

BY

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Among the founder's manuscripts at the William Salt Library in Stafford is a manuscript set of accounts for the musical Society held in the Vicar's Hall, Lichfield during the early 1740s.¹ The manuscript is a notebook, 6¼" × 4¼", of creamy-white laid paper bound in a green leather case with a hasp. The accounts (mostly set out with receipts on the verso and disbursements on the recto of each page) occupy roughly the first half of the book. The remaining pages are blank apart from the last ten folios, which contain the Society's rules, some membership lists and a page of household accounts and remarks about dyes, presumably copied into the book in error by the owner's wife. One isolated page towards the end of the book contains an inventory of the Society's library in 1747.

The Society's rules, which are followed in the MS by ten signatures and the date 18th December, 1739, are presented as follows:

Rules to be observ'd by y^c Members of y^c Musical Club to be kept in y^c Vicar's Hall, viz:
Imprimis.

That a Steward be chosen by y^c Majority of y^c Members on every first Tuesday in y^c Quarter; such Steward to take care y^t there be a good Fire & Candles, y^c Room clean'd out; & to take care of y^c Music Books, & to account to y^c Members for w^t Money, Books &c shall come to his hands, & to deliver y^c same to y^c succeeding Steward.

Item, That every Member pay to y^c Steward on his Election y^c Sum of five shillings. Lay-Vicars excepted.

Item, Every Member to meet exactly at 5 o'Clock in Winter, & 6 in Summer and if any Member come not within an Hour's time after y^c Time fix'd he shall forfeit y^c Sum of 6 Pence.

Item, The Steward to demand from every Gent: or Lady coming to hear y^c Performance y^c Sum of 6 Pence to be apply'd to y^c Use of y^c Club.

Item, The Steward to expend no more than One Shilling in Liquor at any one Club-Night.

Item, That y^c Members present (before they separate) shall fix on y^c Music to be perform'd upon y^c Club-night next following, & that they deliver a Paper of y^c same to y^c Steward for y^c Time being.

Item, All further Rules & Orders that y^c Club shall think proper to make shall be forthwith enter'd in this Book by y^c Steward for y^c Time being:

And that these Rules & Orders & all future Rules & Orders be sign'd by y^c several Members of this Club.

An amendment to the rules, dated 7th April, 1747 and signed by seven members including three of the original signatories, altered the meeting time to 6 o'clock in winter and 7 o'clock in summer.

The earliest items of expenditure recorded in the book relate to the weeks following 10th December, 1739 and include the purchase of candles, coal and ale, as well as a series of payments to "ye woman", evidently the cleaner. The accounts

¹ SMS 24 (iv).

become more regular and systematic from September of the following year, by which time "ye woman" is identified as "Mrs Wood", who during the following few years began to undertake an increasing number of the Steward's duties: on 21st December, 1743 Margaret Wood was paid three shillings for "12 fires", and by October, 1745 she was supplying the candles and coal and drawing a quarterly salary. In the same year "her Son's Attendance" was worth 6s. 6d. and "Mr Wood the Joynor" was paid £1 14s. 4d. Other staff mentioned in the accounts are a boy, a door-keeper and a porter.

A typical page of payments made in 1740 reads:

| | |
|-----------------------------|-------------|
| Novr 18 | |
| Ale | .0 - 1 - 0 |
| Mrs Wood | .0 - 2 - 6 |
| Candles | .0 - 0 - 7 |
| 6 Chairs | .0 - 7 - 6 |
| Nov. 25 | |
| Ale | .0 - 1 - 0 |
| Decr 2d | |
| Ale - Mrs Wood | .0 - 3 - 6 |
| Cand ^s | .0 - 5 - 6 |
| Decr 9 | |
| Ale | .0 - 1 - 0 |
| Decr 23 | |
| Ale | .0 - 1 - 0 |
| Vivaldi | .0 - 15 - 0 |
| Handel's Ov'tures | .0 - 6 - 0 |
| Quire of Papr | .0 - 5 - 0 |
| | 2 - 9 - 7 |

Several interesting expenses for repairs suggest an excess of high spirits at some of the meetings: 10s. 3d. was paid to the "Glasier" on 30th April, 1741, "Mending the Door" cost 6d. on 19th October the following year, and a further 3d. was paid for "Mending Windows" less than a month later. Some improvements were made to the hall in October, 1745, when £1 19s. was paid to "Mr. Cobb for Curtains &c.", 4s. to "Mr. Cook for making them" and 6d. to "Birch for mending the Ceiling".

