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The 1799 Maconochie Affair: Politics, Intrigue, and Enlightenment in the Edinburgh Speculative Society

William Vasiladiotis
HISTORY (PGR), UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN
wvasiladiotis@gmail.com

Abstract

The decline of the Scottish Enlightenment is commonly thought to have originated with counter-enlightenment policies that emerged in response to the growing disillusionment with the French Revolution. These policies, spearheaded by Henry Dundas, enjoyed widespread support amongst his Tory allies in the 1790s. Scottish Whigs, therefore, were tasked with defending and upholding Enlightenment culture. This was achieved in part through the establishment of the third Edinburgh Review. Three of its four founders were members of the Edinburgh Speculative Society. The culture of paranoia and suspicion regarding any perceived discussion of 'revolutionary' ideology permeated Scottish intellectual life in the 1790s and led to political tensions within the Speculative Society. These tensions reached a climax in 1799 following controversy surrounding a proposed debate topic which asked whether French interference in the American War of Independence was beneficial to France. The dispute culminated in the Society's decision to censure Alexander Maconochie, later the 2nd Lord Meadowbank, over his avowal to spy on their proceedings on behalf of the University. The Whig response to this affair acted as a dress rehearsal for the respective careers of Henry Brougham, Francis Jeffrey, and Francis Horner in the Edinburgh Review and beyond. It also demonstrated to Dugald Stewart and John Playfair what they could expect following their successful defence of John Leslie in 1805. The employment of shrewd political tactics in response to the Maconochie affair allowed the nascent Edinburgh Reviewers to challenge the counter-enlightenment movement and carry the culture of the late Scottish Enlightenment into the nineteenth century.

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The 1790s were a turbulent decade in Scottish politics. By this time, Henry Dundas had nearly complete control over political culture in Scottish universities. Writing to the 2nd Earl of Mornington in 1799, Dundas warned of global dangers proceeding from the French Revolution:

> A doubt, however, arises from the strange state of confusion and anarchy which the distracted principles of the French Revolution have disseminated in the world. If the effect of our [Britain's] attack on New Spain was merely to produce an unregulated independence, and that independence was to assume the form of democracy, *founded on the principles of the French Revolution*, no commercial benefit which this country could derive from it would compensate for the mischievous calamities which would result from such a revolution taking place in so large a quarter of the globe.[1]

Dundas's opposition to Enlightenment ideas associated with the French Revolution had a significant local influence. Roger Emerson famously stated that 'as the 3rd Duke of Argyll helped shape the Scottish Enlightenment, Henry Dundas helped to end it.'[2] Although this remark was linked to the University of Glasgow and its academic appointments, Emerson believed it also broadly applied to the Scottish Enlightenment. He ominously declared that 'here [Glasgow], as elsewhere, the impetus to enlightenment had run out in the political hysteria engendered by the French Revolution and the reactions it had provoked.'[3] This narrative of a comprehensive decline is mistaken and has not been corrected by the relevant historiographical developments.[4] The Scottish Enlightenment survived the agitation surrounding the French Revolution through a combination of political finesse and strategic manoeuvring in defiance of Dundas and his supporters. This will be demonstrated through a composite study of the political and intellectual history of the late Scottish Enlightenment in the Edinburgh Speculative Society and the third *Edinburgh Review*.

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1 Edward Ingram (ed.), *Two Views of British India: The Private Correspondence of Mr. Dundas and Lord Wellesley, 1798–1801* (Bath, 1970), 188.

2 Roger Emerson, *Academic Patronage in the Scottish Enlightenment Glasgow, Edinburgh and St Andrews Universities* (Edinburgh, 2008), 180.

3 Emerson, *Academic Patronage*, 201.

4 See Mark C. Wallace and Jane Rendall (eds), *Association and Enlightenment: Scottish Clubs and Societies, 1700–1830* (Lewisburg, 2021); Aileen Fyfe and Colin Kidd (eds), *Beyond the Enlightenment: Scottish Intellectual Life, 1790–1914* (Edinburgh, 2023). The former addressed the Speculative Society mostly in passing with one dedicated chapter on this organisation in conjunction with other student societies (see Rosalind Carr, 'Achieving Manhood in Associational Culture: Student Societies and the Performance of Masculinity in Enlightenment Edinburgh' in Wallace and Rendall (eds), *Association and Enlightenment*, 191–205). However, that chapter did not address the Speculative Society beyond its infancy aside from a brief reference to their acquisition of new rooms in 1819 (Carr, *Achieving Manhood*, 198). The latter volume, despite beginning in 1790, makes no reference to the Speculative Society or its activities as discussed in this article.

In Edinburgh, the 'Age of Reviews' emerged during what some call the twilight of the Enlightenment. It is sometimes called the 'Periodical Enlightenment' to contrast with the somewhat dismissive 'post-Enlightenment' label used by other scholars.[5] This period was heavily influenced by the third *Edinburgh Review*, which held sway over Whiggish circles both in Scotland and beyond. Founded in Edinburgh in 1802, it maintained close ties to Enlightenment intellectuals. Francis Jeffrey, its editor, witnessed legendary Enlightenment figures such as Adam Smith, Robert Burns and James Boswell. Henry Brougham, another Edinburgh reviewer, was the great-nephew of William Robertson. This new *Edinburgh Review* was established in 1802 and exemplified Enlightenment culture enduring through the Dundas years. Its founders included Jeffrey and Brougham, alongside Sydney Smith and Francis Horner. Smith played a crucial role in the *Review*'s success, responsible for securing significant funds for its editor and contributors.[6] Jeffrey, later Lord Jeffrey, served as editor for nearly thirty years and was the heart of the journal. His work as an advocate, and later Lord Advocate, did not prevent him from dedicating time to the *Review* and other pursuits.[7] Brougham and Horner, both lawyers, were only twenty-four at the time of the journal's founding. Brougham later had an impressive parliamentary career in England, becoming Lord Chancellor, during which the 1832 Reform Act was passed. Horner's career also advanced into Parliament, but he was less fortunate, dying in 1817, after which the Speculative Society commissioned a portrait of him for their hall.[8]

The connection of these men with the Academy of Physics and the Speculative Society has been identified as a significant influence on their intellectual pursuits.[9] All were in the Academy, and only Smith was not a member of the Speculative Society. The biography of Thomas Brown, another longstanding contributor, claimed that the Academy directly spawned the *Edinburgh Review*, although this has rightfully received a dubious reception.[10] Regardless, the impact of both organisations has been recognised. The Speculative Society, or the Spec, as it is often fondly called, allowed Jeffrey, Brougham and Horner to share ideas within a convivial yet intellectual atmosphere. The events that will be examined in this article henceforth have previously been relayed as follows:

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5 William Christie, 'The Modern Athenians: The Edinburgh Review in the Knowledge Economy of the Early Nineteenth Century', *Studies in Scottish Literature* 39, no. 1 (2013), 115.

