

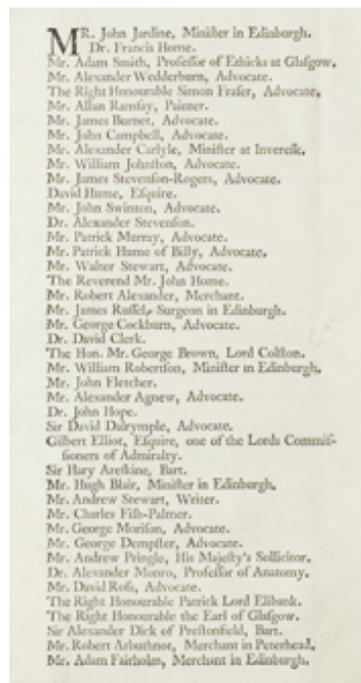
Clubbable Edinburgh

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ROLL of the MEMBERS of the SELECT SOCIETY. 1754 OCTOBER 1754.

Almost all the gentlemen at the centre of Enlightenment Edinburgh belonged to one of its sociable clubs. Some were informal drinking clubs, while others were places for serious debate. One was the Select Society, a debating club founded in 1754 by a group including Allan Ramsay, Adam Smith and David Hume. It became home to some of Edinburgh's most eminent talents in every field, as this part of the membership list shows.



On display in our exhibition beside the list of members is a book of the Society's original rules from May and July 1754. One original rule states than any subject can be debated by the Society except 'revealed Religion' and Jacobitism. I like to think that an additional rule, saying that 'during the time of the debates, no Gentleman shall stand before the fire', is the result of an incident during a debate when an enthusiastic member got too close to the fire and had to be extinguished, but it may simply mean that the venue (the [Advocates Library](#)) was a chilly one.

Print has played a central role in recording the rules of societies and allowing them to communicate with one another. Our exhibition contains printed society rules and regulations from The Schools' [Camanachd Association](#), *Handbook of Hints on Playing Shinty*, etc. (Inverness, 1939) to *The Chemists' and Druggists' Year Book and Directory for Scotland*, (Glasgow, 1914).

It is interesting to trace the development of women's societies: although women such as Lady Mary Shepherd (her [DNB entry](#)) could engage with the ideas of philosophers, she would not have been able to join in debates with the men of the Select Society. One hundred years later, Edinburgh women were beginning to develop such societies for themselves. You can find out more about one such society and its influential magazine by searching for the [Ladies' Edinburgh Magazine](#) at [Scran](#).