Loughborough University

This item was submitted to Loughborough's Research Repository by the author.
Items in Figshare are protected by copyright, with all rights reserved, unless otherwise indicated.

The subscription list for Jean Adam's Miscellany Poems (1734)

PLEASE CITE THE PUBLISHED VERSION

PUBLISHER

© Oxford University Press

LICENCE

CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

REPOSITORY RECORD

Overton, W.J.. 2019. "The Subscription List for Jean Adam's Miscellany Poems (1734)". figshare.
https://hdl.handle.net/2134/286.

This article has been submitted to Loughborough University's Institutional Repository by the author.

Bill Overton: The Subscription List for Jean Adam's *Miscellany Poems* (1734)

It is well known that the publication in Britain of books by subscription began as early as 1617, that it gained pace towards the end of the same century, and that it flourished most in the eighteenth.[1] Data produced by F. J. G. Robinson, P. J. Wallis and R. Wallis indicate a total of 3,912 books known by 1996 to have been published in this form; a few among this total were published outside Britain, though with British subscribers.[2] Although subscription was especially suitable for expensive books, often published in multiple volumes, it also became a means for humbler writers to get their work into print. In particular Roger Lonsdale observes that 'in the 1730s . . . it became normal for women to publish volumes of their verse by subscription'.[3] One such woman was Jean Adam, whose poems were published by subscription at Glasgow in 1734.[4]

Little is reliably known about Adam, and some details generally accepted as facts are incorrect. One example is her name, which appears on her title page as 'Mrs. Jane Adams' but after the dedication as 'Jean Adams'; another is the date of her birth, given by most authorities as 1710. As George Williamson noted over a century ago, the Old Parish Register shows that her name was Jean Adam and that she was born in 1704.[5] Most of what has been written about Adam concerns the authorship of the song 'There's Nae Luck About the House', also attributed to William Julius Mickle. Yet, despite verse that is often of considerable interest, *Miscellany Poems*, of which she is definitely the author,

has attracted little commentary.[6] I have tried to explain elsewhere why *Miscellany Poems* deserves greater attention.[7] In this article I argue that its subscription list casts interesting light both on what kind of publication it is and on its social context.

Accounts of the subscription list for *Miscellany Poems* also suffer from factual inaccuracies. The earliest discussion, in 1818, reported a total of 123 subscribers, probably a misprint for the correct figure of 153. This was still being repeated at the end of the century,[8] although the *DNB* had by then achieved the closer approximation of 154. Most sources since publication of the *DNB* cite the latter figure, but the correct one was given in 1996 by P. J. Wallis and R. Wallis.[9] Yet even this entry is not wholly accurate, for it records the number of female subscribers as 20 instead of 22. The contents of the list and its historical context are, however, more significant than these minor though regrettable slips.

One key fact is that publication by subscription was a relatively new venture in Scotland, especially for verse. The earliest Scottish book recorded as published in this way was at Edinburgh in 1708; the earliest so published in Glasgow did not arrive until 1723, though one listed collectively under Dumfries, Edinburgh, Glasgow and Kilmarnock appeared in 1718. More surprisingly, Adam's *Miscellany Poems* is only the fifth work recorded as published by subscription at Glasgow, and the very first book of verse – the second, Josiah Relph's *Miscellany of Poems*, had to wait till 1747. This accords with the fact that between 1701 and 1775, as R. A. Gillespie has pointed out, 'The majority of the presses in the city . . . concentrated on books of practical divinity, controversial tracts, and popular histories.'[10] James Duncan, printer of Adam's volume, is an especially good example. Of the sixty-odd books he is known to have printed between setting up on his own in 1720 and 1750, only fifteen could be described as secular, and of these only two are in verse: Adam's *Miscellany Poems*, and a reprint of Thomas the Rhymer's *Prophecies*.[11] Even more surprising, however, Adam's collection is only the second female-authored book

of verse recorded to have been published in Britain by subscription, and only the fourth female-authored book so published of any kind.[12]