6 John Clive, *Scotch Reviewers: The Edinburgh Review, 1802–1815* (Harvard, 1957), 19.

7 Clive, *Scotch Reviewers*, 44. Jeffrey was said to have an 'extraordinary capacity for crowding into a single-day law-pleadings, consultations with clients, an evening dinner party, and the composition of an article for the *Review*.'

8 *History of the Speculative Society of Edinburgh from Its Institution in 1764* (Edinburgh, 1845), 42–3. An arrangement of Horner's correspondence from this time can be viewed in Kenneth Bourne and William Banks Taylor (eds), *The Horner Papers: Selections from the Letters and Miscellaneous Writings of Francis Horner, M. P. 1795–1817* (Edinburgh, 1994).

9 For the influence of the Academy of Physics on the third *Edinburgh Review*, see G. N. Cantor, 'The Academy of Physics at Edinburgh 1797–1800', *Social Studies of Science* 5, no. 2 (1975), 109–34.

10 Clive, *Scotch Reviewers*, 21.

> It was therefore a considerable triumph for the Whig members of the 'Spec' – including Jeffrey, Brougham, and Francis Horner – when a political crisis threatening the society in 1799 [the Maconochie affair] was resolved by the resignation of many of the Tory senior members. A resolution of 1794 which had prohibited political debates was temporarily rescinded. This meant that there existed for a time a forum for the free exchange of political ideas, as well as a social situation in which the Whigs gained the upper hand.[11]

While the expression above is generally correct, the details are misleading. The Whig faction of the Spec did emerge victorious in the end, but not because of the repeal of the 1794 resolution, which was reinstated very shortly thereafter. The resignations presented a real crisis in the minds of many Speculative Society Whigs, due to the stature of the resignees in question. The precise length of time which the Spec allowed for 'the free exchange of political ideas' in 1799 was one week. During that interim, the only topic discussed was an essay read on 'the progress of knowledge.'[12] This is not to say that there was no free exchange before or after, but the attribution of when and why is incorrect. The political crisis was solved through a shrewd intervention on the part of the very Whigs who had supposedly 'gained the upper hand.' Resignations solved nothing but instead created a leviathan for the remaining members to contend with.

Alongside clarifying the Maconochie affair, this article will explore the broader historiographical issue of how Dundas's rise to power is linked to the decline of the Scottish Enlightenment. Precise definitions of the Scottish Enlightenment and its culture vary. However, as Richard Sher pointed out, 'it is possible to identify a social and institutional dimension, embracing everything from the literati's clubs and colleges to their clothing and claret.'[13] The soon-to-be Edinburgh Reviewers were able to defend the Scottish Enlightenment through this social and

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11 Ibid., 24. Clive preceded this with an assertion that, following the ousting of Henry Erskine as Dean of the Faculty of Advocates, the minority of advocates that sided with Erskine 'came to constitute the nucleus of Scottish Whiggism at the turn of the century' (ibid., 24). It was around this time that the Foxites, led by Charles James Fox, emerged as a distinct political faction within the Whig party, of which Erskine was a member. Roger Emerson remarked that 'the Erskines were in the Foxite opposition to the [Dundas] administration during most of these years' [1774 to 1806] (Roger Emerson, 'The Scottish Enlightenment and the End of the Philosophical Society of Edinburgh', *The British Journal for the History of Science* 21, no. 1 (1988), 33–4). This was the intellectual environment in which Jeffrey, Brougham and Horner found themselves upon entering the Spec. The third *Edinburgh Review* eventually came to be associated with the Foxite Whigs despite not always aligning with that perspective (see Biancamaria Fontana, *Rethinking the Politics of Commercial Society: The Edinburgh Review, 1802–1832* (Cambridge, 1985), 15).

12 *Minute Book of the Speculative Society 1787–1800, Vol. 3* [Unpublished Manuscript], Archives of the Speculative Society of Edinburgh, Speculative Society, 279–81.

13 Richard B. Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment: The Moderate Literati of Edinburgh* (Edinburgh, 1985), 9. For further details regarding precisely what is meant by the culture of the Scottish Enlightenment, see Sher, *Church and University*, 3–10.

institutional dimension. While it is easy to implicate Dundas in the Scottish Enlightenment's downfall, the resistance to his counter-Enlightenment actions has not been thoroughly examined, apart from in relation to the 1805 Leslie affair, about which Charles Bradford Bow concluded that:

> At the birth of a new century, [Dugald] Stewart's victory in the Leslie affair symbolised a resurgence of the Scottish Enlightenment in defiance of counter-Enlightenment policies.[14]

The Edinburgh Reviewers' victory in the Maconochie affair was also significant. This decisive win in 1799, six years before Leslie's pivotal hearing, laid the groundwork for future criticisms of counter-Enlightenment policies in the next century. It served as a proof of concept for members of the Speculative Society and demonstrated how such proceedings would be perceived by the university, which helped resolve the Maconochie affair. Dugald Stewart and John Playfair, both prominent figures of the late Scottish Enlightenment and members of the Speculative Society at the University of Edinburgh, saw the affair as a demonstration of the university's perspective, playing a role in bringing the situation to an end. For Jeffrey, Brougham and Horner, the incident acted as a rehearsal for the *Edinburgh Review*, ultimately leading to its establishment. Throughout this process, they defended and upheld the Scottish Enlightenment at the close of the eighteenth century.

The Speculative Society, c. 1789–99

The Spec was established in 1764 as a debating club by six students at the University of Edinburgh: William Creech, Allan Maconochie, Alexander Belshes, John Bruce, John Bonar and John Mackenzie.[15] Allan Maconochie, the first Lord Meadowbank, was father to Alexander Maconochie, the second Lord Meadowbank, and a member of the Spec from January 1797 until his resignation in April 1799. It is Alexander Maconochie for whom the titular Maconochie affair is named. His family legacy, both within the Spec and throughout Edinburgh, complicated matters when he clashed with the Society's Whigs. When Alexander Maconochie joined the Spec, his father had just been made a Lord of Session, becoming the first in the family to earn the title 'Lord Meadowbank.'[16] Both Meadowbanks were Tories. The younger Maconochie's brief stint in Parliament was marked by his attempt to prevent the Whigs from reforming the Scottish burgh system.[17] His efforts failed, but they show that his political sympathies had not changed since his time in the Spec.

