taught by the same individual across subjects, had been abolished following visitation by a royal commission in 1726 and a series of specialist chairs had been instituted in philosophy for teaching logic, ethics and physics. One such 'specialist' professor, Adam Smith, who was Glasgow's Professor of Moral Philosophy from 1752 to 1764, later wrote about the benefits to productivity arising from the simple division of labour in his pioneering analysis of political economy, *The Wealth of Nations* (1776). Lectures in Latin were being phased out in favour of a precise modern English in such areas as Moral Philosophy, firstly by the great Francis Hutcheson, who had taught Smith, and later in subjects such as Law, which Muir went on to study. With reform, came a forward-looking curriculum that taught 'experimental philosophy', or science on the Newtonian model, and a version of 'moral' thought that under Hutcheson, Smith, and in turn Millar, offered a strikingly modern vision of the individual as a

self-sufficient yet socially-grounded moral agent, guided by their intrinsic sentiments, sympathies, and sense of justice, within a commercial public sphere.

Glasgow itself was one of the main centres of the ‘Scottish Enlightenment’, a key part of a wider Enlightenment in which intellectuals were engaged in a systematic re-examination of the natural and social order, probing into the nature of the human species and its various relations: moral, social, economic, political, and legal. In America and France, Enlightenment produced the revolutionary establishment of new representative political systems; Scots intellectuals, though inclined towards a comparatively settled constitution, fed into the intellectual ferment of ideas for political change. Enlightenment culture in Scotland was centred around the University towns of Edinburgh, Aberdeen, and Glasgow itself, and the clubs, societies and publishing networks that sprang up in and around places of learning. In Glasgow, the famous Literary Society and the Foulis press were based in the University. By the time Muir reached Glasgow, its contribution to the Enlightenment had been marked. Former staff and students included the ‘father of the Scottish Enlightenment’ Francis Hutcheson, Professor of Moral Philosophy 1730-46, who taught ‘political economist’ Adam Smith and was an influence alongside Locke on the founding fathers of America.²³ Adam Smith returned to teach at Glasgow in the chair of Logic in 1751, shifting over to Moral Philosophy the following year. He was succeeded in 1764 by Thomas Reid, one of the main exponents of Scottish ‘common sense’ philosophy in opposition to the scepticism of David Hume. In science, pioneering chemist Joseph Black had been Professor of Medicine from 1757 until 1766, and engineer James Watt had worked for Black as an instrument maker at the University.²⁴

Studying law with John Millar

No mention of Glasgow’s Enlightenment would be complete without mention of John Millar, who made a decisive contribution to the Enlightenment study of ‘the natural history of man’ with the publication in 1771 of his *Observations concerning the Distinctions of Ranks in Society*, a work which gained him a reputation as one of the founding fathers of sociology.²⁵ Millar was Regius Chair of Civil Law at Glasgow from 1761 to 1800, during which time he invigorated the teaching of law, expanding the subject with a series of innovative and popular lectures on law and government that turned the young Muir’s head. After graduating Master of Arts in 1782, Muir shifted from a planned career in divinity, towards Law. The catalyst for this change was Millar, whose lectures Muir had started attending. Muir, who had by this means developed an interest in the subject, then applied for the classes in Law and Government for session 1783-84.²⁶

Glasgow was at this time acquiring a reputation in the teaching of Law, largely through the efforts of Millar, who had succeeded Hercules Lindsay as Regius Professor of Civil Law in 1761. Craig estimates that where hitherto only four or five students had studied Law at Glasgow, distanced inconveniently as it was from the courts in Edinburgh, the school increased as much as tenfold under the Professor’s watch.²⁷ As Robert Heron remarked in the 1790s: ‘It is to hear his Lectures on the first elements of Jurisprudence and Government, – on the Roman or Civil, – on the Scotch, – and on the English Law, that students resort, from all quarters of Britain, Glasgow is, in short, famous, as a school for Law, as Edinburgh as a school for medicine’.²⁸ Such praise Heron did not extend to Muir, whom he went on to allude to as a ‘a young man who had studied law’ and who ‘had taken it upon him to act as the great apostle of Reform in this neighbourhood’.²⁹

Millar's success has been attributed to such factors as his expansion of the curriculum, the content of his lectures, and his personal lecturing style. In addition to statutory 'public' classes on Roman Law, Millar was by the 1770s delivering lectures on Scots Law and also a series of Lectures on Government.³⁰ Millar had also altered the classes in Roman Law, covering the Justinian Institutes in the first term, and supplementing this with a modern course of Lectures on Jurisprudence on the model of Adam Smith.³¹ Millar was a popular professor, famed for his style of lecturing, which he chose to carry out in English rather than Latin.³² Although unscripted to a degree, his lectures seem to have been remarkably well organised, as shown by existing lecture notes taken by students.³³ The poet Thomas Campbell (1777–1844), who attended Millar's classes in the early 1790s, later noted the Professor's statuesque appeal:

Such was the truth, cheerfulness and courage that seemed to give erectness to his shapely bust, he might have stood to the statuary for a Roman orator; but he was too much in earnest with his duty, and, too manly to affect the orator; but keeping close to his subject, he gave it a seriousness that was never tiresome, and a gaiety that never seemed for a moment unillustrative or unnecessary. His cheerfulness appeared as indispensable as his gravity, and his humour was as light as his seriousness was intensive [...] His students were always in the class before him waiting as for a treat.³⁴

