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CROKER'S LONDON

Pasted into the first minute book of the Athenæum's Committee are copies of letters from John Wilson Croker, the founder of the club, to Sir Humphry Davy, its first chairman. In the course of the first letter, dated 12 March 1823, Croker reminds Davy of an earlier conversation or letter:

> I will take this opportunity of repeating the proposition I have before made to you about a Club for literary and scientific men, and followers of the fine arts. The fashionable and military clubs not only absorb a great portion of society, but have spoiled all the Coffee Houses and Taverns, so that the artist, or mere literary man, neither of whom are members of the established clubs, are in a much worse situation, both comparatively and positively, than they were. – I am therefore satisfied that a Club for their accommodation is desirable, and would be very successful.[1]

Croker was well placed to make such a confident statement: he was a member of White's, the oldest 'fashionable' club; he was deeply involved in the governance of the Union Club, the first of the new 'members' clubs'; and he knew that there was now a gap in the market for a literary club (Plate 1). Taverns had provided meeting places for writers and intellectuals in Shakespeare's day, and coffee houses in Dr Johnson's. Of the two thousand coffee houses in London in the early eighteenth century, 122 were located in St James's, the area in which some coffee houses were to become subscription clubs, thus creating 'Clubland'.[2] Serving officers and veterans of the French

wars had their military clubs, and the upper classes had their fashionable clubs. The 'literary and scientific men' had access to the many learned societies that flourished in early nineteenth-century London, but no club of their own. In rectifying this situation, Croker created a new kind of club, which had no political affiliation, which chose its members on the basis of achievements rather than birth and which was to benefit from the rapid rise of an expanding middle class.

Croker knew about clubs, and he also knew literary, scientific and artistic London better than most. Many of the Athenæum's 'original' members, as those elected in the first year or so were called,[3] moved in the same political and intellectual circles, in the House of Commons and the Admiralty, at John Murray's publishing house and the Royal Institution (both in Albemarle Street), among the book shops of St James's (by the end of the eighteenth century the centre of the London retail book trade),[4] at the learned societies in Somerset House off the Strand, at soirées in private houses, or at the Union Club in Waterloo Place. In this chapter we shall visit these centres of activity in the years after Wellington's victory at Waterloo in 1815, a victory that established Great Britain as the leading European power which ruled over the largest empire the world had ever known.[5] In this way we can see what Croker meant when he referred to 'these times' as being propitious for the formation of a new London club, in his second letter to Davy: 'All that is necessary to create a Club in these times is a Circular Letter of invitation.'

These letters were sent from the Admiralty, where Croker served as first secretary. (His most illustrious predecessor, Samuel Pepys, had gone 'clubbing' at Wood's in Pall Mall back in 1660.)[6] When Croker took up his appointment in the autumn of 1809 he was only twenty-eight years old.[7] An Irish Protestant from Galway, and thus a member of a ruling minority, he had been educated at Trinity College Dublin and then been called to the Irish bar. His strong literary interests led to the publication of verse satires and a friendship with the poet Thomas Moore which was to continue after they both became original members of the Athenæum. Croker found the polarisation of Irish politics and religion unattractive: later he supported Catholic Emancipation while remaining a pragmatic and unsentimental member of the Church of England. In the summer of 1807 he took his seat in the Commons as the member for

Downpatrick.[8] Croker's success in deputising for Sir Arthur Wellesley as Chief Secretary for Ireland during the peninsular campaign led to the post at the Admiralty. Brought up in an environment of patronage and close family ties, Croker placed great emphasis upon personal loyalties and party allegiance.

Over a period of twenty-two years, Croker was a member of four Tory administrations in a highly paid senior post outside the cabinet. An outstanding administrator, accustomed to making difficult decisions and to explaining his position trenchantly, he said that he felt as guilty as a 'truant boy' when not at his desk.[9] He and his wife had apartments in both the U-shaped three-storey building in Whitehall and Kensington Palace. On top of the Admiralty building was a semaphore through which messages could be received from the ports. So the first person in London to hear how the war was going, at sea and on the Continent, was often John Wilson Croker, a man relied upon by monarchs and premiers, colleagues at the Admiralty, and wealthy friends and patrons. These included Lord Hertford, a notorious rake,[10] Viscount Lowther, whose political role was to prove helpful during the club's building programme, and Sir Robert Peel, who wrote 620 letters to Croker between 1810 and 1846:[11] all three were original members of the Athenæum.

By the time he wanted to establish a new literary club, Croker could call upon some of the many personal and political allies he had made at the Admiralty and in the Commons. The biggest prize of all was Arthur Wellesley, the duke of Wellington, who had effectively been Croker's patron in 1807, supplying his election expenses in the general election of that year, and to whom Croker naturally felt a strong allegiance. The duke presented the cloak that he had worn at Waterloo to Croker, who wrote his wife a vivid account of a visit to the battlefield. At the Royal Academy summer exhibition of 1822 a protective rail had to be placed around *Chelsea Pensioners receiving the Gazette announcing the Battle of Waterloo* by Sir David Wilkie RA, the fee for which was negotiated upwards by the sculptor, Francis Chantrey.[12] The historian Henry Hallam celebrated the peace and prosperity which followed the battle as 'the most beautiful phenomenon in the history of mankind'.[13] Hallam, Chantrey, Wilkie and Wellington were all to be original members of the Athenæum, as were Robert Dundas, 2nd viscount Melville, First Lord of the Admiralty from 1812,[14] and Captain (later Rear-Admiral Sir Francis) Beaufort, creator of the wind force scale. Beaufort's

description of near drowning in a letter to a fellow original member, the wealthy scientist William Hyde Wollaston, was of special interest to another, the royal physician Henry Halford, who was researching the nature of the death agony and owned half of the severed fourth cervical vertebra of King Charles I.[15]

Working at the Admiralty and in parliament, at the centre of an extensive web of professional and social intelligence, Croker exercised power in his office and influence at private dinner tables. During a visit to London in November 1826, Sir Walter Scott, an original member, recorded a number of dinners at which Croker was present. On the 14th Scott 'dined at Croker's, at Kensington, with his family, the Speaker [Sir Charles Manners Sutton], and the facetious Theodore Hook'; on the 15th with Wellington, where the party included the Peels and Croker; on the 16th as the guest of Croker at the Admiralty, when 'no less than five Cabinet Ministers were present – Canning, Huskisson, Melville, Peel, and Wellington, with sub-secretaries by the bushel'; and on the 18th 'at Mr. Peel's with Lord Liverpool, Duke of Wellington, Croker, etc.'[16] Known by everybody who was anybody, Croker involved himself in a range of projects which he deemed to be in the national interest. He was, for example, the MP who argued most strongly in support of the arts, and who campaigned for the acquisition of the Elgin Marbles by the British Museum.[17] Croker was often abrasive in style, both in his speeches and his published articles, and as a result made as many enemies as friends.[18] In the first two chapters of Benjamin Disraeli's political novel, *Coningsby* (1844), the portrayal of the odious Mr Digby reveals how Croker was regarded by an ambitious politician who believed himself to be thwarted by him.[19] In reality Croker was politically loyal and administratively dynamic, never pushing himself forward for further promotion and always refusing honours. He preferred to play a supporting rather than a starring role, and his contribution to British political history has been underestimated as a result.

In his letter of 12 March 1823, Croker envisaged a club for 'literary and scientific men, and followers of the fine arts'. The letter's recipient, Sir Humphry Davy, was president of the Royal Society and had been a poet before he was a scientist. He had walked the fells with his friend Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and with Sir Walter Scott and William Wordsworth, who asked him to correct the proofs of the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* (1800).[20] Today, 'literary' and 'scientific' are often opposing or contradictory terms. Not so in the first half of

the nineteenth century, when scientific papers were written in polished English prose, often embellished with classical allusions, and when scientific discovery and literary work often went hand in hand.[21] Sir John Barrow, who served at the Admiralty even longer than Croker did, as second secretary, was awarded an LLD by Edinburgh University in 1821 as a 'proof of their respect' for his 'literary talents' and for his 'effective zeal in promoting the progress of science'.[22] Barrow published accounts of voyages of discovery, including in the Arctic, and considered that nothing was of more interest 'among the literary and scientific world' (rather than worlds) than Captain Parry's 'late Expedition' to discover the North-West Passage.[23] In 1852 the Royal Institution's aim of furthering 'scientific research' was broadened to that of promoting 'Science and Literary Research' – literary in the sense of 'relating to letters or learning'.[24] Many of what Croker describes as 'followers of the fine arts' in his day were also engaged in an important dialogue with the scientists.[25]

By 1823, Croker and Davy had witnessed the rapid expansion of learned societies and institutions in London. During the French wars, the Royal Institution had been established (1799) and three new learned societies founded – the Horticultural Society of London (1804), the Medical and Chirurgical Society (1805) and the Geological Society of London (1807). After Waterloo came the Institution of Civil Engineers (1818), the Astronomical Society of London (1820, later the Royal Astronomical Society), the Royal Asiatic Society (1823) and the Royal Society of Literature (1823). During the 1820s six of these new learned societies were to have a present or future member of the Athenæum as president.[26] But why this ferment of activity?

An anonymous review article of 1826 on the transactions of various provincial 'scientific institutions', in Murray's Tory *Quarterly Review*, praised the wisdom and liberality of the nation's (Tory) ministers. 'Our rapid improvement in wealth, intelligence, and civilization', argued the geologist Charles Lyell, an original member of the Athenæum, 'should not merely render indispensable successive modifications and re-modellings of our political institutions, but also call, from time to time, for some corresponding changes in our public provisions for extending the advantages of a liberal education'.[27] Along with the growth of new cities, and the 'sudden affluence to which commercial or manufacturing industry has raised districts hitherto insignificant and thinly

peopled', Lyell noted the 'introduction and discovery of various arts and sciences before unknown or disregarded'.

The emergence of new kinds of knowledge was also central to the Revd Abraham Hume's explanation for the growth of learned societies. Writing in the 1840s, Hume argued that members joined in order to 'enable themselves to keep pace with the literary and scientific progress of their own times'.[28] He calculated that by 1847 over fifteen thousand members of learned societies were taking an interest, 'more or less active, in the progress of literature and science'.[29] And 'science' was as broadly defined as 'literature'. The 'modern and extended use' of the term 'science', he explained, in part accounted for the number of 'scientific' institutions which had sprung up in the country: 'for we apply it now to almost any subject which is or may be followed out upon fixed principles'.[30] The truly learned man had to be something of a polymath, and this was reflected in the subjects addressed by the learned societies: 'the Royal Astronomical embraces a class of subjects that are ranged with mathematics on the one hand, and with natural history on the other; the antiquary ought to be familiar with architecture, manufactures, costume, palæography, &c.'[31] The Athenæum was founded at a time of intellectual excitement and expansiveness, when a victorious nation was asserting itself as a liberal state which fostered liberal education and research.

The Revd Hume described members of learned societies as the 'choice spirits of the age, the intellectual men in their various localities, the ablest in their respective departments'.[32] It was the choicest Fellows of the oldest learned society whom Croker had in mind in his letter to Davy, when he went on to develop his idea of a new club:

> As every thing must have a beginning, I would propose, in the first instance, to write to each member of the Council of the Royal Society, and each Royal Academician, to propose to them to be of the Club – perhaps also a dozen letters to persons of acknowledged literary eminence might be ventured, such as Sir Walter Scott, Mr. Moore, Mr. Campbell, Mr. Rogers, Mr. Rose, &c &c.

The Royal Academy and both of the leading learned societies – the Royal Society and the Society of Antiquaries – had been accommodated in Somerset House, on the Strand, since 1780. When Davy became president of the Royal

Society in 1820 the scientific fellows were still outnumbered by the non-scientific, such as John Wilson Croker FRS. While vainly attempting to professionalise the institution, which was deeply divided after the presidency of the nepotist Sir Joseph Banks, Davy continued his predecessor's tradition of privately funding weekly soirées at which the latest scientific advances could be discussed – a tradition which Davies Gilbert, another poet and original member of the Athenæum, kept going when he took over the presidency in 1827.[33] Royal Society meetings were dull: papers were simply read aloud and there was no discussion.[34] From Davy's point of view, the new club that he and Croker were discussing could provide FRSs and members of their neighbouring learned societies with a setting for relaxed and lively exchanges of views on science and the arts, leaving the Royal Society to focus upon being a professional scientific body which could engage with government. Davy's ambitions for the Royal Society were to have a crucial influence upon his relationship with Croker and the foundation of the Athenæum.

Of the Royal Academicians elected during Benjamin West's presidency, seventeen were to be original members of the Athenæum;[35] and West's successor, Sir Thomas Lawrence, was to be a trustee of the club, *ex officio*, along with the presidents of the Royal Society and the Society of Antiquaries.[36] The artistic and intellectual elite was a tight-knit group, who often supported one another professionally. Among Lawrence's sitters were at least sixteen fellow Athenians, including the duke of York, the earl of Liverpool, Wellington, Canning, Earl Bathurst and Croker,[37] while Thomas Phillips's tally reached twenty-two.[38] Francis Chantrey's sculptures included busts of ten original members, including Croker, Wellington, Raffles, Canning, Watt, King William IV, Peel and Sir Walter Scott.[39] Royal Academy dinners were opportunities for this elite to get together. In his diary for 29 April 1820, Croker recorded sitting at a small table with, among others, the painters Thomas Phillips and William Mulready, whom he liked. HRH the duke of Sussex, president of the Society of Arts and an original member of the Athenæum, made a dreadful speech.[40]

Before the Royal Society moved out in 1837, Somerset House was the site of cross-fertilisation between the disciplines, in spite of the fact that the council of the Society of Antiquaries declined a request that meetings should not be held on the same night as the Royal Society's.[41] Several Royal Academicians

who were also active in the Society of Antiquaries, including Chantrey, Sir Richard Westmacott, Thomas Phillips, Sir Thomas Lawrence and Charles Robert Cockerell, became members of the Athenæum, as did a number of FRSs who were also Antiquaries: John George Children, Sir Everard Home, Sir Humphry Davy, William Whewell and Davies Gilbert.[42]

Also at the small table with Croker at the Royal Academy dinner in 1820 was the poet Thomas Campbell, one of the dozen 'persons of acknowledged literary eminence' whom Croker had in mind in March 1823 as potential recipients of special letters of invitation. The self-aggrandising Campbell, best known for his war songs such as 'Ye mariners of England', played a leading role in the establishment of London University. William Jerdan, a prominent editor and clubman, described this as the 'great public act of Mr. Campbell's life', in one of a series of short laudatory memoirs of the 'illustrious and eminent personages' of early nineteenth-century Britain, many of them original members of the Athenæum, entitled the *National Portrait Gallery* (1830–34).[43] Like Jerdan, Croker (himself the subject of a memoir) particularly valued those literary figures who made great public acts. Scott's worldwide fame rested not only upon his poetry and fiction, but also his contributions to British public life, particularly in relation to Scotland. Croker also held in high esteem William Stewart Rose, a friend of Scott's and the verse translator of Ariosto, who served as a Whig MP for Christchurch, Dorset, and as Reading Clerk to the House of Lords. Like Scott, Thomas Moore found himself in severe financial difficulties, in his case for political rather than commercial reasons, when his deputy Admiralty registrar at Bermuda incurred huge debts. Moore was rescued by another founding member of the General Committee of the Athenæum, the 3rd marquess of Lansdowne.

Moore and Lansdowne were Whigs, members of the Holland House set which also included Thomas Babington Macaulay, historian, poet, politician and Croker's leading antagonist in politics and the higher journalism, and Samuel Rogers, poet and wealthy retired banker, best known for his patronage of friends such as Campbell and Moore, and his famous literary breakfasts. Ten of the men in John Doyle's imaginary group portrait of one of these breakfasts, dated around 1823, were to be original members of the Athenæum; Sydney Smith was to join a little later; and four of the poets mentioned in Croker's letter are among the ten. Scott wrote in his journal for 19 October 1826:

> Breakfasted at Sam Rogers's with Sir Thomas Lawrence; Luttrel, the great London wit; Richard Sharp, etc. One of them made merry with some part of Rose's Ariosto; proposed that the Italian should be printed on the other side, for the sake of assisting the indolent reader to understand the English; and complained of his using more than once the phrase of a lady having 'voided her saddle,' which would certainly sound extraordinary at Apothecaries' Hall. Well, well, Rose carries a dirk too.[44]

All five poets mentioned by Croker also attended the literary gatherings at 50 Albemarle Street, where John Murray II, another original member of the Athenæum, had his publishing house.[45] Like the soirées of the learned societies, Rogers's literary breakfasts in St James's Place, and similar gatherings in Sir John Soane's house and Francis Chantrey's studio, these meetings of what Scott called Murray's 'four o'clock friends' were seedbeds from which the Athenæum grew.[46]

These informal sites of literary, artistic and scientific discussion, spiced with gossip, allowed individuals such as Thomas Moore to move between opposing political camps. In the years between the French Revolution and the first Reform Act, English letters were 'more polarised by political antagonism than ever before or since';[47] and in Clubland, White's was mainly Tory and Brooks's Whig. Most of the 'four o'clock friends' who gathered in Murray's offices were contributors to his Tory *Quarterly Review*, founded in 1809 in direct opposition to the highly successful and Whig *Edinburgh Review*, launched seven years earlier.[48] Contributors to the *Quarterly* included Scott (Murray's mainstay), John Barrow, Robert Grant, William Stewart Rose and Thomas Young. Gifford, the first editor, regarded Croker himself as 'really a treasure to us'. Croker wrote around 270 pieces, many of them articles on historical and political themes, or literary reviews, including his notorious evisceration of Keats's 'Endymion' (1818). He also advised, or rather pushed, successive editors. Indeed, Scott's future biographer and member of the Athenæum, Lockhart, complained during his editorship that he was 'Over-worked, over-hurried, / Over-Croker'd, over-Murray'd'.

Croker's letter to Davy of 12 March 1823 concludes with some vague hints about the selection of members (by 'ballot, or other wise'), a more solid suggestion about a clubhouse ('I attach great importance to a good situation, but

perhaps for the first year or two we should confine ourselves to a hired house') and a reminder that the time was ripe: 'Pray think and talk over this proposition, and recollect that it is just the season at which the thing must be done, if done at all'. In his reply, written the next day, Davy came to the question of the club after two paragraphs of official business relating to the Royal Observatory:

> I am quite of your opinion as to the Club; except that I think 300 at a moderate subscription would not afford sufficient funds: – I have mentioned the idea in conversation and have found it generally well received. – I think it would be expedient to receive a certain number of names before any letters are circulated & the Founders list should contain not only the names of Men of Science Art & Literature but likewise of some of the higher patrons of these subjects. I shall have an opportunity of mentioning the subject this evening at the Royal Society & likewise on Saturday at a general meeting of the Trustees of the British Museum.[49]

Discussion on the putative club was generally interwoven with discussion on official business, and the success of the enterprise depended upon Croker's and Davy's ability to mobilise their existing professional connections.

Eight months later, on 23 November 1823, Croker had to write to Davy again from the Admiralty, and with a sense of urgency. Davy had spent the summer fishing with Wollaston in Ireland and Scotland, and had not returned to London until the end of October, when he quickly set about investigating an urgent problem relating to the copper sheathing attached to ships' hulls, a crisis that confronted the Admiralty, and thus Croker.[50] On the other pressing question of the new club, Davy and Croker had clearly established broad agreement between themselves by November 1823, so the formality of the March letter's address to 'My dear Sir' is now replaced by the greeting, 'My dear Sir Humphrey',[51] as Croker makes some specific proposals:

> Since you agree in my general proposition about a Literary Club, is it not time to set about the work? All that is necessary to create a Club in these times is a Circular Letter of invitation – our only difficulty I believe will be to

> decide to whom the letters should be addressed: I will give you my ideas. In order to keep our Club, what it is intended to be, a Club of Literary men & Artists, we must lay down, clearly and positively, as our first rule, that no one shall be eligible into it, except Gentlemen who have either published some literary or professional work, or a paper in the Philosophical transactions – Members of the Royal Academy – Trustees (not officials) of the British Museum – Hereditary and Life Governors of the ~~Royal~~ ^ {British} Institution: the latter will open our doors to the Patrons of the Arts – I do not see any other classes which could be admitted, unless Bishops & Judges who are, par état, literary men, altho' they may not have published any literary work.[52]

Croker is putting flesh on the bone. He wants, first, gentlemen who have published and, second, Royal Academicians. His third category, trustees of the British Museum, reflects the fact that this institution was rapidly growing in importance, having recently received the Elgin Marbles and now, in 1823, the King's Library. As Robert Smirke junior worked on the new buildings in Bloomsbury (he completed the King's Library in 1827), many of the museum's trustees were known to Croker and soon became members of the Athenæum, as did some of the officials Croker hoped (in vain) to keep out.[53] The arts, and patronage of the arts, were close to Croker's heart: hence his fourth category, governors of the British Institution at 52 Pall Mall (its title frequently confused with the scientific Royal Institution in Albemarle Street). 'The British Institution for Promoting the Fine Arts in the United Kingdom', to give the body its full title, was founded in 1805 with a view to exhibiting works of art – the first temporary exhibitions of Old Master paintings were held there – and enabling living artists to sell their work. Finally, Croker adds the bishops and the judges, who are assumed to be 'literary', in the broad sense that was then current.

He then moves on to the crucial question of governance:

> We ought next to form, out of the above classes, a Committee of eleven, or twenty-one – suppose, Sir H. Davy, Sir Thos. Lawrence, Sir James Mackintosh, Sir Walter Scott, Sir Geo: Beaumont, Sir Charles Long, Lord Spencer, the Bishop of Carlisle, Mr. Rogers, Mr. Moore, Dr. Wollaston, Mr. Croker, Mr. Chantry [sic], Mr. Smirke, Dr. Young, &c &c. The

> Committee, thus formed, should then write about 200 letters to persons whom they should consider fit Members of the proposed Club, and I have little doubt that the answers to these letters would enable us to set the Club agoing at once. The Union, which consists of 1000 Members, and which has now 600 Candidates, was formed with less machinery, and I think my experience there will be of much use in facilitating our first steps.

The choice of these men, most of whom we have encountered already, reflects the quality of Croker's strategic thinking. Several of them are leading patrons of the arts, for example: Sir George Beaumont, painter, patron to William Wordsworth and generous supporter of the fine arts; Lord Farnborough (Charles Long), one of the founders of the British Institution, an early benefactor of the National Gallery (founded in 1824), a trusted advisor of King George IV on aesthetic matters, and known to Croker as Paymaster General of the forces; and Samuel Rogers. Robert Smirke junior will be useful to have on the Committee as an architect. The inclusion of Sir James Mackintosh, a Whig MP as well as an historian and journalist, sends out the right signals about the non-partisan nature of the club. The 'scientific men' are Davy, Wollaston, Young and Samuel Goodenough, Bishop of Carlisle, who is not only a botanist but also one of the founders of the Linnæan Society, as well as being active in the running of the Royal Society and the Society of Antiquaries. Earl Spencer is president of the Royal Institution, where Faraday – said to have been Davy's greatest discovery and soon to be the temporary secretary of the Athenæum – is superintendent of the house.

Croker then argues that the next logical step is for the Committee to invite 200 individuals to become members. Here he draws on his experience at the Union Club, founded by English and Irish gentlemen in honour of the creation of the United Kingdom through the Acts of Union of 1800, and consisting of 'politicians, and professional and mercantile men, *without reference to party opinions*' (emphasis added).[54] The Union also broke new ground in being the first of the major members' clubs in which the membership 'clubbed' together in order to socialise in style, as distinct from the eighteenth-century proprietary clubs, run for a profit by individuals.[55] Its early history was troubled, however, and a resolution was taken to re-establish the club in 1821, when it was announced that:

> in conformity to the plan adopted on the Establishment of the United Service Club, of considering as Original Members of the Club all Generals, Admirals and Field Officers of the Army and Navy, so, all Noblemen, Baronets, Members of Parliament, and Gentlemen of the highest respectability should have letters written to them, giving to them the same opportunity of thus becoming Original Members of the New Union Club.[56]

Clearly the cachet of being in at the beginning, as an 'original' member, was used as bait when founding or relaunching a club in the 1820s.