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14 Charles Bradford Bow, 'In Defence of the Scottish Enlightenment: Dugald Stewart's Role in the 1805 John Leslie Affair', *Scottish Historical Review* 92, no. 1 (2013), 123–46.

15 *History of the Speculative Society* (1845), 16.

16 Ibid., 70–1; 207.

17 R. G. Thorne, *The House of Commons, 1790–1820, IV Members G – P* (London, 1986), 514.

Political debates were permitted from the start of the Society until the 1794 resolution, which followed the peak of the Reign of Terror in France and its associated paranoia in Scotland. Support for the French Revolution had initially been uncontroversial in Scotland and England. Comparisons to the Glorious Revolution were made, and even those sceptical of the Revolution's merits were not particularly confrontational.[18] It was from 1792 onwards, when the newly established First Republic adopted more radical policies, that a link emerged between support for the French Revolution and a perceived opposition to the 1688 constitution. This was first noticed in England and shortly after in Scotland, along with fears of a potential Scottish Revolution.[19] Engaging in any discourse seen as revolutionary became problematic, especially after the execution of King Louis XVI. Instead of comparisons to the Glorious Revolution, many began to see the French Revolution as resembling the English Civil War, which helped to bolster the Dundas political machine.

Further attacks on associational culture, a cornerstone of Enlightenment sociability, followed the 1797 publication of John Robison's inflammatory tract titled *Proofs of a Conspiracy Against All the Religions and Governments of Europe, Carried on in the Secret Meetings of the Freemasons, Illuminati, and Reading Societies, Collected from Good Authorities*. This hit close to home for the Spec due to Robison's position as Professor of Natural Philosophy at the University of Edinburgh. His book accused 'secret societies' of instigating the French Revolution with similar intentions for other European nations.[20] It animated conservatives across Britain between 1797 and 1802 and was so successful that it went through four editions in only eighteen months. The Irish Rebellion in 1798 'confirmed' fears of a universal manifestation of the French Revolution.[21] Tories in Edinburgh and across Britain thereby increasingly found themselves in the counter-Enlightenment camp, whilst Whigs took on the mantle of defending Enlightenment culture despite their disenchantment with the French Revolution by that time.

A similar pattern can be seen in the Speculative Society. Reflecting early Whiggish views, the Society debated whether the French Revolution would be as glorious as the 1688 Revolution in England. Members were understandably divided on this issue, but in 1790, the Society considered whether the revolution would benefit Britain, and they voted in favour by a vote of seven to one.[22] Conversely, in 1794, the Society unanimously agreed that the French Revolution would harm civil liberty in Europe. Jeffrey participated in this debate and was one of the unanimous voters.[23] Therefore, even before the ban on political and religious

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18 Anna Plassart, *The Scottish Enlightenment and the French Revolution* (Cambridge, 2015), 48–9.

19 Plassart, *Scottish Enlightenment and the French Revolution*, 59–60.

20 Mark Coleman Wallace, *Scottish Freemasonry 1725–1810: Progress, Power, and Politics* (PhD thesis, University of St. Andrews, 2007), 189–90.

21 Michael Taylor, 'British Conservatism, the Illuminati, and the Conspiracy Theory of the French Revolution, 1797–1802', *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 47, no. 3 (2014), 293–312.

22 *History of the Speculative Society* (1845), 378.

23 *Minute Book of the Speculative Society, Vol.* 3, 155. Although this debate on the French Revolution was decided unanimously in the negative, it is worth noting that merely nine

discussions, which was not enforced until December of that year, the Society's Whigs had already become disillusioned with the French Revolution.[24] However, by 1797, Scottish debating societies had begun to come under suspicion due to their political debates.[25] The Society was very aware of this risk. 'This,' wrote the Society historian, 'at that unhappy period of jealousy and bitterness, was sufficient to expose any association, especially of young men for debate, to misconstruction.'[26] They worried about being seen as a political club in disguise as a debating society. In reality, they were far from it.

Between 1789 and 1796, the Spec experienced a decline which, in their words, consisted 'solely in paucity of members.'[27] Two competing theories for why were put forth. The first, according to the author of the 1845 *History of the Speculative Society*, asserted that the political climate of the era was to blame. Alternatively, the historian of the Juridical Society, another Edinburgh debating society, argued that the issue was that the Spec forbade political debates 'at a time when young men wanted to talk of nothing else.'[28] This is unlikely considering the exclusion of modern politics was proposed as a measure to combat this downturn and 'restore the Society to its former flourishing and respectable situation.'[29] The explanation presented in the 1845 *History* is in line with the well-documented mistrust of debating societies and their participants during the Dundas years. However, it also fails to adequately explain how the decline began during an era of greater optimism surrounding the French Revolution and before the height of the 1st Viscount Melville's power. Whatever the reason, the outcome has been wildly misconstrued by previous scholars. Michael Lynch, for instance, has asserted that:

> The Speculative Society, home of most of the later literati, saw attendance at its meetings decline after 1789; the proposal in 1794, supported by Walter Scott

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members attended, and only three of them spoke to the question. As such, it would be dangerous to use this as indicative of anything other than Jeffrey's vote on the matter were it not for the wider shift amongst prominent Scottish Whigs.

24 For more about the evolution of the Jeffrey's thoughts regarding the French Revolution, as well as those of the third *Edinburgh Review*, see Plassart, *Scottish Enlightenment and the French Revolution*, 159–86.

25 Davis McElroy, *Scotland's Age of Improvement; A Survey of Eighteenth-Century Literary Clubs and Societies* (Pullman, 1969), 130.

26 *History of the Speculative Society* (1845), 31. The historian elaborated that 'a hint was given, that the Speculative might be converted, under the appearance of academical debate, into a political club. This at that time was enough.' Davis McElroy further pointed out the contradiction stating that 'on the one hand the French Revolution and its consequences brought all political discussion among the young men in these debating societies under suspicion; on the other hand, it was no great paradox that in such a situation politics was the one thing young Scotsmen wanted to debate' (McElroy, *Age of Improvement*, 130).

27 Ibid., 29.

28 McElroy, *Age of Improvement*, 112.

29 *Minute Book of the Speculative Society*, *Vol.* 3, 159–60.