In his *Life of Lord Jeffrey*, Cockburn records Millar's powers as teacher during the 1780s, the decade when Muir attended his classes:

Professor John Millar, whose subject was Law and Government, was then in his zenith. His lectures were admirable; and so was his conversation; and his evening parties; and his boxing (gloved) with his favourite pupils. No young man admitted to his house ever forgot him; and the ablest used to say that the discussions into which he led them, domestically and convivially, were the most exciting and the most instructive exercises in which they ever took a part. Jeffrey says that his books excellent though they be, 'reveal nothing of that magical vivacity which made his conversation and his lectures still more full of delight than of instruction; of that frankness and fearlessness which led him to engage, without preparation, in every fair contention, and neither to dread nor disdain the powers of any opponent; and still less, perhaps, of that remarkable and unique talent, by which he was enabled to clothe, in concise and familiar expressions, the most profound and original views of the most complicated questions.'³⁵

Although noting that Millar's written works capture little of his brilliance as lecturer,³⁶ Cockburn's account shows the reputation Millar had acquired in person among students both inside and outside the lecture hall. Millar lived in the spacious residence at No.1 Professor's Court which faced the High Street, with his large family and also student boarders. It was a common practice for Professors to take in students: when Muir matriculated at Glasgow, Lord Maitland and David Hume, nephew of the philosopher, and one other were boarding with the Professor.³⁷ Millar also entertained at this house. Edmund Burke dined there on the event of his inauguration as rector, along with Adam Smith and philosopher Dugald Stewart from Edinburgh.³⁸ Bewley notes that Muir was among the favourite students who were invited to Millar's house for discussions.³⁹ Professor and student had much in common. Like Muir, Millar had studied MA at Glasgow (1746-1751), and, had switched from a planned career in the ministry to the law. He had also moved between Glasgow and Edinburgh, where he had practiced as advocate briefly before taking up the professorship in Civil Law. Muir also became acquainted with John Millar junior, who was like him studying law at this time,

and who later died in America after emigrating to avoid punishment for his activities alongside Muir in the Friends of the People.⁴⁰

Extra-curricular links extended to the Glasgow Literary Society, on whose membership roster Muir appeared⁴¹ and of which Professor Millar was already an active member. Founded in 1752 and based in the University, the Society was one of the main improving societies that were to characterise Scotland's convivial Enlightenment, alongside the Select Society of Edinburgh and the Aberdeen Philosophical Society, with which Glasgow had shared some members (notably Adam Smith, David Hume, and Thomas Reid).⁴² It also shared a broad 'philosophical' outlook with its cousins in other University Towns. Here its 'Literary' title should be understood in the expansive eighteenth-century sense of 'polite learning', as it discussed topics ranging from Moral and Natural Philosophy through to Economics and Education, and was as comfortable discussing constitutional matters as questions restricted to belle lettres. The Society was based in the College itself, and normally met at 5.30pm on Fridays during term time from the start of November until early May of the following year.⁴³ There is little to note the impact the Glasgow Literary Society had on Muir, and nothing to suggest that it was a reputed 'hotbed of radicalism' like the Speculative Club of Edinburgh,⁴⁴ but active members included Professors who later sympathised with the French Revolution – Reid, Anderson, and Millar himself – and questions on Government had been a favourite topic of discussion, as we know from the minute books of the society.⁴⁵

Beyond personal attachment and influence, there were the law classes themselves. A fuller outline of Millar's thinking (much of which has been covered in detail by WC Lehmann and by John Cairns) is beyond the scope of the present chapter, but we can make some general remarks. Millar had taken much of the inspiration for his lectures from his friend Adam Smith, whose lectures on jurisprudence he had originally heard in Edinburgh.⁴⁶ This approach can be described as a combination of historical and sociological enquiry, one which looks not at 'law', *per se*, but also at the general 'laws' by which societies progress; at the derivation of rights related to person and property as social formations evolve; and the mechanisms by which such laws, created as they are by a species with relatively uniform inclinations, diversify over time and across national frontiers. From Smith, Millar took a 'theoretical' (or 'conjectural') and 'stadial' approach to human history. 'Conjectural' history involved 'informed' conjectures about human history on the known and uniform principles of human nature.⁴⁷ Craig, for example, called Millar's lectures a 'general system of laws founded on the principle of justice', wherein he 'began by investigating the origin and foundation of each right in the natural principle of justice; and afterwards traced its progress through the different conditions of mankind'.⁴⁸ In other words, Millar exposed students such as Muir to the view that rights are founded on an inbuilt sense of justice which is uniform throughout the species, and that those rights become diversified over time according to the different circumstances of different nations. 'Stadial' history was a key mode of Scottish Enlightenment historiography which viewed human history on a sliding scale of progress from savagery to civilisation, famously mapped out by Smith into key stages of human societal development – hunter-gatherer, pastoral, agrarian, commercial – each of which gives rise to different and ever more complex forms of law and government.⁴⁹ In his writing, Millar acknowledged there is 'in human society, a natural progress from ignorance to knowledge, and from rude to civilised manners, the several stages of which are usually accompanied with peculiar laws and customs'.⁵⁰ His lectures took a similarly historical view of institutions as they progressed through set stages. Although in such histories, pre-democratic, constitutionally unreformed and not-quite-fully-extricated-from-the-slave-trade Britain sat at the apex of 'civilisation', stadialism helped shape the ideology of reform and could be