The publication of *Miscellany Poems* was therefore an unusual event. This may account in part for some striking qualities of its subscription list, especially the representation of many subscribers from the middling sort and even from the labouring classes. Like many such lists, it is arranged alphabetically, but it is more generous than most in the details it gives of place of residence and occupation. Of the 131 male subscribers, 64 are styled as Mr, 18 as Esq., 17 as Captain, 6 as Reverend Mr, 2 as Sir, and 1 as Laird; 2 are styled as 'of . . .', indicating genteel status, and 19 are listed without a title. Of the 22 female subscribers, 15 are styled as Mrs (including 2 as sisters to Lairds, two as spouses, and one as relict), and 2 as the Honourable Mrs; 3 are styled as Lady, 1 as the Honourable Lady and 1 as Dame (Lady Dowager); and another (Janet Adam of Greenock) is listed without a title. The largest number of subscribers appear as Merchants (42, plus 1 retired); there were 20 mariners (though only one is given that title, 18 being listed as Captain, and 1 as Ship-master); 15 involved in Customs work at various levels from land-waiter (superintending the landing of goods) to Surveyor General; 7 church ministers plus a Deacon Convener; 5 students; 4 writers (law-clerks); and 2 each of the following: causier (a paviour), hammerman (a smith or metal-worker, or perhaps a blacksmith's unskilled assistant), schoolmaster, and wig-maker. Trades or professions of which there is only one representative are: surgeon, cooper, copper-smith, Member of Parliament, portioner (a small landowner), Professor of Physick (i.e., Medicine), Provost (retired), teacher of mathematics, and wright.[13]

These details indicate that subscribers were mostly from the middle classes, though there is a scattering both of manual workers and aristocrats. The teacher of mathematics was John Watt, uncle of James Watt the engineer; the Professor of Physick was John Johnstoun, who served in that post in the University of Glasgow from 1714 to 1751; while two further subscribers were the wife of Francis Hutcheson, Professor of Moral Philosophy from 1730 to 1746,

and their son Edward, who matriculated in 1730 and graduated in 1734.[14] So large a representation of the middling sort is unusual in subscription lists of the period. It contrasts, for example, with the large number of aristocratic, genteel and professional subscribers to the two volumes of Allan Ramsay's *Poems* (1721, 1728).[15] A further contrast is in the way the names are ordered. Although, as with most lists, each surname is ordered alphabetically by initial letter, the one in *Miscellany Poems* observes no clear order of precedence – unlike the many such lists, including Ramsay's, that descend from aristocracy through gentry to members of the professions and others. Thus the 27 names listed under 'C' begin with '*Daniel Campbell* of *Shawfield* Esq;', and end with 'Sir *Duncan Campbell* of *Lochnell* Barronet. / The Lady *Campbell*. / Mrs. *Katharin Campbell*'. P. J. Wallis has suggested that such an order 'may simply be that in which they were received by the promoter'.[16] Here, however, the absence of any clear pattern of subscribers from the same districts renders such an explanation unlikely.

The number of subscribers was modest by comparison with those for Ramsay's two volumes (475 for the first, 415 for the second, with some subscribing to both). However, figures produced by P. J. Wallis for 686 lists before 1801 yield a median of 245,[17] and this suggests that a total of 153 was fairly respectable. Only four subscribers opted for multiple copies – 2 in 3 cases, 12 in the other. The number of subscribers is limited by the fact that, unlike those for Ramsay's *Poems*, the great majority were local. Most came from Glasgow (56 definitely, and a further 2 probably) or Greenock (29 definitely, a further 1 probably); 11 came from Port-Glasgow, and 6 from Adams's own parish of Crawfordsdyke (near Greenock). Of the remainder, 5 came from the Glasgow area; 2 each from Cartsburn (near Greenock), Edinburgh, and Renfrew; 1 each from Craigend, Dunmore, Erskine, Fort William, Kilmarnock, Kilpatrick, Lamont and Lochnell (both in Argyll), Skelmorlie, Stevenston and Stirling; 3 are from places difficult to determine;[18] and the place of residence for 22 is unspecified. No proposals for the subscription are recorded in ESTC, but it is likely that those who mustered signatures worked the area diligently. The

subscribers were probably led to support *Miscellany Poems* not only by a wish to benefit the author but by its predominantly religious content. Not only did 8 of them hold positions in the church, but one of the students became a minister, and another (the only one from the University of Edinburgh) was a student of divinity.[19]