> and Francis Jeffrey, that the Society be allowed to discuss 'the political topics of the day,' split it asunder. Politics had infiltrated the world of the clubs.[30]

Too few members attended the Society's 1794 meetings to 'split it asunder,' and the Society's main goal was securing a proper quorum.[31] Although there was a seven-year decline, it was quickly remedied, and the Speculative Society made a rapid and thorough recovery, albeit not without a setback.[32] The seven-year period between 1797 and 1805 was later described as 'perhaps the most brilliant period in the Society's history.'[33] After the decline of the Spec, they returned with vigour, with a significant increase in attendance. Regarding political infiltration, the Spec had discussed such topics for decades. Arguably, for the first time in the Society's history, politics had been expelled from the Spec as it had been from other societies not only in Scotland but also in London.[34] Instead of politics entering the clubs' world, it had to fight its way back from exile and ultimately succeeded. If politics had been to split the Society, it would not have been in 1794, but five years later.

Self-preservation was the driving force behind the initial 1794 Resolution, and only later came to be loathed by new Whig members. It had been instituted following an extraordinary meeting called to assess the state of the Society after the first meeting of the thirty-first session (1794–5) was cancelled for want of a quorum. Several suggestions were proposed for encouraging members to attend meetings 'as often as convenient,' the second of which stipulated 'that the society at the present juncture should be cautious in admitting as subjects of discussion or debate the political topics of the day.'[35] Whether this was a necessary step in ensuring the longevity of the Spec is questionable, as there was not an immediate uptick in attendance afterwards. It is more likely that an influx of new members in subsequent years contributed the most to the Society's resurgence. Nonetheless, despite six of the eleven debates held during the previous session (1793–4) being held on political (or politically adjacent) questions, the resolution was quietly adopted, seemingly without fuss and unanimously.[36]

In the years leading up to the Maconochie affair, tensions emerged between members prioritising freedom of debate and those concerned about potentially permitting revolutionary discourse. Lord Cockburn, when recounting the situation, claimed that the disputes arose from the expulsion of Thomas Addis Emmet for his involvement in the 1798 Irish Rebellion. This led to a rift between the Spec and a similar literary society in Dublin. Eventually, the conflict grew to such an extent that it was no longer confined to the Spec:

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30 Michael Lynch, *Scotland: A New History* (London, 2011), 167.
31 *History of the Speculative Society* (1845), 28.
32 McElroy, *Age of Improvement*, 112–13.
33 *The History of the Speculative Society 1764–1904* (Edinburgh, 1905), 11.
34 Mary Thale, 'London Debating Societies in the 1790s', *The Historical Journal* 32, no. 1 (1989), 67.
35 *Minute Book of the Speculative Society 1787–1800, Vol. 3*, 157–60.
36 *History of the Speculative Society* (1845), 382.

> The agitation brought back the old members, who, headed by Charles Hope and David Hume, of course tried to bear down the younger, who, led by Brougham, Jeffrey, Horner, Lord Henry Petty, and Lord Kinnaird, were as defying in their Whiggism as their opponents in their Toryism. This contest produced animated debates and proceedings, which did not occupy the Society alone, but the whole College, and indeed all Edinburgh, for nearly an entire session.[37]

Cockburn's observation that these debates involved all of Edinburgh highlights the significance of what appears, on the surface, to be an internal society dispute. While Cockburn depicted the incident as a conflict between Whigs and Tories, which it was, viewing these events through the lens of Enlightenment versus counter-Enlightenment proves a more insightful comparison owing to the nature of their disagreement. In the final years of the eighteenth century, the Tory counter-Enlightenment faction became fixated on opposing any suggestion of seditious dialogue, especially when linked to France. David Hume, Professor of Scottish Law and nephew of the Enlightenment philosopher, openly clashed with the Society's Whigs and remarked that 'these young men, like their masters, the French, are evidently skilled in the political arts.' Certainly, there were other differences between these factions, political and otherwise, but none were more prominent or recurring than tensions over revolutionary discourse. It was particularly the Edinburgh Reviewers' support for France in various debates that enraged Hume and alarmed the university Senate.[38] This inevitably placed Enlightenment values in the crossfire, positioning Speculative Society Tories on the 'counter-Enlightenment' side of the dispute.

Political differences surfaced in 1798 even before the expulsion of Emmet, which was decided unanimously and endorsed by none other than Brougham himself.[39] These hostilities became evident on 1 May 1798 when John Forbes (later Lord Medwyn) objected to an essay read by James Loch (later a Whig MP) two weeks earlier on 'Whether a Natural Establishment of Religion is Necessary for the Political Existence of a State.' Forbes claimed it contained 'censurable material' and proposed, seconded by Alexander Maconochie, a motion that formally rebuked Loch. Their opposition was not yet over. At the same meeting, Forbes criticised another member, Thomas Hamilton Miller, over his previously read essay titled 'Origin and Progress of Superstition, and Its Influence on the Human Mind and Character,' arguing that it also contained censurable material. The Society agreed with thirteen votes in favour and six against, and Forbes, again seconded by Maconochie, moved to pass an additional resolution 'in consequence of certain essays recently delivered' stating that 'the Society disapproves the introduction in future of any attacks in the Christian religion and considers such sentiments as too much connected now with revolutionary principles.'[40] The motion was carried,

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37 Henry Cockburn, *Memorials of His Time* (Edinburgh and London, 1910), 77; *History of the Speculative Society* (1905), 13.

38 G. C. H. Paton, 'A Biography of Baron Hume', in *Baron David Hume's Lectures 1786–1822* (Edinburgh, 1958), 345.

39 *History of the Speculative Society* (1905), 8.

40 *Minute Book of the Speculative Society*, *Vol.* 3, 252–3. This quote has been mistakenly employed to signify the end of the Scottish Enlightenment (see Robert D. Thornton,

and after that, Forbes and Maconochie, satisfied with the support, albeit divided, for their attempts to suppress potentially subversive topics, concluded their efforts. Thus, the thirty-fourth session (1797–8) ended.