embraced by Millar as a progressive thinker with abolitionist sympathies. In general terms, Scottish historiography offered a dynamic view of human history with a core underlying assumption that ‘progress’, in the sense of meaningful, positive change, is possible and in many respects inexorable. Such a ‘teleology of civility’, as Murray Pittcock shows, underpinned the development of the Whig school of history, ‘the analysis of the past not on its own terms, but in the light of what it could contribute to an account of progress towards the present’.⁵¹ We see something of this Whig historiography in Mackenzie’s 1831 life of Muir, which subordinates Muir’s story to the contemporary purposes of the 1832 Representation of the People Act, and fits that story within a grand narrative of human liberation against tyranny and the progressive triumph of justice.⁵²

From advertisements in the Glasgow newspapers we know the specific classes Millar was teaching when Muir turned to Law. In October 1782, he advertised his ‘Prelections on JUSTINIAN’S INSTITUTES and PANDECTS’ and ‘Lectures on PUBLIC LAW’ commencing that November.⁵³ The following session, 1783-84, when Muir formally signed up for classes, Millar had placed the following advert in the *Glasgow Mercury*:

JOHN MILLAR, Professor of Law in the University of Glasgow, begins his Prelections on JUSTINIAN’S INSTITUTES and PANDECTS, upon Monday the third day of November next. Also

A course on PUBLIC LAW, on Monday the tenth. And,

A course of Lectures on the LAW OF SCOTLAND, on Tuesday the eleventh day of that month.⁵⁴

Student notes outlining Millar’s teaching in Roman and Scots law exist for a considerable number of sessions and are too extensive to cover here; however a copy of notes from his Lectures on Government were written out by Alexander Campbell for the sessions Muir attended, giving us a valuable insight into the kind of education in matters of Law and Politics that Muir received from Millar. These notes show that Millar began with a customary introduction in which he outlined the ‘General principles of Government, and different Systems which have been adopted with regard to those principles’, offering a ‘stadial’ history of the progress of government through the four stages of ‘savage’, pastoral, agricultural, and commercial society. Millar then moved on to the ‘Modern States of Europe’ before focussing in on: France from the Franks to the present time; Germany from Charlemagne to the present; England, taking in Britons, Romans, Saxons, Normans and again continuing to the present; the Government of Scotland from the departure of the Romans to post-Union; and finally a historical survey of Government in Ireland. The historical sweep is continued in series of lectures on Ecclesiastical government since the establishment of Christendom. Finally, in Part III of the lecture series, Millar enquired into ‘the Present State of Great Britain’. These outline the powers of the constituent members of the British Parliament, of King, Lords, and Commons, before concluding with a review of the judicial establishments in Britain and the ecclesiastical courts of Scotland.⁵⁵

During the final part of the lecture series there are intriguing detours, such as remarks upon inequality in representation between England and Scotland, in which Millar reminds students of the principles of representative government and free election (361-2), revealing his characteristic wariness of universal suffrage (instead, he was said to prefer a franchise based on merit).⁵⁶ Millar also offers some remarks on the state of the royal prerogative which perhaps exemplify the political views he was willing to express in lectures:

The Powers invested in the Crown were at the Revolution ascertained and reduced into moderate bounds.

Since the Revolution however the great increase of the revenue has tended considerable [sic] to extend the indirect influence of the Crown – The effects produced by the increase of the Crown Revenue are discernible in many Particulars especially in those which now come before the Parliament.

It was ascertained that the Crown would not interfere in any measure but in the last resort. But instead of this it is by the influence of the Crown that the most important Bills are introduced into Parliament, by the Ministry and those persons who do depend upon it, and such is their weight that these measures are also carried through – If this was universally the case and no check could be put upon it, the Crown would be altogether absolute. And a Government of this kind would be even worse than for the King avowedly and openly to exercise all the Powers of Government for then it would be known with precision from whom oppression came. Whereas in the other case the King after he has got Parliament to adopt a measure unfavourable for the interests of the People, screens himself under it, and makes the Parliament blameable in the first instance by making it stand between him and the people. If this indirect influence of the Crown was without a check the government would long ere have lost its original balance (442-43).

Millar was opposed to ‘secret influence’ or the indirect extension of royal power through patronage and favour. Here, such influence is said to be exerted insidiously by the Crown in order to push legislation favourable to its own interest, for which Parliament becomes scapegoat. The encroachment of executive powers upon the Revolution settlement was a key concern of Millar, which he also voiced in his published works, particularly his *Historical View of the English Government*, a Whig response to Hume’s ‘Tory’ *History of England*.⁵⁷

Millar’s work reveals his orientation towards constitutional Whiggism and an abiding belief in the Revolution settlement and the mixed or balanced constitution. It is possible that views on the abuses of aristocratic patronage chimed with the ‘Popular’ views Muir would have held on the Church of Scotland, but one can see how Millar’s thinking may have shaped Muir’s politics, inculcating Fox-ite inflections pro-constitutional reform over revolutionary Paine-ite radicalism. Glasgow had its Tory traditions – Millar’s own chair, for example, was a Regius chair and thus subject to the kind of royal influence he opposed.⁵⁸ Yet, for all its Tory leanings, the University contained reformist energies, and Millar helped shape a number of leading reformers, such as the Earl of Lauderdale, who with other Glasgow-educated Edinburgh lawyers helped usher in the great reform of 1832.⁵⁹