When, in September 1821, the committee of the Union Club decided to build their own clubhouse, it was the indefatigable Croker who had 200 copies of a road plan of the 'New Square' (later Trafalgar Square) printed 'at the press of the Admiralty' and then presented them to the committee.[57] The Union Club's first minute books are lost, but the earliest we have, those of 1823, reveal that Croker was very active in committee while Robert Smirke junior's Greek Revival clubhouse was being built on the western side of the square, then a large open space.[58] There were usually weekly committee meetings, on a Wednesday, with three or four members present and often chaired by Viscount Lowther, or by his friend Croker as a substitute. So Croker heard reports on a wide range of domestic matters, such as articles missing from the current temporary clubhouse at 12 Waterloo Place ('46 napkins, 131 rubbers, 11 teacups and 12 saucers, 4 jelly moulds (kitchen)'), the quality of the meat supplied by the splendidly named Mr Giblet and the question of compensation for two injured workmen at the new building.[59] Significantly, he was also present when the possibility of admitting a further 200 members was discussed, in the light of increased costs. Retirements from the committee by rotation, in May 1823, included two future members of the Athenæum, Sir Robert Peel and the Earl Waldegrave; and of the twelve new names, nine were future Athenians.[60] On 4 November 1823, a fortnight before writing his second letter to Davy, Croker attended a small meeting of the building committee of the Union Club to decide upon furniture.[61] The excitement associated with preparing Smirke's clubhouse for the Union, combined with a sense that new members' clubs were good prospects in the early 1820s,[62] energised Croker, encouraging him to pursue his dream of a literary club and thus filling a gap in the market.

Croker concludes his letter of 23 November 1823 by suggesting an entrance fee of 10 guineas and an annual subscription of 5 guineas, enough to provide a 'tolerable house, until we should grow rich enough to build one'.[63] If Sir Humphry agrees, Croker continues, and has found in conversation, as he has, 'a tolerably general assent to the proposition . . . Lawrence and Smirke are both very cordial to it' – he will prepare a prospectus. Davy replied the same day:

> My Dear Sir,
>
> We should lose no time in drawing up the 'Prospectus.' I think members of the Royal and Antiquarian Society, and of the Linnæan, ought to be admitted by ballot; for my idea is that it should be a scientific as well as a literary club. Lord Aberdeen, with whom I have had a good deal of conversation on the subject, has taken it up warmly.
>
> I know already more than 100 persons who wish to belong to it, and many, most of their names will be attractive – Mr. Heber and Mr. Hallam, Mr. Colebrooke, Dr. Young, Mr. Chantrey, Mr. Hatchett, Mr. Brande, Mr. Herschel, and a number of other men of science, will give their names.
>
> When I talked to Lord Spencer on the subject, he did not seem to take an interest in it; and Dr. Wollaston says he is not a man of clubs. But we are certain of success. The difficulty will be in a short name, and one not liable to any Shandean objections. We can talk of this when I have the pleasure of seeing you to-morrow.
>
> I do not think it would be going too far to make members of the corporate scientific and literary bodies eligible by ballot. I see no reason for excluding Judges, Bishops, and Members of both Houses, none of whom can perform their high duties without a competent knowledge of literature.
>
> Very sincerely yours,
> H. Davy[64]

Davy has clearly been sounding out potential members for some time and now shares Croker's sense of urgency. Although Croker referred in March to 'a Club for literary and scientific men, and followers of the fine arts', his latest letter makes no reference to scientists. So now the most famous scientist in the

land, who is past his best but whose latest experiments are still described breathlessly in *The Annual Register*,[65] reminds Croker that it should be 'a scientific as well as a literary club', and that it is this 'idea' that he has been sharing with his own circle of friends and colleagues, a circle that overlaps with Croker's and is equally eclectic. Not that Davy is uncomfortable with the idea of a literary club which also attracts 'followers of the fine arts'. He was a member of the small and exclusive literary dining club, founded by Reynolds and Johnson in 1764, and known simply as 'The Club'.[66] He recorded his impressions of a long Continental tour in 1813–15 in verse.[67] His lectures at the Royal Institution, so popular that Albemarle Street had to be made the first one-way street in London to cope with the crush of carriages, were as elegantly expressed as they were dramatic, and took place in the same rooms as lectures by Constable, Phillips and Haydon on the fine arts. In a few years' time he will be in Italy recuperating after a stroke and recording his 'visions' in a way that is reminiscent of Wordsworth and Blake.[68] Now, however, in November 1823 and as president of the Royal Society, he has consulted his opposite number at the Society of Antiquaries, the earl of Aberdeen, who has taken up the subject of the new club 'warmly' – an encouraging sign from a future prime minister who gives the impression of being cold and reserved, even at his own table.[69] Davy has also talked to the medievalist Henry Hallam, a vice-president of the Antiquaries and a member of Murray's circle, as is Richard Heber, the prodigious book collector and MP for Oxford University. The president of the Astronomical Society of London is the orientalist Henry Colebrooke, one of whose successors will be the mathematician and astronomer John Herschel, winner of the Royal Society's Copley Medal in 1822.[70] Charles Hatchett, a chemist, chaired the meeting of managers of the Royal Institution that approved the appointment of Faraday as a laboratory assistant in 1813, the year in which Davy was succeeded as professor of chemistry there by the steady William Thomas Brande. Four of the individuals mentioned in Davy's letter – Brande, Hatchett, Herschel and Wollaston – were members of the small committee of the Royal Society that he had created earlier in the year to consider the problem of the copper sheathing attached to ships' hulls.[71]

Davy and Croker planned to meet next day, and discussions continued in December 1823 when they exchanged lists of 'Committee-men': Croker's

contained 'about twenty-eight names'.[72] Croker also asked Davy not to extend invitations hastily, saying that he himself had 'applied to no one but to Lord Lansdowne, Sir Walter Scott, and Thomas Moore'. As John Thomson points out in the best essay on the foundation of the Athenæum, 'Lansdowne was a Whig grandee, albeit ready to ally with moderate Tories, Scott a literary Tory and Moore a poet more inclined to the left than to the right, but friends with both': that these three men should be Croker's first choices 'speaks volumes'.[73] Thomson's argument that the bipartisan membership of the club was deliberate, and was primarily due to Croker, is supported by the evidence.[74] His case, however, that 'in the context of its time, it was an innovation which probably could not have succeeded ten years earlier' is rather more questionable: the Union Club was already re-established.

Like other commentators, Thomson focuses upon a particular source or point of departure for the Athenæum, in his case *The Edinburgh* and *The Quarterly*, the calibre and interests of which, he maintains, inspired the creation of the club. He also gives his essay some Scottish spin, suggesting that, if the Athenæum had a model, the Friday Club, established by Scott in Edinburgh in 1803, might be it.[75] Others point to Murray's 'four o'clock club' as the main source, while ignoring Samuel Rogers's breakfasts and similar gatherings of the intelligentsia; in foregrounding the learned societies and their influence, the Royal Institution can be overlooked; and so on. The various intellectual and political circles discussed in this chapter overlapped, and many of the individuals mentioned were involved in several areas of literary and scientific activity, often crossing party political lines in doing so. Interdisciplinary exchange defined the intellectual and cultural life of modern Britain in the 1820s and made the Athenæum possible, largely through Croker's perspicacity and drive. The club's original members included many of the leading figures of the age, whose interests often encompassed a range of disciplines. As we will see in the next chapter, the first Athenians were among those who, in an era of political and institutional reform, shaped early Victorian Britain. The analogy of the literary or scientific 'circle' in this context is perhaps less useful than George Eliot's analogy of the web: touch one strand and the whole web moves.[76] There were almost as many strands to the idea of the Athenæum as there were to Croker's London.

2

‘A COMMITTEE HAVING BEEN FORMED’

In December 1823 John Wilson Croker shelved the problem of finding a ‘short name’ for the club until there was a committee to discuss the matter. He focused instead upon the wording of the prospectus which was to accompany the letters of invitation. This was a crucial moment: his ideas were about to be tested. Having been reminded by Sir Humphry Davy that it should be ‘a scientific as well as a literary club’, Croker gives the ‘scientific’ precedence over the ‘literary’ three times in the opening paragraphs:

> It is proposed to establish a Club for scientific and literary men and Artists, on the principles which have been so successful in the United Service, the Union and other Clubs lately instituted.
>
> It is proposed that the Club shall consist, in the first instance, of 300 Members, to be increased to 500, or more, if the Club, after it is instituted, shall think such an extension advisable.
>
> That persons eligible to this club shall be Authors known by their scientific or literary publications; Artists of eminence in any class of the fine arts; and Noblemen and Gentlemen, distinguished as liberal patrons of science, literature, or the arts.[1]

The prospectus begins as a modest proposal, with its low ceiling for numbers and a bow to recent successes in Clubland; but when it comes to the supremely important question of eligibility it becomes much more ambitious, with its

references to known authorship, eminence, distinction and liberality. (Authorship was a priority for Croker, who in 1838 was to object to the election of Charles Sumner, the Massachusetts politician and lawyer, to Honorary Membership as he 'was not known as the author of any book'.[2])

Modesty prevails, however, as the prospectus continues:

> Candidates shall be admitted, in the first instance, by the Committee, to the number of 300; after which the Club shall be considered as constituted, and it will form its own resolutions as to the mode of admitting other members.
>
> The rules of the United Service, Union and University Clubs, which have been found to combine so much accommodation to their members with so much *economy* and good order, shall be the guide of the Committee in the formation of the regulations of this new club.
>
> The admission money shall be ten guineas, and the annual subscription five guineas.

It was sensible to base the rules and regulations of the new club on those that had worked for others, and it was inevitable that Croker would do the drafting in due course.

The prospectus concludes:

> The Committee will, as soon as a sufficient number of names are obtained, proceed to hire a proper house for the Club, until they shall be enabled to decide on the expediency of building a house for its accommodation.
>
> Noblemen or gentlemen belonging to any of the classes before enumerated, and who may be desirous of belonging to the Club, are requested to signify their wish by letter (post paid, or franked) addressed to 'Mr. Faraday, Royal Institution,' who has undertaken to act as temporary Secretary.
>
> Committee

Faraday, the unworldly Sandemanian who owed his first position at the Royal Institution to Davy, would have felt impelled to respond to the call of his

erstwhile master. Ten years earlier, during Sir Humphry and Lady Davy's long Continental tour, he had served as both valet and research assistant. More recently, when he was proposed for a fellowship of the Royal Society, Davy's opposition hindered the electoral process.[3] Now, as Davy continues to treat him as an assistant in this new project, thus interrupting Faraday's heavy schedule of experimental work,[4] the fellowship is finally confirmed, on 8 January 1824. For the next few months, the brilliant Michael Faraday FRS will slave away as honorary secretary to a fledgling organisation which requires large amounts of paperwork to be handled quickly and efficiently.

Meanwhile Croker's covering letter to Davy, enclosing the draft prospectus, again shows that he has taken the point about scientists: the committee that he proposes includes not only Aberdeen and Chantrey among Davy's 'attractive' names, but also Colebrooke, President of the Astronomical Society of London, Hatchett, the chemist, and Dr Young, the scientific polymath. In his reply, dated 8 February and marked 'Private', Davy pointed out that they now had 'persons in every department of Science except Natural History'.[5] He therefore wished to add the name of Aylmer Bourke Lambert, a vice-president of the Linnæan Society, who would, he thought, be 'very sensible and inoffensive'.

As well as planning the new club, Croker and Davy were urgently discussing the problem of the copper sheathing attached to ships' hulls: on 17 January 1824, Davy was to report directly to Croker on progress with his experiments, believing that Croker's support would ensure that the Navy Board approved practical tests at sea.[6] In his private letter of 8 February, Davy expressed his disappointment at the board's response and asked Croker to petition their lordships at the Admiralty to allow his experiments to continue. As usual, Croker had the upper hand. While flattering Davy by suggesting that they were both 'founders' of the new club, Croker made it clear that he expected his own advice on the committee to be followed and asked Davy 'not to decide on any new names without a consultation', adding, 'My experience in these matters is considerable, and I assure you that all depends on having a Committee with a great *many* good *names* and a *few* working *hands*'.[7]

'Good names' which would attract and reassure recipients of the prospectus included both 'noblemen and gentlemen'. Peers continued to be in the majority in both Tory and Whig cabinets, and dynastic grandees still figured prominently

in public life.[8] (The first three presidents of the Royal Institution were earls and the fourth and fifth were dukes.) As a politician who knew about patronage and presentation, Croker wanted a few big beasts on his committee. Alongside the earls were the presidents of the learned societies and some famous scientists and writers. The 'working hands' were expected to attend meetings and elect the club's first members, thus in effect creating the club. They are italicised here in a list drawn up by Croker and Davy, which is remarkable for its social range in terms of birth and its inclusion of political opponents: the earl of Aberdeen, the earl of Ashburnham, *Sir George Beaumont*, Lord Bexley, *Francis Chantrey* (who trained as a wood-carver, as did Davy's father), *Henry Thomas Colebrooke*, *John Wilson Croker*, Sir Humphry Davy, *Davies Gilbert*, *Sir Henry Halford*, Charles Hatchett, *Richard Heber*, *Joseph Jekyll*, Richard Payne Knight (who declined on health grounds), Aylmer Bourke Lambert, the marquess of Lansdowne, Sir Thomas Lawrence, *Edward Hawke Locker* (a watercolourist, FRS, secretary to Greenwich Hospital and friend of Sir Walter Scott's), Sir Charles Long (1st baron Farnborough in 1826), Sir James Mackintosh, Thomas Moore, Viscount Palmerston, Thomas Lister Parker, Samuel Rogers, *William Stewart Rose*, Robert Smirke junior, Earl Spencer (the Whig Chancellor who was to assist Russell in bringing in the First Reform Act, anathema to Croker) and *Dr Thomas Young*.

Of the politically active members of the proposed committee, eight were Tories and ten were Whigs. Against a background of violent radical activity in the late 1810s and early 1820s, Tories such as Croker, who was an expert on the French Revolution, and Whigs such as Lansdowne were aware that cross-party cooperation and even, *in extremis*, coalition, could be in the national interest. John Thomson suggests that, 'with the prospect of revolution so vividly before them, there was a drawing together throughout the country of the elite and the propertied': the Athenæum was, in a way, a 'product of this feeling of solidarity'.[9] He emphasises the strength of Irish and Scottish interests in the committee, and reflects upon an emerging sense of solidarity between Dublin, Edinburgh and London which was fostered by the quarterlies and the Athenæum, thus helping to create a 'new sense of Britishness'.[10]

The names agreed between Croker and Davy were duly listed by Faraday in the minutes of the inaugural meeting of the Committee on Monday 16 February 1824, truly the birthday of the club, in the apartments of the Royal Society.[11] 'A

Committee having been formed', Davy took the chair, twelve other members being present. But where was Croker? He was not at the Union Club, dealing with the practicalities involved in moving to their new building.[12] Nor was he in the House of Commons, supporting Sir George Clerk, Lord of the Admiralty, in presenting the navy estimates for the year.[13] He was ill, one imagines from a complaint brought on by exhaustion.[14] Whatever the complaint, its effect was that those who gathered in Somerset House to establish the club had to proceed without Croker.

The first resolution of the Committee was 'That the ___Club is established this day': discussion of the 'short name' presumably had to be deferred until Croker was present. It was then resolved that 'the number of Members be limited to five hundred of which four hundred are to be nominated by the Committee and the rest admitted by ballot'. Clearly the response to the prospectus had been even more positive than Croker and Davy had anticipated. Having confirmed the 'admission subscription' of 10 guineas and the 'annual contribution' of 5 guineas, and having named Messrs Drummond as bankers, the meeting resolved that the trustees should be the presidents of the three leading learned societies – Davy, Aberdeen and Lawrence – all of whom were present. A formal alliance between the club and the learned societies was forged.

Five names were then added to the 'Committee of management', which was to have a quorum of nine: the Lord Bishop of Carlisle (Samuel Goodenough, who helped to found the Linnæan Society), the Hon. George Agar-Ellis (a Whig politician and man of letters), Earl Gower (another Whig, later the 2nd duke of Sutherland), Sir Walter Scott and Sir George Staunton (a Canningite Tory MP, traveller and orientalist). Under a final constitutional resolution a sub-committee was appointed, with a quorum of three, 'for the purpose of engaging a suitable house for the temporary service of the Club of purchasing furniture hiring servants and making the necessary preparations for the accommodation of the Members' – precisely the business that Croker had undertaken for the Union Club.[15]

The Committee then turned to the list of 'Noblemen and Gentlemen' who had responded positively to the letter of invitation: they admitted so many members – a total of eighty-two – that Faraday made some slips in the minutes.[16] The best-known figures among them were the duke of Bedford, Viscount

Lowther and the prime minister, the earl of Liverpool, together with two future premiers, Peel and Russell, the geologist Revd William Buckland and Sir Astley Cooper, who was later surgeon to George IV. Less well known at the time, but characteristically Athenian in his range of interests, was Dawson Turner FRS, banker, botanist and antiquary, whose descendants make up one of the club's family dynasties.[17] The list also included the youthful John Lettson Elliot, who managed to outlive all those elected in 1824: he died in 1898.

Thus began a process of election by the Committee which took the membership to around five hundred in four months. Meetings, usually weekly, took place in Joseph Jekyll's house in New Street, Spring Gardens, only a step away from the Admiralty, with Jekyll himself in the chair, even when Croker and Davy were both present.[18] There would have been two advantages to this arrangement. Firstly, the club's founder and its first chairman would be freer to argue for or against candidates. (On 20 February Davy wrote to Croker saying that he was keen to 'pause upon any suspected bores'.)[19] Secondly, Jekyll, famous for the dreadful puns which his generation loved, would have created a convivial atmosphere in his own home. At the first of these meetings, however, on 1 March 1824, a note of caution was sounded. Having repeated the criteria for membership – 'individuals known for their scientific or literary attainments', etc. – the minutes continue with a resolution which suggests that Croker is bringing the Committee to heel when first in attendance: 'It appearing that several persons who do not strictly come under the above description have had notice of their admission. Resolved that they are Members of the Club, but that their admission shall form no Precedent for any departure from the Regulations of the Club.'[20]

Croker was also present the following week, on 8 March, when the Committee resolved that the name of the club should be 'The Society', a dull generic appellation, smacking of hubris and fraught with potential confusion, particularly as it was already applied informally to the Royal Society. He was present again on 29 March, when the twenty-three-year-old Decimus Burton, a protégé of John Nash, gave a verbal report on the house in Regent Street that the Building Committee were considering as a potential temporary home.[21] Indeed, Croker attended every meeting, applying his own style of micro-management to proceedings, until 27 April, when he was absent again. The

following day Jekyll wrote him a letter which gives a vivid insight into the workings of the Committee:

> Dear Croker,
>
> We did as much yesterday at the Committee as could be done in the absence of such a *primum mobile* as yourself. Elections and nominations were expedited. We have now, I should think, 380 members, and above 100 invitations remain unanswered. Verging so closely on our 400, we suspended 50 invitations suggested by a list sent in by Heber, and containing many eligible names.
>
> Saturday next, many of us dine with the Royal Academicians, so the Committee will meet again on Monday, May 3rd.
>
> If our candidates overflow, Davy said the Society might extend its numbers to 600.
>
> Burton said the house might be ready in a fortnight. By Heber's direction Chalié sent in a wine estimate. Wine and servants seem at present the principal desiderata; and except yourself, I think we have no active member for those details. Chalié's wines are high priced. If you desire to inspect his paper before Monday, I will send it to you.
>
> Yours ever,
> Joseph Jekyll.[22]

Jekyll's estimate of 380 members was 8 short of the true number, which can be calculated from the minutes and Faraday's tally of elections.[23] The Committee had elected 187 members at its first three meetings and a further 201 in the six meetings since 15 March. On 8 March, Faraday had been instructed to circulate candidates who had not yet responded to the invitation and prospectus with a reminder that they could become 'original' members if they accepted nomination by the end of the month.[24] This private circular, dispatched from 12 Albemarle Street (the address of the Royal Institution), included the first printed list of 'present members'.[25] Setting aside the Committee, more than half the remaining names of the initial 187 members had some kind of title attached to them: there were two dukes, one marquess, nine earls, five viscounts,

nine lords, ten baronets, eleven knights, five right honourables (three of whom were also knights), nine honourables (one of whom was also a reverend and another two also colonels), one right reverend, thirteen reverends, two captains RN, three colonels, one major, six captains, eight MDs and one LLD (like the bishops, the lawyers seem to have been slow to reply). Most of those who simply had 'esq.' after their names were members of the learned societies – thirty-two of the 'misters' were FRSs, six were FSAs and nine were RAs – or were MPs (five of them). Only thirteen in the list had no stated title or affiliation, and they too are a distinguished group, including Sir Arthur Wellesley's predecessor as MP for Tralee, Samuel Boddington, the poet Thomas Campbell, the architects Charles Robert Cockerell and John Nash, and the young joint secretary of the Geological Society of London, Charles Lyell, later created a baronet.

Throughout the three months of The Society's nascent existence, Croker was also busy at the Union Club, dealing with what Jekyll referred to as 'wine and servants'. As the Union prepared to move into their new Grecian home, designed by Robert Smirke junior, on the western side of what became Trafalgar Square, Croker attended meetings of the building committee that took responsibility for preparing the clubhouse for occupation.[26] He was also involved in planning the Union's move out of its temporary house at 12 Waterloo Place, at the bottom of Regent Street, on 17 April (Plate 2). Croker and Smirke briefed Burton and the rest of The Society's Building Committee on the timing, thus smoothing the path for the new club to take over the house, as the Travellers Club had previously made way for the Union.[27] What is more, among the legal papers in the Athenæum's archive relating to the club's letting agreements with Mr Fielder, the leaseholder of 12 Waterloo Place, is a copy of the Union Club's own agreement of 1822. This was perhaps Croker's copy, which could be used by Clarke, the Athenæum's solicitor, when drafting the new agreement.[28]

By Monday 17 May 1824 – the day on which John Murray burnt the manuscript of Byron's memoirs at 50 Albemarle Street – the Union had moved into its new clubhouse and The Society could bring its own plans to fruition. As Croker could not attend the meeting held at Jekyll's house that day, a letter from him was read from the chair, reporting to the Committee that 'the establishment of servants was now completed and the necessary furniture plate and other articles provided and that the house in Waterloo Place would be ready to

be opened in a few days'.[29] Croker's report reveals the extent to which he used his experience and connections in Clubland. In hiring the servants he was anxious to obtain 'people who had been accustomed to the peculiar business of a Club': 'I have therefore hired a Steward and a Butler, the late head waiter of the Union Club. As Housekeeper, a respectable woman who was barmaid of the United Service Club, and as Man Cook, the person who was late second cook of the latter establishment.' These 'principal servants' recommended 'inferior' ones for vetting by Croker, who then authorised their appointment.

The house, he reported, had been 'thoroughly cleaned within', and some alterations 'in the lower part' had been made under the direction of Decimus Burton. Croker had ordered from Messrs Taprell and Holland twenty dinner tables and sixty chairs of the same pattern and price as those they had furnished to the Union. Shrewdly, he had also arranged for the firm to lend the club more expensive items such as sofas, easy chairs and drawing room tables, 'until the Committee should be able to decide on its probable wants with reference to a new residence'. On the question of wines, next in importance after furniture and servants, he set out comparative prices in shillings per case of port, sherry, madeira, claret, light claret and champagne from three vintners, including Chalié & Co. As those of Messrs Durand & Blakeway were the lowest (49, 52, 71, 78–90, 56–66 and 105 shillings respectively), and as it was necessary to bottle some port, sherry and madeira immediately, he had placed an order with them. The Committee could decide on policy for the longer term once they had tasted the wines, but Croker could testify that some 'gentlemen of his acquaintance' had been well served by the firm. Coals were ordered from Messrs Feetham, glassware from Messrs Pellatt & Green, who had served the Union Club, silverware, 'plated articles' and cutlery from Messrs Thomas & Co., beds for the servants from the suppliers to the Union, along with kitchen furniture. Messrs Billings had been contracted for the servants' liveries at £4. 15s. 0d. per suit, 'viz. a fine drab coat with plated buttons, a waistcoat of the same with sleeves, and black velveteen breeches and drawers'. Croker suggested that the Committee might prefer plush to velveteen 'after half a year's trial', but that the tailor himself recommended velveteen. With his eye for detail, developed after many years considering the fitting out and victualling of ships at the Admiralty, Croker seems to have thought of everything.