The 1799 Maconochie Affair

Political tensions in the Spec reached a climax on 22 January 1799. It resumed with James Loch, who was about to raise the question, 'Was the interference of France in the American war advantageous to France?' Loch himself requested that the question not be discussed due to pressure from other members, citing 'particularly on account of certain reports he [Loch] had heard regarding the society,' despite having proposed the question the previous week. This was objected to, and it was insisted that, since the question had already been agreed upon, they should debate it. One member, William Fullarton, spoke up and said he was aware of the reports Loch referred to, naming Maconochie. Fullarton stated that Maconochie had spoken with him and others a few days earlier about the situation. Maconochie had protested that discussing this matter was too close to a debate on contemporary politics and should not have been approved. Fullarton warned Maconochie not to 'say something which could get him into a scrape,' but Maconochie ignored this advice and declared passionately that 'in future I [Maconochie] shall sit in the [Speculative] Society not only as a member but as a spy upon the conduct of the society for the university.' The minute book records the final words of Maconochie's pronouncement as 'from the university' despite his later entreaty that the word 'from' be changed to 'for.' This request was granted, but only the initial word 'proceedings' was crossed out and replaced with 'conduct.' Thus, Maconochie's statement alternatively reads 'in future I shall sit in the Society not only as a member but as a spy upon the *proceedings* of the society *from* the university.'[41] Although only two words were altered, they completely changed the meaning of the statement. This original comment is blatantly counter-Enlightenment, as it violates the Enlightenment commitment to freedom of expression. 'Proceedings' suggests that all the activities of the Society would be reported and 'from the university' implies some collegiate authority vested in Maconochie. He attempted to soften the impact of his outburst by making a slight change to the phrasing.

Following Fullarton's charge, Maconochie was asked by the Society to answer it. He confessed his intention to act as a spy and write down the details of any debate the Spec might have on a modern political topic in order to call a general meeting with the prospect of 'resigning the privileges of the society into the hands of the university.' Maconochie justified his actions by arguing that the allowance of such debates was likely to lead to the formation of a Jacobin club. This declaration was naturally met with uproar, particularly from Brougham, who formally accused Maconochie of committing a high insult to the honour of the Society. Brougham's motion was put forth and seconded by Francis Horner. It passed, and

'The University of Edinburgh and the Scottish Enlightenment', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 10, no. 3 (1968), 415). The chain of events following from this resolution, in fact, provides evidence in favour of the opposite conclusion.

41 Ibid., 268–70.

the Spec censured Maconochie by a vote of twelve to seven. This resulted in his being unable to take the chair on 5 February 1799.[42] As the son of a founding member, Maconochie's censure caused a stir amongst many extraordinary members of the Society, a myriad of whom had not attended meetings in some time.

After Brougham's motion, Loch's question was discussed as planned. A substantial majority of members decided that France's interference in the American war was not advantageous to France.[43] Despite the appearance of victory against the counter-Enlightenment Tory faction, the matter was not yet settled. The vote to censure was closely divided, and the Maconochie affair ultimately caused several senior members of the Society to leave, fearing being associated with it despite its eventual vindication in the eyes of the university.[44] This occurred following a protest signed against the censure on 12 February. The argument, presented to the Society in a legal manner, asserted that Maconochie had every reason to be concerned about the introduction of modern politics due to the 1794 resolution and the subsequent implication from the university that such discussions could lead to the Society's demise. It was further argued that Maconochie did not intend to conduct his espionage discreetly and meant to openly announce his intentions so that the Society could act before any harm was done. The protest appealed to Maconochie's 'strict sense of duty' and claimed the censure was a disproportionate response. They insisted that the principles Maconochie believed in were correct, and expressed concern about setting a precedent that might allow future members to adopt immoral stances in Society discussions. The petition was signed by six members, each present at the meeting when Maconochie was censured.[45] Three of the seven dissenters resigned immediately that day, leaving four remaining in the Society afterwards. Four of the six signatories were presumably the remaining dissenters, with the other two signing later, after considering other concerns over the following three weeks.[46]

At this juncture, the rift that had been forming under the surface was now split wide open and made palpable. Tory absconders supported counter-Enlightenment policies or at least dreaded Enlightenment ones enough to avoid being seen in any Society espousing them. Remaining members were now concerned with the future of the Society and the reputation of its members. Here, the actions of Jeffrey, Horner and Brougham were made from necessity and a desire to prevent the dissolution of the Society. Jeffrey was an office bearer and a consistent presence during the years in which the Spec often struggled to produce a quorum.[47] Although Brougham and Horner joined together in November 1797 at the onset of the Spec's revival, they too saw the danger facing the Society following the mass resignations. They had two options: accept the resignations and allow any debate topic to be proposed henceforth, or compromise and attempt to retain as many members as possible. The first

42 Ibid., 270–3.

43 Ibid., 271.

44 *History of the Speculative Society* (1905), 12.

45 *Minute Book of the Speculative Society, Vol.* 3, 275–7.

46 The minute book does not reveal precisely who cast the respective 'yes' and 'no' votes, although it is not difficult to ascertain, as the two camps made themselves obvious.

47 *History of the Speculative Society* (1845), 455.

option would have enticed the future Edinburgh Reviewers, but it risked jeopardising the reputation of the Society amongst the university, the public and potentially its remaining membership. Meanwhile, with the alternative approach, the Spec could recoup some of its losses, seek guidance from older, honorary members and ultimately exculpate the Society.

Jeffrey and his colleagues also saw the 1794 resolution as nearly eroded by this point. They stated as much in their address:

> It [the 1794 resolution] was soon, in fact, a dead letter; the gentlemen who had framed or adopted it retiring, and new members succeeding from time to time, it became an object of obscure half recollection, in which the original spirit and intention of the recommendation were entirely lost sight of. It had been adopted with a view to regulate the choice of questions, but was now converted into a check upon debate, even where the question was completely regular and unexceptionable.[48]

The argument claimed the resolution was ineffectual and that members often had to twist themselves into knots and circumvent the rule to make their point. Jeffrey and the others offered this explanation for the removal of restrictions on topics of debate, whilst stressing that the object was not to allow discussions on religion or other questions enabling the defence of immorality. After further assurances that the repeal was not intended to show disrespect towards the members who presented the original resolutions, the address went on to beg the honorary members and the university faculty to whom the document was circulated to judge the members on the conduct of their action rather than the action of repealing all debating restrictions.[49] This was a stroke of genius on the part of the authors who managed to both offer a valid explanation for the decision and to force the hand of any potential counter-Enlightenment forces within the university. If they had any grounds to suspect the members of the Speculative Society of being revolutionary or, as Maconochie put it, a 'Jacobite Club,' they would need to present it immediately. Jeffrey, Horner and Brougham called Maconochie's bluff. The address was signed by the presidents of the Society, which included Horner and Brougham at that time, and John Waugh, the secretary. Per the fourth of the five conditions, the address was also sent to several members of the University of Edinburgh's administration with an invitation to attend the meeting on the first of March.

