Bristol’s Law Societies 1661 to 1945

By W. JOHN LYES

By the middle of the 15th century attorneys had established themselves in Bristol’s courts. An ordinance of 1453 required them to swear:

That that plece that ye plecede in the name of your Cyaunt or lette plecede by the advyce of Counsell in his name. In maner and fomme as hit is pladd is gode and trewe and that your Cyaunt so endeuyed yow and that ye demeys trewe with oute frawele or male Engyme so god yow help and hooly doone and by that booke.

A hundred years later the names of notaries, scriveners and attorneys were regularly appearing in the city’s records. They are, for example, recorded in the burgess rolls, the ledgers of John Smythe and the books of the Staple Court where they represented both plaintiffs and defendants. Some even had an international outlook; in 1555 John Sebright, a notary, took an apprentice and agreed that he would send him to Spain for a year at his own proper cost and expense. However, they rarely appear in the apprentice books; this may be because lawyers were already beginning to think of themselves as members of a profession and not of a trade. Possibly for the same reason there was never a guild of lawyers in Bristol, and instances of guilds of lawyers in other provincial centres are very few and far between. Only two examples have been identified: the 16th-century prompt book produced for the mystery plays for the York guild of scriveners survives as does the minute book (1675–1775) of the Incorporated Company of Scriveners of Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Attorneys were subject to the discipline of the courts in which they practised and this has been advanced as a reason for the absence of attorneys’ guilds.

It was doubtless because of the attorneys’ special subscription to the rule of the courts that they never became a guild, an “art and mystery,” as did members of other crafts.

By the end of the 17th and beginning of the 18th centuries practitioners evidently felt the need to associate together to discuss matters of common interest. On 6 May 1712 a correspondent wrote to the Spectator:

5. York Archives, Acc. 104/49.
6. Tyne & Wear Archives, GULSC1.
I was last Wednesday night at a tavern in the city among a set of men who call themselves the 'Lawyers-club'. You must know, Sir, this club consists only of attorneys and at this meeting every-one proposes the cause he has taken in hand to the board, upon which each member gives his judgment according to the experience he has met with. If it happens that any-one puts a case of which they have had no precedent, it is noted down by their clerk Will Goose-quill (who registers all their proceedings) that one of them may go the next day with it to a council. This indeed is commendable, and ought to be the principal end of their meeting; but you have been there to have heard them relate their methods of managing a cause, their manner of drawing out their bills, and, in short, their arguments upon the several ways of abusing their clients, with the applause that is given to him who has done it most artfully, you would before now have given your remarks upon them.

In London a club of attorneys met in the 1730s to debate legal questions and at about the same time the Society of Gentlemen Practisers in the Courts of Law and Equity was formed. Bristol was not without its early societies.

The Rose Garden Society

C.T. Jeffries, a Victorian bookseller, carried on business in Carynge's house in Redcliffe Street. He advertised that a very high price would be given for anything that would make paper such as old papers and books (Fig. 1). Fortunately for Bristol's historians not all the material collected by him ended up in a paper mill. He retained a large quantity of interesting documents and carefully preserved them in a number of scrapbooks, which now comprise the Jeffries Collection in Bristol Reference Library. In volume 19 will be found the minutes (1661-70) of a society described by Jeffries as 'Bristol Royalists'. From a perusal of the names of the participants and of the minutes themselves it is apparent that the members were attorneys. The first meeting took place on 27 September 1661. Twenty-five men were present and Francis Yeavins senior was appointed Prior and Edward Ley his Assistant. The Prior presided over the meeting and served for one meeting only; his Assistant was responsible for summoning the next meeting and succeeded to the office of Prior.

With one exception the venue of all subsequent meetings was described as 'the Rose garden' although on one occasion the words 'Rose Tavern' were used. An indication of the location of the meeting place can be found in the minutes of the meeting held on 2 January 1662 when the members ordered that if Mr. Robert Howard doth neglect to provide the dinner of the Society ready upon the table precisely at the hour of one by Christchurch clock that then he shall be forfeit to the Society a quart of sack and a quart of claret.

The Rose Tavern was the meeting place in 1643 of Yeavins and Boucher, the Royalist conspirators, and Taylor and Nicholls I take this to refer to the establishment in Temple Street.

BRISTOL'S LAW SOCIETIES

C. T. JEFFERIES & SONS,
CANYNGE HOUSE,
And Canynge Buildings, 66, 97 & 98 Redcliff Street,
and 1, 2, 3 & 4, Ferry Street, and Redcliff Backs,
BRISTOL,
Stationers, Bookbinders, Printers. New and Second-
Hand Booksellers, &c.

Note.—Most of their extensive alterations are now com-
pleted (care having been taken to preserve Canynge's Chapel,
&c.) As there are about 300 hands at work upon the premises,
sold by Steam power, they are able to supply cheaper than
most houses.

PAPER MATERIAL DEPARTMENT.—A very high price given
for anything that will make Paper, such as old papers, books,
rove, canvas, &c.

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Fig. 1. Advertisement in Henry J. Jennings's The Bristol Guide (1872).

In the section of Historic Bristol\(^2\) headed 'Around the Tolzey' Charles Wells described the Rose Tavern as

a noted hostelry in the seventeenth century and it was here that Robert Yeamans, the indescrete and
bombastic gentleman who so ingloriously led the local Royalists in 1643, used to do his drinking and
boasting.

Temple Street cannot be described as 'around the Tolzey', nor is it within earshot of Christ Church
clock. A more likely candidate for the society's venue appears to be the Rose on the west side of
High Street some 20 yards from the church.\(^3\)

Meetings took place quarterly. William Meredith was originally appointed clerk but he declined
the office and Thomas Oldfield took his place for the remainder of the society's existence. There
seems to have been no lack of interest in the society and attendance remained buoyant, some 20
to 30 men attending each meeting. In all the society had 50 members and on occasions they were
joined by John Robins, the steward of the sheriff's court, Gilbert Jones, the chancellor of Bristol
diocese, and John Dauntsey, Doctor of Physick, who was appointed physician to the society. At
an early stage the members laid down procedure for governing their debates but the topics which
they discussed are not detailed. However on 19 June 1663 it was recorded that

On this day a charge was given in by Mr. Francis Yeamans senior against Christopher Giles another mem-
ber of the same Fraternity for a miscarriage pretended by the same Francis Yeamans against the said
Christopher Giles in their practice of Attorneys: the matter was heard, debated and determined by the
Fraternity and the persons differing reconciled.