Millar’s lecturing did cause some concern among the Tory establishment. Francis Jeffrey never attended Millar’s law classes while at Glasgow due to his father’s distrust of Millar’s Whig principles, liberal reputation and ‘free doctrine’.⁶⁰ Alexander ‘Jupiter’ Carlyle called Millar’s pro-teaching poisonous for its pro-democratic views.⁶¹ Alexander Fraser Tytler, Lord Woodhouselee, offered censure of principles along with praise of talents:

[...] although the republican prejudices of Mr Millar gave to his Lectures on Politics and Government, a character justly considered as repugnant to the well-tempered frame and equal balance of our improved constitution, there were few who attended those lectures, without at least an increase of knowledge.

Establishment idolisers of a perfectly balanced constitution such as Tytler rallied against Millar's belief that the 'liberties of the subject are in perpetual danger from an increase of the influence of the Crown', which Tytler characterises as 'unreasonable alarm' at 'chimerical' fears,⁶² yet it might be too much to suggest that students like Muir were indoctrinated in Whig ideology. Millar's reputation had not stopped other Tories such as philosopher David Hume from sending his nephew and namesake to study with him at Glasgow. Indeed, during Muir's time as student of law, we see Millar offered a passionate defence of his teaching:⁶³

If we are charged with *lecturing* upon politicks, I am afraid the charge must fall principally upon myself, as in lecturing upon public law I certainly am guilty of endeavouring to explain the principles of our own government. I know that I have been accused of inculcating Republican doctrines, but I am not conscious of having given any just ground for such an imputation. It has always been my endeavour to recommend that system of limited monarchy which was introduced at the Revolution, an acquaintance with which I conceived to be as useful to young men of fortune as many other branches of science. I should think it petulance, if, in the capacity of a public lecturer, I was to meddle with the local and partial politicks of the day; and in order to avoid the suspicion of intending any thing of that message, I have, in some lectures, been careful to pass over in a more slight and general manner certain subjects which I used formerly to treat at more length.⁶⁴

That said, Millar's defence here appeared in the context of charges made by John Anderson against colleagues at the University rather than as a riposte to Tory concerns, even if it does appear to answer the latter. It is also slightly disingenuous. As a 'private citizen' at least, as Lehmann points out, Millar did in fact more than meddle in the politics of his day.⁶⁵ He was a committed supporter of the Rockingham Whigs led by Charles Fox. He became active in the abolitionist movement in Glasgow.⁶⁶ Millar also pinned considerable hope on the French Revolution, albeit with reservations about the confiscation of Church property and other actions of the Assembly.⁶⁷ In 1791, he presided over a dinner in Glasgow to commemorate the fall of the Bastille.⁶⁸ He authored the republican *Letters of Crito*, sent anonymously to the editor of the *Scots Chronicle* in 1796, on the prosecution of the war with France, and was said to have authored an earlier Glasgow petition against the war.⁶⁹ In Muir's time at Glasgow, Millar had led an assemblage of citizens who voiced opposition to the Pitt's accession to office by disrupting a public meeting in Glasgow on 28 February 1784, intended as a loyal address.⁷⁰ Despite the professor's protestations about the impartiality of his teaching, Millar had well-founded Whig credentials and was a well-known progressive in Glasgow circles and beyond. Although there has been some debate about the level of his participation in the Society of the Friends of the People – over whether he was a 'zealous member' as Craig claimed or simply gave it 'moral support' – Millar likely acted as inspiration to members Muir and his own son John.⁷¹

Muir's withdrawal from University

That Millar's teaching was a formative influence on Muir is not in doubt. Yet beyond the professional mentorship and the shared membership of the Society of the Friends of the People, there are complexities which suggest that their sympathies did not always perfectly coincide. The events leading up to Muir's withdrawal from the University show that Millar held quite different views to Muir with regard to John Anderson and the 'crisis' of 1783-84, commonly held to be the reason for Muir's 'self-expulsion' from the University in 1785.

Anderson, who had been Professor of Natural Philosophy at the University from 1757 was a difficult and divisive colleague who had involved the University and fellow professors in a series of law suits prior to the crisis of session 1783-84. Though a thorn in the side of colleagues, Anderson, or 'Jolly Jack Phosphorous' as he was known, was popular with students. It was their support for moves to reform the University that helped fuel the crisis, a brief account of which is as follows. Anderson's activities finally got him suspended from Senate, an event that raised much student indignation. The students contacted Rector Edmund Burke to step in, but he refused, leading to a problematic re-election as Rector for the statesman, when re-election for a second year had hitherto been a matter of course, and the worsening of relations between University and students. Anderson petitioned the Home Office for a royal commission to visit in order to sort out the University's affairs, for which he canvassed support among the townspeople of Glasgow and within the student body.⁷² This move was finally defeated, leaving Anderson alienated. Leading student reformers were ordered to apologise: some did, while others refused and were expelled; Muir, as the story goes, refused to submit to the University's terms and withdrew, moving instead to Edinburgh to complete his studies.

