Edinburgh, then the largest town in Scotland during the Scottish Enlightenment, flourished with its motifs of good taste and fine rhetoric. Coffee-drinking was linked to intellectual creativity and the cultivation of literary taste. Links between taste and knowledge were a feature of Edinburgh coffee-houses (Fig. 1). There, coffee, like tobacco and snuff, were imported Oriental exotic luxuries well into the eighteenth century. Like tea, chocolate and sugar, coffee was an exotic rarity when it was first introduced into Scotland. Those drinking and attracted to this novel and fashionable and luxurious commodity were, essentially, consuming exotica. Just as it was fashionable to read the Arabian Nights’ Tales in the eighteenth century, so the exotic Oriental origins of coffee intrigued a society dominated by the culture of curiosity, politeness and good taste. Yet by the 1790s, coffee drinking had gradually become part of everyday life in Edinburgh as standards of living rose during a period of rapid political and economic change.

Somehow appropriately in the light of Enlightenment perspectives, coffee was probably first drunk as a stimulant by Sufis in fifteenth-century Yemen who wanted to dedicate themselves to prayer and contemplation, in order to escape materialism. Its initial use in Yemen has been credited to a mystic of the Shadhaliyyah Sufi order, possibly Shaykh ‘Ali ibn ‘Umar al-Shadhili (d.1418), patron-saint of Mocha. The coffee habit spread northwards through the Ottoman Empire (Fig. 2), then into Europe and eventually to Edinburgh from the mid-sixteenth century.

Drinking Coffee

In the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, information about the best way to drink coffee was readily available in Edinburgh through various periodicals including the Caledonian Mercury (CM), the Weekly Magazine and The Scots Magazine (SM). Its literati were well informed about coffee, as many of these publications contained excerpts from travel accounts that had been written by Scots from Edinburgh who had lived in the Ottoman Empire, including Travels by the consul in Aleppo, Alexander Drummond, brother of George Drummond (1688–1766) who was Lord Provost of Edinburgh several times between 1725 and 1764. This book, based on letters sent back to George Drummond by his brother, was ghost-written by the Scottish author, Tobias
Smollett, before he made his reputation as an author. Edinburgh citizens could even view the coffee plants for they were grown in the John Hope’s glasshouses in the Botanic Garden, Leith Walk.

In 1756, Alexander Russell MD FRS from Edinburgh, published The Natural History of Aleppo, in London with the Scottish publisher, Andrew Millar. A second edition was published by Alexander’s half-brother, Patrick Russell MD FRS in 1794 and both editions reflect their intimate knowledge of Aleppo, then a major city in the Ottoman Empire. These widely acclaimed editions were based on careful observation in the Enlightenment tradition. As the Russells demonstrated, a man of ‘good taste’ (le bon goût) knows how to value and enjoy the fine things of life: food, coffee, conversation, critical debates, and creative or aesthetic ideas. As he described, in Aleppo guests, family and friends were entertained in luxurious surroundings in their courtyards, with fountains and arbours, roses and jasmine, with lavish meals or with tobacco, sweetmeats and coffee. Hot, unsweetened coffee and tobacco were consumed by adults, day and night: ‘Coffee made very strong, and without sugar or milk, is a refreshment in very high esteem with everybody; and a dish of it, preceded by a little wet sweet-meat (commonly conserved of red roses, acidulated with lemon-juice), and a pipe of tobacco, is the usual entertainment at a visit.’ In Edinburgh the preference was to add milk and sugar to a cup of coffee: there were no sweetmeats, fountains and arbours of roses and jasmine.

The integration of coffee into Scottish culture also involved its perceived medical properties. This was where good taste strayed into the realms of wellbeing. A balanced diet was important for healthy and enjoyable life. In theory, the key was moderation and the only way to find moderate delight was in the pleasures of good taste. Indeed, an article ‘Directions on the Use of Coffee’ published in The Scots Magazine 71, in 1809, drew attention to an essay by John Fothergill FRS MD (1712–80), a lifelong Quaker friend of Alexander Russell from