12. Published Bristol, 1902.
The last recorded meeting took place on 22 April 1670, not at the Rose garden but at ‘Mr William Hobson’s house’. Hobson was not a member of the society, nor was he, as far as the writer has been able to establish, an attorney. Twenty-seven members attended and a new member, Jasper Smyth, elected at that meeting was appointed to be the next Prior. Francis Yeomans the elder, the society’s first Prior, was elected as Assistant Prior. However, it seems that the meeting had been convened to discuss a much more contentious matter.

Thomas Edwards became a member of the society at their meeting on 15 April 1668 and at the meeting on 19 January 1670 he was elected as Assistant to the Prior, a position that he accepted. The meeting of 22 April 1670 noted

Whereas Mr Thomas Edwards whom this Society formerly thought worthy to be a member thereof and to that purpose he had due summons from tyme to tyme yet voluntarily hath absented himself and having been at the last meeting of this Society duly elected Assistant to Mr Arthur the then Prior elect to the said Society, hath not only contumaciously absented himself and deserted his duty and office, but hath by apprehension and ill words reproached the Society for their friendly meeting which is conceived far more innocent than those illegal conventicles he hath been observed to frequente on disguised or getting practice, whereof the Society being fully informed have thought fit and so ordered by general vote of the members of the Society nemine contradicente that the said Thomas Edwards be totally excluded from the said Society with the stigma thereof.

Edwards was an Anglican who acted for local gentry families and in later years was the principal executor of Edward Colston’s will and yet, nevertheless, in the 1670s and 1680s he represented local dissenters.14 The society numbered amongst its members Nathaniel Powall, the diocesan registrar, and Richard Williamson, the chapter clerk; on one occasion the minutes noted:

Forasmuch as Mr Gilbert Jones, Dr of Lawe and Chancellor of the Diocese of Bristol hath att severall meetings past upon invitation and desire of this Society honoured them with his presence and company the Society doe resume the said Dr Jones hearty thanks for his friendship and kinnesse...

It is not surprising that Edwards’s sympathy with nonconformists put him at odds with other members of the society. John Hellier was one of the original members and a regular attendant; following the passing of the Test Act in 1673 he played a prominent part in the persecution of local dissenters.15 It has been suggested that the society collapsed when all members had served their term as Prior,16 yet the last meeting was attended by 27 men who admitted a new member and specifically made provision for members to serve a second term as Prior. Perhaps there were further meetings the minutes of which have been lost; the record does not consist of a minute book, but merely single pages that Jeffries had pasted into a scrapbook. It may be that the obviously acrimonious tone of the meeting left members not wishing to continue. For whatever reason the record ceases with the minutes of the meeting on 22 April 1670 and it was to be another 100 years before the next recorded meeting of Bristol attorneys took place.

The Law Society of 1770

On 19 October 1770 18 attorneys and solicitors met at the Bush Tavern in Corn Street and 'upon Consideration of the many Advantages which might arise from a regular and well ordered Association of the Practisers of the Laws of this Realm' resolved to form themselves into a society to be known as The Law Society. The rules which they established have not survived but the members revised them in 1774 and the revised set are in Bristol Law Society's archives.18

The 1774 rules provided that the society would meet on every second Tuesday and also on the first and last days of every term and that each member in turn should assume the office of President for two meetings. The other office was that of Treasurer who held office for a year and who had to provide two sureties and enter into a bond to ensure the correct performance of his duties. Members residing in Bristol were fined 2s. 6d. and other members 1s. 0d. if they failed to attend a meeting. It was enacted that 'no Cards, Dice or any other Sort of Games shall be introduced into this Society; nor any wager proposed or laid on any Pretence whatsoever. And that each Member acting contrary to this Rule shall forfeit Five Shillings'.

In all the society had just over 30 members of these ten lived outside Bristol. The membership probably comprised slightly more than a half of the lawyers practising in Bristol at the time. Contemporary records are apparently incomplete; the Law List for 1777 lists 35 attorneys but does not include 18 who were members of the society; similarly, Sketchley's Directory for 1775 contains 38 entries but does not include 16 members.

The members resolved to continue to meet at the Bush Tavern whose tenant, John Weeks, was renowned as an excellent carver. They also recorded that it was usual for members of the society to spend a day together during the Long Vacation and on 3 October 1775 unanimously agreed that the Members of this Society do meet to dine and spend the Day together at the Bush Tavern in Corn Street on the 25th instant at the Expenditure of such Members as shall be then present; and that Mr Jeremiah Osborne and Mr Seager (the two Sureties for the present Treasurer) and Mr Richard Hawkswell (Chamberlain of Bristol), the Oblige of the Treasurer's Bond be on that Occasion invited.

Although the meetings appear to have been primarily social gatherings, doubtless matters of professional interest were discussed. On 11 July 1775 John Seager moved that there be some regulation made in the manner of stating Law Questions in this Society and that every Member having a Question to propose do produce that same fairly written on one or more Half Sheets of Paper of equal sizes; That the same be then read that every Member may (if he pleases) take a copy or minute thereof, That the Case be then filed on a file to be kept for that purpose, And that the opinion of the Society be taken upon at the next Meeting and when taken be written under such Case, and that no more than three Cases be proposed at one Meeting.

The proposal was carried, but at the next meeting

17. It was demolished in 1854 to make way for the new West of England Bank; Lloyds TSB now occupies the site.
18. Bristol Record Office (BRO), 41956/Law/2/1. They are also set out in The Bristol Law Society, The First Two Hundred Years (Bristol Law Society, 1970). The identity of the author of this pamphlet is not recorded; it was commissioned by the society to mark the bicentenary of the formation of the 1770 society and contains no reference to the Rose Garden society or to the Law Association. Copies are available in the BRO and Bristol Reference Library (BRL).
Some objections having been stated to the order of the last meeting concerning Law Questions on the motion of Mr Seager it is agreed and ordered that such Rule be (and it is hereby) rescinded.

The minutes contain no further reference to legal topics being discussed. However the society’s funds were on occasions used to purchase textbooks, volumes of statutes and the London Gazette and these volumes were kept in a chest belonging to the society.

Other items comprised charitable donations. On 28 November 1775

Mr Burges gave notice that he should at the next meeting of this society move for the disposition of ten guineas, part of the fund of this Society, towards a subscription now opened in London for the relief of the soldiers now serving and the widows and families of such families as have lost or shall lose their lives in the prosecution of the measures lately adopted by the Government against the rebellious North Americans.