The account of Anderson and student politics by Carruthers and Kaur in this volume not only reveals the central ideological and theological tensions behind the crisis, but also provides much needed evidence regarding Muir's role, and indeed that of his father, in events. Such evidence helps us to address the uncertainty regarding Muir's actual activities, particularly when biographers have (quite understandably) tended to emphasise Muir's role, seeing it as his first emergence as a leader of reform. In accounts of the events by those involved, Muir is often not mentioned at all. The Reverend James Smith, for example, later claimed to have been a 'prominent reformer' while at the University, and recounted how he himself became one of the leaders of 'certain students of reform principles' who attempted 'a thorough reform of the University', petitioning the King and Parliament for a royal commission to examine management of University finances, the library and compulsory library fees. These actions invoked the hostility of the majority of professors, with the sole exception of Anderson, who 'joined the party of reform students', inviting them to breakfast in his house to discuss strategy. Where others focus on Anderson as the prime mover, Smith emphasizes the students' role in initiating calls for reform. In order to quash this 'reform movement', the university 'selected a few of the leading reform movement, and, *interrorem*, expelled them from the university', including Smith himself, who was then forced to apologise in order to continue his studies in Divinity. No mention is made of Muir.⁷³

A second eyewitness account appeared in the short-lived radical monthly *The Glasgow Magazine* of July 1795.⁷⁴ Written a year after the trial of Muir as the first part of a projected life by William Marshall, a Glasgow lawyer and one of the magazine's editors, this account appears to have been the major source of information for Muir's student politics followed by later biographers. This outline, Marshall says, is intended to do justice to Muir, that is to quash rumours circulating at the time that Muir was expelled, a task for which the editors 'are enabled from a perfect knowledge of the circumstances attending it'. Marshall was in fact one of the students involved. According to him, Anderson's suspension from office as 'member of the *jurisdictio ordinaria*' during session 1783-84 so offended students that they sought redress the following session. For his sanctioning of such injustice they attempted to block Burke's re-election as rector for his second year, but, despite forming a 'formidable faction' they were defeated by the powerful professorship. This action, Marshall claims, was carried out by students alone, without Anderson's backing. The College's attempts to intimidate students backfired, prompting reformers to turn to the more serious action of procuring the

royal visitation, 'to correct the abuses which had crept into the university'; this was with a view to preserving long-standing student rights in the election of rector, against which professors had been asserting their better qualification over pubescent students to choose an appropriate rector. There are echoes here of wider electoral battles regarding constitutional reform, and Marshall's account makes explicit the parallels between the crisis and other struggles: 'The university acted on this occasion as every other corporation would have done in the same situation. Tenacious of its power, it opposed to popular clamour its ancient usage'.⁷⁵ It is at this stage that Muir emerges as a central figure:

Mr. Muir, from the beginning, considered an application for a royal visitation as the right and privilege of the students, and the grievances complained of as warranting that measure, and incompatible with the character of freemen. He therefore exerted his talents in promoting the cause [...] and by his prudent counsel tempered [...] the fervent enthusiasm of the youths who co-operated with him. After their undertaking had totally failed, and at the commencement of the next session, a circular letter was issued from the faculty to all the professors, enjoining them not to admit into their classes Mr Muir, nor twelve others, who were named in it, as it was alleged that those so excluded, had been concerned in certain publications injurious to the characters of the professors. Mr Muir could easily have vindicated himself from this charge, but finding that it was only the ostensible cause for their proceeding, and that the most humiliating and ignominious concessions were required, he turned from Glasgow college with indignation and disgust, and went to Edinburgh [...]⁷⁶

Marshall was keen to vindicate Muir against rumour-mongering, but already in this account there is the kind of shaping of events to prefigure the later Muir as leading reformer that is taken up by later biographers. Peter Mackenzie's account followed Marshall with little to add other than the significant alteration that at this time Muir 'threw off' his habitual reserve and emerged one of the students 'most enthusiastic leaders'. This small change may be significant in enhancing Muir's role. Indeed, a 1946 pamphlet in 'The Fight for Freedom Series' based on what it calls 'data' from Mackenzie, proudly headlined this episode 'THOMAS MUIR LEADS STUDENT PROTESTS'.⁷⁷ Bewley likewise held Muir up as 'one of the most energetic and admired student leaders [...] one of the deputation who presented the students' resolution to Burke, and the convenor of a meeting of senior students which decided to publish a pamphlet ridiculing Leechman and his supporters'.⁷⁸

Other commentators have been sceptical about Muir's student leadership. George Pratt-Insh went so far as to question the foundation of claims about Muir being obliged to leave Glasgow because he found no evidence in University records that Muir had led anything other than a 'blameless life'.⁷⁹ That said, there is no reason to discount Marshall's account of Muir's involvement, as Marshall himself was directly implicated in events and was censored by the University for his conduct in January 1785 while a student in Anderson's class.⁸⁰ Though Muir, unlike Marshall, is not mentioned in College minutes, as Bewley recognised those records are 'incomplete'.⁸¹ Moreover, the students identified by name in Faculty records are either those expelled for 'contumacy', viz. David McIndoe for petitioning for the royal visitation, and Alexander Humphreys and William Clydesdale for authoring pamphlets attacking the University, or those students who apologised to the University for attending a meeting which authorised publication of the student pamphlets.⁸² That Muir does not appear among these names would actually lend support to the idea that he refused to submit to the University's terms, and instead withdrew to Edinburgh. Muir is, as Carruthers and Kaur reveal in this volume, linked directly to the student campaign in Court papers, and in a

defamation case between Anderson and plaintiff Dr William Taylor – who had been the particular target of student reformers in their slanderous pamphlets – Muir’s own father testified regarding his son’s entanglement.