The list of "Books belonging to the Clubb" in April, 1747 comprises:

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Geminianis and Corillis Concerts | Six Books |
| Vivaldis Concertos and Handels Overtures | 7 Books |
| Tessarinis Concertos | 6 Books |
| Humphries Sonatas | 3 Books |
| Handels Select Airs | 4 Books |
| Several other Books wanting | |

Vivaldi and Handel items were purchased on 23rd December, 1740 (see above); "Binding Vivaldi &c" cost 12s. three weeks later. An undated entry in 1746 records the payment of 5s. to "Mr Spateman for Handel's Songs". The missing books included music by Lampugnani and Martini, which was bought for Christmas, 1745 at the cost of 10s. In 1755 the Society subscribed for a copy of Charles Avison's *Eight Concertos*, and during the following years (having changed its name to "The St.

Cecilia Society of Lichfield”) it was among the subscribers to John Pixell’s *Collection of Songs* (1759), William Felton’s *Eight Concertos for the Organ or Harpsichord* (c. 1755–60), Philip Hayes’s *Six Concertos . . . for the Organ, Harpsichord or Forte-Piano* (1769) and the Lichfield organist John Alcock’s *Harmonia Festi* (1791).² Instruments mentioned in the accounts include a violoncello, which was bought for £2 2s. in January, 1744 (1s. being paid to “Mr Marshall for a Bass String” eight months later), and a trumpet.³

Apart from the regular concerts presented by members of the society, guest musicians were occasionally invited. A benefit concert for Dr. R. Wickham on 1st September, 1743 made £24 15s., of which £10 10s. 6d. was retained by the Society for expenses and the remainder paid to Dr. Wickham two days later. In 1746, “Expences the night that Doctr Heighington gave a Concert” came to 9s. Musgrave Heighington was involved at various times with music societies at Yarmouth, Dundee and Spalding, where he was living at the time of his Lichfield concert.

Two nineteenth-century annotated transcripts of the MS survive in the William Salt Library.⁴ In these, an entry dealing with the Lichfield races in 1743 attracts the following remark:

The Compiler of these Mss can remember these Concerts at Lichfield Races at the Vicars Hall, held about eleven in the forenoon, and fully attended by the Nobility and Gentry of the County. He has seen 4 splendid Equipages drawn by 6 horses, belonging to the late Marquis of Stafford, Marquis of Donegal, Earl Talbot and Lord Bagot &c. about the year 1784.

Extensive sets of accounts relating to the Lichfield agency of Lord Gower, the Marquis of Stafford, include annual payments from 1768 to 1797 for wine at “St. Cecilia’s Feast” (the Society’s main meeting).⁵ The annual payment amounted to £1 4s. until 1779, when it was increased to £1 10s. Interestingly, also in December, 1779 (a few months before a local election, in which the Marquis had an interest), his Lordship took out a two-year subscription to the Society: the most marked interest he had shown in their proceedings since the previous Lichfield election, in 1774, when he had “Paid Mr. Bedford Steward of the Cecilian Society Mr. Gilberts Arrears” of £3 1s. 6d. The accounts also show that it was the Marquis’s habit in the period before each election to make gifts to various groups including the local Morris dancers and to settle outstanding bills at the Lichfield public houses.⁶

² I am indebted to Dr. Peter Wallis, director of the Project for Historical Biobibliography at the University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, for bringing some of these subscriptions to my attention.

³ 13th May, 1746: “To the Trumpet” 1s.

⁴ SMS 370 (iv), pp. 391–429, which was in turn copied, with slight errors, as SMS 371 (iv), pp. 273–311.

⁵ Staffordshire County Record Office MSS D593/F/3/12/1/1–16 (volumes of accounts) and D593/F/3/12/2/1–12 (vouchers and receipts). I am indebted to Mr. F. B. Stitt, Staffordshire County Archivist, for bringing these to my attention.

⁶ A number of sets of account books relating specifically to elections in which the Marquis had an interest survive as MSS D593/F/3/12/3/4–5 *etc.* His political activities are discussed at greater length in James Ross Wordie, “A Great Landed Estate in the Eighteenth Century: Aspects of Management on the Leveson-Gower Properties, 1691–1833” (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Reading, 1967). Not all such gifts had a political motive, of course: the Marquis, like many wealthy landowners, made occasional Christmas gifts to musicians and morris dancers—a practice described in Robert W. Malcolmson, *Popular Recreations in English Society 1700–1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), p. 57 and *nassim*.

The later history of the Society—otherwise obscure—is briefly given on the title-page of the two transcripts of the Society's account book, where it is described as:

A Musical Club Established in 1739 held in the Vicars Hall at Lichfield which formed the basis of the present Society still existing in that City (1835) & its anniversary is kept on St Cecilia's Day when the Society met, and a public Concert was celebrated with great eclat, and eminent Vocal and Instrumental Performers were engaged. After the Concert, a Ball concluded the Evening. These Meetings were sanctioned, and attended by the First Families in the neighbourhood; but now in 1835, it has degenerated into a mere anniversary Dinner.