Archibald Crauford's preface to *Miscellany Poems* indicates that Adam's father had been a shipmaster, and that after his death she had joined the household of a local minister, presumably as a servant.[20] Such a position implies resources far too limited to have enabled her to publish her verse otherwise than by subscription, and even that must have required considerable help from supporters. Yet it is highly unlikely that her book would have been published at all had its character not been primarily religious. In this respect it is less anomalous as a book of verse published by subscription during a period when most publications in Scotland, by subscription or not, were of a spiritual or ecclesiastical kind. The social composition of the subscribers, and the fact that they are not listed by rank, give interesting early evidence for the view that subscription publication was a kind of democratization of patronage.[21] The same facts, however, may also reflect the principle, strong among Scottish Presbyterians, that everyone is equal before God.

References

[1] See Sarah L. C. Clapp, ‘The Beginnings of Subscription Publication in the Seventeenth Century’, *Modern Philology*, xix (1931–2), 199–224, and ‘Subscription Publishers Prior to Jacob Tonson’, *The Library: A Quarterly Review of Bibliography*, xiii (1933), 158–82; ‘Introduction’, F. J. G. Robinson and P. J. Wallis, *Book Subscription Lists: A Revised Guide* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Harold Hill and Son, for the Book Subscription List Project, 1975), i–iii.

[2] See *Revised Guide* and P. J. and R. Wallis, *Book Subscription Lists: Extended Supplement to the Revised Guide* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Project for Historical Biobibliography, 1996), viii.

[3] Introduction, *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets: An Oxford Anthology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), xxvi.

[4] *Miscellany Poems. By Mrs. Jane Adams in Crawfordsdyke* (James Duncan). All subsequent references are to this edition.

[5] *Old Greenock* (Paisley and London: Alexander Gardner, 1886), 144.

[6] There is brief commentary in Andrew Crawfurd, ‘Jean Adam’, *The Visitor, or, Literary Miscellany*, 2 vols (Greenock: 1817–18), II, 263–74, 295–308, and in Alexander Rodger, *Jean Adam of Cartsdyke: Her Authorship of the Ballad There’s Nae Luck About the House, Vindicated* (Greenock: A. Mackenzie, 1866). However, as with most discussions of Adam, and as Rodger’s title indicates, both are more concerned with the attribution of the song. Adam is not mentioned in *Scottish Literature: In English and Scots*, ed. Douglas Gifford, Sarah Dunnigan and Alan MacGillivray (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002), and is not included in *Eighteenth Century English Labouring-Class Poets*, 3 vols, ed. John Goodridge, William Christmas, Bridget Keenan and Tim Blake (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2003). The account of Adam’s verse in *A Dictionary of British and American Women Writers, 1660–1800*, ed. Janet Todd, rev. edn (London: Methuen, 1987), is uninviting.

[7] ‘The Poems of Jean Adam (1704–65)’, *Women’s Writing*, x (2003), 415–41.

[8] ‘Jean Adam’, 266; J. Cuthbert Hadden, ‘The Songs of Scotland before Burns’, *Scottish Review*, xxv (1895), 203–26 (at 214).

[9] *Extended Supplement to the Revised Guide*, 3. Except where otherwise noted, all information about subscription statistics is from this work and the *Revised Guide*, its predecessor.

[10] *List of Books Printed in Glasgow 1701–1775 with notes on the printers and booksellers* (thesis approved for Fellowship of the Library Association, 1967), I, iii.