Fig. 2. Gentlemen relaxing, smoking pipes and drinking coffee in Aleppo (Aleppo I: 102–104).
their Edinburgh medical student days. Fothergill recommended to ‘those who have delicate stomachs, Coffee ought to be used with as little sugar as the taste will allow otherwise it may create acidity.’ For breakfast he recommended: ‘Let Coffee be made in the usual manner, only a third part stronger; let as much boiling milk be added to the Coffee, before it is taken from the fire, as there is water; let it settle; drink it with or without cream, as may be most agreeable.’ As to its medical properties Fothergill stated that ‘it is generally allowed that Coffee enlivens the spirits and without prejudice to the constitution prevents drowsiness. It is also with many a cure for a very distressing and common complaint the headache besides being a relief in various other disorders.’ Coffee became a panacea for almost every ailment. Indeed, the French Enlightenment philosopher Voltaire is thought to have consumed between 40 and 50 cups a day — but lived into his eighties.

Supplying coffee to Edinburgh

It is now extraordinary to contemplate the complexities of supplying Edinburgh with coffee before the twentieth century. From the seventeenth to the early eighteenth century, Yemen was the sole source of coffee beans for the international market. Coffee was grown in the Yemeni highlands between 1,000 and 2,000 m above sea level. After being dried, it was packed into rush baskets and made up into bales weighing 150–200 kg (c.330–440 lb). These were then wrapped in sacking to protect them from the damp. It was then sold in emporia in the Yemeni interior, especially to an inland market known as Bayt al-Faqīh and shipped via the Yemeni entrepots of Mocha (Mukhā), al-Ḥudaydah and al-Luhayyah on the Red Sea. Arab traders transported about 16,000 bales of coffee each year until 1803 from the northern Yemeni ports by dhow to Jiddah. It was then sent with pilgrims returning to Constantinople or taken to Suez by large Turkish vessels. The bales were then taken by camel, two bales per camel, across the desert to Alexandria to be shipped across the Mediterranean to northern ports and hence to Europe and on to Scotland.

In advertisements published in Edinburgh newspapers, Yemeni coffee was often called ‘Mocha’ after the port from whence it was despatched. As demands for coffee in Europe increased, several European factories were established in Mocha. From 1618 until the early nineteenth century (with brief closures in 1726–8), the British East India Company ran a factory in Mocha where they traded in a variety of goods, including coffee, gum Arabic, myrrh, frankincense and precious metals – including gold from Persia. In 1795 about 2,154 bales of coffee were exported from Mocha by the East India Company. These sold in Mocha at between 36 and 40 Marie-Teresa dollars per bale, that is about £10 3s 8d per cwt. There were Scots in Mocha too: between 1801 and 1803 its acting resident in Mocha was John Pringle (d.1813), of a Scottish aristocratic family.

Apart from the East India Company, there were various other European companies that made treaties or established factories in Mocha and brought coffee to Europe and hence to Scotland. In particular, the Dutch East India Company (Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie: VOC), imported coffee into Amsterdam and Rotterdam between 1618 and 1738. It brought the first important cargo of coffee to the Netherlands from Mocha in 1663 and had arrangements in place to export 600 bales of coffee free of Ottoman duties each year by 1708. In 1714 VOC exported about 800,000 kg of coffee from Mocha. The Compagnie française pour le commerce des Indes orientales, active between 1664 and 1769, also established a factory in Mocha and exported around 1 million kg from Yemen in 1708.

In 1720 Daniel Defoe wrote a pamphlet entitled ‘The Trade to India critically and calmly consider’d’, in which he explained how the East India Company avoided paying duties on textiles, tea, coffee and pepper and exposed its ‘clandestine trade’: that is, smuggling. The Danish East India Company and the Swedish East India Company (active from 1602 until 1798 with a trading station in Mocha from 1755) also set up trading arrangements in Mocha to bring coffee to Scandinavian ports such as Copenhagen and Gothenburg. At the same time, British import duties on tea were around 119 per cent in the 1750s and as a result about two thirds of the ‘Gottenburgh Teas’ drunk in Britain was smuggled from Gothenburg. This trade inevitably involved some of the merchants in Sweden who were from long-established trading Scottish families and other Scots who had fled to Baltic ports after the 1715 or 1745 Jacobite uprisings.
such as Charles Irvine (1693–1771). Alexander Wallace, a Norwegian-born merchant of Scottish parentage, described ‘shipments of East India goods from Copenhagen to Norway, from where they were smuggled to England’ in 1757. Wallace, the British consul in Bergen by 1765, himself owned the ‘George’ of Sunderland which was seized by the English authorities and carried a cargo of gin, brandy and coffee. Whilst most recent studies have focused on ‘Gottenburgh Teas’, coffee was subject to similar high duties so that coffee from Mocha,

![Image](220699-02 Food for Thought.indd)

Fig. 3. Advertisement for tea and coffee. *Caledonian Mercury* 3 December 1768. ©The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved.