At the next meeting the proposal failed but shortly afterwards the members agreed to subscribe 20 guineas to a similar fund that had been opened in Bristol and three years later they donated £50 (to be subscribed in the name of the Law Society of Bristol) to ‘the Committee of the Subscribers for Raising Men for His Majesty’s Services in Support of the Constitutional Authority of Great Britain over her Rebellious Colonies in America’. They also noted that ‘Mr Adderley having for the laudable purpose of Serving and Protecting his Country entered in the Somerset Militia and being desirous yer to be considered as a Member of this Society’ and agreed that he should be considered as a non-resident member. On a subsequent occasion the members agreed to donate a guinea for the relief of six debtors.

From the outset the society’s income comprised fines levied on members for non-attendance and other breaches of the rules. On 10 November 1778 Daniel Burges was fined £3 0s. for proposing to make a bet with Jeremiah Osborne who was fined a similar amount for having agreed to take it. At the same meeting the members agreed, at Burges’s suggestion, to invest some of the society’s funds in a lottery ticket. It proved to be a wise investment as six weeks later it was reported that ticket number 44,267 had drawn a prize of £20. Funds were also invested in turnpike tickets.

The rules provided that every person who is inclined to become a Member of this Society shall be proposed at one Meeting and balloted for at the next, and that one Negative shall be sufficient to exclude him’. This provision provided an opportunity for the members to demonstrate Bristolians’ rejection of London’s influence. In November 1776 Daniel Burges proposed for membership a Bristol attorney named William Bowden and Samuel Bowyer who was ‘one of the Clerks in the Equity Exchequer Office within Temple, London’. Bowden was elected but Bowyer was ‘Balloted for and there appearing one Black Ball... therefore rejected’.

Relations between members were not always harmonious. James Hughes, one of the original 18 founder members, had apparently declared himself no longer a member of the society but had not resigned, and the other members requested the President to ask him to state his intentions. He replied

As I am not sensible that I ever gave the Gentlemen of the Law Society Reason to Doubt my sincerity, I cannot but be surprized at their conduct with respect to me. The Majority of the Resident Members know my Determination. Therefore saying more on the matter is only giving unnecessary Trouble to myself. However, as they have now thought proper to put the matter upon a short issue I have for some weeks Declined being any longer a Member of the Law Society.

Hughes (Fig. 2) was described by a contemporary as ‘Jemmy Hughes, an attorney – he was a pot-bellied man – lame – used crutches so that he was called the devil upon two
sticks and one can almost sense the relief of the members who at their next meeting recorded, in capital letters, 'IT IS THEREFORE CONSIDERED THAT MR. JAMES HUGHES IS NO LONGER A MEMBER OF THIS SOCIETY'.

Regularity of attendance at the fortnightly meetings was a constant matter of concern. There were some 20 resident members who were supposed to be present at each meeting but the number attending never exceeded 11. On many occasions the number present fell as low as two or three and on 14 May 1776 the minutes recorded 'the President and most of the Members being engaged at Gloucester in the election not one member present at this meeting'. On 9 July 1776

Mr Adderley (the President) having requested Mr Castle to attend for him at this Meeting and it appearing to the Society that he was in this House this Evening at 9 o'clock apparently disengaged and it also appearing that he has not attended any meeting of the Society since May 1775 Except at their Annual Dinner in October last. It is unanimously ordered that the succeeding President do write to Mr Adderley requesting him to state the reason of such non-attendance.

Adderley's reply is not recorded but he was present again three months later. By the beginning of 1780 such was the concern that on the first day of the Hilary term (when seven members attended) it was agreed that 'the President do desire the Members to attend at the Bush Tavern on Thursday next at ½ (Ge) past nine in the forenoon there to breakfast'. At that meeting only three men were present although another came in at the end of the meeting and agreed with their conclusions which recorded:

The meeting was proposed for the purpose of remonstrating with the members touching many of them having been defaulters in duly supporting the Society by punctual attendance at the stated meetings and the three persons who did attend came determined either to propose or to come into such measures as might be proposed to induce all the resident members to be attentive to this useful and laudable Society and to render it all the aid and support in their power to make the meetings of it amusing and to promote concord and harmony among the practisers of law in this city.

No action resulted from this motion and for the remainder of 1780 attendance never reached double figures, on occasions just two or three attended. On 6 November, the first day of the Michaelmas term, seven members were present and elected Richard Parker to be Treasurer for the following year. His proposed sureties were approved and he was directed to enter into the usual bond and to produce it at the next meeting. John Gyles was elected President for the next two meetings. There are no further entries in the minute book, which contains a number of blank pages, and it is thus nor possible to conclude that a subsequent minute book has been lost. At the time the society possessed a chest containing a number of books and a balance in its account amounting to some £150. Three volumes of the society's records comprising the minute book, and books of accounts and subscriptions are in the possession of Bristol Law Society although the manner in which they came to be there is not known.20

Although the fate of the society is not known, there is some evidence that local legal practitioners either had or wanted to have some form of professional organisation after 1780. In 1787 a number of Bristol attorneys petitioned Parliament asking that conveyancers should be made subject to the same laws as attorneys. They represented that 'many improper persons who are a Disgrace and Scandal to the Profession and a nuisance to Society gain Admission to the Roll by undue means' – the chief of these being fictitious clerkships, the clerk being articulate without payment or duty. The petitioners desired that their calling should be 'confined to persons of liberal education, neither deficient in Integrity or Professional Knowledge'. The petition is recorded in the House of Commons Journal for 25 April but unfortunately the names of the petitioners are not listed. A further attempt to organise local practitioners took place in November 1814 when Arthur Palmer, the under-sheriff, convened a meeting to discuss the taxation of costs.

**Bristol Law Library Society**

On 3 December 1805 Thomas Jarman, a Bristol attorney, wrote to his professional colleagues proposing a meeting to discuss the setting up of a law library. It was to be another 14 years before the project came to fruition. In the summer of 1819 a meeting took place at which those attending agreed to form a law library society and appointed a committee of reference to prepare a set of rules; the committee reported to a further meeting that took place in the Commercial Rooms on 22 September. The rules as then approved established that the society would be known as the Bristol Law Library Society and that its membership would consist solely of Barristers, Gentlemen

20. BRO, 41956/Law.
entered at one of the Inns of Court for the purpose of being called to the Bar, Solicitors, Attornies at Law and Gentlemen articled to Solicitors and Attornies. All members (except articled clerks) were stated to be joint proprietors of the books and effects of the society and, for the first year, the committee of management would comprise such barristers as were members and the nine most senior attorneys. The rules were initially subscribed by four barristers and 46 solicitors and attorneys; the Law List for 1820 contains the names of ten barristers and 93 solicitors practising in the city.