[11] Gillespie lists 40 books printed by James Duncan, ESTC 50. Each list contains titles not included in the other; when the two are combined and overlaps are eliminated, the total is 62. Gillespie also provides notes on Duncan’s career, II, 38–41. Duncan’s other titles in verse are two devotional works, an edition of the Psalms, and four editions of the Psalms in Gaelic.

[12] The first female-authored verse collection recorded as published by subscription is Mary Masters, *Poems on Several Occasions* (1733); the two earlier books so published are Elizabeth Elstob, *An Anglo-Saxon Homily* (1709) and Eliza Haywood, *Letters from a Lady of Quality to a Chevalier* (1721; repr. 1724). Mary Barber’s *Poems on Several Occasions*, also published by subscription, appeared in 1735, despite the date on the title page of 1734. See A. C. Elias Jr., ‘Editing Minor Writers: The Case of Laetitia Pilkington and Mary Barber’, in *1650–1850: Ideas, Aesthetics, and Inquiries in the Early Modern Era*, III, ed. Kevin L. Cope (New York: AMS Press, 1997), 129–47 (at 136–7). Adam Budd erroneously claims, in an otherwise informative discussion, that Mary Barber’s was the second female-authored verse collection to be published by subscription, and fails to note Elstob’s work of 1709 or the first edition of Haywood’s. See ‘“Merit in Distress”: The Troubled Success of Mary Barber’, *Review of English Studies*, n.s., liii (2002), 204–27 (at 205).

[13] Glosses are from *OED*, except for ‘causier’ (*Scottish National Dictionary*).

[14] For John Watt, see George Williamson, *Memorials of the Lineage, Early Life, Education, and Development of the Genius of James Watt* (Edinburgh:

Thomas Constable for the Watt Club, 1856), 50, 51–8; for Johnstoun, J. D. Mackie, *The University of Glasgow 1451–1951: A Short History* (Glasgow: Jackson, Son, 1954), 169, 224, 226; for Francis Hutcheson, *DNB* and Mackie, 234–35; for Edward Hutcheson, *The Matriculation Albums of the University of Glasgow from 1728 to 1858*, ed. W. Innes Addison (Glasgow: James Maclehose and Sons, 1913).

[15] *The Works of Allan Ramsay*, ed. Burns Martin and John W. Oliver, 6 vols (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood, 1951–61), I, xxx–xxxvii, II, xv–xxi.

[16] 'Book Subscription Lists', *The Library: A Quarterly Journal of Bibliography*, xxix (1974), 255–86 (at 257).

[17] 'Book Subscription Lists', 260. 81 of the lists, or 11.8 per cent, had fewer than 100 subscribers; 198, or nearly 29 per cent, had 101–200. Large subscriptions were more common later in the century: of 41 eighteenth-century lists with more than 1,000 subscribers, only 6 predate 1734 and 10 predate 1740 ('Book Subscription Lists', 275–6).

[18] Cairnmuire, Kirkhead and Walkinshaw.

[19] The subscribing student who became a minister was Abraham Dawson, who graduated in 1733 (*Matriculation Albums*); the Edinburgh student of divinity was John Cooper, whose matriculation in 1731 is recorded in *A Catalogue of the Graduates in the Faculties of Arts, Divinity, and Law, of the University of Edinburgh, Since its Foundation* (Edinburgh: Neill, 1858).

[20] The minister must have been either Andrew or David Turner, who served 1704–21 and 1721–86 respectively; see Ninian Hill, *Story of the Old West Kirk of Greenock. 1591–1898* (Greenock: James M'Kelvie & Sons, 1898), 23–7.

[21] See Paul J. Korshin, 'Types of Eighteenth-Century Literary Patronage', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vii (1973–4), 453–73 (464–5, 472); and Thomas Lockwood, 'Subscription-Hunters and Their Prey', *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, xxxiv (2001), 121–35 (at 132). Peter Laslett gives details of two subscription lists with a high proportion of manual workers in 'Scottish Weavers,

Cobblers and Miners Who Bought Books in the 1750s', *Local Population Studies*, iii (1969), 7–15.