On 1 March 1799, many extraordinary and honorary members attended. Every seat in the fairly small debating room was likely filled, packed to capacity. A few professors also appeared as honorary and extraordinary members, along with celebrities within the Society. These included Walter Scott, who was then the secretary, and Francis Jeffrey, still a frequent attendee but an extraordinary member, nonetheless. Stewart and Playfair could not attend but sent letters supporting the resolutions.[50] Their absence is notable given the presence

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48 *Minute Book of the Speculative Society*, *Vol.* 3, 282; *History of the Speculative Society* (1845), 33–4.

49 *Minute Book of the Speculative Society*, *Vol.* 3, 284–6; *History of the Speculative Society* (1845), 36–8.

50 *Minute Book of the Speculative Society*, *Vol.* 3, 286–7.

of George Baird, the Principal of the University of Edinburgh, although several explanations could account for this. Regardless, their letters showed their support. Baird had been admitted to the Society in 1783, elected Principal of the University in 1793, and made an honorary member that same year.[51] Therefore, he was present in a dual capacity, although he never outwardly displayed conflicting loyalties. Neither Alexander Maconochie nor his father was there, despite the younger Maconochie being indirectly responsible for the gathering. Both had announced intentions to resign, but these plans would be postponed for another six weeks. As a result, the meeting lacked its most abrasive Tories but remained filled with outspoken Whigs and Whig sympathisers committed to Enlightenment ideals.

The meeting resulted in the formation of a committee comprised of university officials and John Waugh, in his role as secretary, 'with full powers to take what steps they may judge most proper for satisfying these members whose resignations were received at last meeting and now lie under consideration.' Some members slowly began to withdraw their resignations, but not all. At the next meeting, Horner announced his intention to make a motion regarding the resignations the following week. Brougham arranged for a letter to be sent to Baird asking the Society's resolution that the university faculty be given honorary membership so that they had the authority to probe the recent actions of the Spec, and for this letter to be laid before the *Senatus Academicus*. Baird responded eleven days later. He brusquely explained that the Senate already considered itself to have jurisdiction to carry out this scrutiny by way of a 1769 Act of Council.[52] Despite this offhand response from Baird and the Senate, no complaint or response was recorded in the Society's Minutes. It would have behoved the Senate to accept the Society's offer, as the Lord Provost sent a letter requesting access to their records for the investigation, which was subsequently granted.[53] A fortnight later, the committee exculpated the Society from any wrongdoing. They made their ruling on 8 April, and it was read to the Society at the meeting of 9 April. This absolution was, however, not without reservation. The Senate stipulated that although the Spec continued to 'pursue in general the great purposes of its original institution,' some of its members had 'occasionally uttered sentiments and employed expressions obnoxious in point of religious and political tendency.' Due to this and the nearly successful repeal of the 1794 resolution, the Senate resolved to give the Spec an official warning 'to be cautious on these points.'[54] Nevertheless, the gambit worked, and with the Senate's decision, the danger had passed. Brougham and his allies were vindicated.

Meanwhile, Maconochie and his confederates experienced a severe setback within the Spec. The younger Meadowbank's initial claim that he would be a spy on the Society's conduct was rendered irrelevant after the university's ruling. By deliberately inviting the Senate to assess the situation, Maconochie's opponents in the Spec challenged his assertions and succeeded. Moreover, his censure was maintained. This sent a message to any remaining dissenters against the Enlightenment that such actions would not go uncontested. The only remaining option was to wait for the Spec to accept his resignation, which happened in the

51 *History of the Speculative Society* (1845), 165.
52 *Minute Book of the Speculative Society, Vol.* 3, 287–90.
53 Ibid., 291.
54 Ibid., 293–4.

week immediately after the Senate's decision. On 16 April, Maconochie, along with other like-minded members, officially resigned from the Society. In the same meeting, the Spec agreed on six future debate topics, two of which carried the political implications the Senate had warned about. The first question, whether colonies are 'of advantage to a mother country,' had an obvious potential for current political examples to be cited as supporting evidence, even if the issue could be discussed in the abstract. A slightly different objection could have been made against the second, which asked if the crown should have the power to pardon.[55] These debates took place on 30 April and 10 December of that year, with the vote almost evenly divided after the colonies discussion.[56] Unsurprisingly, this question was introduced by Brougham and then addressed by Jeffrey, with Loch casting the deciding vote.[57] In three months, the Maconochie affair was resolved, with the only consequences for Brougham and his fellow Whigs being a largely symbolic rebuke. This marked the conclusion of the thirty-fifth session (1798–9).

Maconochie, Leslie and the Scottish Enlightenment

One might be inclined to see this conflict as simply a heated political dispute between Whigs and Tories, but it cannot be separated from the influence of counter-Enlightenment pressures. Although what happened in the Spec was a relatively private matter, these forces clashed publicly in 1805. This was a consequence of the appointment of John Leslie to the Chair of Mathematics at the University of Edinburgh. The Leslie affair, as it became known, was a clear victory for Stewart, Playfair and other late Scottish Enlightenment thinkers over Dundas's counter-Enlightenment 'moderates.'[58] Leslie's Whiggism and unorthodox religious views had already made the Hill family, allied with Dundas, opposed to him in his bid for an academic Chair at St. Andrews in 1796. The anti-Hill faction was led by none other than Playfair, who, along with Stewart, was Leslie's strongest supporter. After four attempts to secure an academic post, the stars finally aligned in 1805, enabling John Leslie's successful nomination whilst Dundas was preoccupied with his impending impeachment trial. For years, Playfair and Stewart supported him covertly, only voicing their support publicly when the timing was right.[59]

55 Ibid., 295.

56 *History of the Speculative Society* (1845), 389.

57 *Minute Book of the Speculative Society*, *Vol.* 3, 298. Loch's vote resulted in a narrow 8–7 majority, concluding that colonies *were* of advantage.

58 Bow, *Defence of the Scottish Enlightenment*, 146. Moderates are in quotations because they put Enlightenment principles into practice until the passing of William Robertson; after which, they became reactionary and increasingly detached from Enlightenment values (Sher, *Church and University*, 321).

59 J. B. Morrell, 'The Leslie Affair: Careers, Kirk and Politics in Edinburgh in 1805', *The Scottish Historical Review* 54, no. 157 (1975), 67; 74–7; 81–2.

Brougham and his fellow Edinburgh Reviewers *in vitro* also waited for the right time to act and did so quite literally at a moment's notice. Following Maconochie's resignation, they progressed to bolder steps, having received implicit permission from the university. The first Spec historian maintained that this ban was 'strictly observed' until 1804, but as we have seen, there was pushback immediately after its institution in 1794.[60] The Maconochie affair occurred precisely because of this disagreement on the rule, whereby Jeffrey and Horner were proven correct in their assertion that the 1794 was a 'dead letter.' When a proposal to revoke the 1794 Resolution was raised in 1826, the reasoning was that no society should contain a law such that the violation of that law is systematic and beneficial to the purposes of that society. John Montgomery Bell and John Reddie, the proposers, then concluded that violating the 1794 resolution 'has been for many years systematic and beneficial in the practice of the Speculative Society,' and consequently it should be repealed.[61] Shortly thereafter, it was.