The rules are set out in the society’s records and specify that the society’s officers would comprise a president, vice-president, treasurer and secretary. The city’s recorder was invariably invited to be president. From the outset the town clerk was invited to be vice-president. In 1353 the city corporation had decided that “from hensforth no parson or parsons shallbe elected or chosen Townclerke...of this said cite unless he or they have been an utter barrister of some inne of court”; but the practice changed following the Municipal Corporations Act of 1835, after which solicitors were appointed to the office. Daniel Burges, the first solicitor to be appointed town clerk, modestly disclaimed the honour. The early meetings of the committee were usually presided over by Andrew Drummond, a barrister, John Bush, an attorney, was the society’s first treasurer. He served until his death in 1854 and in later years he often presided over committee meetings. The first secretary was William Wsbrugh, an attorney, and when he retired from practice in 1840, his son Henry Sidney took over from him. Thomas Jarman, whose circular letter led to the society’s formation was, together with his nephew Francis, an original subscriber but played no part in the organisation probably because he became bankrupt in the year following the society’s formation. He left the country, no doubt to avoid his creditors, and died in New York in 1824.

The first entry (on 11 October 1819) in the minute book records that the Committee of Management had agreed to rent three rooms at 11 Corn Street in premises belonging to Messrs Beadle Fiske, grocers and tea dealers, at an annual rent of 20 guineas. An illustration of a room in Corn Street used as the law library is contained in J.S. Prout’s Picturesque Antiquities of Bristol (Bristol: 1833) (Fig.3). The room was once the banquet-room of Hugh Brown, sheriff in 1642 and mayor in 1650, and the building appears to have been subsequently renumbered as number 36. It was demolished about 1866 and became the site of the Liverpool and London and Globe Insurance Company.

The rules fixed the membership fee at five guineas with an annual subscription of two guineas. Members were generous in donating books; J.G. Smith gave a set of Tainton’s Reports and John Bush a copy of Viner’s General Abridgement of the Laws of Equity. The committee was also active in building a stock by purchase; at their meeting on 28 October 1819 they agreed to buy some 200 books at a cost exceeding £425. About 60 men had originally subscribed to be members of the society on its formation and this early purchase must have used a substantial part of the initial membership fees and annual subscriptions. The society benefited from the misfortunes of others; in December 1819 it purchased books at the sale of property belonging to Samuel Worrall, the

21. Ibid. 41956/Lib/2/1.
23. 5 & 6 William IV, c. 76.
24. BBO, 41956/Lib/1/1–4.
town clerk who had become bankrupt following the failure of the Exchange Bank in which he was a partner.

The society remained at 11 Corn Street for a number of years and the fact that Wasbrough's professional office was in the same building must have made the task of administration much easier. By the mid 1840s the rent paid to William Mackrell (Beede Fiske's successor) had increased to £35 per annum; in 1854 it became necessary to increase the size of the accommodation and the society agreed to pay Wasbrough and his partner John Bligh Stanley the annual sum of £10 for the use of an additional room. In 1866 the society moved to premises at 30 Broad Street but this must have been a temporary arrangement because four years later the library relocated to rooms within the new assize courts.

A charter of 1373 granted to the mayor and the justices of Bristol the right to try felonies and to deliver the gaol and it excluded the justices assigned to take assizes in Gloucestershire and Somerset from having any criminal jurisdiction within the town. The exclusion of jurisdiction was removed by the Municipal Corporations Act of 1835 and from that time trials of the more serious criminal offences took place at the Gloucestershire Assizes. Bristol city corporation made a number of representations to the Government for an assize to be held again in Bristol but this was not granted until 1865. It then became necessary to provide additional court premises and Latimer describes how a number of sites were proposed and hotly contested. Eventually it was decided to construct the court on a site fronting Small Street at the rear of the existing Guildhall. The Law Library Society asked the city corporation to provide accommodation for a law library within the new building and, after some hesitation, this was agreed. Latimer's account concludes:

BRISTOL'S LAW SOCIETIES

The architect succeeded in preserving two Romanesque chambers in the mansion in Small Street erroneously styled "Coleson's". The new building cost £16,000. The judges used a portion of it for the first time at the August assizes in 1870, and the second court was opened at the spring assizes in the following year. The interesting ancient apartments were granted to the Incorporated Law Society, who fitted them out for their library. 30

From its establishment in 1819 and for many years thereafter the committee members of the Law Library Society principally concerned themselves with the provision of books and the general administration of the library although in 1822 they were sufficiently well established to organise a dinner for the members; it was attended by 21 men who drunk the following toasts:

The King
Duke of York & the Army
Duke of Clarence and the Navy
the Lord Chancellor
the Members for the City
the Recorder
the Mayor, Sheriffs & Common Council
the Town Clerk
Prosperity to the Law Library Society
the Treasurer
the Secretary
Plaintiffs and Defendants
Trial by Jury
the Glorious Uncertainty of the Law
the Metropolitan Law Society

It was evidently a success because three years later, at the Montague Tavern, another dinner was held, also for 21 diners, using the same toast list with the addition of 'Prosperity to the City of Bristol'. The cost to each member, exclusive of dessert and wine, was 5s. 0d.

Members of the committee did not wish to become embroiled in disputes between members. In 1851 William Lewron Clarke requested that a statement in reference to the dispute between himself and his late partners should be placed upon the library table, but he was informed that this would be inconsistent with the rules of the society. However it was perhaps inevitable that, although the rules made no reference to the promotion of the general interests of the profession, such affairs were eventually discussed and acted upon. In 1828 the committee prepared a petition urging the prevention of unqualified persons acting as conveyancers and in the following year they successfully requested the corporation to improve the accommodation for attorneys in the assize court. Since the end of the 19th century solicitors and attorneys had been liable to pay a tax on their annual practising certificate; the duty gradually increased, reaching its peak in 1815 when the annual rates were £120 for London practitioners and £80 for others. When Peel revived income tax in 1842 the profession perceived that they were being doubly taxed and the society supported efforts by the profession nationally to have the practising certificate duty abolished. They also considered the scale of costs in bankruptcy proceedings and the removal of central courts from Westminster to the Strand. In 1865 they made representations concerning the siting of the new assize court; one of the proposals was to locate the new building in Queen Square and the

30. The rooms are illustrated in Reece Winstone, Bristol As It Was 1874–1866 (1966), plates 12-15.
committee resolved "that the proposed site in Queen Square and Thunderbolt Street is most undesirable [and that the new court] should be conveniently situated with reference to the general bulk of the legal profession, the banks, hotels and the post office."