The Committee duly thanked Croker *in absentia* and instructed Faraday to have the clubhouse ready to receive the Committee on Friday 28 May. In stating that those who wished to dine that evening as a Committee were to 'give in their names accordingly', there began a tradition which continues to this day. Faraday was further ordered to circulate the first four hundred or so members with a printed list and notice of a General Meeting at 12 Waterloo Place on 1 June, at which the Committee's proceedings were to be confirmed, the rules and regulations adopted and the Committee's preferred new name for the club, 'The Athenæum', discussed.[30] Faraday, who had 'afforded his gratuitous services to the Committee during the formation of the Club', was to be offered the office of secretary with a salary of £100 per annum, subject to the 'approbation of the General meeting'. Finally, fifteen new members were elected and Jekyll was thanked for his hospitality. Within a fortnight of this last meeting in Spring Gardens all but one of the Committee's resolutions had been enacted.

At 11 a.m. on Saturday 22 May 1824, the General Committee of the new club gathered at its first home, 12 Waterloo Place, by then in the final stages of preparation after the departure of the Union Club. The house was in the north-west corner of Waterloo Place and was rented by the club from Fielder for £900 per annum, including taxes.[31] The building was later demolished (the club rescued a shattered volute as a keepsake),[32] but a schedule of furniture and effects in the Union Club's indenture of 1822 indicates that the clubhouse contained a billiard room, a large drawing room, a 'Chinese Room', library, 'dining parlour', coffee room (i.e. larger dining room) and a small back parlour.[33] It was clearly a dusty house. In March 1825, Philip Duncan, keeper of the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, wrote to Heber suggesting that 'it would be advisable to cover our dining room entirely with oil cloth like that which is now laid down at the Entrance', adding that 'the room is not fit for use for some time after it is brush'd in the morning.'[34] That the house was suitable only as a temporary home, largely because of the 'limited means of accommodation' which it afforded,[35] is evident from the fact that both the Travellers Club and the Union had moved on to purpose-built clubhouses, as the Athenæum was to do in 1830. Indeed, even before they moved into 12 Waterloo Place the Committee had passed a resolution relating to 'the house to be built'.[36]

The main purpose of the Saturday meeting was to confirm the rules and regulations that had been approved by a sub-committee the previous day. Both Davy and Croker were present, but no chairman is specified in the minutes.[37] Variations in the texts suggest that Croker, the consummate draftsman of Admiralty documents, had probably worked through the Union Club and United Service Club rules line by line and amended them where necessary.[38] Whereas the United Service had a committee of thirty-six, the Athenæum opted for twenty-four, as at the Union, although initially there were in fact thirty-three members. They were to hold weekly meetings at 1 p.m. on Tuesdays, whereas the Union, like the United Service, met on Wednesdays: so Croker could ride two horses. The Athenæum followed the Union in having five trustees, of whom two were to be elected from the Committee. All three clubs opened at 9 a.m. and closed their doors to new arrivals at 2 a.m.,[39] all banned gambling – an important feature of the older 'fashionable' clubs in St James's Street – and all were insistent that no dogs should be taken into their clubhouses.[40]

The object of the club was expressed simply and with characteristic solemnity: it was for the 'association' of its members (Rule I). For provincial members who had business or social engagements in the metropolis, the clubhouse provided a haven. Many original members of The Society lived in or around St James's, however, in houses which they owned or rented, particularly during parliamentary sessions, and this is reflected in its Rule XXVI: 'no Provisions cooked in the Club-house or Wines or other Liquors, are to be sent out of the house *on any pretence whatsoever*'. For those who lived or worked nearby, 'association' in the clubhouse could be casual and frequent. (For example, in the late 1820s and early 1830s the vicinity of Spring Gardens was inhabited not only by Jekyll, but also Decimus Burton, Sir Astley Cooper, John (later Lord) Campbell and Sir James Scarlett, all early members, and by Joseph Freeman and John Hill who joined in the 1840s. Among many other examples, John Taylor lived at 13 Waterloo Place and Henry Southern lived in Suffolk Street, Pall Mall East.) A century and a half later, amendments to the wording of Rule I were to reflect changes in the living and working patterns of members, and were to signal the reinvention of the club for a different age.[41]

A number of other matters associated with the rules and regulations needed to be settled at the Saturday meeting. Most significantly, the club's new name,

the 'Athenæum', was confirmed and adopted for use at the head of notices. Derived from the temple in Athens where poets, philosophers and orators met to share their ideas, the name of the new 'literary' club announced its commitment to intellectual exchange – a significant aspect of 'association' for its species of member – under the auspices of Athena, the goddess of wisdom in the ancient world, also known as Minerva by the Romans. (Athena/Minerva's association with owls is illustrated in William Miller's engraving of 1829, Plate 3.) A representation of Athena's temple figured on the cover of the magazine entitled *The Athenæum* (1828–1921), many of whose contributors would be members of the club. An earlier monthly magazine of the same name, offering 'literary and miscellaneous information', was edited by the Unitarian John Aikin MD. This journal epitomised the spirit of rational enquiry and the defence of civil and religious liberty that was fostered by Joseph Priestley and his circle, of which Aikin was a member, in the late eighteenth century. The term 'Athenæum' had a particular resonance in the north of England. The Liverpool Athenæum, founded in 1797 as a library and news room for 'the acquisition of knowledge', was visited by an approving Washington Irving, an original member of the St James's Athenæum, in the mid-nineteenth century.[42] Manchester's Athenæum was established in 1835 for the 'advancement and diffusion of knowledge', and numerous smaller Athenæums with similar aims sprang up around Britain. The Boston Athenæum, founded in 1807, still flourishes today as a membership library; the founding of the Athenaeum Club of Melbourne in 1868 fulfilled colonial aspirations; and there are numerous other examples overseas.

In St James's in 1824 the new name expressed the club's classical ideals and thus its non-sectarian and non-partisan identity. It also made a statement about the quality of its membership. Sir Thomas Lawrence designed a handsome seal, based on the goddess's helmeted head, which was engraved by William Wyon RA: it remains the club's emblem today (Plate 4).[43] At a more mundane level, the club's change of name was later to come to the attention of London's Central Criminal Court during a case relating to stolen linen. Over the weeks leading up to the occupation of 12 Waterloo Place, the newly acquired linen had been marked with the name of The Society, and some of this remained in use for the first five years of the club's existence. We know this because Martha Geary, the housekeeper during those years, was accused of stealing '2 sheets, value 8s.;

8 napkins, value 7s., and 22 table-cloths, value 6l., the goods of the Earl of Aberdeen and others', and in October 1829 the club's representative had to explain to an Old Bailey jury that some of the club's linen was marked 'The Society' and some 'The Athenæum'.[44] Although found not guilty, Geary was less fortunate when also indicted on the same day for stealing linen from General Stapylton's house.

The temporary clubhouse was duly opened on Monday 31 May 1824. Next day Croker took the chair for the first regular Tuesday meeting of the General Committee, at which a further twenty-four new members were elected.[45] Davy was present at the meeting, and it soon became apparent why he was not chairing it: Faraday announced that he would not be accepting the Committee's offer of the post of secretary, due to pressure of work elsewhere. By offering him a salaried position, which he could decline, the Committee had freed him from Davy's control. As a mark of their gratitude to Faraday, who had served in an honorary capacity during the club's gestation, the Committee made him an honorary member and waived his entrance fee and his subscription for the current year. They also accepted his recommendation of Edward Magrath as his successor, and on the same terms.[46]

Once settled at 12 Waterloo Place, the General Committee dealt with numerous practical matters associated with establishing and running a club-house, while also taking advice from the Building Committee, which was to meet numerous obstacles on the road to establishing a permanent home – the subject of the next chapter. The new clubhouse could not be afforded unless the membership grew. On Saturday 22 May the General Committee had decided that the membership was to be increased by 200, half of whom would be chosen by the Committee and half elected by ballot. A further extraordinary meeting was held the following Wednesday, 26 May, primarily to start the process of electing a further 100 members.[47] This was a young club in a hurry: with Jekyll in the chair, and with both Davy and Croker present, they elected thirty-two new members. They directed that a letter of invitation be sent to 'all the Judges not already members', all English archbishops and bishops, the four Irish archbishops and the bishops of Limerick, Raphoe and Dromore. This covered an important point formerly agreed between Croker and Davy during the planning phase. They also resolved to maintain the pace of elections by

establishing a House Committee which would meet for an hour before each regular weekly meeting 'until the fifth hundred of the members be filled'.

After only four meetings the House Committee had filled its quota of one hundred, at which point the General Committee decided that they should nominate a further fifty.[48] This incremental process continued throughout 1824, with the result that the great majority of the 990 members listed in January 1825 had been elected by the General Committee. A Candidates Book, opened on 30 June 1824 for the use of the general membership, yielded only thirty-one new balloted members by the same date.[49] The General Committee's earlier decision to have half the candidates balloted had been quietly set aside.[50] The upshot was that control remained firmly in the hands of the Committee. From the beginning, membership of the club signified either recognised distinction or potential. In an age, however, in which patronage or personal support was needed in any transaction or appointment, it was taken for granted that individuals also had to know at least one member of the Committee, and preferably several. Each Committee member was expected to propose names, and, if he wished, could exercise considerable influence by attending meetings and speaking for or against candidates. In his letter of 28 April 1824, quoted earlier, Jekyll informed Croker that Richard Heber had sent in a list of at least fifty names.[51] The fact that Committee members submitted batches of names helps to explain why those elected at a particular meeting sometimes included a high proportion of one profession or calling. On 31 August 1824, for example, eight of the nineteen members elected were doctors of divinity, including the 'high and dry' Revd Henry Phillpotts, who was later to be a combative Bishop of Exeter.[52]

In choosing virtually the whole of the foundation membership, the Committee, steered strongly by Croker, set the tone of the club for generations to come; and 215 of those elected in 1824 were still on the list of members in 1858.[53] Over the twelve months that it took to elect the one thousand original members, at an average rate of over eighty a month, a high standard was set. The ratio of noblemen to gentlemen is rather higher in the first list of 187 members (March 1824) than in later lists, where professionals such as lawyers and clergy, and gentlemen belonging to the learned societies, figure in large numbers.[54] Although all three categories in Croker's initial prospectus – 'scientific and literary men and Artists' – are represented, it is the scientists who stand out, not

only in terms of their eminence but also for their contribution to the life of the club. Alongside the physicists, chemists, botanists, astronomers and geologists were pioneering engineers and inventors who helped to create a modern infrastructure for the age of steam. George and John Rennie junior were among those elected at the first meeting of the General Committee; Thomas Telford, president of the Institution of Civil Engineers, followed in March 1824 and Mark Isambard Brunel in May. These early engineer members 'carried many of the marks associated with the élite – working and residing in Westminster and often also qualified as lawyers, well-placed for promoting parliamentary bills to develop roads, bridges, canals and railways'.[55] Among the inventors who followed a less conventional route to fame was Sir William Congreve, elected in April 1824, whose successful experiments at Woolwich – Congreve rockets terrified the French, even though they did little actual damage – were followed by other inventions, some of which worked, included a hydropneumatic canal lock and sluice, a perpetual motion machine, a process of colour printing and a gas meter. A great favourite of King George IV's, he was also MP for Plymouth.

Of the original members, however, it was the geologists who had the highest profile within the club: Sir Roderick Murchison and General Sir Edward Sabine both became trustees, and Buckland and Lyell served on the General Committee. (All but Buckland, a clergyman, were later knighted.) Every president of the Geological Society from 1824 to mid-century was a member of the club.[56] Geology was the most controversial of the sciences in the 1830s, when differences between the 'catastrophist' theories of William Buckland, Canon of Christ Church and Oxford's first Reader in Geology, and the 'uniformitarian' arguments presented by his brilliant former pupil, Charles Lyell, raised difficulties for those who read the early chapters of Genesis as history.[57] Although it is true that academic disagreements could generally be separated from personal feelings 'among the clubbable' at the Athenæum,[58] it is unlikely that sensitive topics such as the fossil record never brought a flush to a clerical cheek there.

Most of the leading geologists could be described as 'compound characters', a phrase applied by William Jerdan to Lord Eldon, himself an Athenian, who was not only a lawyer and judge but also a politician and statesman.[59] Murchison could have been speaking for several of them when he recalled that, as an 'active' original member of the club, he 'had a finger in most things which were stirring

among men of letters, art, and science'.[60] The Revd William Whewell DD, who published on geology (he invented the terms 'catastrophist' and 'uniformitarian'), mineralogy, philosophy, architecture, theology, physics, political economy, mathematics, education and the history of science, was perhaps the most wide-ranging among a number of early nineteenth-century polymaths who were also active in public life: Whewell was president of the Geological Society for two years and Master of Trinity College, Cambridge for a quarter of a century, actively engaged in university politics.[61] These compound characters also tended to be collaborative, as in the case of the Geological Survey, founded in 1835 by several members of the club. Similarly with the Zoological Society of London, instituted by Sir Humphry Davy in 1824 and presided over by his friend Sir Stamford Raffles, recently returned from Singapore. The institution developed its famous zoological gardens through the efforts of the marquess of Lansdowne, Joseph Sabine and Sir Robert Peel, all original members of the Athenæum, and of Lord Auckland and Nicholas Aylward Vigors, both elected in 1830. Decimus Burton, the future architect of the Athenæum's clubhouse and an original member, designed the layout for the zoo. Raffles became a member of the Athenæum in November 1824 and joined the General Committee eighteen months later.

Some of the most active members in the club were also the busiest outside it. Dr Thomas Young, for example, who attended twenty-five meetings of the General Committee in the first year of its existence, rivalled Whewell as a polymath and had even more demands upon his time in the wider world.[62] A child prodigy from a Quaker background, he mastered ten languages, studied medicine at Edinburgh, Göttingen and Cambridge, and became an effective if somewhat aloof physician at St George's hospital in London, handsome, rich (by inheritance) and happily married. He was professor of natural philosophy (1801) and a rather ineffective superintendent of the house at the Royal Institution, and became foreign secretary to the Royal Society. As a botanist, he announced new discoveries to the Linnæan Society; as a physicist, he developed theories of light, elasticity ('Young's modulus') and surface tension; and as a physiologist, he worked on the muscularity of fibres attached to the eye. He assisted in the interpretation of the hieroglyphics on the Rosetta Stone, wrote the article on Egypt for the supplement to the *Encyclopædia Britannica* (1819)[63]

and contributed articles to Murray's *Quarterly Review* on a wide range of subjects. Several of the colleagues whom Young encountered on the way were later to be fellow members of the Athenæum and its General Committee.

It is Young's work on longitude, however, that best illustrates the kind of relationship that existed between professional networks and club life. The bill that consolidated early acts for rewarding the discovery of longitude, and that established a new Nautical Almanac, was introduced to the House of Commons by Croker, as Secretary to the Admiralty, in 1818.[64] It was again Croker who presided over the transfer of responsibility from the Board of Longitude to the Admiralty in 1828, four years after he founded the Athenæum. A member of the board who also 'assisted in the obsequies' was Davies Gilbert, an original member of the club who was Davy's successor as president of the Royal Society and was one of Bodmin's two MPs, the other being Croker.[65] The advisors to the Admiralty on longitude were also original members: Young, as superintendent of the Nautical Almanac, assisted by Faraday, as a chemist, and Colonel Sabine, as a 'practical observer'. Even the opposition originated within the club, in the shape of the irascible James South FRS, astronomer and original member.[66] In 1829 South published a pamphlet entitled *Refutation of the Numerous Mistatements and Fallacies contained in a Paper presented to the Admiralty by Dr. Thomas Young*, a copy of which is held in the Athenæum library.[67] Back in 1818, South reported, Croker found fifty-eight errors in the Almanac, and yet today the number remains the same; and whereas the post of superintendent was once full time, Dr Young has at least five other stipendiary positions, leaving little time for the Almanac, which should now be reformed.[68] South was knighted two years later.

Although Croker's concept of a 'literary' club was broad, it is surprising to see how few creative writers there were among the original members. Keats, Shelley and Byron had died, and in any case would have been considered no more clubbable than Wordsworth, the great philosophical poet of the 'egotistical sublime', and Coleridge, who held court in Highgate. Scott and Moore were both on the first General Committee, although neither attended meetings. George Crabbe and Thomas Campbell were also original members, as were a string of authors whose poetry is little known today, including the Revd Henry Hart Milman, Thomas Babington Macaulay, Samuel Rogers and Francis

Palgrave. The fine arts were rather better represented: among the Academicians were Lawrence, Chantrey, Mulready, Phillips, Soane, Turner and Wilkie.

Whereas documentary material relating to elections at the Athenæum is plentiful, evidence of attendance at the clubhouse is harder to come by, and accounts of conversations harder still, as an unwritten rule of confidentiality has generally prevailed. Some raw data are available from 1830 in the form of selected dinner bills, preserved by a miracle of archival retentiveness, which have members' comments on the food and wine scribbled on the back. Many past members who attended the clubhouse on a particular day did not dine, however, and in order to discover more we have to draw upon anecdotal evidence in the biographies, journals and letters of members in each generation. Three examples from the early years of the club will suffice to indicate the scattered nature of such evidence.

In a century of religious revival and intense sectarian controversy, some of the most voluminous 'lives and letters' are by and about clergymen. Joseph Blanco White's long journey from Seville, where he was brought up and trained for the Catholic priesthood, to Liverpool and Unitarianism, via Oxford, Anglican orders and Dublin, is the subject of the once widely read *Life, written by Himself, with Portions of his Correspondence*, edited by his friend John Hamilton Thom, a Unitarian minister, in three substantial volumes (1845). Following his election to the Athenæum on 22 March 1824, White was one of the first members to donate books to the club.[69] Unique in his spiritual formation, he might also be the only member to have been awarded a degree in the clubhouse. Among the journal entries towards the end of the first volume of the *Life* are these:

> 19 April 1826: Received a letter from Dr. Coplestone [Provost of Oriel College, Oxford], telling me that the University is about to give me a Diploma of Master of Arts . . .
>
> 28 April 1826: To the Athenæum, – met the two Duncans, in whose presence Dr. Coplestone gave me my Diploma, with the hearty congratulations of all.[70]

Further entries record how White first wore his Master's gown in Oxford, on 3 October 1826, later preaching there and having long conversations on

walks with Whately and Newman of Oriel.[71] Whereas histories of the Tractarians are enriched by quotations from letters and journals recording conversations in college rooms and on walks in Oxford, similar records from the early years of the Athenæum are not available to the historian.[72] The paucity of the evidence can be illuminating, however, as when we find only one example among Blanco White's selected letters of his writing on club paper: this was when he was a candidate for a post and presumably wanted to make a good impression.[73]

Connop Thirlwall, the highly literary Bishop of St David's, was described by Gladstone as 'one of the most masculine, powerful, and luminous intellects that have for generations been known among the bishops of England'.[74] Thirlwall's work on the *History of Greece* and his deep involvement in a series of ecclesiastical controversies are described in his letters and *Remains*, published posthumously in five octavo volumes. When the Committee elected him, on 2 November 1824, they were adding to the membership, not a clergyman but a barrister: the 'great change in his life', when he 'abandoned the legal for the clerical profession', occurred in 1827.[75] It was said, hyperbolically, that only Thirlwall and Julius Hare (elected in 1825) had enough German to read Schleiermacher in the early 1820s. On 1 November 1824, the day before his election, Thirlwall wrote to Hare from 52 Lincoln's Inn Fields: 'The plan of the *Athenæum* is very tempting, though I am afraid I shall not be able to make much use of it. Still I think I can hardly decline so flattering an offer.'[76] It is likely that many other original members felt equally flattered and accepted the club's invitation in the knowledge that they would make little use of the clubhouse: it was membership that mattered. Thirlwall himself went on to Cambridge and ordination, eventually becoming a bishop who, on visits to London, wrote from 1 Regent Street. Evidence of his dropping into the clubhouse is not to be found in the five volumes.

Our third example is the diarist Henry Crabb Robinson, barrister, German scholar and a friend of Blake, Wordsworth and Coleridge, who were to figure prominently in his famous *Reminiscences*, again published posthumously. When he first visited 12 Waterloo Place, on 1 July 1824, he recorded that it was 'a genteel establishment' and added: 'I foresee that it will not answer my purpose as a dining-place, and, if not, I gain nothing by it as a lounge for papers, &c.'[77] He was to change his mind, however, and in 1851 appended to this entry a

reminiscence in which he stated that the club constituted one of the 'great elements' of his 'ordinary life'. In fact his becoming a member had proved to be an 'epoch' in his life: 'I had a place of resort at all times, and my circle of acquaintance was greatly increased.'[78]

In Robinson's diary entry of 4 May 1825 we get a rare glimpse of a private social event at Waterloo Place, probably held in the 'Dining Parlour', with a narrowly professional *dramatis personae*:

> A house dinner at the Athenæum set on foot by me. It went off very well indeed. I took the bottom of the table. We had Edward Littledale at the top. The rest barristers, or coming to the Bar, viz: – F. Pollock, Storks, Wightman, L. Adolphus, Wood, and Amos, Dodd and his pupil, Lloyd – not an unpleasant man of the party. The conversation not at all professional or pedantic. We broke up early. I remained at the place till late. After my nap, Sir Thomas Lawrence came in, Dawson Turner, &c. The President and Turner talked of the present Exhibition, Turner asserting it to be superior to the Exhibitions in the days of Sir Joshua. This Sir Thomas denied.[79]

Professional networking, followed by a nap (on a sofa or deep armchair) and concluding with a chat with friends who drop in: the kind of evening which modern members would recognise. Again, however, we have to rely on scraps of evidence rather than a solid body of material relating to life at no. 12.

Like most of the original members, White, Thirlwall and Robinson were elected by the Committee. There had been some balloting for new members since the summer of 1824, but this became a more significant aspect of club life only after the original members had been listed in March 1825. As the Committee had resolved that the number of members would 'not on any pretence exceed one thousand',[80] it was now only through vacancies caused by death, resignation or expulsion that it was possible to join the club. Again the hand of Croker can be detected in the shaping of policy. Davy may have signed the first Annual Report of 1825, but it was Croker who drafted it, at the request of the General Committee. There is much justifiable trumpeting of the first year's achievements, especially in the paragraph on membership. A reference to politics strikes a new note, reflecting satisfaction that no fewer than

100 MPs, including Huskisson, Palmerston, Peel and Russell, were among the original members:

> The estimation, in which the Club and its objects are held, may be best appreciated, by observing that the List of Members includes the names of the most distinguished Literary, Scientific, and Political characters, and of the most eminent and successful Artists of the present day. And the Committee have the pleasure of adding, that the desire of being associated to this Institution is by no means diminished, and that there are numerous Candidates of great respectability, who, as it has been thought necessary to limit the Members to One Thousand, must await the occurrence of vacancies.[81]

In the months that followed, a number of problems associated with balloting came to light. On 15 June 1825, several members 'declared their belief that they had not voted as they intended in consequence of a misapprehension arising from the marks on the Boxes'.[82] Heber and Rose, as members of the General Committee, declared the ballot void and ordered Magrath to remove the balls from the boxes 'without making himself acquainted with the results'. The following month another ballot was declared void as only six members voted.[83] This was probably unusual, although there is no hard evidence, the earliest balloting certificates having been lost. The first surviving certificates indicate that one of the candidates whose names were entered in the book in mid-January 1825 and who went into the ballot thirteen months later was elected (51 yes, 2 no), and another was rejected (45 yes, 6 no).[84] 'Blackballing' meant placing a cork ball on the black 'no' side of the wooden divider inside the box: more than one 'black ball' to ten balls on the white 'yes' side led to rejection. Clerks were stationed at the ballot boxes to take the names of members, in an attempt to prevent them from voting early and voting often.[85] Feelings could run high as ballot days approached, as a minute of the General Committee meeting on 24 January 1826 reveals:

> Ordered That the names of Parties proposed for Ballot be hung up as usual and that the Secretary be directed to provide a Glass Frame to prevent their

> being disfigured. The same to be kept under Lock and Key and that members who think proper be allowed to add their names to those of the proposer and seconder certifying their acquaintance with the Candidate either personal or from a knowledge of his works.[86]

This distinction between personal acquaintance with the candidate and 'a knowledge of his works' (note the plural) is retained in the Candidates Book of the Athenæum to this day. Evidence of both clubbability and a substantial contribution to science, literature or the fine arts was required for success in elections which became increasingly testing later in the nineteenth century, as both the list of candidates and the years of waiting lengthened, and the bar was raised to one black ball to fifteen white.[87]

While attempting to limit the abuses associated with ballot boxes and cork balls, the General Committee also retained as much power as possible in the selection of members. In February 1826 they 'abrogated' their own self-denying ordinance, thus enabling members of the Committee to propose or second candidates in the book: their status in the club ensured a good number of signatures on a certificate and votes in a ballot.[88] At the AGM in May 1827 they proposed electing a further 200 members themselves, 'in the manner in which the election of Members was conducted up to the period when the present number of the Club was completed'.[89] A year later they proposed to the AGM that they should elect one-third of the candidates for vacancies without ballot in any one year, but this too was rejected by the membership.[90] After a further two years, in 1830, they succeeded in introducing the famous 'Rule II', whereby the Committee could elect no more than nine particularly distinguished members without ballot each year.[91] Meanwhile membership of the General Committee, which was to rotate on a regular basis, was itself balloted for, thus making the group rather more representative than formerly. Trustees, however, including Croker, remained on the committee.