Although the ban on politics was not officially lifted until 1826, the Society began to erode that boundary after the Maconochie affair. They initially continued as before but soon moved to bolder actions. Loch, for one, did not learn his lesson after instigating the Maconochie incident. Precisely one year after the Senate's ruling, he raised the question 'Were the measures which produced the American War justifiable on the part of Great Britain?'[62] This was notably similar to his question that sparked the initial controversy, except this time, the Society readily accepted the topic for discussion. The 'forced interpretation' of the 1794 Resolution, which Jeffrey and others complained about, insisted that no argument should be 'drawn from what had taken place in Europe within the last ten years.'[63] Although the new question was phrased in a way that avoided direct comparison, arguments invoking other Enlightenment-inspired rebellions, such as the French Revolution, could still be made, even though it was not mentioned explicitly this time.[64] The question seemed historical, but in the context of the Dundas era, it was equally problematic. Loch faced no difficulties during the resumption, and the debate began.

The abrasion continued between 1800 and 1804 with the inaugural debate of the thirty-seventh session (1800–1). That question asked whether the Test Act ought to be repealed. Of the thirteen debates held during that session, slightly more than half had political undertones. Brougham was particularly adamant in his desire to discuss these subjects. Each debate he opened touched on politics, as did the one in January 1802, two years after the Maconochie affair, where the Spec similarly decided unanimously that it was in the commercial interest of Britain to allow her colonies to conduct free trade with other nations.[65] They likely

60 *History of the Speculative Society* (1845), 53.

61 *Minute Book of the Speculative Society 1825–1832, Vol.* 7 [Unpublished Manuscript], Archives of the Speculative Society of Edinburgh, Speculative Society, 36.

62 *History of the Speculative Society* (1845), 390. The debate was decided in the negative by a vote of 3–10.

63 *Minute Book of the Speculative Society*, *Vol.* 3, 282; *History of the Speculative Society* (1845), 33.

64 Explicit support for French Revolutionary principles would not be commonplace again for another decade (see John D. Brims, 'Scottish Democratic Movement in the Age of the French Revolution', doctoral dissertation at University of Edinburgh (1983)).

65 *History of the Speculative Society* (1845), 392.

drew on arguments from Adam Smith's economic theory to make that point. A unanimous decision directly supporting Smith as late as 1802 shows that the 1790s did not weaken the Spec's commitment to the Scottish Enlightenment. This was not to be taken for granted, as this idea had a powerful critic in Dundas, who argued in 1796 that allowing British colonies free trade would result in 'great loss and detriment to the nation.'[66] Not only was the Spec more willing to dive into political topics, but they were routinely accepting and perpetuating Enlightenment ideas.

Brougham was not alone. Two weeks later, the Spec debated the following question: 'Have the states of Europe any reason to dread the preponderance of Russia in the political scale?'[67] The lack of opposition to this is significant. In Brougham's address following the Maconochie affair, he named this exact subject as one that certain members found problematic:

> On the 12th of February current, the following question was proposed for the subsequent meeting, 'Have the States of Europe any reason to dread the increasing ascendancy of Russia in the balance of power?' It was manifest that no argument could be carried on with regard to the future prospects of the Continent, without bringing forward a view of its present circumstances.[68]

This 1802 version of the controversial 1799 topic used slightly different wording but maintained the same purpose. Importantly, both questions asked members to consider the future of Europe, which was the controversial part of the query in 1799. The rest of that session (1801–2) involved revisiting questions about the Test Act and whether Britain had the right to tax the American colonies, the latter of which was nearly decided against, with only one vote in favour. Repeatedly, the Spec continued to defend the Scottish Enlightenment. The ban on politics was far from 'strictly observed' in the years before 1804. The Leslie affair, beginning in spring 1805, was a public reckoning for the oppressive atmosphere during the Dundas years, but the Spec enjoyed its 'most brilliant period' away from public scrutiny. The Maconochie affair was the first indication of a backlash against the counter-Enlightenment forces of that decade, and although Brougham, Jeffrey and Horner seldom attended meetings after founding the third *Edinburgh Review*, they still left a lasting mark on the Society.

Epilogue

The outcome of the Maconochie affair confirms that the Scottish Enlightenment survived the 1790s. This contrasts with claims made by scholars who have linked the decline of the Scottish Enlightenment to the start and development of the French Revolution. Emerson's assertion, for example, that the 'impetus to Enlightenment' was destroyed by the hysteria

66 Colonial Policy, *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Commons, 8 February 1850, vol 108 cc538 (Lord John Russell, Prime Minister).

67 *History of the Speculative Society* (1845), 392.

68 *Minute Book of the Speculative Society, Vol.* 3, 282; *History of the Speculative Society* (1845), 34.

surrounding the French Revolution becomes problematic. At the peak of public suspicion about the very nature of Enlightenment sociability, the Speculative Society emerged victorious on all fronts. The Society's Whigs, who took it upon themselves to defend Enlightenment values within the Spec, demonstrated that it was possible to enjoy both sides of the issue. They effectively managed to discuss and agree with French Revolutionary principles, resulting only in a mild rebuke from the Senate.[69] When tested, Enlightenment conviviality proved resilient against the Dundas regime.

Jeffrey, Horner and Brougham's handling of the Maconochie affair served as a practice run for the *Edinburgh Review*. The 1799 address to the ordinary members explaining the Maconochie affair and subsequent controversies had been signed by the Society's office-bearers, including Brougham and Horner.[70] Jeffrey was also one of its authors, yet not a signatory, likely because he was no longer an office bearer in the 1798–9 session.[71] It is nonetheless significant as Jeffrey's first anonymous composition. The relevance to his professional career was unforeseen. Jeffrey remained committed to a legal career even after the establishment of the *Review*. He consulted Horner on the decision to accept the editorial role, remarking that despite the downsides, '£300 a year is a monstrous bribe to a man in my [Jeffrey's] situation.'[72] Jeffrey further added that he would prefer to make his money through his chosen profession, but that he could accept the role without risk to his honour or career.[73] Nevertheless, he took on the responsibilities of editor, along with the paycheque accompanying it. Unbeknownst to him, his role in the 1799 Maconochie affair was the perfect prerequisite.