Reference has already been made to the Society of Gentlemen Practisers that was founded in London in 1739. Its members principally comprised the crème de la crème of the profession and almost all of them practised in the capital. The society's principal object was to improve professional standards and its importance was that there was for the first time a body of attorneys and solicitors formed for the purpose of improving the standards and representing the interests of the profession.31 The society was dissolved about 1823 but it had been the only organisation representing the profession as a whole until the Law Society was founded in the same year. Another body with similar objectives was the Metropolitan and Provincial Law Association established in 1847; originally formed by the provincial law societies under the name of the Provincial Law Association, but finding their activities hampered without a London office they enlarged the scope of the association to include the Metropolis.32 It was not long before there was contact between the two national bodies and the Bristol Law Library Society. As one historian of the Law Society describes the relationship:

There were several communications throughout the early years of the Society with local and provincial law societies trying to effect a reasonable liaison with the Society. Local societies sent the Society information on sham lawyers which the Society might investigate and also complaints concerning the admission of particular attorneys.33

By 1862 Bristol Law Library Society was being asked by the Law Society to organise the preliminary examinations for persons who applied to enter into articles. The education of men about to enter the profession and those already in it was becoming a matter of interest to its members. A society of articled clerks in the city was formed in 1856 and in the following year they asked permission to use the library every alternate Thursday evening for the discussion of questions of law and practice. The committee evidently had reservations because they felt that they had to have the acquiescence of Mr Mackrell, their landlord, and they needed to make arrangements to safeguard the society's property. They eventually consented provided that the society was not put to any expense.

The fact that matters other than the mere administration of the library were assuming more importance led to the appointment of a committee to assume the functions of a law society and of an additional secretary to service it. They appointed Lewis Fry, a member of the Fry's chocolate dynasty and later (in 1885) the Liberal MP for North Bristol.

By 1870 the society's functions as a law society had become such that it was decided to dissolve the Law Library Society and transfer its assets and responsibilities to a body to be known as the Bristol Incorporated Law Society. The report of the committee to the annual meeting of members on 24 October 1870 told them:

31. Harry Kirk, Portrait of a Profession (London, 1976), p. 23. See also Birks, Gentlemen of the Law, pp. 132 et al., Christian, A Short History of Solicitors, p. 120.
Your committee have much pleasure in reporting that the Finance Committee of the Corporation have agreed to grant the use of the new and commodious room in the Assize Courts building for the use of the Law Library at an annual rent of £5 on condition that the library should during the Assizes or any other sittings of the superior Courts be open free of charge to the Judges and Officials of such Courts and to the Bar and should also be open to the Recorder of Bristol and Officials of the Court of Quarter Sessions. These terms appeared to the Committee to be very satisfactory and were gladly acceded to by them.

It is well known to all the Members that proposals have recently been made for the establishment of an Incorporated Law Society in Bristol and for the transfer to such Society of the Bristol Law Library.

Bristol Law Association

Mention has already been made of the Metropolitan and Provincial Law Association. This organisation was formed in 1847 at the instigation of the Yorkshire Law Society with the support of fifteen local law societies; amongst the founding societies were those from the counties of Gloucester and Somerset and the town of Bridgewater. Bristolians soon began to show an interest in the project. At the annual meeting of the Bristol Law Library Society in October 1848 it was resolved to form a committee
to enquire into and report upon the expediency of forming a Law Association in the City either in connection with this society or with the Metropolitan and Provincial Law Association or otherwise.

At the annual meeting in the following year the report was read and ordered to be printed and it was decided to call a general meeting to consider the matter. There is no report of that meeting and reference to a Law Association disappears from the society's records until June 1861 when the secretary reported to the committee that the Bristol Law Association had transferred to the Library Society the sum of £10. 7s. 1d. being the balance left in the hands of the Treasurer of the former society on its dissolution.

No records of the Bristol Law Association have survived. According to the Bristol Directory for 1851 both the Law Library and the Bristol Law Association were located at 11, Corn Street, the latter's secretary being H.S. Washbrough and its president W.B. Ward. Washbrough apparently combined the secretarieship of both organisations and Ward was the association's president for the whole of its existence. The entry is repeated each year until 1862; from the following year only the Law Library is mentioned.

It was not long before Bristol solicitors became involved in the national organisation. 34 The association held annual meetings the first of which took place in Derby in October 1852 and a deputation from Bristol attended. By the following year H.S. Washbrough was a member of the Committee of Management of the national association and remained a member until the end of the association's existence, often in association with other Bristol solicitors. At the 1855 annual meeting in Birmingham a Bristol practitioner, Robert Leonard, contributed to a discussion on a learned paper relating to the consolidation of statutes. At the 1857 meeting in Manchester Cam Clyde Heaven, described as the vice-president of the Bristol society, spoke in the following terms:

I have the honour to appear here with the secretary of the Bristol Law Association to invite the attendance of this Association in that city next year...Certainly you have never been as far south as Bristol, and I fear

34. The information in this paragraph is based on the association's circulars, copies of which are held in the Law Society's library.
that the objects of the Association are hardly taken up so strongly in the south as they have been by the energy and perseverance of the north...but I assure you that you will find a very hearty welcome in Bristol.

The 1858 meeting was held in the lecture hall of the Athenaeum in Corn Street and a large number of local practitioners attended the sessions, four of whom read learned papers to the gathering.

The annual meeting of 1870 also took place in the city.

It may well be that the Bristol Law Association was disbanded because local practitioners could see no point in having two organisations fulfilling the same purpose; the Library Society was already taking on responsibilities in addition to those involved in merely running a library. That there was obviously a close connection between the local and the national associations is evidenced by the fact that Wsbrugh was both secretary of the Library Society and a member of the Management Committee of the national association. This relationship was cemented in 1867 when he became president of the national society.35

Bristol Incorporated Law Society (later Bristol Law Society)

The society was incorporated under the provisions of the Companies Act 186236 on 18 February 1871; the Board of Trade granted a licence to omit the word 'limited'. The articles of association listed the objects as:

(a) the acquisition and maintenance of a law library,
(b) the consideration of all general questions affecting the administration or alteration of the law,
(c) the promotion of improved legal education,
(d) the promotion of honourable practice amongst attorneys and solicitors; the protection of their interests as a profession; the settlement of disputed points of practice; and the decision of questions of professional conduct arising amongst them, and
(e) the doing of all such things as are incidental or conducive to the above objects.

Provision was made for the society to be managed by a council comprising a president, two vice-presidents, two honorary secretaries and 15 ordinary members. Membership was limited to attorneys or solicitors practising in the city or within 30 miles of it, although members of the bar on circuit or attending quarter sessions and members' articled clerks were to be allowed free use of the library. The first president was Charles Edward Ward and the honorary secretaries Lewis Fry and William Hurle Clarke.