Once settled into 12 Waterloo Place, the General Committee began its weekly meetings with housekeeping: approving bills, getting cheques signed by trustees and making decisions on a wide range of practical matters which the secretary and senior servants brought to their attention. In August 1824, for example, with Croker in the chair, the Committee ordered that 'the Servants be

supplied with working Jackets, Trousers and Hats', presumably to save those fine liveries.[92] During 1825 the Committee ordered that green cloth be provided for the coffee room tables, approved the wording for a form letter which the steward could send to debtors, ordered that fires be lit when the temperature fell below 62° F or on demand, and stipulated that 'the Green Grocery be purchased from Covent Garden Market'.[93] Disciplinary matters arose from time to time. In December 1846 it was reported that the barrister Charles Edward Dodd, a member of Henry Crabb Robinson's party the previous year, had brought a 'stranger' into the clubhouse and had dinner with him in the coffee room. The secretary was instructed to write, warning him against repeating 'so manifest an offence against the fundamental constitution of the Society', lest steps be taken to expel him.[94]

Having dispatched the immediate business of the day, the Committee would then turn to more general matters of policy. Perhaps the most significant innovation was agreed at a meeting on 2 November 1824, with Davy in the chair: 'Resolved that from the commencement of the sittings of the Royal Society until the rising of Parliament a conversazione be held every Monday evening at nine o' Clock.'[95] Fine-tuning was required at subsequent meetings to make these occasions more attractive to members and to strengthen still further the club's connection with the learned societies: tea was to be served at the club's expense (7 December) and the three presidents were to be 'privileged to introduce five Visitors each at the Monday evening parties' (14 December). Even as the ceiling of 1,000 members was reached, the committee was seeking a means of introducing strong candidates to the club who might later fill any vacancies.

The administrative work associated with these meetings was handled by the first salaried secretary, Edward Magrath. In his 1926 history of the Athenæum, Humphry Ward simply states that Magrath had a keen sense of humour, was friendly with Jekyll and Faraday, served well for many years and was a serious loss to the club when he retired in 1855, shortly before his death.[96] F.R. Cowell does not even mention Magrath's thirty-one years of service in his 1975 history, although he makes much of the fact that some eminent early *members* of the club came from humble origins: Faraday and Chantrey (1824), Daniel Maclise RA (1841), John Gould FRS (1854), Richard Cobden (1858) and W.P. Frith

RA (1859), for example.[97] Cowell's defensiveness on questions relating to class and Ward's Olympian approach to the question reflect the attitudes of earlier generations. The appointment of a good secretary, crucial to any club's well-being, was awkward in terms of the rigid social hierarchy of the day. Like a governess in a private house, who was neither servant nor family, a club secretary operated in a liminal position between classes. In 1829 Magrath, for it was he at the Old Bailey, answered to Lord Aberdeen, a trustee of the Athenæum, and also managed the light-fingered housekeeper, Martha Geary. Earlier, in the first years of his secretaryship, class had been a factor in Magrath's troubled relationship with the Committee.

Little is known about Magrath, even though he served for three decades at the Athenæum and was of sufficient standing to be portrayed in oils by a well-known artist.[98] Some light was shed by Faraday's first biographer, Henry Bence Jones, who cited memoranda of Faraday's in which he explained how Magrath, as secretary of the City Philosophical Society, had introduced him as a member in 1813.[99] The society, he went on, 'consisted of thirty or forty individuals, perhaps all in the humble or moderate rank of life', who met every Wednesday evening 'for mutual instruction'. That spring, Faraday and Magrath established a 'mutual-improvement plan' and met either at the former's rooms in the attics of the Royal Institution or at the latter's place of work, a ribbon warehouse in Wood Street: 'It consisted perhaps of half-a-dozen persons, chiefly from the City Philosophical Society, who met of an evening to read together, and to criticise, correct, and improve each other's pronunciation and construction of language. The discipline was very sturdy, the remarks very plain and open, and the results most valuable. This continued for several years.'[100]

In September 1826 Faraday, by now director of the laboratory at the Royal Institution, wrote from there to Magrath, secretary of the Athenæum, who was in France, with some reassuring news: 'I was at the Athenæum nearly two whole days looking over the Journals all seemed right there. I have not been lately. There is nobody in town.'[101] The following year Faraday added a postscript to another letter from the Royal Institution, asking Magrath how much he paid his 'waiting man' per night for attendance at the club: 'he charges us 5/- which we think rather high'.[102] These letters are from one professional gentleman to another. The servant side of Magrath's story emerges from his commonplace book, referred to obliquely

by Ward but hitherto largely ignored.[103] As in his thousands of official minutes of meetings, there are spelling mistakes. Many of the entries record comments, particularly witticisms, made by Committee members. Occasionally, however, when Magrath feels aggrieved in his lonely position as the senior member of staff at the Athenæum, he writes private minutes in his commonplace book. A scribbled entry misleadingly dated 30 August 1826 reveals not only the source of Magrath's unhappiness but also something of club life at 12 Waterloo Place:

> Lord Guilford's Secretary Mr Robertson was here taking Coffee this afternoon. On stating to him the hard bargain made with me as Secretary of the Athenæum he encourage [sic] me by stating that his outset in Official Life he received a hundred Guineas a year only from his Patron but that he soon was employed by Lord Guilford and that he is now well provided for. I requested him to bear me in mind because my remuneration of £200 a year with the obligations to keep up appearances and a residence in the house is not adequate. It is scarcely credible that a body like the Committee of the Athenæum could have descended to the paltry saving of Thirty pounds a year after having requested as a favour that I would come to reside in the house. Perhaps such a proceeding was never heard of and I will therefore record it. After having procured my assent to reside in the house – Sir H Davy said – You will save your Lodging – We shall charge you Twenty Pounds. I enquired what I was to do for Breakfast as I could not afford to pay eighteen pence a morning and one shilling an Evening for Tea to the Coffee Room keeper. On which he of course with the consent of the Committee deducted me another Ten pounds – Leaving me £170 a year with the privilege of paying for Dinners at the Coffee Room prices – Adding a stipulation that I should confine my services exclusively to the Athenæum – The members of the committee as written under the direction of Mr Locker are curious and will be found amongst my Papers. The members present were – Sir H Davy – H T Colebrooke Charles Hatchett Richard Heber E H Locker W S Rose and Dr Young – After the Committee broke up Mr Heber asked me if I was satisfied I asked him how it was possible to be so. On which he said Mr Locker and I fought a hard-battle [sic] for you Sir H D strove hard to confine you to a £100 a year.[104]

The waspish Croker was far from universally popular at the Athenæum, and here is Sir Humphry Davy being betrayed by Heber, a fellow trustee. It seems that Faraday's departure had only hardened Davy's attitude towards the secretaryship. Davy had taken the chair when Magrath's case was discussed by the General Committee for the second time, on 14 June 1826.[105] The unminuted meeting with Magrath must have taken place on or around that day, as by 25 June Scott was lamenting the fact that Heber had resigned as MP for Oxford and gone abroad, long after rumours of homosexual activity had begun circulating in London.[106]

The dispute between Magrath and the club remained unresolved for months. Various compromises were suggested by the Committee on 12 December 1826, but Magrath was far from satisfied.[107] He wrote in his commonplace book:

> It will scarcely be credited that the representatives of such a body as the Athenæum could condescend to deal in a style with an acknowledged important Officer which would disgrace an inferior merchant or Tradesman. I have still the privilege of paying for my Dinners because say they I might choose to be extragavant [sic]; thus putting me on a worse footing than their upper Servants who have unlimited command of the Provisions . . .

Magrath's request was met in due course: his salary was raised from £200 to £250 in 1830 and to £300 in 1835, and for the rest of his career he enjoyed his life at the club, according to his niece.[108]

A happier aspect of the General Committee's work was its gradual building of a library.[109] A number of bibliophiles were available to advise them, including the 2nd earl Spencer, president of the Roxburghe Club in 1812; Viscount Morpeth, soon to be the 6th earl of Carlisle; the antiquary James Heywood Markland; Earl Gower, later the 2nd duke of Sutherland; Heber, the collector who filled eight houses with books, and who believed that a gentleman should own three copies of every title, one for show, one for use and one for borrowers; and, initially, the Revd Thomas Frognall Dibdin, an obsessive bibliographer whose catalogue of Earl Spencer's library at Althorp was unreliable, but whose charming accounts of bibliographical tours of the libraries of Europe and

whose book, *Bibliomania*, first published in 1809, made him famous. Later in life, Dibdin recorded that he was pleased to have 'contributed, in conjunction with the late Sir Humphry Davy and Mr. Heber, to the establishment of the Athenæum'.[110] Of the thirty-one members of the Roxburghe Club who subscribed to its first publication, no fewer than twenty were future members of the Athenæum, six of them serving on its General Committee.[111]

To begin with, the library was formed largely through donations, a process that was strongly encouraged by the Committee. On the cover sheet of a printed list of the first 506 members, dated 22 June 1824, 12 Waterloo Place, and intended to attract more members, were these words: 'All members of the Club are invited to present copies of their published works, for the purpose of forming a Library for the use of the Club.'[112] The first donations of books – they were charmingly called 'presents' – were from William Stewart Rose, a member of the General Committee, who in June 1824 gave copies of his *Letters from the North of Italy* (1819), addressed to fellow Committee member Henry Hallam, and his translations of Casti's *Gli Animali Parlanti* (1819) and Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* (the first two volumes of four, 1823).[113] The Committee ordered Magrath to write and thank the donor – a courtesy which is still maintained – and at its next meeting further decreed that 'a Copper Plate similar to that used by the Royal Society be prepared for a Letter of thanks for presents received by the Club', and that a bookplate be made for presents. William Tooke FRS, a founding member of the University of London, donated his *Lucian of Samosata: works from the Greek* (1820); the Revd Blanco White gave eight volumes of *El Espanol*, the journal that he edited, and his *Letters from Spain* (1822), under the pseudonym of Doblado; the businessman John Taylor presented selections from the Baron de Humboldt relating to Mexico (1824); Sharon Turner gave his *History of the Anglo-Saxons* (1820); and James Mill his *History of British India* (1818) and *Elements of Political Economy* (2nd edn 1824).[114]

So significant were donations in the early days that an additional request for 'any other useful publications, more especially works of reference', was inserted in a new printed list of members in January 1825. Reference books, the core of what was always a working library, were also purchased by the club: in October 1824 the 'Booksellers Bill to this time amounting to £40. 7s. 1d. was presented and ordered for payment'.[115] Equally important were periodicals, such as the

Classical Journal, to which the club subscribed liberally from early on.[116] Back in December 1823, when Davy was responding to Croker's draft of the first prospectus for the new club, he recommended adding words to the effect that, in addition to the comforts of the most popular clubs, this one would provide 'periodical publications foreign or domestic on the subjects of letters'.[117] Davy believed that this 'would offer a temptation to persons not caring for french cookery, or even good Society, I mean some of the retiring philosophers whom it is always desirable to bring into the living world.' Again, an emphasis upon the importance of periodicals offers a clue to the usage of the library. Many of the founding members, and not only the retiring philosophers, were engaged in research and writing, and they needed to keep in touch with the latest findings in the scholarly journals to which they themselves contributed. And the quarterlies, particularly the Whig *Edinburgh Review* and Murray's Tory *Quarterly Review*, were not only read by members but, in the case of the *Quarterly*, largely written by them.

Unfortunately, by November 1825 several newspapers and books, including presents, were missing from the Reading Room at no. 12, and a reminder of the rules had to be posted up there.[118] Three months later, the committee room was converted into a 'Reading Room for Newspapers'.[119] In January 1830, just before the move to the new clubhouse, Croker chaired a meeting of the General Committee, at which the wording of another circular was discussed. It was to include yet more guidance on 'presents', with a view to the club's new accommodation. 'It is not necessary', the circular reads, 'for the Committee to offer to the members any particular suggestions for the selection of Books to be presented by them but they may be permitted to observe that Maps, Plans and Works of local information collected during their Travels, as well as Engravings of every description, more particularly the Portraits of Individuals belonging to the Club would fall in conveniently and usefully with the arrangement in contemplation.'[120] The number of acquisitions – donations and purchases – would rise, and at a phenomenal rate, once a permanent clubhouse had been built which could accommodate a large collection of books. In 1824 the General Committee hoped that they would be able to move within about three years. In the end it took six.

3

'THEY HAVE BUILT A PERFECT PALACE'

Why did it take the Athenæum so long to build a clubhouse of its own? First, a potential site considered by the Committee in 1824 failed to meet their requirements. Then another site proved to be less attractive than a third option, which in turn remained unavailable until 1826. Planning complications associated with this excellent site on Pall Mall delayed the approval of Decimus Burton's proposed elevations, which later had to be changed as a result of skulduggery outside the club. Negotiations with the owners of properties that stood on the site caused further delays. What is more, all three sites, and an existing clubhouse that was offered for purchase but declined, were located in an area that was being redeveloped as part of the most comprehensive building programme that London had seen since the Great Fire of 1666. This programme was the responsibility of the Office of Works, the Land Revenue Office and the Office of Woods and Forests, three departments that would be combined in 1832. In pursuit of its goal, the club's Committee frequently had to negotiate with the Commissioners of His Majesty's Woods, Forests and Revenues. The result of all this was that members could not take possession of their 'perfect palace' until February 1830.

Even before the triumph of Waterloo, the prince regent (King George IV from 1820) had dreamed of creating an imperial city that would outshine Paris.[1] John Nash, soon to be appointed the royal architect, began to execute his plan for the Regent's Park in 1812, collaborating with his young protégé Decimus Burton and with builders such as Burton's father James.[2] Following the passage of the New Street Act in 1813, work also began on Nash's plan to

break through a number of cross streets to the south of the park, in order to create a royal mile, later named Regent Street, that terminated at Carlton House, the prince's residence immediately to the north of another royal park, St James's.[3] By 1815–16 James Burton, one of the most successful developers in London, was building Waterloo Place at the bottom of what is now Regent Street St James's and facing Carlton House.[4] In practice, this ambitious programme was subject to compromises, with the result that it was quite unlike the kind of Gallic planning that produced modern Paris.[5] In principle, however, it was coherent, and in style it was Greek. If Waterloo was Britain's Marathon, could not the prince regent be compared to Pericles?[6]

The Greek Revival in architecture, which was to peak in 1820, was the product of a passion for all things Hellenic after Lord Elgin had displayed the Marbles that he had brought back from the Parthenon in a makeshift museum on Park Lane. Whereas the 'artists', such as Haydon, Chantrey, Lawrence, Westmacott and Keats, were enchanted by their naturalism, the 'connoisseurs', including Payne Knight, Wilkins and the earl of Aberdeen, considered that they fell short of the classical ideals expounded by Sir Joshua Reynolds and the Royal Academy, and embodied in the Townley Marbles at the British Museum.[7] With opinion sharply divided, it was not until 1816 that the government finally agreed to accept the Marbles for the nation and to pay Elgin less than half his expenses in acquiring them, which he had done with the support of William Richard Hamilton in Greece and John Wilson Croker in London. In Croker's article of that year in the *Quarterly Review* he described the Temple of Minerva in the Acropolis (Plate 3) in detail, praised Pericles and Phidias to the skies, and sympathised with Lord Elgin, who, like most benefactors of mankind, had been 'traduced by ignorance, by envy, and by malice'.[8] He particularly admired the 'fabulous Minerva, whose story the eloquent chissel of Phidias recorded', and the frieze.[9] Those of his readers who had access to *The Antiquities of Athens*, whose subscribers included Decimus Burton, could see engravings of the frieze, based on drawings of the Marbles, in the fourth volume (1816).[10]

Several future members of the Athenæum visited Athens in the early years of the century and enthused about it on their return to London. Colonel W.M. Leake, the topographer of the Levant, was there in 1802 and sailed with William Richard Hamilton that year in the very boat in which many of the Elgin Marbles

were sunk off Cythera.[11] Like other travellers at that time, Robert Smirke junior and the earl of Aberdeen brought home antique fragments, and Byron's 'travell'd thane, Athenian Aberdeen' established the short-lived Athenian Club.[12] Thomas Hope, who travelled in Greece in 1799–1800, had a powerful influence upon the reinterpretation of antiquity in Regency design, opening his eclectic Duchess Street house-museum to Royal Academicians in 1802 and later to other insiders, and publishing *Household Furniture and Interior Decoration* in 1807. Other visitors to Athens included William Haygarth, William Walker, Sir Charles Monck, John Galt, Gally Knight, Lord Sligo and the earl of Guilford.

Among several works by these future Athenians that were later to be acquired by their library, one is pre-eminent as an index of the cultural milieu in which both the club and its new house were conceived. Lord Aberdeen's *Inquiry into the Principles of Beauty in Grecian Architecture* was published (inevitably by John Murray) in 1822, just two years before the earl became a trustee of the Athenæum – *ex officio*, as president of the Society of Antiquaries – and a member of its first Building Committee.[13] George Hamilton Gordon assumes that his reader shares his ideals of civilised taste and values. He states that 'all nations in the most advanced state of civilization, have been unanimous in their admiration of Grecian architecture', and that 'such admiration appears to have been generally considered as inseparable from the existence of real taste and knowledge in the art'.[14] His 'endeavour to trace the causes of this unanimity, and to ascertain the principles on which it is founded', may therefore 'form the subject of an interesting inquiry'.

Although the *Inquiry* proves to be less interesting than its subject matter, it is significant here, being written in the same spirit that inspired the new classical clubhouses in London, such as Robert Smirke junior's Union Club (1824) and United Service Club (1819).[15] In his concluding remarks, for example, Lord Aberdeen comments on the value of studying the 'precious remains of Grecian art', so long neglected but now available to the architect who 'aspires to permanent reputation':

> Other modes are transitory and uncertain, but the essential qualities of Grecian excellence, as they are founded on reason, and are consistent with fitness and propriety, will ever continue to deserve his first care. These

> models should be imitated however, – not with the timid and servile hand of a copyist; but their beauties should be transferred to our soil, preserving, at the same time, a due regard to the changes of customs and manners, to the difference of our climate, and to the condition of modern society.[16]

'Reason', 'fitness' and 'propriety' were to be key principles for Aberdeen, Croker and their colleagues as they considered the design of a house for literary and scientific men, and followers of the fine arts, who were leaders of 'modern society'.

In 1822, the year of the *Inquiry*, the radical philhellene Percy Bysshe Shelley proclaimed in his preface to *Hellas* that 'We are all Greeks'.[17] 'Our laws', he argued, 'our literature, our religion, our arts have their root in Greece. But for Greece – Rome, the instructor, the conqueror, or the metropolis of our ancestors, would have spread no illumination with her arms.' Most of Croker's generation did not share Shelley's republican views, and for them Rome was more closely associated with Napoleon and France, the vanquished enemy, than with Wellington and England. Nevertheless, like Athens and Pericles, Rome and Augustus could be invoked as classical models. In June 1826, a reviewer in Murray's *Quarterly* cited a popular facetious epigram that ironically compared Augustus with Nash, also 'a very great master': 'He finds us all brick and he leaves us all plaster'.[18] The following month, Nash's royal patron was compared to Augustus without irony in James Elmes's oleaginous dedication of his *Metropolitan Improvements.*[19] Some Roman sources were to be in Decimus Burton's mind as he designed and then redesigned his Grecian clubhouse for the Athenæum.

Nobody had more influence over Burton and the process of securing a good site for the house than Croker, who ensured that a powerful group of architects, connoisseurs, politicians and administrators could provide support at crucial moments during the planning stages. No fewer than ten of the witnesses before the House of Commons select committee on the Elgin Marbles in 1816 would later be original members of the Athenæum: Croker would have ensured that they were recruited.[20] John Nash, the king's architect, Sir John Soane and Robert Smirke junior were the three 'attached architects' to the Board of Works, and thus responsible for public buildings in London. All three men were to be original members of the club, as were James and Decimus Burton. Smirke was to serve on both the General and Building Committees. Sir Charles Long, another future

member of both committees, was said to have been the spectacles through which the king viewed architecture and interior decoration: he became Lord Farnborough in 1826, the year in which he published his *Short Remarks* on Nash's 'improvements'.[21] The five successive First Commissioners of Woods and Forests, with whom Croker and Farnborough negotiated between 1824 and 1830, were all original members of the club, and all but one served on the General Committee.[22] Croker himself was one of the ministers who presided over the 'metropolitan improvements' of the 1820s, along with figures such as Lord Farnborough and Lord Liverpool, another original member.[23]

Croker was also an insider at court. He had become a member of the Carlton House set in 1813, the year in which the prince regent appointed Nash. Croker was a regular guest, at one period, dining there as often as twice a week.[24] The house had been acquired from Richard Boyle, the earl of Burlington, in 1732 for Frederick, Prince of Wales, and William Kent had improved the grounds. When the prince regent took it over and commissioned Henry Holland to make improvements in 1783, Horace Walpole was astonished by the 'august simplicity' of this 'chaste palace', with its tastefully arranged ornaments.[25] The Prince's initial delight abated, however, and, inspired by the Bourbon splendours of Paris and Versailles, he commissioned Walsh Porter and others to embellish Carlton House. A permanent record of the sumptuous rooms that Croker knew, such as the crimson drawing room, is provided in Pyne's *History of the Royal Residences* (1819; see Plate 5).[26] In 1826 Carlton House was demolished, creating the space for the southern continuation of Waterloo Place on which Nash's United Service Club and the 'new' Athenæum, as it was called,[27] were to be built.

Members of the Athenæum could observe these activities from the south-facing windows of their temporary clubhouse at 12 Waterloo Place (Plate 2). Even before they moved in there, back in May 1824, their Committee, meeting in Joseph Jekyll's house, had made resolutions relating to the 'house to be built': the precocious Decimus Burton, aged only twenty-three, was to join the Committee and its preparatory sub-committee; and a financial arrangement proposed by his brother-in-law, the banker Edmund Hopkinson, was accepted in principle.[28] Within two months of that move a Building Committee had been formally established with authority to settle 'all matters relating to building

the house and furnishing and completing it for the Reception of the Club'.[29] The three *ex officio* trustees – Davy, Lawrence and Aberdeen – were to serve, together with Croker, Heber, Hatchett, Jekyll and Robert Smirke junior. Croker called Smirke the 'Dr Baillie of architects', after the author of *Morbid Anatomy* (1793): he was a safe pair of hands and was adept at correcting the mistakes of others.[30] His Covent Garden (1808–9), perhaps the most significant building of Britain's Greek Revival, has been described as 'ruthlessly simple', the product of an 'austere and cerebral approach to the whole business of architectural design'.[31] As his British Museum rose in Bloomsbury, Smirke would have spoken with most authority on the Building Committee as they discussed Burton's drawings for the Athenæum.