Jeffrey was also able to secure a measure of revenge against Robison. Jean Joseph Mounier, a recently repatriated French exile, published a text in 1801 refuting the claims made in *Proofs of a Conspiracy*.[74] Anna Plassart has shown that Jeffrey's review of Mounier's book, which was praised in the very first volume of the *Edinburgh Review*, set the tone for the nascent journal's perspective on the French Revolution.[75] Jeffrey's criticism did not involve Mounier's repudiation of Robison's theory, but rather that the French author did not go far enough to distinguish Enlightenment ideas behind the revolution from what transpired during it. In his review, Jeffrey claimed the following:

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69 Paton, *Baron Hume*, 347–8.

70 *Minute Book of the Speculative Society*, *Vol.* 3, 285; *History of the Speculative Society* (1845), 38.

71 *History of the Speculative Society* (1845), 32.

72 Henry Cockburn, *Life of Lord Jeffrey: With Selection from His Correspondence*, Volume Two (Philadelphia, 1852), 63.

73 Clive, *Scotch Reviewers*, 43.

74 See Jean Joseph Mounier, *De l'Influence attribuée aux philosophes, aux francs-maçons et aux illuminés sur la Révolution de France* (Tubingen, 1801).

75 Francis Jeffrey, 'Mounier, De l'Influence des Philosophes, Francs Maçons, et Illuminées, sur la Revolution de France', *Edinburgh Review*, 1 (1802); Plassart, *Scottish Enlightenment and the French Revolution*, 163.

> But though we conceive that philosophy is thus, in some degree, responsible for the French revolution, we are far from charging her with the guilt that this name implies. The writers, to whom we allude, may have produced effects very different from what they intended, and very different even from what their works might seem calculated to produce. An approved medicine may have occasioned convulsions and death; and the flame that was meant to enlighten, may have spread into conflagration and ruin. M. Mounier, throughout his book, has attended too little to this distinction. He has denied, for the philosophers, all participation in the fact; and has had but little interest, therefore, to justify them on the score of intention. It is a subject, however, which deserves a little consideration.[76]

'A little consideration' occupied the next four pages of Jeffrey's assessment where he agreed with Mounier that the existence of such a cabal as Robison suggested was 'erroneous' and 'gives an air of theatrical interest to the history.'[77] It has been argued that neither Mounier's monograph nor Jeffrey's review of it ended popular belief in Robison's conspiracy. Instead, the transference of Britain's primary enemy from French Jacobins to Napoleon played a more important role where British Tories were concerned.[78] Jeffrey would have likely disagreed, having written in that same review how 'the devices by which Robespierre was successful cannot account for the triumphs of Bonaparte.'[79] Though this was in the context of France, it also hints at differences in European attitudes towards the respective statesmen. However, for a Whig audience, the *Edinburgh Review* would have undoubtedly been a reputable source, and its placement at the front of the volume is telling. Jeffrey's experiences in the Speculative Society amidst an era where such 'erroneous' claims were taken seriously gave him all the motivation he needed to publicly reinforce the dismantling of Robison's *Proofs* through a positive review of Mounier's efforts to do the same.

Brougham's time in the Spec also greatly influenced his career, both in the *Review* and beyond. Cockburn and Jeffrey praised Brougham's eloquence and zeal in glowing terms well into the nineteenth century.[80] His reputation preceded him. The questions he raised in the Spec closely resembled the articles he wrote for the *Review* and the issues he later discussed in Parliament. For example, his interest in debating whether colonies benefit their mother country in April 1799 marked the beginning of a concern that culminated in a two-volume publication titled *An Inquiry into the Colonial Policy of the European Powers*. Published in 1803, Brougham spent most of 1801 and 1802 working diligently on this, 'relieved only by weekly discussions at the Speculative Society,' and his role in helping establish the *Edinburgh Review*.[81] One such weekly discussion, initiated by Brougham himself, focused on colonial

76 Jeffrey, *Mounier*, 9–10.
77 Ibid., 13–14.
78 Taylor, *British Conservatism*, 306–7.
79 Jeffrey, *Mounier*, 13.
80 Chester New, *The Life of Henry Brougham to 1830* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), 7.
81 Henry Brougham, *The Life and Times of Henry, Lord Brougham*, Vol. 1 (Edinburgh, 1871), 164–5.

trade with foreign nations. While the Maconochie affair led Jeffrey and Horner to experiment with relatively anonymous authorship, it also gave Brougham the chance to test his Whiggish theories and criticisms before publishing them in the *Review* and ultimately presenting them in Westminster. This is supported by his own recollections of his time in Parliament where he remarked that:

> Great progress was made in the practice of debating, which many of us [in the Speculative Society] showed in after-life that we had well learned; and I remember Lord Medwyn, when he came to London during the session of Parliament, saying that when he heard the debates he recognized his old brethren of the Speculative, *as well as their speeches there*.[82]

For Stewart and Playfair, this was a demonstration of how an event like the Leslie affair might play out. Although neither were present, both were involved with the university Senate and members of the Spec. They maintained a convivial relationship with Jeffrey, Horner and Brougham through the Bonaly Friday Club, founded in 1803. Sydney Smith was also a member, making the Friday Club the social wing of the *Edinburgh Review*.[83] None were active members of the Spec any longer. When Stewart and Playfair sent letters of support, both had ceased to be ordinary members more than two decades prior.[84] They could then quietly observe the theatrics from their proverbial box seats. The Society's exculpation provided the perfect case study for the university's receptiveness towards the counter-Enlightenment arguments of the day. It emboldened Stewart and the other supporters of Leslie in 1805 to attack the Moderate clergymen in the way that they did. Some believed the Scottish Enlightenment itself to be on trial along with Leslie.[85] If so, the opening arguments began in 1799 with the Maconochie affair.

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82 Brougham, *Lord Brougham*, 70–1.

83 *Records of the Edinburgh Dining Club, The Friday Club, formed in June 1803 and continued until 1850, prefaced by a long autograph memorandum by Lord Cockburn* (NLS, Library Archives and Manuscripts collection, MS 15943), 6–8.

84 *History of the Speculative Society* (1845), 105; 115. Typically, members would have to wait three years before applying for extraordinary membership (*History of the Speculative Society* (1845), 58–9). Extraordinary members were not required to attend regularly and often appeared as 'distinguished alumni' of the Spec. In short, this meant that neither Stewart nor Playfair had taken part in the Society's happenings for at least two decades.

85 Bow, *Defence of the Scottish Enlightenment*, 140–1.