Millar’s role in the crisis

There is a certain romance to accounts of student politics in so far as they show the emergence of Muir the rebel against unjust authority, wherein events become an apprenticeship in martyrdom in which, in the words of AH Millar, Muir ‘suffered for vindicating the principle of representation’.⁸³ History has sided in this affair with Muir, with fellow student reformers, and, to an extent, with Anderson as beneficent pioneer of technical education and founder of Anderson’s Institute, yet the actions of other Professors show a quite different side to events.

Muir’s mentor seems to have taken the side of the University against this incipient reform movement. Millar attended the meetings at which students were expelled, and wrote to rector Burke against student reform on a number of occasions. On 16 August 1784 he addressed reports spread by Anderson, such as the accusations of meddling in politics in his lectures mentioned above, noting his distance, and that of colleagues from Anderson. Anderson, he says, is ‘never happy but when engaged in some dispute, generally about a frivolous matter, which by his trifling head, is magnified into an affair of importance and which after spinning it out as long as he can in our College meetings, he carries it at length, if possible, before the civil courts’.⁸⁴ In a letter to Burke of 19 January 1785, Millar reported that student support for the petition for a royal visitation started by divinity student David McIndoe had not been unanimous, and that students Thomas Kennedy and John Hamilton⁸⁵ had brought the petition to the notice of Faculty after repenting their signing of it. It had also emerged that students as young as eleven had been ‘inveigled, without knowledge of parents and guardians, to subscribe this paper, but have been refused the liberty of withdrawing their subscriptions’, leading to McIndoe being called before Faculty and, after failing to appear, expelled.⁸⁶ Millar then wrote again in April to thank the Rector for his intervention, hinting that a letter from the Secretary of State disapproving of the late actions against the University and attempts to ‘excite the younger students, and the tradesmen of Glasgow’, were it to be made public would ‘be very effectual in putting an end to the disorders which have taken place, and in re-establishing our authority’.⁸⁷ What is striking about this letter are the terms used by Millar to describe student action: ‘I formerly acquainted you,’ he reminds Burke, ‘that we *expelled* one of our students, who was the ringleader of the sedition’. Perhaps not the terms we would expect a future Friend of the People to use, but confirmation that Millar was on the other side of Muir’s early reform activities.

Principal William Leechman’s letters to Burke go further than those of Millar, outlining some of the wider popular reform networks in Glasgow involved in the crisis. Leechman accuses Anderson of having held ‘Cabals with Students at Taverns and other places in the town’, with consorting with ‘certain of the Masters of Arts’ – which likely included Muir – to gain support for his cause, and raising the ‘interest the Lowest and Classes of Mechanics and Manufacturers here’, publishing advertisements and ‘defamatory Handbills’ in order to encourage ‘all Classes of People’ to sign the petition in favour of his ‘pretended Grievances’. Matters are exacerbated by Kirk politics and the Moderate position from which Leechman attacks Auld Licht Anderson, yet even from such partisan attacks we gain some insight into the strangely popular support for the Professor of Natural Philosophy. ‘[I]t was the more easy’, he says, ‘for Mr Anderson to procure a promiscuous multitude of such names both on

account of the Active part he took among them in the disturbances about the Popish Bill, as it was called, and of the constant support he gives to the Fanatical Party, as an Elder in the General Assembly of this Church'.⁸⁸ Though hardly impartial, there may be some grounds for Leechman's claims against 'Fanatical' support: opposition to the Catholic Relief Bill of 1778 had been widespread,⁸⁹ and the anti-patronage protest of the Popular Party had also begun to take on pro-reform characteristics (in fact, both may have fed into the later reform movement of the 1790s).⁹⁰ Not long before 'Andersongate', the trades and corporations of Glasgow had been active in popular opposition to the 'Popish Bill'. Groups were formed such as 'The Friends of the Protestant Interest in Glasgow' and the 'Committee of Correspondence', who set up as networks of intelligence and a means of canvassing subscriptions against repeal of the penal statutes against Catholics. The 'self-defence' of Protestantism was also, as figured by the Burgesses of Glasgow, a stated defence of constitutional liberties set out in Reformation, Glorious Revolution, and Union 'which freed us against Popery, slavery, and arbitrary power'.⁹¹ One John Anderson of Lanarkshire appears on the list of subscribers to the anti-Popish petition of the 'Eighty Three Societies in Glasgow'.⁹² It is possible, then, that Anderson was able to harness such energies that would later feed into networks for popular political participation, albeit in this case on a very limited, localised scale. Leechman suggests that the expulsion of student petitioner David McIndoe been used to draw additional support due to McIndoe 'being the Son of a Low Fanatic'. Certainly, it seems that Anderson had the ability to mobilise popular support: Coutts records that the Professor left petitions in shops, that porters were sent out to solicit signatures from passers-by, and that his followers even indulged in house to house canvassing. Anderson also appears to have made particular attempts to gain the support of Masters of Arts within the College, a group to which Muir belonged.⁹³