The first potential site that they considered in the summer of 1824 was on the north side of the newly constructed Pall Mall East, where other significant building developments were already under way: on the corner with Suffolk Street was the United University Club, designed by William Wilkins, another original member, and opened in 1826; Smirke's College of Physicians, with its high entrance portico of six Ionic columns, was on the opposite side of the street, attached to his new Union Club, and was opened in 1825. At their first meeting, chaired by Jekyll and with Croker and Heber present, the Building Committee discussed Hopkinson's proposed heads of agreement for 'a Club House to be erected according to the design and elevation of Mr Decimus Burton, upon ground on the north side of Pall Mall East containing sixty two feet of frontage towards the street and of various depths to thirty eight feet, the extreme depth, held from the Crown by Mr Hopkinson. – Mr Hopkinson to pay to the extent of but not exceeding five thousand Pounds towards the amount of the contract'.[32] The club's solicitor, who was in attendance, was asked to negotiate with Hopkinson, and Burton was asked to let the committee know when he could present drawings.

At first all went well and at a rapid pace. Only two days later, on 23 July 1824, Burton was instructed to consult Smirke – nineteen years his senior – on his drawings and specifications before the next meeting. By 18 August the Building Committee, chaired by Davy and with Croker, Heber, Lawrence and Smirke present, could discuss drawings and a model. Whereas the plan was approved, with 'one or two alterations marked thereon', the front elevation was

to be revised: 'Order'd that the Architect do make his plans elevation and specification in such way as to separate the ornamental front and to substitute a plainer one and that Mr Burton be requested to push this matter on with all possible celerity.'[33] It may well have been Smirke who argued for a plainer front, supported by Croker and Lawrence, a great admirer of Smirke's Covent Garden. Or was it a question of costs rather than aesthetics? Although Burton's final elevations for the Athenæum cannot be traced, one of his unidentified elevations that has survived may be a design for the Pall Mall East site (Plate 6). Presented in a domestic idiom that is appropriate to its scale, it is simple, self-assured and elegant.[34] In the ensuing months, arguments for and against plainness were to become political counters, pragmatically handled by Croker and his colleagues, some of whom were experienced 'improvers', as they strove to build the club a house that was both affordable and handsome.

In November 1824, Magrath was ordered to write to Fielder, the leaseholder of 12 Waterloo Place, enquiring whether the club could continue to occupy the house until midsummer 1826.[35] Meanwhile, the Pall Mall East proposal was running into trouble. While tenders from contractors were coming in, Burton tried and failed to persuade Sir Richard Birnie to sell or let the plot behind the site of the proposed clubhouse, on which a kitchen and coffee room could be added to a building with a narrow frontage.[36] Moreover, the proposed 'projection' of 9 or 10 feet beyond the building line was turned down by the Commissioners of Woods and Forests. On 14 December, when the Building Committee heard both pieces of bad news, the draft agreement with Hopkinson was immediately dropped.[37] Characteristically, however, Croker was ready with a better alternative, and could report to the meeting that there was 'a disposition on the part of the Commissioners to place at the disposal of the Club a piece of Ground on the eastern side of Union Square'.[38] Burton was therefore instructed to prepare 'a suitable plan for a House on that ground', and Croker was asked to continue the negotiations with Woods and Forests. With the membership now standing at around a thousand, they could work on this second, more ambitious option with confidence.

Whereas the first proposed site had been cramped, this one provided twice the frontage and a commanding position in Nash's ambitious scheme for what is now Trafalgar Square, in the spot where South Africa House stands today.[39]

Nash's 'improvements' to the former site of the King's Mews involved the demolition of numerous properties in order to create the most impressive square in London, and thus make a grand imperial statement. On a plan dated 12 May 1826, a site for the Royal Academy is shown at the centre, surrounded by regal statues (Plate 7).[40] (In the end the Academy had to share Wilkins's building on the northern side of the square with the National Gallery.) The proposed site for the Athenæum is shown on the eastern side, with a portico of five pillars, between the Royal Academy of Literature and the 'Vicar's House' for St Martin in the Fields, and with extensive stabling behind, serving the new Golden Cross inn to be built on the Strand.

Having rapidly produced a plan, Burton was asked to prepare an estimate below £12,000 and to ascertain from Woods and Forests what external elevation they would require for the proposed structure.[41] Croker's own nine-page letter to the commissioners, dated 24 January 1825, reveals his grasp of the principles involved in Nash's scheme and his attention to detail, as he weighs the arguments for and against uniformity in the square. In his closing statement he argues that the club's funds 'are too limited to allow of any considerable expenditure for mere ornament, but they also think that in point of taste, considering the materials of which the House is to be composed, too much attention to external embellishment would be out of character & might produce an appearance the very reverse of ornamental'.[42] Again, aesthetic and economic arguments are difficult to disentangle.

By 1 March 1825, Croker could report to the Building Committee, at their ninth meeting, that he had a firm offer from the commissioners of a site measuring about 130 feet by 30 feet, 'Southwards to the proposed new College of Arms'.[43] The commissioners had responded to Croker's letter, however, by insisting upon a 'very handsome and Architectural Elevation', and requesting a drawing. The committee asked Sir Charles Long and Croker to continue negotiations. It was also agreed that the rent must be reduced 'towards defraying the expences [sic] of the extra decorations'. Burton produced a new plan and elevation that were approved and forwarded to the commissioners. Another unidentified 'Design elevation of a public building' by Burton would have provided a frontage of about 130 feet (Plate 8). Written at the bottom of the sheet are the words, 'N.B. The panels are proposed to receive the Elgin Frieze'.

The Panathenaic frieze, based on the Elgin Marbles, is the most famous external feature of the built clubhouse in Pall Mall. The note strengthens the case for this drawing being an early proposed elevation of the clubhouse for Union Square, with 'extra decorations', albeit with six columns to the portico.[44]

The first annual meeting of the club, held at 12 Waterloo Place on 9 May 1825, had before it a report, signed by Davy but drafted by Croker, in which the details of current negotiations were veiled behind vague references to 'the neighbourhood of Union Square, Cockspur-street', and the 'detailed plans of the Government for the buildings in that quarter of the town not being yet finally arranged'.[45] Assurance was given, however, that the clubhouse would be 'conducive to the general convenience of its Members, and the ornamental appearance of the neighbourhood in which it is to be placed'. A 'considerable degree of external decoration' would probably be 'insisted upon by Government', but the additional expense was manageable: it was hoped that by the end of 1825 there would be between £13,000 and £14,000 'applicable to the erection of the house'. Having formerly argued for plainness, partly on economic grounds, Croker could now blame the commissioners for insisting upon 'mere decoration'.

But the house was not to be in Union Square: an even better option was coming into view. The foundations of Carlton House having been declared to be 'absolutely unsafe',[46] early bids for the space it occupied were lodged in the summer of 1825, twelve months before parliament authorised the commissioners to demolish the house.[47] The Athenæum entered the ring in December, when Croker and Long reported on progress with the commissioners.[48] In deciding against the site 'in the neighbourhood of the Mews', Croker and his colleagues saved the club from having extensive stabling to the rear of their clubhouse and the hubbub of Trafalgar Square on their doorstep. They also rejected a suggestion from the United Service Club (USC) that the Athenæum might buy their former clubhouse on Charles Street (now Charles II Street), designed by Smirke and now outgrown. Burton quickly proved that 'it would cost less to build a more appropriate building', and the Building Committee moved on, their ranks reinforced by the addition of Lord Lansdowne, the Whig power-broker, and Sir Charles Long, the king's spectacles.[49] Future generations were to thank them for securing a site on the corner of Pall Mall and the southern continuation of Waterloo Place, with gardens to the south. (Charles

Barry's Travellers Club – an Italian Renaissance *palazzo*, with a plan on the *cortile* model – was completed next door on Pall Mall in 1833.) Croker in particular deserves their thanks, as he applied much of his time, as well as his exceptional gifts, to the housing of the club.[50]

He also exercised patience. By the summer of 1826 another year had passed, and Croker had to explain in his second Annual Report that the Carlton House site was preferable to Union Square; that he recognised members' 'just anxiety' about the delay, caused by the fact that parliament had yet to pass the necessary legislation; but that they 'may be in possession' of their new house early in 1828.[51] When the USC and the Athenæum were allocated sites on opposite sides of the new section of Waterloo Place, the commissioners and their pre-eminent architect, John Nash, insisted that the two houses should be uniform in design. Nash, full of years and of his own importance, was also architect to the USC. He therefore had ample opportunity to play both sides against each other, and thus to outmanoeuvre the Athenæum, of which he was a member, and Decimus Burton, his junior colleague, when it suited him, which was often.

The Athenæum's request for a copy of Nash's plan for the USC was promptly granted by the commissioners in July 1826.[52] In drawing his own plan, Burton clearly had to pay close attention to Nash's. He also had Smirke monitoring progress. The result was a plan which followed in a tradition that began with Smirke and his original USC – the first of the post-Waterloo clubhouses – and continued with Wilkins's University Club, with a central hall from which spacious rooms were accessible on the ground floor, and a grand staircase leading to a landing which gave onto the rooms on the *piano nobile*.[53] As we will see when we come to the interior, Burton's clubhouse met the particular needs of a club for literary and scientific men, and followers of the fine arts, with its large coffee room and drawing room, and its generous allocation of space for the library. The main problem, however, was not with the internal but the external design.

In June 1826 the commissioners informed the Building Committee that the elevations of their east and north fronts must correspond with those of the USC's west and north fronts, a condition which they accepted.[54] Nash then informed them that the designs for the USC had been 'long since settled' and that therefore no changes could be made to them. This was untrue, but the Athenæum took the statement at face value and asked for copies of the elevations.[55] When these finally

arrived, four months later, the Building Committee pointed out that there was an inconsistency between them and the notification that the two houses should be uniform.[56] Nash had his main façade on the Pall Mall side, which was longer than that of the Athenæum. As the two frontages onto Waterloo Place were both about 105 feet in length, would it not seem natural to have the main façades facing each other? In their reply, the commissioners indicated that uniformity could be achieved by adopting 'a style, of which the plainness would render the inevitable difference with extent of the frontage the least observable', and by having windows and doors of the same size and in similar positions.[57] Having previously argued for plainness themselves in discussions on the Union Square option, and then prepared the membership for extra costs associated with the decorations imposed by the commissioners, the Building Committee was now having plainness thrust upon them. Once again they accepted the commissioners' conditions, and in December an agreement was signed by the Athenæum and the USC, subject to both sides making a number of modifications.[58] Nash, however, and the building committee of the USC were to renege on the agreement.

As discussions with both the commissioners and the USC dragged on, the Building Committee of the Athenæum accepted a tender from Messrs Bennett and Hunt, an experienced and 'very respectable' firm, who in May 1827 presented by far the lowest estimate at £26,715.[59] That month each member of the General Committee was presented with a 'Lithographic Plan and Elevation of the intended new Athenæum'.[60] At the third annual meeting of the club, the General Committee was pleased to announce that they had secured the splendid new site, but regretted that circumstances beyond their control had led to an increase in cost and a delay. The piece of ground that they had been granted, they said, 'is perhaps larger than the Committee would have thought absolutely necessary for the accommodation of the present number of members, but as the exterior which they were bound to adopt is in a plain though handsome style, the Committee hoped that the increase of expense will not be so great, as the increase of accommodation to be derived from the greater space'.[61] Once again, external pressure, whether for plainness or for decoration, is used to justify an increase in the cost involved in building a better clubhouse. The Committee also reported that 'some difficulties, which the Commissioners of His Majesty's Woods Forests and Land Revenues met with in obtaining possession of two

private houses, which occupy part of the site of the Athenæum, have prevented the obtaining as early possession as they could have wished, and this has necessarily postponed the commencement, and ultimately, the completion of the House'. It was still possible, however, that the new house would be ready in eighteen or twenty-four months' time.

In July 1827 it was agreed that the ground should be staked out with a view to building as much of the house as possible, while waiting for the commissioners to arrange for the demolition of number 109 Pall Mall. The Crown lease was not due to expire until May 1829, however, and the owner refused to go to arbitration, declining generous offers from the commissioners, supplemented by extra funds from the club, until finally agreeing terms in March 1828.[62] Lord Farnborough, Croker's colleague in discussions with the commissioners, now replaced the absent Heber as a trustee, after legal advice had been taken.[63] He also chaired the meeting of the Building Committee, in February 1828, at which it was reported that Nash had failed to report that he had not implemented the modifications to the USC's house. Whereas the Committee had 'sacrificed their own intentions' in order to 'accommodate the other parties', as they stated in an aggrieved letter to the commissioners, the USC's deviations from the agreed scheme 'must tend to throw a shade of inferiority over the Edifice of the Athenæum'.[64] Moreover, the 'hardship upon them' was 'very much aggravated' by the fact that the only notice they had received of these deviations was 'by seeing from the Street the erections actually completed': Nash had retained an upper portico on the Pall Mall façade and a 'colonnade' facing south, and had not added a continuous balcony. Claiming the moral high ground, the committee added that they were now willing to make their own balcony 'as little conspicuous as possible', again for the sake of uniformity, and to 'give up the idea of forming it with a stone parapet and Balustrade, as was prescribed to them by the Commissioners'.

Meanwhile much time had been lost: by March 1828 the contractors were submitting bills to cover the cost of delays, as well as for work completed.[65] Soon the General Committee were preparing for yet another AGM, at which they were to announce that the building should be 'covered in' during the autumn and ready for the 'accommodation of members' twelve months later.[66] In June the Building Committee's concerns about the proposed height of the Travellers

clubhouse, to be built next door on Pall Mall, and the question of a party wall were amicably resolved in discussions between Burton and Barry.[67] John Brady, a labourer, was injured in a fall: the General Committee awarded him 5 guineas 'towards the support of his family during his confinement in the Hospital'.[68] (Following an injury to John Burton six months later, the club was to compensate him until the clubhouse opened, when they employed him as a messenger.)[69] A group of members presented a 'memorial' to the General Committee asking for baths to be incorporated in the building, a request which was turned down on the advice of the architect: quite apart from the expense of making such a late addition, 'steam and effluvia' would be 'felt in the apartments on the principal story'.[70] Potentially far more serious had been the matter of the foundations, to which reference was made at a meeting of the General Committee on 8 July. Receipts from the builders included an additional '£367. 13s. 5. being the cost of the Artificial Foundation'.[71] No explanation is minuted, but ten months later, at the fifth AGM held at 12 Waterloo Place, Croker told the membership that it was 'in consequence of the substratum of the ground appearing, on being opened, to consist of a shifting sand, with pits from which sand had been excavated'.[72] It was the 'absolutely unsafe' condition of the foundations of Carlton House that had justified its demolition, and the footprint of the clubhouse overlapped that of Carlton House. Although the problem had now been addressed by constructing an 'artificial foundation', Croker's enemies must have relished the thought that his house was built upon the sand.

Later in July 1828 the commissioners wrote to the USC, rebuking its committee and Nash for failing to make the agreed modifications, and to the Athenæum, thanking them for their forbearance and releasing them from the agreement of December 1826. This allowed the club to make significant enhancements. The commissioners immediately agreed to a request for the addition of a Panathenaic frieze, designed by John Henning junior, who started work in the autumn of 1828.[73] Jekyll's much quoted epigram, in which Croker is said to have given the members a frieze when they wanted an ice-house, has no basis in fact.[74] Like the balcony, the entrance portico and the large statue by Edward Hodges Baily based on the Pallas Athena of Velletri in the Louvre, the frieze was not only a beautiful addition to a building that would have been plain indeed, but also ensured that its lavishly porticoed neighbour cast no

'shade of inferiority' over it (Plate 9). Indeed, Nash's USC was described in the anonymous *London Interiors* (1841–44) as 'singularly plain, and unimposing'.[75] The supreme irony is that the late additions to the Athenæum's clubhouse were what Croker had much earlier described as 'mere decoration'.

Croker was ever the pragmatist and micromanager. As work proceeded on both the exterior and interior of the clubhouse, the architect consulted him personally on matters both great and small. Burton and the secretary, Magrath, called on him 'respecting the Balustrade & Balcony', for example, a matter that led to long-drawn-out discussions.[76] Burton designed many of the fittings, such as pendant light fixtures and even small items such as clock-cases; and much of the best furniture in the house is his, including massive library tables and more delicate desks, large and small armchairs, upholstered in dark green and much of it in use today.[77] *The Gentleman's Magazine* reported that 'the furniture of the whole is at once classical and elegant; the carpets are of the utmost beauty, and strength of fabric'.[78] As at 12 Waterloo Place, everything passed under Croker's critical eye, as well as those of Smirke and Lawrence.

In May 1829, Croker, as chairman, could report good progress with the building in his Annual Report, using terms which were reminiscent of Lord Aberdeen's Hellenist principles of 'reason', 'fitness' and 'propriety', adapted to 'the condition of modern society'.[79] The new house, Croker suggested, was 'suitable to the rank and the character of this Society'.[80] In order to match the enhanced USC, the Committee had agreed to additions to their clubhouse which 'could give sufficient dignity to the external appearance of their elevation', including the balustrade and cornice, and the frieze, which together cost £2,165. 1s. 10d. There had been 'no hesitation', however, in selecting the Panathenaic procession which formed the frieze of the Parthenon, as 'the most appropriate, as well as the most beautiful specimen of sculpture which could be adopted':

> To an edifice which borrows its name from Athens, intended for the reception of a Society professedly connected with Literature and the Fine Arts, they flatter themselves that the celebrated production of Athenian taste, restored, as it here is, to a degree of perfection in which it had never been seen in modern times, would not be inappropriate, and they were glad to have an opportunity of exhibiting such an admirable specimen of ancient

art in, as nearly as circumstances would permit, the position in which the original was employed.[81]

What Croker did not mention was the portico, the very feature that would later come to symbolise the club itself. On the morning of the AGM, Henry Crabb Robinson was told that the Committee had 'meant to have a neat portico of four columns – the one actually erected – but that Croker had arbitrarily changed the plan, and the foundations were then digging for a portico of two columns, not at all becoming so broad a space as the front comprises'.[82] When members gathered at one o'clock, with Croker in the chair, his report was read out and discussion invited. Dr John Henderson, presumably with the frieze in mind, reproached the committee for their 'lavish expenditure'.[83] This gave Robinson the perfect opportunity to tackle the chairman, whom he describes in his reminiscence as the 'officious manager and despot' of the club, 'according to common report'. Far from being lavish, Robinson argued, the Committee was making a false economy:

A mistaken desire to be economical had, I believed, betrayed them into an act which I thought the body of the proprietors would not approve, and on which I would take their opinion. I then began to state the point about the portico, when Mr. Croker interrupted me, saying I was under a great mistake – that there never was any intention to have any other portico than the one now preparing. This for a moment perplexed me, but I said, 'Of course the chairman meant that no other portico had been resolved on, which might well be. Individual men might be deterred by his opposition, but I knew,' raising my voice, 'that there were other designs, for I had seen them.' Then Mr. Croker requested me, as an act of politeness, to abstain from a motion which would be an affront to the Committee. This roused me, and I said that if any other gentleman would say he thought my motion an affront, I would not make it; but I meant otherwise. And then I added expressions which forced him to say that I had certainly expressed myself most handsomely, but it would be much better to leave the matter in the hands of the Committee. 'That,' I said, 'is the question which you will, in fact, by my motion, submit to the meeting.' There was then a cry of 'Move,

> move,' and a very large number of hands were held up for the motion. So it passed by acclamation. I was thanked by the architect, and everybody was pleased with what I had done.[84]

In his three-volume selection from Robinson's diaries and reminiscences, Thomas Sadler omitted the damning words that follow this extract: 'A few days afterwards, seeing . . . one of the Committee, I said to him: "What could Mr. Croker mean by lying so?" He smiled: "You show your ignorance, Mr. Croker always lies." '[85] Nash was not alone in his deviousness, although it is impossible to ascertain how decisions over this particular matter had been made. There is, however, a letter from the commissioners on the subject, dated 21 April 1829, saying that they would be grateful if the Building Committee were to give instructions to the builders, who were ready to put up the portico, as soon as possible.[86] Scrawled on a corner of the letter in Burton's hand are the inscrutable words, 'Ap 23 Direct the Architect to proceed with the portico as originally designed'.

Stylistically, Burton had little choice but to follow the USC in the design of his entrance portico, although connoisseurs could see that he distanced himself from Nash's Roman emphasis by introducing a deeper entablature, in the manner of the Parthenon. This was complemented by the statue of Pallas Athena and the Panathenaic frieze, then uncoloured, above.[87] In 1858–59, Burton was to be retained by the USC to extend and augment their clubhouse. By enriching the Pall Mall front, altering the fenestration and adding a bold frieze, he sharpened the contrast between his beautiful and coolly Greek Athenæum, presided over by the goddess of wisdom, originally spearless,[88] and the assertively Roman USC, decorated with battle honours – Theodore Hook's 'mental' and 'regimental'.[89]

Meanwhile, in the summer of 1829, the pace was quickening. On 21 July, the General Committee, chaired by the 6th earl of Shaftesbury (Cropley Ashley-Cooper, father of the social reformer), ordered Magrath to write to the commissioners requesting them to 'grant the Lease of the House erected in Waterloo Place without delay'.[90] It was then reported that an agreement had been made with the Phoenix Fire Office for the loan of £16,000 at 4½ per cent, 'to be secured by a Mortgage on the Building to be repaid by Annual Instalments of £1000'. By 27 October, when the General Committee was chaired by Lord Farnborough, it was agreed that preparations for the move to the new clubhouse

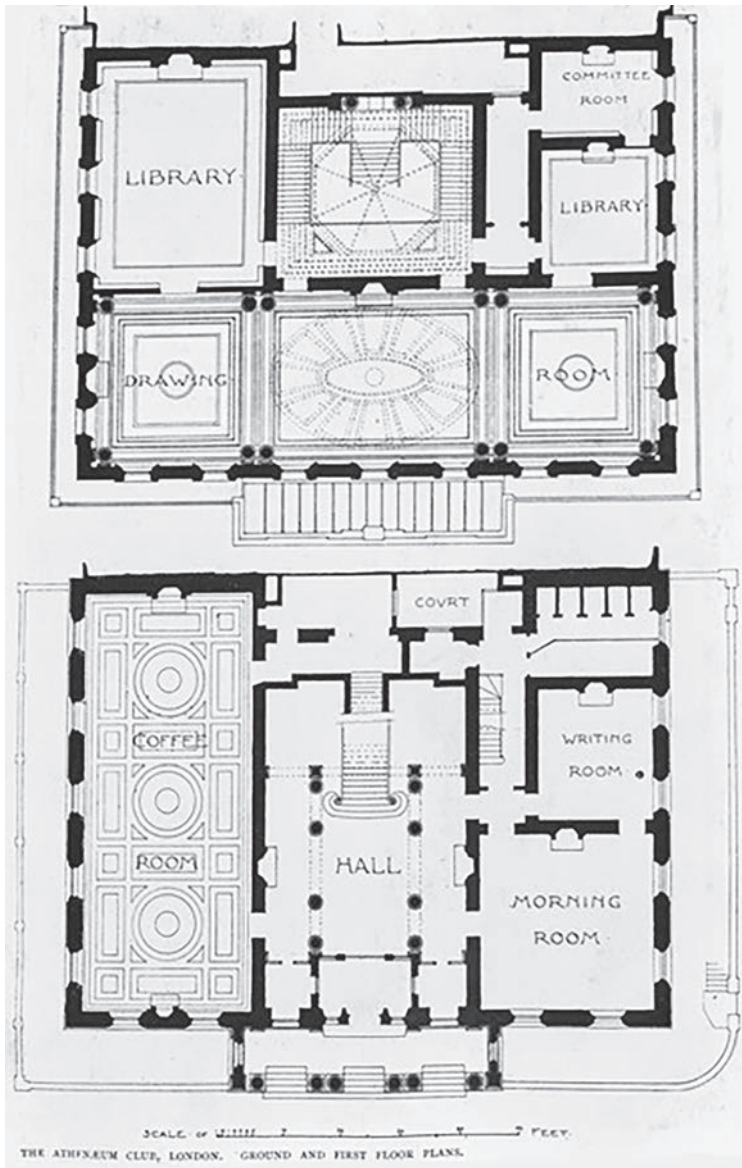
should be made by a sub-committee. Yet again Croker took charge, supported by Edward Hawkins, keeper of antiquities at the British Museum, and Richard Penn of the Colonial Office.[91] Having reviewed the 'Domestic Establishment', the 'duties of the Upper Servants and the management of the Accounts', they reported to the General Committee three weeks later. When salaries were compared with those of the USC, the Junior USC and the Union Club it was agreed that Magrath's £200 per annum should rise to £250 in the new clubhouse, increasing to £300 after five years.[92] The steward's £180 would be increased to £200 and the cook's £100 to £120. At the other end of the scale, a scullery maid would receive £12.