Java and later the West Indies, was also smuggled into Scotland. Many of the Edinburgh merchants advertised coffee but almost as an afterthought following more prominent details about the tea they had on offer (Fig. 3).

The citizens of Edinburgh were kept informed about the shipment of coffee supplies through reports in the local newspapers. From Mocha coffee was shipped via the Cape of Good Hope to such major ports as Bordeaux, Rotterdam, Ostend, Bristol and London. Thus Andrew Russell (1629–99), a successful Scottish merchant-factor based in Rotterdam between 1668 and 1697 who had substantial commercial links with Scotland, traded in coffee beans, tea, and chocolate in many Baltic, North Sea and North American ports, as well as from Surinam, before he retired to Edinburgh. Supplies for Edinburgh were then shipped to Scottish ports, including Leith, Glasgow, Port Glasgow and Greenock, as well as Newcastle in the north-east of England. For example, the *Caledonian Mercury* of 6 July 1731 confirmed that the ‘Berrington’, an East India Company vessel, sailed from Mocha with 1,000 bales of coffee to London. On 24 May 1733, the *Caledonian Mercury* reported that the ‘Houghton’ with over 2,940 bales of coffee arrived off the Isle of Wight and that the ‘Monmouth’ was expected home with a similar cargo. This arrived on 27 September 1733 laden with 150 bales of coffee ‘which is the most welcome that has been known for many years the price of coffee being 7 shillings per pound; very little to be had for the money’. Obtaining consistent supplies of coffee in Edinburgh was difficult. Ships laden with coffee were sometimes seized by pirates in the Red Sea near Mocha or corsairs in the Mediterranean around Algiers; other ships were shipwrecked on the long journey via the Cape. As a valuable commodity, coffee cargoes were seized at times of war: *The Scots Magazine* on 1 March 1745 reported that a French ship from Mocha of 200 tuns and 40 guns carrying 200 tuns of coffee and other ‘rich goods to the value of 30,000 l’ was captured by the ‘Sheerness’ and taken to Bristol.

By the second half of the eighteenth century, Mocha lost its coffee monopoly. Coffee and sugar were shipped from colonial plantations in Dutch Java (Batavia) and from Spanish America; sugar from British or French West Indies to Western Europe. Scotland had direct social and economic ties with the West Indies and its plantations depended on investment from Scotland, and as in other Old-World countries, on shipping and slaves. Edinburgh newspapers reported on more colonial trade as production expanded in the 1730s, coffee was exported from islands.

If our American Islands have felt of late years a sensible decrease of their sugar and rum trade, they are like to make themselves more than triple amends by going upon the plantations of coffee, which is produced to so great a perfection in Jamaica and Barbadoes, as to exceed that of Mocha in the East Indies, from whence we used to have that commodity for ready money; whereas our colonies will be satisfied to barter it for our manufactures which will be no small advantage to Great Britain. And as those who apply themselves to the
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planting of coffee find it already to succeed so well, that it is assured several of times clear 6000 l per annum by it.21

The coffee trade expanded in the West Indies in the second half of the eighteenth century, despite periodic hurricanes and slave uprisings, conflicts between French and British in the Seven Years’ War from 1756 to 1763 and the impact of the War for American Independence (1776–83).22 On 17 September 1781, the Caledonian Mercury reported that as on 1 January 1772 St Lucia had 48 sugar plantations, 5,395,889 coffee trees, 1,321,600 cocoa plants and 367 plots of cotton. A list of ships at the mouth of the Demerara River in Guyana on 27 February 1781 indicates that at least two-thirds of them were carrying coffee, many of them Dutch.23 Between 1804 and 1809, 115,080 cwt of coffee was imported into Glasgow.24 Sugar, rum and coffee were then transhipped from Greenock and Port Glasgow into Leith at least from the 1780s. Yet, to raise the value of the bales of coffee from Latin America and Java, terms such as ‘Mocha’ and ‘Java’ were used by Scottish merchants to identify Latin American beans according to the original provenance of the coffee beans.