Anderson printed a handbill to the Masters of Arts of the University, undertaking to set out to London with no less than fifteen petitions to the King signed by the Masters of Arts of the University, from 'most of the Irish students', the Trades House and corporations of Glasgow, and 'merchants, traders, manufacturers', totalling in all, he claimed, 'three-fourths of the students that were at the University last year and from more than two-thirds of the inhabitants of the city'.⁹⁴ Reporting Anderson's departure for London, Leechman wrote again to Burke, and charged Anderson with having met 'with certain of the Lowest of the Scotch & Irish students' in taverns and in his own house, which led to 'defamatory publications', circulated privately among students.⁹⁵ Besides the expulsions, Leechman remarked that a number of other students who had supported Anderson and signed petitions had applied for Degrees and Certificates, but had been refused them until they made acknowledgement of their undutiful conduct, which the students had refused to do. Such students, Leechman claimed, had been openly aided and abetted by Anderson, 'and indeed have been his constant companions during the Winter in Open Defiance of all academical order and authority'. Though Muir is not named directly in any of these letters, he would have been among this group.

It is difficult to side with the University when one sees its efforts to squash a student reform movement and its introduction of repressive measures which included the monitoring of the membership and activities of student literary societies.⁹⁶ Yet should we also suspend our sympathies for Millar? Bewley notes that during this crisis Millar had defended student rights, and indeed was instrumental in getting Muir a place at Edinburgh.⁹⁷ Millar's response to the crisis complicates his relationship with Muir, and though that relationship did not apparently suffer in the longer term, it would be wrong perhaps to see their relationship as a straightforward, uncomplicated transference of reform principles from Professor to student. The professors at Glasgow University certainly had a formative influence upon Muir, and

Millar more so than others, but the way in which Glasgow shaped the young Muir was not simply the outcome of his Law classes.

Notes and References

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- ² Mackenzie, 1831, p.1
- ³ Bewley, 1981, p.3.
- ⁴ Biography of Thomas Muir (1765-1799) by HT Dickinson. In: *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004 [Online 2010]. Available from <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/19498> [Accessed 31 August 2016].
- ⁵ Donnelly, 1975, p.2.
- ⁶ Craig, 1806, p.ii.
- ⁷ Addison, 1913, p.xi.
- ⁸ Addison, 1913, p.119.
- ⁹ For an outline of the matriculation process see Murray, 1927, p.274.
- ¹⁰ Matriculation Album, 1756-1809, GUA2878. Glasgow University Archives.
- ¹¹ Register of Masters of Arts, 1764-1888, GUA26676. Glasgow University Archives.
- ¹² For a detailed account of the curriculum, see Coutts, 1909, pp.208-9.
- ¹³ Mackie, 1954, p.210.
- ¹⁴ For an account of student life at Glasgow College see <<http://www.universitystory.gla.ac.uk/student-life/>> [Accessed 2 August 2016].
- ¹⁵ The relations between town and University are outlined in Sher, 1995-96.
- ¹⁶ Figures compiled from the entries for 1777 transcribed in Addison, 1913, pp.116-20.
- ¹⁷ Addison, 1913, p.119.
- ¹⁸ Eyre-Todd, 1934, p.113.
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- ²³ Fleischacker, 2003, pp.316–7.
- ²⁴ Biography of James Watt (1736–1819) by J Tann. In: *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004 [Online]. Available from <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/28880> [Accessed 31 August 2016].
- ²⁵ On this reputation, see Lehmann, 1960.
- ²⁶ Donnelly 1975, p.2.
- ²⁷ Craig, 1806, p.xi.
- ²⁸ Heron, 1799, 2:418.
- ²⁹ Heron, 1799, 2:420.
- ³⁰ Cairns, 1995, pp.134-9.
- ³¹ Craig, 1806, pp.xix-xx.
- ³² Craig, 1806, p.xii; Cairns, 1995, p.134.
- ³³ Notes of Millar's lectures are held at Glasgow University Special Collections, at Glasgow's Mitchell Library, and the National Library of Scotland and the University Library in Edinburgh.
- ³⁴ Cited in Lehmann, 1960, p.31.
- ³⁵ Cockburn, 2004, 1:10-11.
- ³⁶ See Murray, 1927, p.224.
- ³⁷ Murray, 1927, p.397.
- ³⁸ Lehmann, 1960, p.51.
- ³⁹ Bewley, 1981, p.5.
- ⁴⁰ Meikle, 1912, p.157.
- ⁴¹ Lehmann, 1960, p.53n, cf. Bewley, 1981, p.8.
- ⁴² For a standard overview of club culture in the Scottish Enlightenment, see McElroy, 1969, especially pp.41-44 for the Glasgow Literary Society.