The council soon got to work. At its first meeting it agreed that any barrister practising in Bristol could have access to the library on payment of an annual subscription of three guineas and it engaged James Thomas as librarian at a weekly wage of 16s. 0d. Whilst still continuing to administer the library, the society began to involve itself in legal education and the discipline of the profession and it soon became the voice of Bristol solicitors, making representations about local and national matters affecting its members.

The society continued to administer the preliminary examination of men about to enter into articles. In 1881 some 90 candidates sat the examination in that year. The society also continued

35. The author of The Bristol Law Society. The First Two Hundred Years (possibly following the note on page 52 of Contemporary Biographies – Bristol 1898 Vol 1 [W.T. Pike & Co., Brighton]) incorrectly states that Lewis Fry became president of the national association in 1867.
36. 25 & 26 Vic. c. 89.
the Library Society’s practice of allowing articled clerks to use the library for their meetings. In 1876 the council considered a memorial from articled clerks pointing out that the University College (which had opened its doors in October of that year) had made no provision for legal education. Discussions soon took place between the society and the college, and in February 1877 local solicitors had subscribed sufficient funds to pay for the appointment of J.W. Willis-Bund, MA, who gave a course of 20 lectures on equity and conveyancing. In 1879 the lectures were attended by some 20 students but by 1880 enthusiasm for them had waned and they were discontinued. In 1887 the council agreed to purchase students’ “elementary” textbooks for members’ articled clerks. Towards the end of the century there was a renewed demand for lectures and in 1904 a Board of Legal Studies involving the society and the college was created; this resulted in the re-establishment of lectures for articled clerks which continued into the second half of the 20th century when the system of legal education was reorganised. Although the council supported the University College’s campaign for a royal charter, it could not encourage its members to contribute towards the appeal fund because it was not intended that the new university should include a law faculty.

From its earliest years the society was keen to protect the profession’s integrity. In 1877 the society prosecuted John Price, a solicitor who had neglected to take out a practising certificate; there was a similar prosecution against Samuel Broomhead Ward in 1886. In 1872 John Bennett Ayre, a local solicitor, impersonated Thomas Boon Clements at the Law Society’s final examinations. He was discovered and struck off but shortly afterwards Clements had the effrontery to make repeated applications to sit the examination. The Law Society asked the local society to investigate and eventually they were able to report that they had evidence of Mr Clements having carried on the business of a Fireworks Manufacturer during the greater part of his articles and they were later able to produce an affidavit from a gentleman in the Town Clerk’s office that a house in Nicholas Street was registered in the name of Mr Clements under the Explosives Act.

The legal profession jealously guarded its sole right to undertake certain types of work. On more than one occasion the society prosecuted debt collectors for representing themselves as solicitors in letters threatening to take legal proceedings. In 1875 it reported to the Inland Revenue a tradesman who had prepared an unstamped deed. The profession was also concerned about the activities of associations set up to conduct cases, principally claims for personal injuries, on a commission basis. In its annual report for 1933 the society reported that trouble and unhealthy litigation were caused by organisations calling on injured persons in hospitals to get authority to make claims and that local hospitals had taken steps to prevent the practice and arrangements had been made for injured persons to get help from local solicitors.

37. Willis-Bund was called to the bar by Lincoln’s Inn in 1869 and was Professor of Constitutional Law and History at University College London from 1869 to 1882; he later became chairman of the Seven Fisheries Board and chairman of Worcestershire County Council. He was also a noted antiquarian, writing many papers on Worcestershire history and editing five volumes of the Victoria County History relating to that county. See John Foster Kirk, A Supplement to Allibone’s Dictionary of English Literature and British and American Authors (London, 1900), p. 248; C.A.M. Press, Worcestershire Lives – Social and Political (London 1899).

However, the monopoly that most occupied the attention of the society's council during the last quarter of the 19th century was that relating to conveyancing. As early as the 1840s, Lord Campbell had introduced several Bills to restrict the length of conveyancing documents. The Bills had been greeted with the wrath of the solicitors' profession which feared 'very serious consequences to the general emoluments, and thus to the social status of its members'. In 1886 members of the profession were aware that a Bill was to be introduced to make registration of title compulsory when land was transferred inter vivos or upon death; this proposal was discussed by the council of the society and on 1 November Mr Sturge proposed 'that steps should be taken to protect the interests of the profession in view of the proposed legislation facilitating the transfer of land'. There was, however, not unanimous objection to the principle of registration and at the council meeting on 4 July 1887 there was a vigorous debate during which a motion to object to the proposed legislation was rejected by 6 votes to 5; this was followed by an agreement to petition against compulsory registration. The view that registration was desirable but that it should not be compulsory was reiterated at subsequent meetings and the society appears to have bowed to the inevitable in March 1889 when it agreed to accept an offer by Mr C.F. Brickdale, an assisting barrister at the Land Registry, to give a lecture to members. The lecturer (later Sir Charles Brickdale) was the chief land registrar from 1900 to 1923 and was a strong advocate of compulsory registration. The objections to compulsory registration did not abate and the society continued to make representations and to lobby members of parliament and parliamentary candidates about the matter. The efforts were evidently successful as registration of title did not become compulsory in Bristol until 1967.

The society had serious reservations about the increasing role by central government in the administration of the law. It objected in 1892 to the creation of the office of Public Trustee and in 1889, in a letter to the city's members of parliament setting out to its objections to the compulsory registration of title to land, the society commented:

It is likely to cause delay in the transaction of business, as it is notorious that work done by officials in a Government Department is not executed as promptly as work done by professional men in competition with each other.

Following the 1875 Judicature Acts the society supported the provision in the city of a probate registry and a district registry of the High Court. Over a number of years the society, supported by the Chamber of Commerce, made repeated complaints to the Inland Revenue about that body's decision to locate its local office in Queen Square; the society considered that it should be relocated within the heart of the city nearer to professional offices. At last the authorities capitulated and moved to a new building in Baldwin Street. In common with other local law societies it made representations about the form of the rules for the newly created County Courts and the draft rules were amended to its satisfaction. It objected, unsuccessfully, to the proposal to appoint an unqualified man as District Probate Registrar in place of a solicitor and to the appointment of the town clerk as registrar of the Tolzey Court in place of a solicitor in private practice.