Excise duties and roup (public auctions)

Coffee was a luxury product subject to duty on domestic consumption along with tea, brandy, sugar, tobacco, wine and other liquors.25 In 1723, Sir Robert Walpole, the de facto Prime Minister, imposed excise duties on exotic products such as coffee, tea, cocoa and coconuts. All retailers had to register with the excise officials who had the power to inspect and prosecute merchants. Walpole also established the principle of bonded warehousing whereby tea, coffee and cocoa nuts were compulsorily warehoused on payment of a small duty. These could be re-exported without further duty, but the full tax was payable as excise if the produce was withdrawn for sale for consumption at home.26

This legislation led to major income from this revenue but also resentment, smuggling and arbitrarily seizing of goods by excisemen. In addition, as coffee was relatively expensive it was sometimes adulterated by cheap substitutes by rogue dealers and coffee-house keepers: ground chickpeas, hazelnuts, beans, peas, and grains of sand.27 Unscrupulous coffee-house proprietors even reused coffee grounds from time to time. Eventually, in 1784, the Prime Minister, William Pitt the Younger, reduced the duty to a tenth of the existing level and thus reduced the amount of smuggling of those goods that were being imported illegally. Periodic changes in coffee duties continued well into the nineteenth century.

There were further expenses to be paid once the coffee was sold. Coffee-houses in Scotland had to be licenced. Licences were administered by the Edinburgh town council from the 1670s. By 1825 retailers of tea, coffee, and/or spices had to pay 11s for a licence. Licences were not unique to Scotland. In the Netherlands in 1794 private families had to pay for a licence to drink coffee and tea at the rate of 6 guilders or more. In addition, innkeepers in public houses were taxed at 23 guilders a year to sell tobacco, coffee and tea.

As a result of the high excise duties, there are many advertisements in the Caledonian Mercury for roup to sell off the sequestrated coffee: many of them held in the coffee-houses of Edinburgh and Leith. ‘Conderaned’ (condemned) coffee was sometimes sold by the Honorary Commissioners of Excise in the Excise warehouse in Leith as in this example of 10 July 1771 (Fig. 4).

As the many advertisements in local newspapers revealed, by the eighteenth-century coffee-houses became places of business where commodities were auctioned. The Caledonian Mercury frequently announced roup to be held in coffee-houses around Edinburgh and Leith including those at John’s Coffee-House (24 April 1741; 16 December 1749) or that at the Old Exchange Coffee-House in Edinburgh in 1793. Notices about forthcoming roup were posted by trustees and businessmen in local newspapers and the articles for sale at the roup were minutely listed. Auctions of heritable property were regulated by hour glass. Almost anything could be sold at these auctions by a buyer bidding for the article or the roup.

Fig. 4. ‘Conderaned’ (condemned) coffee for sale. Caledonian Mercury | 13 July 1771. ©The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved.
be sold at these *roups* in coffee-houses including assets for liquidation as result of bankruptcies and unsold goods to land, wine, ships, land and leases on land and houses — even shares in capital stock of the Bank of Scotland sold by public voluntary *roup* under the supervision of David Erskine CS on 20 December 1768 (Fig. 3). Thus ‘On July 4th, 1810, St Bernard’s Well, with the whole of the small buildings and a strip of ground connected therewith, were exposed for public *roup* in the Royal Exchange Coffee-House, Edinburgh, ‘to be let on lease for the period of five years, at the upset sum of £30 sterling of yearly rent'. In turn the newspapers benefitted from income from the notices of *roups* as did the coffee-houses where the *roups* were held.

### Grocers and coffee merchants in Edinburgh and Leith

Whether coffee merchants and coffee-house keepers used smuggled coffee, bought sequestrated coffee in *roups* cheaply, or simply charged high prices to cover excise duty and their expenses in order to make a profit, several coffee merchants made fortunes and often reinvested in the coffee-trade or other industries. Though some of the coffee-houses also sold coffee beans, several grocers and merchants traded in raw coffee, several of them also trading in tea, spirits and even paper.

David Shepherd’s substantial advertisement (Fig. 5) splendidly demonstrates the wide range of imported goods that was available in January 1775: everything from oranges and figs, brandy and spirits, Jamaican pepper to roasted and raw coffee. His later advertisement, of 1785 even provides prices for a range of teas, wines, spirits, chocolate, cocoa and coffee (Fig. 6).