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- ⁴³ Lehmann, 1960, p.53.
- ⁴⁴ Bewley, 1981, p.8.
- ⁴⁵ Among questions discussed in this period, those related to government were discussed on twenty-two occasions – more than any other subject: for a breakdown, see Sher, 1995-96, p.338.
- ⁴⁶ Scott, 1937, p.56 and p.63.
- ⁴⁷ Stewart, 1982, p.293.
- ⁴⁸ Craig, 1806, p.xxiii, p.xxvi.
- ⁴⁹ An exemplary excerpt from Smith's Lectures on Jurisprudence appears in Smith, 1997, pp.478–87.
- ⁵⁰ Millar, 1806, p.4.
- ⁵¹ Pittock, 2003, pp.258-62.
- ⁵² See Mackenzie, 1831, pp.45-46.
- ⁵³ *The Glasgow Mercury*, 10-17 October 1782 [Periodical]. Murray collection, Mu60-f.1-14. Glasgow University Special Collections.
- ⁵⁴ *The Glasgow Mercury*, 16-23 October 1783 [Periodical]. Murray collection, Mu60-f.1-14. Glasgow University Special Collections.
- ⁵⁵ Lectures on government, delivered in the University of Glasgow by John Millar, written from notes taken by Alexander Campbell, 1783 [Lecture notes]. MS GEN 179. Glasgow: Glasgow University Special Collections. Further references to this text appear in parenthesis.
- ⁵⁶ On this point, see Lehmann, 1960, p.67.
- ⁵⁷ Millar, 2006, 4:699-712.
- ⁵⁸ Millar, 1886.
- ⁵⁹ Bewley, 1981, p.4.
- ⁶⁰ Cockburn, 2004, pp.10-12.
- ⁶¹ Carlyle, 1860, pp.492-4.
- ⁶² Tytler, 1807, I:199-201.
- ⁶³ See Cairns, 1995, p.145.
- ⁶⁴ John Millar to Edmund Burke, 16 August 1784 [Facsimile letter]. MS GEN 520/37. Glasgow University Special Collections.
- ⁶⁵ For an overview of this private activity, see Lehmann, 1960, pp.64-76 (especially pp.71-2).
- ⁶⁶ Craig, 1806, pp.cxi-cxii.
- ⁶⁷ Craig, 1806, pp.cxii-xciii.
- ⁶⁸ Meikle, 1912, p.49; Lehmann, 1960, p.68.
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- ⁷⁰ George Pratt-Insh, Unpublished biography of Thomas Muir, pp.23-24 [Typescript manuscript]. NLS Dep 344. Edinburgh: National Library of Scotland.
- ⁷¹ Craig, 1806, p.cxv; cf. Lehmann, 1960, p.73.
- ⁷² For an overview of the whole Anderson affair, see Coutts 1909, pp.283-94.
- ⁷³ 'Senex', 1856, pp.372-3.
- ⁷⁴ For a recent account of the magazine, see Leask, 2015.
- ⁷⁵ *The Glasgow Magazine*, July 1795, p.43 [Periodical]. Murray Collection, Mu 24-d.15. Glasgow University Special Collections.
- ⁷⁶ *The Glasgow Magazine*, July 1795, p.44.
- ⁷⁷ Anon, 1946.
- ⁷⁸ Bewley, 1981, p.7.
- ⁷⁹ George Pratt-Insh, Unpublished biography of Thomas Muir, p.22n [Typescript manuscript]. NLS Dep 344. Edinburgh: National Library of Scotland.
- ⁸⁰ Records of Glasgow College, 20 January 1785, GUA 26693. Glasgow University Archives.
- ⁸¹ Bewley 1961, p.195 (note 3). Indeed, the Faculty records for 4 November 1785 allude to a previous meeting at which a number of students were called to answer for their actions, but the present author could find no minute of this earlier meeting.
- ⁸² See Records of Glasgow College for 1785 and 1786.
- ⁸³ Millar, 1886.
- ⁸⁴ John Millar to Edmund Burke, 16 August 1784 [Facsimile letter]. MS GEN 502/37. Glasgow University Special Collections.
- ⁸⁵ Identified in Records of Glasgow College, 13 January 1785.
- ⁸⁶ Millar to Burke, 19 January 1785 [Facsimile letter]. MS GEN 502/38. Glasgow University Special Collections.

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- ⁸⁷ Millar to Burke, 17 August 1785 [Facsimile letter]. MS GEN 502/39. Glasgow University Special Collections.
- ⁸⁸ William Leechman to Edmund Burke, 16 February 1785 [Facsimile letter]. MS GEN 502/35. Glasgow: Glasgow University Special Collections.
- ⁸⁹ See, for example, *Scotland's opposition to the Popish Bill: a collection of all the declarations and resolutions, published by the different counties, cities, towns, parishes, incorporations, and societies, throughout Scotland* (Edinburgh: David Paterson, 1790) [Rare book]. Bdg.s.38. Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland.
- ⁹⁰ A recent discussion of the continuity between reform societies and earlier popular movements appears in Honeyman, 2009.
- ⁹¹ *Scotland's opposition to the Popish Bill*, p.56.
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- ⁹³ Coutts, 1909, p.290.
- ⁹⁴ Cited in Coutts, 1909, p.291; and Muir, 1950, pp.21-2.
- ⁹⁵ Leechman to Burke, 1 May 1785 [Facsimile letter]. MS GEN 502/35. Glasgow University Special Collections.
- ⁹⁶ See the Records of Glasgow College, 20 October 1786.
- ⁹⁷ Bewley, 1981, p.8; cf. Millar, 1886.