The society had no hesitation in crossing swords with the city corporation acting as the urban sanitary authority. In 1881 it strongly objected to the authority's practice of selling land at auction under contracts that barred a purchaser's right to examine the title and published a

39. See ibid, p. 197.
41. Under the provisions of the Public Health Act of 1875 (38 & 39 Vic. c. 55).
warning of the risks involved in the local press. The president, with some colleagues, also intended to attend a forthcoming auction and voice the society's concern. The corporation responded by obtaining an interim injunction from Lord Coleridge (sitting as vacation judge in the Queen's Bench division) prohibiting a repetition of the advertisement and the proposed protest at the auction. The litigation continued for a number of years in the central courts and the injunction was eventually discharged.

In 1889, following a suggestion from a member, the society set up a register of clerks requiring positions in solicitors' offices and of situations vacant. In the following year it was reported that several positions had been filled from the register.

Domestically, the work in the library had evidently increased as in 1885 H.G. Harwood was appointed as deputy librarian at a weekly salary of 15s. 0d. He was called up for military service during the Great War and Miss Thomas was appointed as his temporary replacement. The society's secretary must have been gratified to receive this letter from him:

France: 13.9.17
Dear Sir,

The Society I expect will soon be holding its Annual Meeting and I should like to take the opportunity of thanking the Members for the allowance which has been paid to me for the past twelve months, and for which I am very grateful. Before the next Annual Meeting is held I trust that victory will be ours and that I shall have the pleasure of being in my old place at the good old Law Library.

I am very pleased to say that I am keeping in good health, also that so far I have been fortunate in keeping out of harm's way.

I remain, Sir, Yours respectfully,
H.G. Harwood, 29451, L/Cpl.

Harwood did return safely and the society was obliged to dispense with the services of Miss Thomas, whilst recording its appreciation for her services. Harwood succeeded to the post of librarian in 1935 when James Thomas retired after 66 years' service; Harwood himself served until 1955.

The society was not an enthusiastic supporter of pro bono activities. About 1902 the Broad Plain Mission had established a free legal dispensary.

The purpose of the Bristol Legal Dispensary is the giving by duly qualified members of the legal profession of legal advice and assistance to poor persons free of charge. Experience has shown that in the lives of those belonging to the poorer classes apparently trivial questions frequently arise where a word of advice from someone possessing legal knowledge may be of considerable service.32

The service was managed by John Arthur Helton Daniell,33 who was admitted to the roll of solicitors in 1901, and in 1912 he reported that there had been some 630 interviews in that year.34 On 5 February 1912 Daniell applied to the society for a grant to help with the running of the dispensary and was told that such a grant would be unwise as the articles of association and could not be made. He persisted and wrote again seeking approval of a circular that he proposed to send to members of the profession; this was referred to a sub-committee and no further reference to the matter appears in the minutes.

42. Arrowsmith's Dictionary of Bristol (2nd edition 1906).
43. Daniell was married to E.H. Young, the novelist, and was killed at Ypres in July 1917.
44. Bristol Observer, 22 Feb. 1913.
The society was similarly unenthusiastic in its support of the 'poor persons' procedure.\textsuperscript{45} This was introduced in 1914 to enable impecunious persons to take divorce proceedings. No government funds were available and the scheme depended on counsel and solicitors who were prepared to act for petitioners and respondents without remuneration. In December 1914 the society heard from the officials administering the scheme that they had difficulty in finding solicitors in Bristol who were prepared to take on cases; the council replied to the effect that they were not prepared to recommend members to participate. After the scheme was revised in 1926 it was administered by the Law Society through local committees; out of pocket expenses were paid to counsel and solicitors and, in some circumstances, judges had discretion to award costs to a successful litigant. From that time the Bristol local committee reported some 20 or 30 cases being dealt with annually.

Relations with the Law Society in London were not always harmonious. In 1874 the Law Society intimated that Bristol's president would be elected as an extraordinary member of its council, but the practice did not continue as in 1903 local members remonstrated because there was no local representative in London whereas the presidents of the Birmingham and Manchester societies had been co-opted. There was further dissatisfaction because membership of the council was weighted heavily in favour of London members. Lewis Fry was elected as a member of the council in 1880 and when he resigned in 1889 a solicitor from Cirencester was elected in his stead. Only vigorous lobbying ensured that Robert Lowe Grant Vassall, a Bristol practitioner, was elected to the council in 1893 and on this occasion the Bristol members recorded that 'the time has come when Bristol, as the chief business centre of the West of England should be represented'. Despite this friction the parent society held its annual provincial meetings (the forerunner of the annual conference) in Bristol in 1877, 1894, 1910 and 1932. In 1900 the Bristol president, Charles Edward Barry, was invited to be a member of an influential committee to recommend measures following the financial failures of some London solicitors. Barry became president of the national society in 1933.

At the end of the 19th century the education provided by the society started to take another direction. Lectures had hitherto been provided principally for articled clerks but the University College and, later, the University took over this responsibility\textsuperscript{46} and the society began to provide lectures for qualified solicitors. In 1889 Brickdale's lecture on the registration of title to land was attended by a large number of practitioners and in 1925 a series of lectures on the new property legislation was provided. In 1932 Miss N. Dermot Harding, the city archivist, wrote to the society about the preservation of records of historical importance and was invited to give a talk on this topic to members and their articled clerks. In 1945 the society organised refresher courses for members on their demobilisation from H.M. Forces.

**Conclusion**

Writing of the lower branch of the legal profession in Stuart times Michael Birks in 1960 commented

> Although there were many honest attorneys and solicitors, collectively they were a rabble, needing no qualifications and subject to no form of control...From now onwards the profession was slowly dragged to the surface of respectability. This had largely been achieved by the end of the end of the eighteenth century...\textsuperscript{47}

\textsuperscript{45} See Abel-Smith and Stevens, \textit{Lawyers and the Courts}, pp. 140 et seq.

\textsuperscript{46} J.A. Borkowski and H.G. Thomas, \textit{The Bristol Law Faculty, the First Fifty Years} (Bristol, 1984), pp. 1 et seq.

\textsuperscript{47} Birks, \textit{Gentlemen of the Law}, p. 132.
BRISTOL'S LAW SOCIETIES

In 1976 Harry Kirk pointed out

that the general educational standard was low cannot be doubted. In 1630 members of the profession were
described as the 'unlearned and uncounselable crew'...In 1796 Mr. Joseph Day considered that a dreadful
proportion of the lower class of them cannot write their own names and yet are accounted brave fel-
lores in the business'.48

It might be expected that practitioners in such a prosperous and important city as Bristol were a
cut above those described by Birks and Kirk, and to some extent the evidence provided by the
records of the societies described here bears this out. The minutes of both the Rose Garden and
the 1770 societies display more than an average literary competence; it is apparent that the
members' skills extended far beyond the ability to write their own names.