On their arrival at the new clubhouse to prepare for its opening in early February 1830, the non-resident staff would have first gone down long flights of back stairs into a labyrinth of vaulted basement offices, kitchens and storerooms, with extensive wine cellars the other side of an area and beneath Waterloo Place.[93] Members, on the other hand, passed through both sets of tall glazed double doors into the spacious hall, with the central grand staircase facing the entrance (Plate 10).[94] *London Interiors* recorded that the spectator was 'immediately struck by the classic taste, the refined feeling of the design': 'Once conceived, its clear and symmetrically defined outline never quits the mind; the plan, its arrangement, and accessories, impress and confirm the impression of unity, harmony, simplicity, proportion.'[95] Although today's members would agree with much of this statement, some of the most prominent 'accessories' are different from those of 1830 and the floor of the hall is a shiny modern addition.[96] A small sample of the original 'Venetian pavement' can be seen in the bag room, usually covered with pieces of luggage and hitherto unidentified: it is constructed of 'particles of marble set in hard cement, or scagliola resembling Sienna marble, rubbed down and polished'. The 'warm and carpeted effect' of this delicately coloured Venetian floor complemented the scagliola columns, imitating white marble, that support a Roman barrel-vaulted ceiling, richly coffered. The capitals of these columns were modelled on the Tower of the Winds, a famous structure from antiquity which was illustrated in the first volume of *The Antiquities of Athens* (chapter III, plate III).[97]

The introduction of statues and the absence of pictures in the hall in the 1830s intensified the aura of academic classicism. In April 1832 William

Sotheby, one of the first members to be elected, donated a cast of Samson slaying the Philistines by John Graham Lough, who himself donated a Milo.[98] These were mounted on large plinths, but were later removed in order to accommodate a system of 'Warming and Ventilation'.[99] Burton's elegant treatment of the niches above the marble fireplaces, in which casts of Roman statues from the Louvre are displayed – on the east wall the 'Figure of Diana Dressing', as the supplier Peter Sarti described it, and on the west wall 'Ditto Venus Victorious' – is reminiscent of Carlton House and the house-museums of Hope and Soane.[100] (Sir Thomas Lawrence seems to have chosen these and other casts in the last months of his life.)[101] *London Interiors* reported that 'objections' had been made to the decoration of the hall and staircase: the walls were described as 'cold and naked, over which the eye wanders unexcited and unrelieved'.[102] The story of Alma-Tadema's opulent redecoration of the 1890s, and its jettisoning in 1956, with a partial return to something closer to the original scheme, must wait until later chapters.[103] In 1830, Burton's muted colours and syncretic classical references in the hall suited a space in which 'literary' Whig and Tory members of a non-partisan club mingled under the aegis of Athena / Minerva.[104] By 1841 the hall was said to be the club's 'Exchange, the Lounge': 'Here the politicians, the men of literature, and those "about town" assemble. Often have we heard the hum of earnest debate, the laughter provoked by wit or sarcasm, mingled with the ebb and flow of topics afforded by the butterfly existence of a London season, arise in fitful gusts, and startle the more sober solemnity of the rooms we have described.'[105]

The main rooms adjacent to the hall – the morning room and the large coffee room – are both thought to have been 'equally straightforward' in their decorative schemes, originally executed in oil paint, with 'contrasting fawnish off-whites for the walls and ceiling'.[106] Ranged along the north (Pall Mall) side of the clubhouse were the morning room, where 'all the English and Foreign newspapers of any interest' were and still are supplied;[107] the writing room, also used as a 'Private Dinner Room' for parties and as a 'strangers' room', until three o'clock;[108] and the lavatories, with seats of Spanish mahogany,[109] which were later to feature in a number of myths and legends. Extending the whole length of the south side is the coffee room, which overlooks gardens. Appropriately, the south-eastern corner of this hospitable room sits above part of the footprint of the crimson



Ground and first floor plans of the club

drawing room in the demolished Carlton House (Plate 5). The delicate plaster panelling on the walls was characteristic of the 1820s. Later generations wrongly assumed that these large panels defined spaces in which to hang pictures. As early as the 1830s a plan was afoot to hang paintings, 'the subjects of which should be drawn from memorable incidents in the lives of deceased members, who [had] eminently contributed to promote Science, Literature, and Art'.[110] Some hoped that the plan would not only be executed but also extended to the morning room, but mercifully it came to nothing.

Originally the splendid staircase, with its 'best spanish Mahogany hand rail' and classical detailing,[111] was naturally lit from a large skylight – an invitation upward from the darker hall under its Roman ceiling. The stairs divide beneath a large cast of the Apollo Belvedere by George Rennie RA, gratefully donated by Burton.[112] Installation of the Apollo was difficult: Sarti's bill for 'busts etc' included the sum of £3. 10s. 0d., 'For taken down [sic] & putting twice the Apollo and altering four times the leaf'.[113] More casts of statues were installed on what was known as the 'landing of the Great Staircase': the *Grecian Archer*, by Rennie, one of the first batch of Rule II members to be elected, in 1831, and *Eve at the Fountain* and the group of *Poetry and Painting* by Baily, who joined in 1830.[114]

Two doors give access from the landing to the drawing room, which extends the whole length of the east (Waterloo Place) side of the clubhouse. It was the 'grand, massive, chaste, and severely simple outline, the unity and the harmony of design' of this famous room that impressed *London Interiors*, rather than its detailing and decoration.[115] 'Chaste' and 'simple' were positive terms during the Greek Revival, and here the room was divided into three harmonious sections – a square at each end and an oblong in the middle – with a grand central dome, reminiscent of Burton's version of the Roman Pantheon at his Colosseum in the Regent's Park. Such a long room also had a practical advantage in a club that tried, but occasionally failed to exclude bores: it provided 'the only protection against the person who is eloquent upon affairs, either Foreign or Domestic, the member who sleeps and snores, the man descended from John de *Bore*ham, or the victim afflicted with the complaint called the "Grumbler" '.[116]

The development of the original decorative scheme for the drawing room can be traced by comparing Burton's coloured drawings of 1829 (Plate 11) – the

only ones to survive – and James Holland's charming watercolour of *c*. 1836 (Plate 12). Burton's drawing labelled 'Athenæum', and endorsed as 'Approved by the Committee / E Magrath Secty – / 25 June 1829', shows scagliola pillars with capitals based on the Choragic Monument of Lysicrates, another familiar source which was illustrated in the first volume of *The Antiquities of Athens* (chapter IV, plate III). The larger Lysicrates pillars were adopted at the corner of each section of the room, but not the proposed shorter ones flanking the fireplaces and mirrors, where pilasters and capitals inspired by the temple of Apollo at Miletus were substituted.[117] The palmette, a decorative motif from antiquity beloved of late-Georgian architects, features throughout the room. Had Burton's proposed classical motifs above the windows and laurel wreaths in the intermediate spaces been adopted, the room would have continued the antiquarian theme of the hall and landing even more clearly. Although these classical features were dropped, however, possibly for financial reasons, the Building Committee again opted for sculptures rather than pictures, and for a unifying colour scheme, in this case fashionable puce.

Labelled the 'Library' by Burton in 1829, and described as the 'Great Room' by the General Committee as late as August 1848,[118] the drawing room as depicted by Holland contained taller bookcases than the architect had originally proposed, reflecting the fact that the club's collection of books and pamphlets was growing rapidly.[119] In 1833, Burton was asked to design these larger classical bookcases, which were topped with plaster busts of famous literary, scientific and artistic figures – a fitting pantheon for a British 'Athenæum'.[120] Three years earlier, when the club moved from 12 Waterloo Place, the whole collection could be housed in their new holy of holies, now known as the south library, which is accessible through glazed doors at the south end of the drawing room and via another door off the landing.[121] In 1832, Burton was asked to design a gallery on one side of the 'Library and Reading Room' to accommodate more books. This gallery was described in *London Interiors* as being 'of peculiar elegance' and 'constructed of mahogany, supported by ten bronze cantilevers'.[122] Characteristically, Burton ornamented the sixteen steps up to the gallery with 'elaborate scroll brackets of the same material'. Above the marble fireplace in the library was a space reserved for the large portrait of George IV on which Sir Thomas Lawrence was working at the time of his death, on 7 January 1830, and

which was intended to be a gift to the club. His executors contested this, however, and it cost the club £115 to purchase the picture at a sale in June 1831.[123]

Through a door at the north end of the drawing room was the 'small library', known today as the north library: its densely packed bookshelves can be glimpsed in Holland's drawing. To the west of the small library was the committee room, now the west library. Beyond that room and above it (at a mezzanine level) were various offices and accommodation for servants. An inventory of rooms and their contents in the 1830s reveals the pecking order among the staff: the librarian's room and his bedroom (with a 'Four post bedstead'), the secretary's room (with six mahogany chairs and two 'sets of furniture') and his bedroom, the 'Old Newspaper Room', two men's bedrooms (with five iron bedsteads in each), the hall porters' bedroom (two iron bedsteads), man cook's bedroom (four poster), woman cook's bedroom (one iron bedstead), housekeeper's bedroom (four poster), kitchen maids' bedroom (four iron bedsteads), still room maids' bedroom (two iron bedsteads), housemaids' bedroom (five iron bedsteads) and their sitting room (six painted chairs).

Some of the staff were on hand to serve a group of leading members who gathered to dine there on Saturday 6 February 1830, six years after the inaugural meeting of the Committee in the Royal Society's rooms at Somerset House. Croker's old friend and colleague, Thomas Moore, wrote in his diary: 'dined at the Athenaeum – a grand dinner for the opening of the Club consisting of all those members that had belonged to Committees – Croker in the Chair, supported by Lords Lansdowne, Gower, Lowther & Bexley – Bishop of London, Agar Ellis &c. &c. to the amount of about thirty – sat next Chauntrey [sic]'.[124] Grand company, a grand setting and, presumably, food and wine to match – a combination which the club has tried to emulate on special occasions ever since. This bipartisan list of luminaries – Lansdowne, Gower, Agar-Ellis and Moore were Whigs – combines wealth, power, connoisseurship and creativity. Earl Gower is soon to be the richest man in Britain as the 2nd duke of Sutherland; the marquess of Lansdowne's house in Berkeley Square contains a superb collection of marbles purchased in Italy; Viscount Lowther, currently First Commissioner of Woods and Forests, Lord Bexley, who helped to found King's College London, Agar-Ellis, who campaigned for

the creation of the National Gallery, and Croker are all FRSs; one of the most popular poets writing in English sits next to a sculptor who is to be knighted in five years' time.[125] In January 1830, Francis Chantrey described the clubhouse as a 'superb building' and looked forward to having a 'peep into the shop'.[126] He had heard that it was 'so fine' that statues and busts would be 'mere dirt'. What he thought on 6 February 1830 is not recorded.

Two days later the clubhouse was finally open to members. First impressions were positive: Sir Walter Scott's son, Charles, who worked at the Foreign Office, was not the only member to describe the house as a 'palace'.[127] The Athenæum was one of the 'gentlemen's clubs', of course, until a successful transition to mixed membership was made in the early twenty-first century.[128] In 1830 the admission of ladies simply to view the place was regarded as a special privilege. In an enthusiastic letter to his sister on the subject, dated 26 February, Charles Lyell throws light on ballot evenings and members' use of particular rooms:

> I wish you had been in town at the opening of our new club, the Athenæum, which is reckoned the most elegant turn-out of all, and for a fortnight gay soirées were given to the ladies between nine and twelve o'clock, and it still continues to do so every Wednesday, which I hear is to go on for months. It is really worth seeing, and fitted up in a style which I must say would be ridiculous, except for receiving ladies. There has been a great deal of fun about it, verses innumerable. Some of our members grumble at the invasion, and retreated into the library, which was respected at first, but now the women fill it every Wednesday evening, as well as the newspaper room, and seem to examine every corner with something of the curiosity with which we should like to pry into a harem. They all say it is good for bachelors, and makes married men keep away from home, and talk of a ladies' club, &c. As the house was much admired, the number of candidates increased prodigiously. The ballot, which in a smaller house was a nuisance, is now an agreeable muster.[129]

One of the misogynistic grumblers, probably a crusty bachelor, is worth quoting for his passing references to the learned peace which the female invasion disturbed:

> We are now really in our new palace, and we throw open its gates every Wednesday evening to whomsoever, among your gentler sex, are disposed to enter. . . . I, who am a hermit in my own way, and by no means too inclined to sociality, must confess that I never felt a more melancholy pang than when, for the first time, I beheld, from the large chair in which I was 'quietly inurned,' a party of invading Amazons, with bare necks and yellow gowns, sweep across the chamber I had hoped would have been for ever sacred to frock coats and the modest virtue of cravats . . . true, that Wednesday is only one day in the week, but, then, that one day unsettles us for the six others . . . Besides, what mischief to the *tone* of our society! Instead of the learned silence hitherto breathing around, or the murmurs of scientific discussion or literary dispute, we hear the *suaves susurri* of 'Last night – charming woman – beautiful eyes – good bust – pretty ankle!'[130]

According to the Revd Waugh, however, these 'reunions' were 'highly appreciated by others'.

By February 1830 the USC clubhouse across the square had been open for sixteen months, and Nash's grand Carlton House Terrace was under construction. In March the General Committee was presented with a petition to the House of Commons regarding an opening from Waterloo Place to St James's Park, with a request that it be placed on the morning room table for signature.[131] This was agreed, but only as a special case, as the matter was considered to be of 'immediate and local interest'. A lithograph of the scheme shows a roadway sloping down between Nash's terraces to an ironwork screen at the level of the park. This arrangement, which was not adopted by the government, would have allowed carriages to pass through and thus alleviate the dreadful traffic jams in Charing Cross.

Instead, only pedestrian access to the Mall was provided via a handsome set of steps, at the top of which was a flat area large enough to accommodate the base of a column of Scottish granite, 124 feet high, designed by Benjamin Dean Wyatt. This was erected by public subscription, to be surmounted by a bronze statue of Frederick, duke of York – the second son of George III and a member of the club, who had died in 1827 – by an original member, Sir Richard Westmacott.[132] The General Committee was consulted by the managing committee of the project on

22 March 1831. Lord Farnborough, an authority on such matters, sent his apologies, adding that 'he did not apprehend there could be any objection on their part having understood the other inhabitants of Carlton Gardens had consented'.[133] The Committee acquiesced. At 12 Waterloo Place, members had watched their new house rising to the south. Between April 1831 and April 1834, their new southerly outlook was dominated by the scaffolding surrounding this monument – a constant reminder that their clubhouse was built on the site of a royal palace and that theirs was a Crown lease.

The clubhouse had been designed and built in the reign of George IV, who died on 26 June 1830. The king was dead, long live the king! Exuberant expressions of the club's loyalty to William IV proved to be costly, however. The contractors had to be called in to 'secure the Ballustrade in consequence of the Accident by which a part was destroyed by the Crowd at the proclamation of the King' on 28 June.[134] On 3 August, Decimus Burton was asked to 'take measures with Mr Edge for illuminating the House at the approaching Birth Day of the King', on the 21st, at 'an expence not exceeding Ten Pounds exclusive of the Frame Works'.[135] A week later the General Committee received a letter from Mr W. Smith, 'requesting to be employed to illuminate the house on the Birth day of the Queen on the 13 Instant'.[136] A design was also submitted from Mr Edge to 'illuminate with Gas at an expence of £25 which was approved and ordered to be executed provided it can be ascertained to be the intention of the USC to light on that night'. Burton reported that the frameworks for Arthur's Club and the USC cost £112 and £150 respectively, and that work on the Athenæum was in hand. The General Committee clearly wished to hold its own with other clubs, and on 17 August ordered that 'the letters for the King's birthday be 'WR'.[137]

The year 1830, one of revolutions on the Continent, marked a turning-point for both the nation, with its new monarch, and the Athenæum, with its new clubhouse. In both cases the old guard was changing. The Iron Duke's opposition to reform brought to an end two decades of Tory hegemony, when Earl Grey became prime minister on 22 November. Croker's long rule at the Admiralty ended, and he turned his formidable energies to attacking the Reform Bill in opposition; he also proposed 'Conservative' as the new name for the Tory party. Some of his most influential colleagues on the founding

Committee had already died: Sir Humphry Davy and Dr Thomas Young in 1829, and Sir Thomas Lawrence the following January. Although Croker now attended far fewer committee meetings, he remained a trustee and ensured that the club's founding principles were followed in the 1830s, a period of rapid political change and technological development, during which the Athenæum flourished, with an ever lengthening waiting list and an expanded membership, which included many of the brightest talents in science, literature and the arts.

Part II

VICTORIAN GRANDEUR

(1830–90)

4

'THE MOST EMINENT PERSONS IN THE LAND'

Thomas Walker, police magistrate and author, considered the 'present system of clubs' to be 'one of the greatest and most important modern changes in society'.[1] His comments on his own club were no less fulsome. Among the 1,200 members of the Athenæum, he believed, 'are to be reckoned a large proportion of the most eminent persons in the land in every line, civil, military, and ecclesiastical, peers spiritual and temporal, commoners, men of the learned professions, those connected with science, the arts, and commerce in all its principal branches, as well as the distinguished who do not belong to any particular class'. Eminence 'in every line' might seem improbable, but a similar point was made eight decades later by a non-member, Thomas Escott, who stated that the Athenæum 'numbers from time to time as many famous soldiers and sailors as its nearest Pall Mall neighbour' (the United Service Club), is 'as well supplied with ambassadors as the Travellers' and with the 'makers and unmakers of administrations' as Brooks's or White's, the Carlton or the Reform, and through the nineteenth century was 'the only London home of his spiritual lordship, Samuel Wilberforce'.[2]

These claims will be tested in Part II, covering the years from 1830 to 1890, a timespan defined by the contours of British political and cultural history. By 1890, the year in which the club happened to change its administrative structure and refurbish its clubhouse, the Athenæum had achieved worldwide fame and was often invoked as the archetypal gentleman's club, the subject of Walter Wilson's *Ballot Day 1892*, discussed in the Prologue, and of the Revd Francis Waugh's short history, where he proudly announced some remarkable figures:

120 members were represented in the National Portrait Gallery, 67 were buried in Westminster Abbey and 25 in St Paul's.[3] In this chapter, which takes the story of the membership to 1860, we will consider how, as numbers increased to 1,200, the standard of new entrants, far from falling off, actually rose, not only as a result of fresh interest in a new clubhouse, but also through a series of interventions by the General Committee. By examining the special elections held by the committee in 1830 and 1838, and the introduction of 'Rule II' membership in 1830, we can see how the club defined itself for an elite on the cusp of the Victorian era, when political economists, scientists and explorers were creating an intellectual environment imbued with what Edward Bulwer Lytton described as 'the spirit of examination and questioning'.[4]

At the first AGM to be held in the new clubhouse, on 10 May 1830, it was fitting that Croker should take the chair, and that the General Committee's report should begin with its congratulations to 'the Club at large on having a Residence not inferior in beauty and convenience to that of any other Society'.[5] There was a cost, however, and the Committee earnestly appealed to the membership to tackle a debt of £3,612 (on top of mortgage repayments), either by levying a contribution from each member or by increasing the membership by 200, as previously recommended. Although the Committee made this proposition 'chiefly as a financial arrangement', they felt 'bound to state it as their opinion, that if this addition were to be made with more particular reference to the original objects of this institution, by the selection of *persons eminent in Science, Literature, or the Arts*, it would be highly advantageous to the general interests and credit of the Society'. The voice of Croker, ever vigilant in defence of the club's founding principles, is unmistakeable.

The members, always resistant to proposed levies or increases in subscriptions, agreed to the Committee's proposal, as they had done previously in 1824, when they moved into 12 Waterloo Place. But how to implement it? Rather than leaving half the elections to the General Committee, the membership preferred to create a special committee for the purpose. A second General Meeting, convened a fortnight later, ratified the proposal that '100 of the said members be selected by a Committee', and that 'the other 100 be elected by printed Lists' by the general membership.[6] The Irish poet Thomas Moore recorded in his journal that members of the selection committee were 'so

chosen as to represent different classes': 'for instance, the representative of the Peerage is Lord Farnborough – of the Commons, Croker – of the Clergy, the Bishop of Llandaff [Copleston], – of the Law, *Chief Justice* Park – of the Army & Navy, Napier – of the arts, Chantrey, of Science, Davies Gilbert & Professor Sedgwick – of General Literature, Thomas Moore, and so on'.[7] (Croker came a lowly eighth in the ballot.)

Forty years later, Sir Henry Holland, the physician and travel writer, could safely publish an account of the committee's confidential work.[8] They were to 'select, by unanimity of vote, one hundred out of the many hundred candidates on the books, to be immediately admitted as members'.[9] Achieving unanimity, he went on, proved to be 'laborious, litigious and encumbered with much correspondence'. Inevitably, Croker took the chair, and his 'astute but despotic energy, well known to all who knew the man, was shown in the way in which he carried the selection of any person for whom he was interested', although in one case he failed. The admission of another person of 'some public note' was so strongly contested that Holland received letters from four cabinet ministers canvassing him warmly. The candidate was elected.

As soon as Thomas Moore was chosen for the selection committee he received thirty letters from 'canvassers for the Club', one of them for a candidate whose claim was based on having written about the Siamese twins.[10] Moore's journal entry for Saturday 12 June 1830 is particularly revealing: 'Meeting of Committee – got through our business – had resolved to stand by Ellis in his general veto, in case the Bishop opposed Barnes – but all was right & unanimous.'[11] Since becoming editor of *The Times* in 1817, Thomas Barnes had transformed it into the campaigning newspaper that in 1831 would encourage its readers to 'thunder' for parliamentary reform. In October 1831, all but two of the bishops were to vote against the Reform Bill in the Lords. Agar-Ellis's 'general veto' may have been against blackballing on political grounds – Edward Copleston, Bishop of Llandaff, was a comparatively liberal Tory who strongly opposed the Reform Bill – or possibly on the basis of candidates' private lives: Barnes lived with a common-law wife.

Moore then refers to Colonel (later Sir) William Napier, hero and historian of the Peninsular War: 'Napier protested against Theodore Hook, which, though quite right, I rather regretted, on account of our Chairman Croker, who had set

his heart on getting the fellow in, and was himself most conceding & accommodating to the wishes of every body.' The facetious Hook was a man of letters, practical joker (he was behind the famous Berners Street hoax of 1809), debtor (he was imprisoned in the 1820s), and another common-law husband. He was supported by Scott and Croker in his literary career and was loathed by Macaulay, Croker's arch-enemy. As one of Croker's oldest friends, Moore was concerned for the chairman's feelings rather than those of the candidate, who was also a friend. There was a constant struggle between personal loyalties and objective standards in the election process. 'I could not indeed have anticipated', Moore concluded, 'that 13 men should have got on together, at once so conscientiously & smoothly, & our list tells well, I think, for the conscientious part of the business – George Villiers even withdrew his brother (whom we were all willing, for *his* sake, to elect) saying that his claims by no means came up to the point at which we had fixed our standard'. Moore 'left them nearly finished at a quarter before 7'.

Once the committee's list was settled, the general membership elected a further 100, and by 13 July the process was completed: 200 new members – technically 'supernumerary' – had been chosen from about 1,100 names in the Candidates Book.[12] As Holland pointed out, 'the distinction between the two modes of admission was keenly appreciated; and the eager struggle to be among the *select*, curiously illustrated a common form of human foible'.[13] There had been a rush to the Candidates Book, with members of the General Committee and of the selection committee prominent among the proposers and seconders of promising candidates, with the result that 44 of the 102 whom they finally elected were entered in the book between 24 May 1830 and the deadline of 1 June.[14] The 'select' 102 included luminaries such as Isambard Kingdom Brunel, Macaulay, John Stuart Mill, Edwin Landseer and Lord Ashley (later the philanthropic 7th earl of Shaftesbury). But then there were also outstanding individuals among the second group, such as Charles Austin, the brilliant lawyer who made a fortune during the railway mania, Charles Buller, the popular barrister and reforming MP, Sir Francis Goldsmid, another barrister and later a QC and MP, and Sir Moses Montefiore, the philanthropist and President of the Board of Deputies.