Major merchants advertised in local newspapers, including Messrs William Thorburn & Sons, spirit and tea merchants based at the Tea and Coffee Warehouse at the top of Kirkgate on the corner of Laurie Street, Leith, in 1784–5. A well-respected merchant and magistrate, James Reoch, was principal partner in the firm and son-in-law of Charles Cowan, another coffee merchant listed in 1775–6 as a grocer and tea dealer. Charles Cowan & Co. traded from the Tea and Paper Warehouse near the Cross and had a grocer’s shop on the east side of Tolbooth Wynd, Leith, in 1773. In 1785...
Charles Cowan was trading in tea, sugar, chocolate and coffee from the second fore-stair below the Exchange Coffee-House on the north side of the High Street, Edinburgh as well as from his warehouse at Tolbooth Wynd, Leith. Some of these supplies were acquired from the Swedish East India Company (presumably contraband) and others direct from the East India Company’s Warehouses in London. In 1779 Charles Cowan was trading in coffee, tea, wine and paper from the port of Leith and went on to lease paper mills in Penicuik, Midlothian—a business that lasted for six generations. By 1793–4, Charles Cowan had leased the ‘British Linen Court, Canongate’, as a tea and paper warehouse and had made a considerable fortune, so much so that by the 1830s he was living in Moray House where the family lived until 1845.

Curiously, many of these esteemed coffee merchants and grocers served on the jury at the trial of Robert Watt for high treason as a result of his active support for French republicanism, which led to his execution on 15 August 1794. One was William Sibbald of William Sibbald & Co. (Sibbald Brothers & Co.), run by merchants John and William Sibbald (d. 1828). They were brothers with offices in Kirkgate in Leith, near to the Lochend water pipes. They ceased trading in 1826. The brothers prospered by trading in sugar and rum as well as coffee and had their own fleet of West Indiamen by 1804 that included the ships ‘Isabella Simpson’, ‘Lady Forbes’, ‘Roselle’ and ‘Luna’.

### Coffee-houses in Edinburgh

How often we glibly read that the Scottish Enlightenment flourished in the taverns and coffee-houses of Edinburgh without any knowledge of its actual establishments. Intellectual and social life in Edinburgh in the eighteenth century for the professional classes, nevertheless, began to revolve around attendance at several clubs. These tended to meet in coffee-houses partly as a reaction to excessive alcohol consumption in some taverns. Indeed, coffee was ‘a new social beverage which could be drunk in public settings in a manner akin to alcoholic beverages like ales, beers, or wines, but it could be consumed without fear of consequent intoxication’.

In 1673, John Row opened the first coffee-house in Edinburgh in ‘Robertson’s Land’, a tall tenement by the old Goldsmith’s Hall, near the old Parliament House, on the west side or head of Parliament Close—but it was closed down in 1677 after a brawl. It opened twenty-one years after the first coffee-house was established in London by Daniel Edwards, a Levant Company merchant trading in Smyrna, and his servant Pasqua Rosee; and one hundred and eighteen years after Hekem of Aleppo and Shemsi of Damascus opened the first in Constantinople in 1555. Coffee reached Hungary by 1570; the first coffee-house opened in Vienna on 17 January 1685. By the end of the seventeenth century there were between 2,000 and 3,000 coffee-houses in London.