Whilst the activities of the 17th- and 18th-century societies appear to be principally social in
character, they nevertheless did cater for the discussion of legal problems. The Law Society of
1770 started to acquire law books, although the number could not have been great as they were
all housed in a single chest. The nature of the activities changed at the start of the 19th century
when the law library was promoted and a substantial expenditure was incurred in the purchase
of books and the acquisition of premises in which to house them. Law libraries were established
at this time in other parts of the country: at Manchester in 1820, Plymouth in 1815 and
Birmingham in 1818.49 Many articled clerks were sufficiently motivated to educate themselves;
Neaste Greville Prideaux, who was articled in Ilminster from 1801 to 1804 and who later practised
in Bristol, recorded in his diary on 10 December 1801 that he had begun to read Blackstone's
Commentaries for the second time.50 By the middle of the 19th century the Library Society and
the Bristol Law Society took on an increasing role in the education of its members and their
articled clerks.

The influence of all the societies described here seems to have been strictly limited in its
geographical scope. Although the 1770 society had different rates of fines for members’ non-
attendance depending on whether they lived in or outside Bristol it is not thought that many lived
very far outside the city boundary. The library established in 1819 would have been principally of
use to men practising in its vicinity although there were occasional instances of lawyers in the area
(e.g. Chipping Sodbury) asking permission to use its facilities; they were allowed to do so on
payment of a reduced subscription. Membership of the incorporated society of 1871 was limited
to solicitors practising in the city or within 30 miles of it.

The societies' influence within Bristol increased over the years.

Even as late as 1860 solicitors were generally regarded by the upper classes as tradesmen, who, if they vis-
ited a barrister's house entered by the back door. But the situation changed rapidly.....By 1881 it was
claimed that solicitors were 'now largely recruited from public schools'.51

Although the members of the Rose Garden Society occasionally entertained the steward of the
sheriff's court and the diocesan chancellor, both barristers, they appear to have done so with the
respect due to men of superior standing. By 1819 the attorneys and solicitors were to found a society

49. The information on law societies in other towns and cities is taken from Robert Robson, The Attorney
in the 18th Century (Cambridge, 1959), chapter IV.
jointly with barristers upon an equal footing and by the mid 19th century they were able to form their own society. During the course of that century they made representations about attorneys' accommodation in and the location of the assize court and the siting of the Inland Revenue office. Before the Municipal Corporations Act of 1835 Bristol was governed by a corporation comprised almost entirely of merchants; only one attorney alderman has been identified. This changed after 1835; the original 63 members of the council following the election of 1835 included three attorneys...in the present [1899] are numbered 8 solicitors. By 1881 the society had sufficient confidence to challenge the local authority and become involved in litigation with it. Despite the fact that the 1770 society was established 'upon the many Advantages which might arise from a regular and well ordered Association of the Practisers of the Law', it played no part in disciplining dishonest members. Until the Solicitors Act 1878 authorised the establishment of a Disciplinary Committee consisting entirely of solicitors, the responsibility of the discipline of the profession rested with the courts. The city corporation maintained the right to license attorneys to practise in Bristol courts but the only recorded occasion on which it exercised disciplinary powers occurred in 1771 when it removed the name of John McArthur for malpractice; the nature of his offence is not recorded. The courts took no action unless prompted and there is no record of any of the Bristol societies initiating such action in the 18th or early 19th century. It was left to individuals to do so. At the beginning of the 19th century a local attorney, Charles Houlden Walker, secured the conviction and striking off of two dishonest practitioners and so impressed were some of colleagues that they signed a memorial recognising his activities. Some local societies did take steps to discipline their members. In 1844 The Law Times reported that the annual report of the Manchester Law Society....is a document deserving particular notice, for it exhibits, in the most striking form, the manifold advantages that might be obtained from the general formation of like associations...They must not be...merely nominal confederations whose business it is to eat a certain number of dinners in a year, but they must show themselves to be bodies having something more than animal functions to perform, endowed with a soul, instinct with energy and life.....Another admirable feature in the report from Manchester is the announcement of the expulsion of two of its members for malpractices in their profession.

The Bristol society only became involved in such activities towards the end of the 19th century when it supported the activities of the Law Society's Disciplinary Committee.

Some societies placed a greater emphasis on good works. The Gloucestershire Law Association, founded in 1817 at the King's Head in Gloucester, affirmed at a general meeting held in June 1819 that the objects of this society be the distressed members of it, and also such other distressed attorneys and solicitors who are deserving, resident in the county and city [of Gloucester] and their respective families. Bristol apparently did not attribute the same importance to this activity.

52. Henry Bengough who was mayor in 1792–3.
56. 17 Feb, 1844.
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During the period under consideration the society did not embrace the concept of pro bono activities and it was left to individual members of the profession to assist the disadvantaged. In 1810 C.H. Walker took up the case of a servant girl who claimed to have been raped by a member of a well-known Bristol family and in 1831 he represented an impeccable young man who was tried, convicted and executed for his part in the Bristol riot of that year; Walker even organised an unsuccessful appeal for clemency. 58 Three solicitors, Francis Gilmore Barnett, Hugh Holmes Gore and Edward James Watson, were prominent amongst those assisting striking cotton operatives in 1889. 59

In the early years of the 19th century local law societies began pursuing objectives in addition to the provision of a library, particularly the protection of the profession’s monopoly to undertake certain types of work and objections to the growing role of central government in the administration of the law. This activity became an increasing part of the functions of both the Library Society and the Bristol Law Society.

Although outside the scope of this paper it should be noted that the second half of the 20th century saw a steady increase in the society’s activities and membership. Continuing education became a requirement of the profession and the Bristol Law Society met this need by arranging regular lectures and courses. The ‘registry of clerks seeking positions’ developed into an employment agency. The society took an increasing interest in pro bono activities. There is now an assured place for a Bristol solicitor on the council of the national society and two local practitioners (Sir Denys Hicks in 1960–1 and Sir Richard Gaskell in 1988–9) have served as its president. In 1967 the local society dispensed with the word ‘incorporated’ in its title and it thus became known simply as Bristol Law Society. Following rebuilding in the Guildhall in 1961 the library moved from the rooms described by Latimer to new accommodation in the same building and in 1994 there was a move to purpose-built premises in the new law courts in Small Street. The society’s activities continue today.

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58. Lyes, A Strong Smell of Brimstone, p. 11.
59. S. Bryer, An Account of the Labour and Socialist Movement in Bristol (Bristol, 1929), pp. 18 et seq.