The second group also included two well-known raconteurs: Charles Cavendish Greville, Clerk of the Council in Ordinary since 1821 and famous

for his published diaries (in which conversations at the Athenæum are unrecorded), and Theodore Hook (earlier turned down by the committee) who was to be an habitué of the clubhouse.[15] Indeed, Hook became a kind of club mascot, entertaining members and staff with his witticisms as he dined with friends, including Thomas Moore and Abraham Hayward, at his favourite table in the north-east corner of the coffee room.[16] This became known as 'Temperance Corner', as in order to avoid scandal he invented innocuous code names for the strong drinks that he ordered from the waiters in large quantities. It was easier for a colourful and controversial figure like Hook to be elected through the members' ballot than by a unanimous vote in the selection committee.

In 1836 Hook recorded that it was the 'custom with certain of the present Ministers' to have 'house-dinners' at the Athenæum – hosted affairs in the private dining room – each Wednesday.[17] It is in the political arena that the list of 200 supernumerary members proves to be most revealing. Top of the national agenda between July 1830 and June 1832 was the 'perilous question' of Reform.[18] Among the new members elected to the non-partisan club in the summer of 1830 were a number of Whigs who were to play a part in the ensuing struggle for reform: Macaulay (the *wunderkind* MP, poet and historian), Buller (a genial Radical) and 'Honest Jack' Althorp (Viscount Althorp, leader of the Whigs in the Commons and Chancellor of the Exchequer), whose name had been placed in the Candidates Book only a week before the deadline, and whose seconder was none other than Croker, one of his main political opponents. Althorp was one of the Committee of Four, who met in secret in 1830 to frame the Reform Bill. Two of the others were already members of the club: Lord Durham ('Radical Jack' Lambton, subsequently the originator of the Reform Club)[19] and Lord John Russell, who introduced the bill in the Commons.[20] Among the new Tory Athenians of 1830 were George Spencer-Churchill, marquess of Blandford, an Ultra Tory who was pro-Reform for his own reasons,[21] and Lord Wharncliffe, later a trustee, who in effect led the opposition to the second Reform Bill in the Lords in 1831, but then became a 'waverer'. They joined a club which included among its Tory members Croker, who locked horns with Viscount Althorp in the Commons,[22] Sir Robert Peel, the duke of Wellington, Viscount Mahon (later Earl Stanhope) and Henry Phillpotts, Bishop of Exeter, who was burnt in effigy in Exeter on 5 November 1831, shortly after the devastating Bristol riots.

Outside the clubhouse there was widespread hardship and political agitation among the 'labouring classes', sometimes breaking out into riots. Following the dissolution of parliament in April 1831, the Lord Mayor circulated handbills inviting citizens to illuminate their houses, thus endangering those that remained dark. Apsley House was attacked, with the Iron Duke's dead wife Kitty still lying inside, and forty-seven of the Athenæum's panes of glass were smashed by a mob.[23] Inside the clubhouse the perilous question was weighed cerebrally, through the reading and writing of pamphlets. Of the more than one hundred pamphlets on the subject of reform published between 1830 and 1832, and still in the club's library, at least seventeen were written by members, including Blandford and Buller; Henry Pelham, duke of Newcastle (an Ultra Tory); George 'Pamphlet' Scrope (a Whig geologist and social reformer); and George Grote (Radical MP, banker and historian of Greece). Many pamphlets on this inflammatory topic were anonymous or pseudonymous, as authors wished to protect themselves from verbal or physical attack, or to avoid difficulties with professional superiors. We shall never know how many members published as 'Country Clergyman', 'Whig Commoner', 'Barrister', 'Junius' or 'One of the Old School'. We can, however, be sure that this group of pamphlets engaged the interest of a wide range of members, some of whom were leading protagonists inside and outside parliament.

When the third Reform Bill was finally passed, the General Committee addressed the ticklish question of how 'the Club at large' was to respond. On 5 June 1832, two days before the bill received the Royal Assent, they ordered that, 'in case of an illumination being called for', the clubhouse was to be lit with 'Candles in the lower Windows and Flambeaux on the Balcony'.[24] Candles were lit throughout London, and darkened windows might have invited further attention from those celebrating outside. Flambeaux, however, were expensive and more exuberantly celebratory: they were used by the club to mark major royal events.[25] On this occasion they must have been the subject of debate within the Committee, as at the next weekly meeting the minutes were approved, subject to a single alteration being made: 'That White Lamps be substituted for Flambeaux on the Balcony'.[26] The Athenæum could not, or would not be seen to exult.

In the cramped old Houses of Parliament, the 'great heat, the crowd, and the prolonged attention' were 'very fatiguing' for Tory and Whig parliamentarians

alike, and some of those who belonged to the Athenæum would escape to the clubhouse.[27] The duke of Newcastle was later to describe the south library as a haven for those in high political office.[28] The long drawing room and private dining room facilitated private discussions, out of earshot and, ostensibly, off the record. The club's non-political status, established in 1824, was reinforced in subsequent decades, thus setting it apart from much of Clubland. In May 1848, only a few weeks after the great Chartist meeting on Kennington Common, the General Committee decided not to subscribe to House of Commons dispatches, as the cost would be prohibitive for a facility which few members were likely to use.[29] Magrath, the club's secretary, who had visited the Commons and several clubs in order to research the matter, reported that the Union, the United University, the United Service, the Junior United Service, the Travellers, the Reform, the Carlton and the Conservative Club each paid between £27 and £50 to receive dispatches several times per evening – eight times at the Carlton. For politicians, the neutrality of the Athenæum as a 'literary' club added to its attraction.[30]

Ralph Waldo Emerson, a distinguished outsider, gave a first-hand account of club life on his election to honorary membership, under Rule XIII, in 1848.[31] He focused upon two MPs, Macaulay and Emerson's friend and supporter, Richard Monckton Milnes, poet and Tory politician. Milnes had visited France to witness the revolution and had been satirised in Mr Punch's 'Dream of the future' as Citizen Monckton Milnes.[32] Emerson wrote home to his wife:

> I was honoured with an election into the Athenæum Club 'during my temporary residence in England,' a privilege one must prize, not because only ten foreigners are eligible at any one time, but because it gives all the rights of a member in a magnificent library, reading-room, a home to sit in & see the best company, and a coffee room, if you like it, where you eat at cost. Milnes & other good men are always to be found there. Milnes is the most goodnatured man in England, made of sugar; he is everywhere & knows every thing; his speeches in the house of Commons are always unlucky, & a signal for emptying the house, a topic of great mirth to himself & all his friends. He is so entirely at home everywhere, & takes all so quietly that Sidney [sic] Smith called him 'the cool of the evening.' They address

> him now as 'Citoyen Milnes,' since Punch's, that is Thackeray's, late list of the Ministry . . . Macaulay is the king of diners-out. I do not know when I have seen such wonderful vivacity. He has the strength of ten men; immense memory, fun, fire, learning, politics manners, & pride, – talks all the time in a steady torrent. You would say, he was the best type of England. Yet, I am told, & it was pathetic to hear; that this most fashionable orator, scholar, poet, statesman, gentleman, is, in some companies of highest fashion, voted a bore. Sidney Smith [sic], you know, said 'he (Macaulay) had improved, he has flashes of silence.' Hallam is quiet & affable & courteous.[33]

The exchanges overheard by Emerson are characterised by affable banter and good 'politics manners'.

About 10 per cent of the original members of the Athenæum were MPs, more than the number in several of the smaller political clubs combined,[34] and in the club's first Annual Report (1825), Croker added 'Political characters' to his categories of the 'most distinguished'.[35] The decline in the number of MPs from over 100 to 78 by 1838 can be explained partly by the redistribution of seats at the first general election after the passing of the Reform Act, and partly by the availability very nearby of Barry's Reform Club, founded in 1836 (Plate 13).[36] Nevertheless, the Athenæum's staffing levels were adjusted in accordance with the parliamentary year. George John Shaw Lefevre, an eminent barrister and Whig politician, was another of the new supernumerary members of 1830. He was soon elected to the General Committee, where he presided over a meeting in 1831 at which it was ordered that the steward 'be allowed an Extra Man to carry up the Dinners and an Extra Waiter, both to be discharged at the end of the Session of Parliament'.[37] Similarly, extra evening papers were ordered while parliament was sitting, cleaning and repairs were carried out during the summer recess, and by the 1860s meetings of the General Committee were suspended for a few weeks during recesses.[38]

Cabinet ministers, like judges and bishops, were invited to join the club without ballot under Rule XII, and many accepted. Eleven of the fifteen 'political characters' portrayed by John Gilbert in a painting entitled *The Aberdeen Cabinet deciding on the Expedition to the Crimea* (1854; Plate 14) were members of the Athenæum: Lord Aberdeen (Byron's 'travell'd thane'), Charles Wood, Sir

William Molesworth, the duke of Argyll, Lord Clarendon, Lord Lansdowne, Lord John Russell, Lord Granville, Lord Palmerston, Sir George Grey and the duke of Newcastle, who spent a 'great deal' of time in the clubhouse, 'constantly dining there'.[39]

Leaks were a serious problem for this coalition. According to George Douglas, 8th duke of Argyll, Molesworth was well named:

> Our Cabinet at that time was rather leaky. Things got out, we did not quite know how, and reports, not very correct, were circulated as to the part taken by individual members. . . . Molesworth had a habit of taking down in a pocket-book notes of what passed in Cabinet discussions. . . . If the note-books were accessible to anyone, their contents may have reached the ears of Charles Villiers, of Kinglake, and of Hayward, through whom they would have a wide circulation in the press and in the clubs of London. This I believe to have been the source of a great deal of the small-talk, full of misrepresentation, which was embalmed in the history of the Crimean War, which we owe to the clever but not very scrupulous pen of the author of 'Eothen'.[40]

The evidence points to the Athenæum as the prime suspect among the clubs referred to here. Molesworth was the only Radical member of the cabinet: early in his career his acquaintances included Buller, Grote and James and John Stuart Mill, all members of the Athenæum, to which he was elected in 1853. Argyll was elected the same year, as was the Whig barrister and MP Alexander Kinglake, best known for *Eothen* (1844), a lively account of travels in the East, and his *Invasion of the Crimea* in eight volumes (1863–87). The Hon. Charles Pelham Villiers, brother of the earl of Clarendon, had been a member since 1825: he was an MP for sixty-three years and a member of the club for seventy-three. On the death of Theodore Hook in 1841, Abraham Hayward QC, reviewer, leader-writer and advisor to cabinet ministers, had inherited his famous table in the coffee room, soon renamed 'Abraham's Bosom', and developed his own coterie, known as 'the Society'.[41]

The duke of Argyll's memoirs also provide an example of the kind of chance encounter with fellow members that is characteristic of club life. During the Crimean War he set off for a cabinet meeting:

> I walked down to it, as I often did, from the Athenæum Club, and on my way I recognised the square form and sturdy step of Palmerston approaching the top of the steps leading down from the Duke of York's column. Hastening my own pace, I soon overtook him, just as he had crossed the Mall and was walking down the Esplanade. Putting my arm under his, and joining his walk, I said: 'Well, Lord Palmerston, I feel sure we have done the right thing in ordering an attack upon Sebastopol . . . and yet I cannot help feeling a little nervous about it . . .' On which Palmerston replied in his most cheery and jaunty tones: 'Oh, you need not be in the least anxious. With our combined fleet and our combined armies we are certain to succeed.'[42]

Many of the diplomats who were either appointed by Palmerston, or had to deal with him over a long political career, were also members of the Athenæum, including Sir Woodbine Parish, chargé d'affaires at Buenos Aires, Sir John Bowring, the fourth governor of Hong Kong, and Sir Harry Parkes, a controversial figure in the Second Opium War.

When Palmerston lost the general election of 1858, Richard Cobden celebrated what he hoped would be the demise of the Liberal Party by resigning from the Reform Club, the very name of which he considered to be a 'swindle', and joining the Athenæum.[43] Cobden was elected under what came to be known as 'Rule II', a means of electing particularly distinguished members which had been established in 1830. Having raised the question of adding 200 supernumerary members, the Annual Report of that year went on to argue that the club's founding principles could best be preserved by introducing 'a certain number of persons of distinguished eminence in Science Literature or the Arts' each year.[44] Rule II members would be fast-tracked into the club, rather than waiting for a decade and a half to be entered in the ballot. Here was another opportunity for the Committee to enhance the club's standing. The new rule would also enable them to bring in individuals who could be useful, and at short notice.[45] The limited scope, however, of Rule II – no more than nine candidates could be elected each year – reflected the membership's unwillingness to allow the General Committee to control the election of new candidates,

as it had done in 1824–25. Members of the Committee served for only three years, apart from the five trustees, one of whom was Croker.

A quorum of nine members of the Committee was necessary when Rule II proposals were considered, and a trustee took the chair.[46] The names of the first successful candidates, who had to be elected unanimously, were listed in the Annual Report presented to the 1831 AGM, chaired by Martin Archer Shee, president of the Royal Academy:

> H.W. Pickersgill, Esq. R.A.; the Rev. Dr. Maltby, Reader to Lincoln's Inn; Dr. Christie, author of several valuable works, and now engaged in the prosecution of an overland journey to India, with the view of making a series of observations on Geological Phenomena, under the patronage of the President and Council of the Geological Society; Sharon Turner, Esq., author of the History of the Anglo-Saxons, and of other works; the Right Hon. Sir George Murray, G.C.B., late Quarter-Master-General to His Majesty's Forces; and George Rennie, Esq., Sculptor.[47]

The list provides useful clues to some of the club's priorities and predilections.

Pickersgill, the portrait painter, and Rennie, whose most widely known sculpture, *The Archer*, was on the landing of the grand staircase of the Athenæum, represented the arts. Only one other sculptor, John Foley, was elected under Rule II before 1860. Painters were much more successful: not only did they have a higher public profile, as their exhibited works were widely reviewed, but successive presidents of the Royal Academy, and thus influential trustees of the Athenæum, *ex officio* – Martin Shee, Charles Eastlake and Francis Grant – were all painters themselves. The club's Establishment leanings are reflected in the choice of artists who received royal commissions or portrayed monarchs: *The Opening of the New London Bridge* was commissioned by William IV in 1832, the year of Clarkson Stanfield's election; Francis Grant, elected in 1853, had painted several portraits of Queen Victoria; and William Frith's *Ramsgate Sands* (1854) was purchased by her five years before his election. Several of the other artists of the period elected under Rule II were household names: John Martin (1833), Daniel Maclise (1841), David Roberts (1845), John Rogers Herbert (1849), Richard Redgrave (1854), John Frederick Lewis (1856) and George

Richmond (1856), whose sitters included Athenians such as Faraday, Hallam, Macaulay, Lyell, Ruskin and Lord Lyndhurst. Three of these Rule II painters went on to serve on the General Committee, as did the architect Charles Barry, elected in 1836.

The election of John Ruskin, the most celebrated art critic of the day, illustrates the process through which a Rule II candidate passed. A first attempt to admit him by this means proved to be unsuccessful, in January 1847.[48] His proposer was the Dean of Westminster, Dr Buckland, an original member of the club and Ruskin's former tutor at Christ Church, famed for his private ambition to consume the entire bestiary. In the public realm he had been Oxford's first Reader in Geology and in London the founding president of the Geological Society, of which Ruskin had been a fellow since 1840. In a club in which there was a large contingent of distinguished scientists, including Lyell, who was present when Ruskin was discussed, Buckland would have regarded Ruskin as a promising geologist, as well as a brilliant young art critic: Ruskin's early notebooks are crammed with geological observations. Two years later, on 23 January 1849, Ruskin's name was placed in the Candidates Book by a prominent and popular member of the club, Canon Henry Hart Milman, Rector of St Margaret's Westminster, and soon to be Dean of St Paul's.[49] Ruskin, author of 'a very distinguished work on Modern Painters', was due to be considered as a Rule II candidate that day, and although Buckland, his proposer, was absent, Milman was present at the General Committee meeting.[50] It was decided, however, to postpone discussion of the eleven candidates until the next weekly meeting, which Buckland attended. Ruskin was not elected then, nor at meetings in February and early March: only thirty years of age, he was already a controversial figure. But then, on 27 March, when Buckland was present and Viscount Mahon, president of the Society of Antiquaries, was in the chair, John Ruskin, 'private gentleman', was unanimously elected to membership of the club 'under the 2nd rule'.[51] Although it is true that 'key figures were co-opted as soon as their celebrity demanded it' by means of Rule II,[52] the process itself could take two or more years.[53] Ruskin used the clubhouse, the classical design of which he always disparaged in print, and donated copies of his books to the library; but he was too shy to change for dinner there in the evenings, in case the servants did not recognise him.

As well as bringing in younger men of great potential, successive General Committees had a happy knack of anticipating preferments or promotions in their choices of older candidates under Rule II, as in the case of the Revd Dr Edward Maltby, 'Reader to Lincoln's Inn', elected in April 1831. A fine scholar and a liberal Churchman, born in 1770, Maltby was to become Bishop of Chichester in September 1831, and thus the only Whig on the bench of bishops at a crucial point in Earl Grey's struggle for Reform; he was eventually Bishop of Durham. Other clerics elected under Rule II included the legendary Sydney Smith (1832), Canon of St Paul's, whose correspondence after his election reveals friendships that were possibly made or renewed in the clubhouse;[54] Richard Chenevix Trench (1858), poet, philologist and Dean of Westminster, later Archbishop of Dublin; and Charles Vaughan (1857), New Testament scholar and headmaster of Harrow School. In terms of preferment, however, the club backed a loser in Vaughan, whose sudden resignation from Harrow in 1859 and later withdrawal of his acceptance of the see of Rochester may have been precipitated by the threat of his affair with a boy at the school being exposed: the evidence, which is ambiguous, was suppressed until 1964.[55] Within the club he was regarded sufficiently highly to figure in *Ballot Day 1892*.[56]

These clergymen joined bishops of the Established Church who had also been invited into the club without being balloted, under Rule XII. John Bird Sumner, who became Archbishop of Canterbury in 1848, was an original member. His successors, Charles Longley and Archibald Tait, also joined before their translation to Canterbury, in 1857 and 1856 respectively. Like bishops Phillpotts of Exeter, Shuttleworth of Chichester, Wilberforce of Oxford and Wordsworth of Lincoln, the archbishops held varying ecclesiastical and doctrinal positions, in a period that witnessed fierce controversies over matters relating to Church politics and to new scientific approaches to scripture and the creation. All the clerical members could be accommodated in the Athenæum, under the aegis of a pagan goddess, because their shared classical education and the range of their interests and attainments offered scope for 'association' which avoided confrontation. Several senior clergy also became involved in the governance of the club. In the mid-1850s, for example, many meetings of the General Committee were chaired by the Dean of St Paul's (Milman) or the Bishop of Oxford (Wilberforce), the latter also chairing the AGM in May 1857.[57]

The first scientist to be elected under Rule II, at the same meeting as Pickersgill and Maltby, was virtually bound to be a geologist, in a club which included Murchison, Sabine, Buckland, Lyell and Whewell among its members, and which chose the Revd Adam Sedgwick as one of the two scientists to sit on the supernumeraries committee in 1830.[58] The wordy description of Dr Christie, however, in the Annual Report of 1831, only underlines his obscurity; and Humphry Ward, who filled more than half of his 1926 history of the club with potted biographies of Rule II members, could offer no details on him. This was because he died in 1832. Another young man with great potential (he was born in 1801), Alexander Turnbull Christie wrote a treatise on epidemic cholera, served as an assistant surgeon for the East India Company in Madras and sailed back to Scotland in 1828, where he developed his interest in geology and meteorology.[59] He was appointed as a geological surveyor by the government of Madras, to which he returned in 1831 with the support of the great scientific polymath, Baron Alexander von Humboldt, who was a foreign member of the Geological Society.[60] Christie, a 'compound character', was characteristically Athenian in engaging in three areas: science, medicine and empire.

In an age of the gentleman amateur expert, when several of the most senior members of the Geological Society were clergy, geology was the most controversial of the sciences, with the highest public profile. Among the rich crop of Rule II members chosen by the General Committee in 1840 – the year of Robert Stephenson and Samuel Wilberforce – was Gideon Mantell, 'Author of various works on Geology, Founder of a large collection of Fossils recently purchased by the British Museum, and well known as the discoverer of the Iguanodon and Hylœosaurus'.[61] Mantell's descriptive catalogue of the 'objects of geology' in his Brighton museum contains epigraphs from the writings of the late Sir Humphry Davy, the first chairman of the club ('If we look with wonder upon the great remains of human works . . .') and from the future Archbishop Sumner's study *On the Records of the Creation, and on the Moral Attributes of the Creator* (1833), which aimed to prove the 'unreasonableness of supposing that geological discoveries are hostile to the Mosaic account of the creation'.[62] The ability of the Athenæum to accommodate professional antagonists is exemplified by the inclusion of the highly competitive Richard Owen in the same group of Rule II

members as Mantell. Described in 1831 as the Hunterian Professor at the Royal College of Surgeons, and 'at present engaged by the British Association to draw up a Memoir on Fossil Reptiles', Owen was feared by many of his fellow scientists. Following Mantell's death in 1852 from an overdose of opium – he was suffering from scoliosis following a terrible accident – Owen stored part of his spine at the Royal College; and it was Owen rather than Mantell who was then available to advise Benjamin Waterhouse on his much visited sculptures of the Crystal Palace Dinosaurs at Sydenham.