It is hard to track down the locations of all the various coffee-houses of the eighteenth century. A study of the Edinburgh Gazette between 1699 and 1707 suggests that there then were about six important coffee-houses in Edinburgh: the Caledonian, the Royal Exchange, the Exchange, Donaldson’s, McClurg’s and the German Coffee-House...
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Merchants</th>
<th>Locations</th>
<th>Williamson’s Directories</th>
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<td>Walter Aitchison</td>
<td>Tea and spirit dealer, head of Fleshmarket Close</td>
<td>1784–1785</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Aitchison</td>
<td>Tea and spirit dealer, Forrest Wynd</td>
<td>1784–1785</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R. Baillie &amp; Co</td>
<td>sold tea and coffee, Tea Warehouse at the corner of Parliament Close</td>
<td>Advertisements in the Caledonian Mercury</td>
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<tr>
<td>Boyd &amp; Little</td>
<td>Tea dealers, Bridge Street</td>
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<tr>
<td>Archibald Boyd</td>
<td>Tea dealer at foot of Leith Wynd</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Burnet</td>
<td>Tea and spirit dealer, opposite the Guard</td>
<td>1784–1785</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Clapperton</td>
<td>Tea and spirit dealer, Potter Row</td>
<td>1784–1785</td>
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<td>William Cowan</td>
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<tr>
<td>George Dunbar</td>
<td>Old Tea Warehouse in Smith’s Land opposite Blackfriar’s Wynd</td>
<td>Advertisements in the Caledonian Mercury</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Galloway</td>
<td>Tea and spirit dealer, near the Guard</td>
<td>1784–1785</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Gibb</td>
<td>Tea and spirit dealer, opposite Linen Hall</td>
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<td>Miss Gibson</td>
<td>Tea dealer, West Bow</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Graham</td>
<td>Tea and spirit dealer, Fleshmarket Close</td>
<td>1784–1785</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mrs Hutton</td>
<td>Tea and china merchant in front of the Exchange</td>
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<tr>
<td>William Jarvey</td>
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<td>1773-1774</td>
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<tr>
<td>John Little</td>
<td>Tea and spirit dealer, Lawnmarket</td>
<td>1784–1785</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John McEwen</td>
<td>Tea dealer, St Andrews Street</td>
<td>1784–1785</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Ramidge</td>
<td>Tea and spirit dealer, Bristo Street</td>
<td>1775–1776</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Ramige</td>
<td>tea dealer, West Bow</td>
<td>1775-1776</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Reoch</td>
<td>Tea dealer</td>
<td>1773</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard Richardson</td>
<td>a tea merchant, the Exchange</td>
<td>1773–1774;</td>
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<tr>
<td>David Sheppard &amp; Sons</td>
<td>Coffee merchant, Strichan’s Close</td>
<td>Caledonian Mercury (12 December 1785)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David Shepherd</td>
<td>Grocer and coffee merchant, above the head of Blackfriars Wynd</td>
<td>Fig. 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Sibbald</td>
<td>Coffee merchant</td>
<td>1773</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Sturrock</td>
<td>tea and spirit dealer at the head of Leith Wynd; tea dealer Canongate</td>
<td>1774–1776</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Sturrock</td>
<td>tea dealer</td>
<td>1773</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Swanston</td>
<td>coffee merchant at head of Carruber’s Close</td>
<td>in 1786 he advertised frequently in the Caledonian Mercury,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Thorburn</td>
<td>Tea dealer</td>
<td>1784–1785</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Various coffee traders of Edinburgh and Leith who advertised in the Caledonian Mercury and/or in Williamson’s Directories. 29
House. By the eighteenth century, there were several more coffee-houses in Edinburgh. These included Laigh Coffee-House with John Lech as its proprietor in 1727; John Muirhead’s Coffee-House; Blair’s Coffee-House established in 1736; Ellis Coffee-House; and Nether Bow Coffee-House ‘at the gate’, which was demolished by Edinburgh Town Council in 1764. Another important coffee-house was John’s Coffee-House in the north-east corner of Parliament Close in Parliament Square (Fig. 8a and b) where judges and Writers to the Signet would meet for their ‘meridian’ or twelve-noon dram. In 1760, its proprietor was Oswald whose son, John, a poet known as Sylvester Otway, knew Latin, Greek and Arabic. Sylvester served in India until 1783 before becoming a violent radical and pamphleteer; fighting and dying in the French Revolution in 1792.

Williamson’s Directory for 1773–1774 lists Andrew Forrester as keeper of the coffee-house at the Cross, and Walter Orrock as the keeper of the Exchange Coffee-House at the Cross: by 1774–6 Mrs Orrock was its proprietor. Charles Reoch was keeper of the Old Coffee-House at the Cross but listed as keeper of Balfour’s Coffee-House at the Cross by 1775–6 (Fig. 9). By 1784 coffee-houses included the Royal Exchange, the Exchange, and Gibb’s of Leith. Coffee-houses were also established in the New Town, including the Turf Coffee-House in South St Andrew’s Street and another in Princes Street. There were even itinerant coffee-makers on the streets of Edinburgh, just as there were in Istanbul.
Although some of the proprietors were female (Mrs Orrock of the Exchange Coffee-House from 1774; and probably Mrs Ainslie who lived in the coffee-house in Shakespeare Square in 1784), no respectable woman would enter a coffee-house in Edinburgh. An exception was Lady Euphemia Lockhart who frequented Whig coffee-houses of Edinburgh disguised in men’s clothes. Her intention was to discover more about the bribery of Scottish parliamentarians before the Treaty of Union of 1705, on behalf of her husband, Sir George Lockhart, of Carnwath (1673–1731), an ardent Jacobite spy.