As Bulwer Lytton pointed out in 1833, the 'cultivation of science' was not a profession in England.[63] The 'higher departments of science', he argued, 'are pursued by a few who possess independent fortune, by a few more who hope to make a moderate addition to an income itself but moderate, arising from a small private fortune, and by a few who occupy the very small number of official situations, dedicated to the abstract sciences; such are the chairs at our universities'. Lytton could have named examples of all three types at his club. Having suggested ways of improving the situation, he then turned upon Davies Gilbert, president of the Royal Society, a trustee, *ex officio*, at the Athenæum, and the second member responsible for science on its supernumeraries committee. A man of 'respectable endowments' and of 'large fortune', he was 'as a child' in science. The Royal Society, Lytton added in a footnote, was 'the mimic of a fashionable club'.[64]

So much for Davy's dream of professionalising the Royal Society.[65] His aspirations for the Athenæum, however, as a place of association for fellows, were largely fulfilled, as recruitment from among their number continued. An early composite photograph of five leading Victorian scientists depicted Faraday, Huxley, Wheatstone, Brewster and Tyndall: all were Athenian FRSs.[66] Between 1827 and 1859, twenty-seven members of the club were awarded the Royal Medal of the Royal Society, and a further eight medallists joined after receiving the honour. The medallists' range of backgrounds and interests is striking. Take, for example, the first three years in which two Athenians were joint winners: 1834, the geologist Charles Lyell and John (later Sir John) William Lubbock, astronomer and banker; 1838, the chemist Thomas Graham (subsequently elected under Rule II), who discovered dialysis, and Henry Fox Talbot, inventor of the calotype process of photography; and 1840, the astronomer Sir John

Herschel, a Rule II member and medallist for the second time, and the physicist Charles Wheatstone, famous for his 'bridge'.[67]

Dr Christie was not only a scientist, but also a medical man, and here again the Athenæum excelled.[68] Of the fifteen members who figured in Thomas Pettigrew's *Medical Portrait Gallery* (1838–40), eight held positions in the royal household at various times: among the most famous of them were Sir Henry Halford and Sir Benjamin Brodie, both original members, and Sir William Lawrence, elected in 1830.[69] Two other well-known figures elected that year were characteristically Athenian in their professional interests. 'Mummy Pee' Pettigrew, who was persuaded to include an entry on himself, entertained his friends by carrying out autopsies on mummies, and was asked by the duke of Hamilton to preserve his body after death. Bearing in mind that Halford owned half of the severed fourth cervical vertebra of King Charles I,[70] and that Richard Owen stored part of a fellow member's spine at the Royal College of Surgeons, a pattern seems to be emerging here.[71] One of the most glamorous surgeons of the day, Sir Astley Paston Cooper, exhibited another Athenian trait in his inveterate habit of note-taking: he kept a detailed journal each day, recorded geological and mineralogical observations when travelling and carefully preserved his case-notes throughout a long medical career.[72] Cooper performed a lithotomy, without anaesthetic, on a fellow original member, the courageous Sir John Leach, vice-chancellor of England, in a mere twenty-five minutes.[73]

Dr Christie applied his medical and geological skills in India, a country which for many young men of his generation was either a graveyard or a staging post in a distinguished career. Histories of British India were written by James Mill of the India Office, an original member of the club who remained firmly in Pentonville rather than travelling to the subcontinent; the Revd George Robert Gleig, a prominent Scottish military chaplain (elected in 1829); and the Hon. Mountstuart Elphinstone (1830), formerly lieutenant-governor of Bombay, who was highly regarded by the duke of Wellington.[74] Elphinstone's 'code' of the 1820s had as powerful an influence upon Indian education as did Macaulay's introduction of the English language as the medium of teaching in secondary schools in the mid-1830s, when Macaulay was a Member of the British Supreme Council in India. Many members of the club served in the East India Company and were either pupils or teachers at its college. Macaulay himself became an

assistant commissioner of the board in June 1832, and within six months had become the secretary of the East India Company.[75] The Revd Thomas Malthus, an original member and one of the most influential political economists of his day, was known as 'Pop', or 'Population' Malthus at East India College, where Mahommed Mirza Ibraheem taught from 1826 to 1844, before returning to Persia. John Stuart Mill, elected in 1830, like Ibraheem, wrote in defence of Malthus and became an assistant examiner to the company. Horace Wilson, a Rule II member in 1837, held the Boden Chair of Sanskrit at Oxford and was the company's librarian. He disagreed with Macaulay on the use of the medium of English in Indian schools, and decided that it would be best to visit India when he was writing a continuation to James Mill's *History*. Henry Thoby Princep was educated at the college and travelled to Calcutta with a writership at the age of sixteen, later becoming a member of the Council of Bengal and a director of the company: when elected under Rule II in 1846, he was described as a 'distinguished Oriental Scholar & Indian Statesman';[76] and the Tory politician Edward Law, earl of Ellenborough, an original member, became governor-general of India in 1842. (In all, fifteen of the viceroys of India were members.) It is hardly surprising to find that the Athenæum was eager to benefit from a government announcement in 1859 that it was giving away certain publications printed by the now defunct East India Company.[77]

As we will see in the next chapter, books of travel and exploration were in demand at the club: many members were long-distance travellers themselves, often on East India Company vessels, and others were hungry for accounts of foreign tours.[78] The extensive journeys of Sir Joseph Dalton Hooker MD, elected under Rule II in 1851, equipped him to be the leading authority on the geographical distribution of plants, a natural successor to his father at Kew and an ideal correspondent with Darwin. Sir James Brooke, the dashing Rajah of Sarawak, 'whose merits as an enterprising Traveller are universally acknowledged', was listed in the Annual Report of 1848 alongside other Rule II members with outstanding records overseas.[79] In *Eothen* (1844), Kinglake entertained his readers with anecdotes of the Pasha of Belgrade, who announced that he understood locomotives: 'whirr! whirr! all by wheels! – whiz! whiz! all by steam'.[80] Kinglake used Clubland as a cultural reference point when exploring the modern English gentleman's response to the foreign Other. If one becomes a 'man about

town' at Jerusalem, he suggests, 'your club is the great Church of the Holy Sepulchre, where everybody meets everybody every day', and 'your Pall Mall is the Via Dolorosa'.[81] A decade before Kinglake's election to the Athenæum, an encounter in the desert anticipates life in the drawing room.[82] In the middle of a 'wilderness', he passes a gentleman dressed in an 'English shooting-jacket' and riding on a camel.[83] Lifting their hands to their caps and waving their arms 'in courtesy', they pass 'quite as distantly as if we had passed in Pall Mall'. Only when their native servants fall into conversation do the two Englishmen feel constrained to address one another.

It transpires that the stranger is a military man returning home from India. Contemporary readers of *Eothen* might have imagined the 'gallant officer', once back in London, sitting in the United Service Club, or perhaps the Travellers. If, however, he had been one of the more bookish officers in his regiment, he might well have been a member of the Athenæum. Wellington's mainstay in the Peninsular War, Sir George Murray, described as 'late Quarter-Master-General to His Majesty's Forces' in the first Rule II list of 1830, was educated at the University of Edinburgh, held an honorary degree from Oxford and was a fellow of the Royal Society. Murray was to leave maps among his voluminous papers. Other officers were authors. Colonel Napier wrote the standard history of the Peninsular War (1828–40). Major General Sir John ('Jock') Malcolm, an original member, published *The History of Persia* (1815), *The Political History of India* (1826), *Sketches of Persia* (1828), *A Memoir of Central India* (1832) and *The Government of India* (1833), all of which were listed in the club's first printed catalogue of 1845.[84] Sir Graves Haughton, who studied oriental languages as a young army officer at Fort William College, Calcutta, and later taught at the East India College in England, donated several 'Works edited by him in Bengalee' to the library, on his election in 1830.[85] Colonel William Sykes of the Indian Army, elected in 1837, became a director of the East India Company on his return home and by 1845 had ten publications listed in the library catalogue, ranging from his study *On the Increase of Wealth and Expenditure in the various Classes of Society in the United Kingdom* (1837) to his monograph *On the Quails and Hemipodii of India* (1836).[86]

Several of the more adventurous military men and naval officers embraced by the Athenæum were as 'colourful' as they were gifted. The much fêted

Captain Alexander Burnes's election under Rule II in 1835 came the year after his *Travels into Bokhara* appeared, a book which rivalled the *Pickwick Papers* as a publishing sensation. The Afghans who killed him six years later were said to have included the male relatives of women with whom he had slept. Major Dixon Denham, an original member, and Lieutenant Hugh Clapperton RN, elected in 1827, were famed explorers of northern and central Africa, from which they returned as enemies. Neither lived to enjoy the clubhouse for long, but they outshone Eastlake in several respects, not least in achieving the remarkable feat of travelling together for 133 days without speaking. (Denham had accused Clapperton of having sexual relations with an Arab servant boy.) Following Denham's death in 1828, Clapperton made a second expedition into the interior of Africa, taking care to contradict Denham's version of the first expedition in his own account of the second.[87]

Clapperton had been proposed for membership of the club by Sir John Barrow, second secretary at the Admiralty.[88] Barrow sponsored a number of polar expeditions of the period which seized the popular imagination. Rear-Admiral Sir John Ross and his nephew, Rear-Admiral Sir James Clark Ross, were both elected under Rule II in 1834. (John Ross had sailed to the Arctic in 1818 with Edward Sabine on board; Ross's naming of the 'Croker Mountains', a great barrier to progress which proved to be a mirage, damaged his reputation.)[89] Rear-Admiral Sir John Franklin, an original member, died in 1847 in search of the North-West Passage: his statue with memorial plaques, raised 'by unanimous vote of Parliament' close to the clubhouse in 1866, was sculpted by Matthew Noble, later a member of the club.[90] Another naval officer and original member, George Lyon, was unusual in taking part in expeditions to both the Arctic and Africa.[91]

As well as looking outwards to empire, the club looked back to history, and particularly English history: the Committee's choice of Sharon Turner as their 'literary' figure among the first Rule II members in 1830 reflected the membership's interest in the subject. The year after his election, Turner donated four of his multi-volume works, on subjects ranging from the Anglo-Saxons to Queen Elizabeth.[92] Henry Hallam, a member of the club's founding Committee and later an active committee man, was a more distinguished scholar who wrote influential accounts of the history of medieval Europe and of the constitutional

history of England. When he came off the General Committee by rotation, in 1839, Macaulay went on.[93] Nine years later Macaulay would become the most famous historian in the land, having published the first two volumes of his best-selling *History of England from the Accession of James II*. Another committee man, Milman, published his controversial *History of the Jews* in 1829, and then two widely read works: *The History of Early Christianity* (1840), as it was popularly known, and the *History of Latin Christianity* (1854–55). Milman's liberalism worried many of his clerical brethren, who felt that his histories seemed to rinse the miraculous out of the grand narrative of the Bible.

In proposing Ruskin for Rule II membership in 1849, Milman was supporting the future historian of Venice and of Amiens, who regarded Thomas Carlyle as his mentor. The delay in the election of Carlyle, 'Sage of Chelsea', until 1853, sixteen years after the publication of *The French Revolution*, reflects not only what might have been regarded as an 'unclubbable' personality, but also his personal circumstances. When Lord Ashburton brought him in under Rule II, however, with a promise to cover his fees, Carlyle wrote, 'You have really given me a very pretty Freehold for the rest of my life; and in a way that cannot be refused, – that can only be accepted, with a feeling which is itself a real possession to one. I do return many thanks; and will not speak another word. It is certain, except for this or some such miracle, I should never had been a member of any Club.'[94] Six years later, Carlyle's disciple and biographer, James Anthony Froude, was also elected under Rule II. It was Froude's monumental *History of England* (1856–70) that most effectively challenged Macaulay's Whig interpretation of history and Henry Buckle's 'doctrine of averages'.[95] Following the publication of his *History of Civilization in England* (vol. I), Buckle had been elected under Rule II in 1858,[96] the year before Froude – another example of the club's accommodation of intellectual combatants.

Milman and Macaulay both published historical verse, as well as prose: Milman was elected professor of poetry at Oxford in 1821, the year after his *Fall of Jerusalem* appeared; and Macaulay's *Lays of Ancient Rome*, begun in India, made his name as a writer in 1842. 'This is a great literary epoch with your nation', a German commented to Bulwer Lytton in 1833.[97] Reflecting upon 'the great books we have produced during the last twenty years', Lytton's memory reverts to 'the *chef-d'œuvres* of poets and writers of fiction' – the works of Byron,

Wordsworth, Scott, Moore, Shelley and Campbell. Scott, Moore and Campbell were all original members of the Athenæum, but the next generation of poets, including Tennyson and Browning, were too early in their careers to be elected.

An opportunity for reassessment presented itself in 1838, when the General Committee made its third intervention in the election process. With increased running costs, and with the total membership under strength at around 1,160, the club was again facing difficulties. The General Committee recommended the appointment of another special committee, chosen by the membership, as in 1830, in order to elect forty distinguished candidates at one blow. At the AGM held on 14 May 1838, with the 6th earl of Shaftesbury in the chair, the broad proposal was accepted, but the idea of a special electoral committee was rejected. It was resolved that ordinary members would be limited to 1,200, that the supernumeraries elected in 1830 who were still members would be included in that number and that the General Committee itself would choose the remaining forty from among the names already in the Candidates Book.[98] The constitution dictated, however, that the decision of the General Meeting had to be ratified at a second meeting, two weeks later. So there was a chance to smuggle new candidates into the book before it was closed on 28 May. Ten of those eventually elected were among them: hence the clever, if technically inaccurate sobriquet of the 'Forty Thieves'.[99]

Croker, who had seldom attended the General Committee's meetings since 1830, now chaired those at which the procedure for the impending election was agreed.[100] On 21 June 1838 the General Committee met in the library at noon, with Lord Shaftesbury in the chair. Among the other twenty-four members present were Croker and Shee (both trustees); William Brande (chemist and editor of a *Dictionary of Science, Literature, and Art*), Robert Brown (the first keeper of the Botanical Department of the British Museum) and Lyell; the Dean of Carlisle (Robert Hodgson), the Bishop of Hereford (Thomas Musgrave) and Milman; Augustus Callcott (painter and RA) and Eastlake; Hallam (historian); Colonel W. Gordon Macgregor; Dr John Mayo (physician); and John Parker (MP for Sheffield).

A jaundiced view of the election process, and particularly of Croker's role in it, emerges from correspondence between two of the Wilberforce brothers,

both still clergy with rural livings in 1838, and both soon to become archdeacons. Robert Isaac Wilberforce had been elected in 1825, the same year as his reforming father, William.[101] Following the publication of their joint *Life of William Wilberforce* in five volumes (1838), the gifted and highly ambitious Samuel wrote to Robert, his elder brother, on 19 April, suggesting that a copy must go to the Athenæum, 'which you ought to give as a member, and I as an aspirant and so in which we both have an interest'.[102] Samuel had been in the Candidates Book since 30 January 1837,[103] and was piqued when he was not among the Forty Thieves, privately blaming Croker, whom he rightly suspected of writing the hostile review of the *Life* in the *Quarterly Review*.[104] 'I was *not* elected', he wrote to Robert on 6 July: 'Dr Hodgson told me. They must be unanimous. Any one voice postponed, put off the election . . . No question is asked or reason given. 15 out of the whole 25 who could have been present signed my recommendation – the feeling for me was strong.'[105] Croker, he continued, 'is a man who has raised himself by doing the dirty work of others – he is clever; but he owes far more to being a clever dung feeder than a clever man; few men would carry talents to *his* Master and therefore he found little competition'. In December 1839 the quick-tempered Samuel discussed with Robert how to 'silence' Croker, and even consulted Gladstone on the matter. Although Gladstone was not a member, he contacted a number of senior Athenians, pleading Samuel's cause. Samuel was elected under Rule II in 1840 and subsequently changed his mind about Croker, who was a member of his congregation at Alverstoke.[106] In 1845 'Soapy Sam' Wilberforce became Dean of Westminster in May and then Bishop of Oxford in November; Robert converted to Roman Catholicism in 1854 and died three years later.

The forty candidates who overcame all obstacles in 1838 included a number of academics, politicians, clergy, medical men and scientists, a sprinkling of the titled and landed, an interesting selection of artists, but only one writer. There were no fewer than nine FRSs in the list. Among the scientists, medical men and travellers were Viscount Adare MP, FRS (astronomer), Charles Darwin MA (secretary of the Geological Society of London), Captain John Washington RN (secretary of the Royal Geographical Society), John Royle FRS (surgeon, naturalist and professor at King's College, London), the Revd Francis Lunn FRS (naturalist), Bransby Cooper FRS (surgeon, lecturer in anatomy and Astley

Cooper's nephew; he died in the clubhouse in 1853),[107] Richard Partridge FRS (surgeon at King's College Hospital), William Henry MD, FRS (chemist and physiologist), William John Hamilton (geologist, son of William Richard Hamilton) and Lieutenant John Wellshead (India Navy and author of *Travels in Arabia*). Most were 'compound characters', in an age in which 'participation in science was often a form of economic and social upward mobility',[108] a process which was accelerated by election to the Athenæum, especially in this select group of 1838.

Darwin, the giant among them, had taken the first volume of Lyell's *Principles of Geology* on board the *Beagle* at Plymouth in 1831: volumes II and III were waiting for him in Montevideo and Valparaiso.[109] On his return to England, his work of classification and election as an honorary secretary of the Geological Society of London had been supported by Lyell, who also proposed him for membership of the Athenæum in December 1836.[110] The naturalist whose work was later to transform the sciences and social sciences, and destabilise received ideas in theology and the arts, wrote to Lyell on 9 August 1838: 'I go & dine at the Athenæum like a gentleman, or rather like a Lord, for I am sure the first evening I sat in that great drawing room, all on a sofa by myself, I felt just like a duke. – I am full of admiration at the Athenæum; one meets so many people there, that one likes to see.'[111] Darwin used the clubhouse frequently and made various suggestions about its working. In 1842, for example, he wrote to the General Committee, 'suggesting the propriety of having the lines of railways and stations, as far as completed and finally determined, laid down by hand on the Ordnance Maps in the cases; and also the addition of the stations to the several lines of railway represented on the large Map in the Newspaper room'.[112] This was approved, the cost for the thirty-two maps being estimated at £4. 0s. 0d.

The scholars among the Forty Thieves included Colonel John Briggs (historian of India and Persian scholar), the Revd R.W. Browne MA (Roman historian and professor of classical literature at King's College, London), the Revd Thomas Ormerod (divinity lecturer at Oxford), the Revd Arthur Stanley (Church historian, traveller and later Dean of Westminster) and George Grote MP.

From public and political life, and the law, were Andrew Rutherfurd (Solicitor-General for Scotland), the 2nd marquess of Northampton (president of the Royal Society in 1838 and a patron of the arts), Lord Lyttelton (Gladstone's

brother-in-law and principal of the Queen's College, Birmingham), George Greenwood (barrister and historian of the Germans to AD 772), George Nicholls (Poor Law Commissioner), Edwin (later Sir Edwin) Chadwick (barrister, Poor Law Commissioner and sanitary reformer), William Crawford (philanthropist and prison inspector); and Richard Monckton Milnes MP.

Those associated with the arts, broadly defined, included Robert Vernon (self-made profiteer and patron of art, whose house was in Pall Mall), George Cattermole (artist and illustrator), William Macready (actor manager), James Harding (watercolourist), John Sheepshanks (art collector and public benefactor), Philip Hardwick FRS (architect of public and railway buildings) and Sydney, later Sir Sydney Smirke (architect).

And then there was the one writer in the group of new members, another Charles and another giant. Charles Dickens of 48 Doughty Street was placed in the Candidates Book on 12 May, suspiciously close to the original deadline of the 14th, by his friend and proposer, Serjeant Thomas Noon Talfourd MP, lawyer and author, to whom he had dedicated the book edition of the *Pickwick Papers* the previous year. He was seconded by Serjeant Henry Storks, an original member of the club, and duly elected, aged only twenty-six. Six other candidates were also still in their twenties, and two were even younger than Dickens, one of them being Stanley, the future dean who was to bury him in the Abbey.[113] Dickens had completed only one novel: *Sketches by Boz* had been published in 1836, and *Oliver Twist* was currently appearing in *Bentley's Miscellany*. But *Pickwick Papers* was a phenomenon, bringing Dickens international celebrity. (Darwin loved it.) Nevertheless, Dickens's election in 1838 is remarkable, considering that he had started work in squalid conditions at Warren's blacking factory, Old Hungerford Stairs, on 9 February 1824, two days after his twelfth birthday and seven days before the foundation of the club. His election reflected the club's desire to attract the most promising talent in literature, art and science, irrespective of parentage and background.[114] For the young writer himself, admission to the Athenæum was a badge of respectability as a gentleman.

Dickens's main literary rival was Thackeray, whose election to the club followed a very different trajectory, partly because his rise to fame as a novelist was much slower: in 1838 the 'Yellowplush papers' were appearing in *Fraser's*,

and the part publication of *Vanity Fair* was still nine years away. Hallam's first attempt to bring in the author of 'the Irish Sketch Books . . . . . Journal from Cornhill to Cairo and various other popular productions' under Rule II failed, in February 1847.[115] No reference was made to Thackeray's popular series, 'The Snobs of England, by One of Themselves', then just concluding in *Punch*: when researching the section on clubs, he had inspected not only the complaints book of the Reform, of which he was a member, but also that of the Athenæum.[116] Soon after his rejection, Thackeray began his 'Travels in London' by describing the author meeting Mr Punch in St James's Park, 'under the Duke of York's Column', to discuss a commission for a foreign tour.[117] Having assured the author that 'Britons do not care a fig for foreign affairs', and told him to travel in London and bring him an account of his tour, Mr Punch turns into the Athenæum 'in company with my Lord Bishop of Bullocksmithy, whose cob had just pulled up at the door'. They enter a clubhouse containing plentiful supplies of bishops, maps and books on 'foreign affairs'.

When Milman took up the cause of the 'Author of Vanity Fair' in 1850, Croker was in the chair – by now a rare event – and Thackeray remained unelected.[118] Milman shared his frustration with Hallam:

> There is no counting on the stubborn stupidities of men. One voice, you know, excludes, and among eighteen committee-men that there should not be one self-conceited – I must not fill up the sentence. We are bound not to reveal the secrets of our *Conciliabulum*, but I may say that it was curious to see Macaulay and Croker rowing together in my boat, with Mahon, &c. &c. If I had not thought myself sure of my success, I should not have subjected Mr. Thackeray to the chance of rejection. Pray assure him of my regret and disappointment . . . Every man whose opinion Mr Thackeray would value was with him.[119]

The candidate himself thanked Milman and Abraham Hayward for their efforts, telling Hayward that, as a satirist, he wondered that he had not made more enemies than he had, and adding: 'If you should ever know the old gentleman (for old I am sure he is, steady and respectable) who objects to me, give him my best compliments, and say I think he was quite right to exercise

his judgment honestly, and to act according to that reason with wh. heaven has mercifully endowed him. But that he would be slow, I wouldn't in the least object to meet him.'[120]

Success came at last in February 1851, when Thackeray was proposed by William Broderip, the lawyer and naturalist.[121] Although he had joined the Garrick in 1833 and the Reform in 1840, Thackeray became an habitué, working in the club's 'beautiful library', seconding candidates for election and later enjoying whist and billiards.[122] Ironically, whereas he was the complete Athenian, Dickens, elected thirteen years earlier, seems to have been a restless and occasional attender, who would stand up eating a sandwich, sometimes pacing about, and who fantasised about an Athenian bore, 'Mr Prowler, of the Royal Society of Arts'.[123] Dickens did, however, enjoy the company of friends such as Cattermole and Macready, fellow Forty Thieves, and the journalist and historian John Forster, later his biographer. Forster was elected under Rule II in 1852. Thomas Walker had claimed in 1835 that the membership of the Athenæum contained 'a large proportion of the most eminent persons in the land in every line', and this could be said with even greater confidence by the 1850s.

5

'A SCORE OF GRAVE GENTLEMEN'

During Thackeray's first American lecture tour, two years after his election to the club, his thoughts turned towards 'the familiar London flag stones, and the library at the Athenæum'.[1] On his second tour, in 1855, he began his new lecture on George III with memories of returning from India as a child in 1817, 'peeping through the colonnade at Carlton House, and seeing the abode of the great Prince Regent'.[2] Today, he explained, 'where the palace once stood, a hundred little children are paddling up and down the steps to St. James's Park,' and 'a score of grave gentlemen are taking their tea at the "Athenæum Club;" as many grisly warriors are garrisoning the "United Service Club" opposite.' More subtle than Theodore Hook's ditty on the 'mental' and the 'regimental',[3] Thackeray's affectionate contrast between the 'grave' and the 'grisly' members of the two clubs is also more telling. His election to the Athenæum had been problematic, but now he was drawn there by the library and the opportunity to be a 'grave gentleman' himself.

The pleasures of club membership had been summarised by several earlier commentators. The author of the article on the Athenæum in *London Interiors* (1841–44) acknowledged the 'wealthy, comfortable, and gregarious' nature of life in the sparkling new clubhouses of St James's, but then chose a startling analogy to explain the levelling effect of membership:

> It may be considered in some respects as like the grave, where the rich and the poor meet, and the mighty and the powerless are blended together: but

> this very diversity of caste and mind tends to the improvement of all; every one forms to himself an example; dullness finds its level; ability is acknowledged – the truly great mind is respected: and no morsel of pure moist Muscovado is so readily dissolved in water as the pompous gentleman, great by virtue of his ancestry, and his lofty opinion of his own good qualities.[4]

'Diversity of caste and mind' neatly summarises the range of backgrounds and intellectual pursuits that were represented in the Athenæum.

In 1835 Thomas Walker described Burton's clubhouse as a 'sort of palace', kept 'with the same exactness and comfort as a private dwelling', in which 'every member is a master, without any of the trouble of a master'.[5] He found it 'impossible to suppose a greater degree of liberty of living', adding that clubs in general afford 'a harmless place of resort at all hours', for married members as well as bachelors, because 'there is nothing going on but conversation, study, or a little play for the sake of amusement'. Walker reported that 17,323 dinners had been served at the Athenæum in 1832, costing on average 'two shillings and nine-pence three farthings', and that the average diner consumed 'a small fraction more than half-a-pint' of wine. He then outlined the pattern of attendance at the club:

> Very few members breakfast there, and of those few the majority are generally visitors to town, who, if not at the club, would be at a coffee-house. There is a greater number to read the morning papers, who have breakfasted at home, and take the club in the way to their business. During the day there is a succession of stragglers who look in as they pass by, or have occasion to consult books or write letters. There is generally the largest assembly between the arrival of the evening papers and the hour of dinner, when people congregate on their way to their respective homes; but as it is to learn the news, and to give invitations, the ladies can be no losers by such a practice. From the number of dinners I have already mentioned to have taken place at the Athenæum in 1832, it appears the daily average of dinners was forty-seven and a fraction; and if from that number be deducted those members, who, independently of clubs, from their