More generally, upper- and middle-class ladies preferred to drink coffee at home. Though households usually owned a variety of items that were used in the ritual of tea drinking at home, paraphernalia associated with coffee was less elaborate. Coffee-cups were made of glazed earthenware or porcelain; coffee-pots of stoneware or copper. The gentry would have drunk their coffee from fine Asian porcelain and used silver coffee-pots and coffee-urns, spoons, sugar bowls and milk jugs, some made in Edinburgh by silversmiths such as James Kerr, William Dempster, and Ebenezer Oliphant. In this ‘private sphere’, these sociable ladies would visit each other to drink coffee together, to converse and gossip, invent scandal and learn the news in an atmosphere of sociability and politeness. Gentlemen, too, would drink coffee at home.

There were, however, coffee-houses in Edinburgh, like its bawdy oyster-cellars, with seedy reputations; even the occasional cockfight might be held in the less reputable. In 1775, Ranger’s Impartial List of Ladies of Pleasure, a directory of prostitutes, was published in Edinburgh.
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In Edinburgh in 1766. It remained there until 1810, moving from Fortune’s Tontine Tavern (in Princes Street) to Mr McEwen’s Tavern; then in 1823 back to the Coffee-House. It was finally closed in 1836.

There were two basic hotels by the mid-eighteenth century: The White Horse in the Canongate area, a well-known coaching inn; and the White Hart Inn in the Grassmarket, established in 1518, which also offered ‘half-merk’ marriages. Run by Francis McKay, vintner, by 1788 it was a cheap establishment mainly used by carters, though Robert Burns stayed there in 1791. By 1775–6, George Bain was keeper of John’s Coffee-House. This establishment also ran a hotel, under the direction of its hotel keeper, James Parlane. An advertisement posted by Matthew Poole in July 1783 announced that he had set up a hotel above his coffee-house at 10, Princes Street, New Town.\textsuperscript{42} This coffee-house was in existence by 1773–4 and was patronised by military idlers and members of the garrison: ‘the advantage of the coffee-house and tavern adjoining must make it convenient and agreeable for single gentlemen’.\textsuperscript{43}

By 1800, better-quality coffee-houses in Edinburgh offered meals, breakfast, lunch and dinner in the style of London eating-houses,\textsuperscript{44} and served a range of drinks from coffee, chocolate, tea and sherbet to claret, porter, punch, ale and beer. It is not therefore surprising to find that when he visited London David Hume lodged at the Rainbow Coffee-House, or that Adam Smith frequented the British Coffee-House in Cockspur Street near Charing Cross, a hub of Scottish social life in London where a Scottish literary club met.\textsuperscript{45} It was there that Adam Smith revised his \textit{Wealth of Nations}. It was in such London coffee-houses in the 1780s, that Scots could read copies of Edinburgh’s newspapers: the \textit{Caledonian Mercury}, the \textit{Weekly Magazine}, the \textit{Evening Courant}, and \textit{The Scots Magazine} too.\textsuperscript{46}

Edinburgh coffee-houses aimed to be completely democratic but were typically male spaces. All that was essential from customers was prompt payment and good manners. Neither gambling or blasphemy were encouraged. Coffee-houses in Edinburgh were also for pleasure and for quiet reading; for informal book clubs where anything from the \textit{Arabian Nights} to works by Tobias Smollett or Sir Walter Scott might be read aloud; for people playing chess, billiards and other games whilst they sipped their coffee. Songs were sung, plays were sometimes read or performed...
Fig. 10. Green, painting of the Royal Exchange and John’s Coffee-house, Edinburgh nineteenth century (reproduced with the permission of Glasgow Museums

(Fig. 10); new books closely read and philosophical ideas exchanged. A range of newspapers, chapbooks, broadsides and almanacs were available to read or to purchase in the coffee-houses. Poetry readings were held in some coffee-houses: the poet Robert Fergusson (d.1774) frequented the Royal Exchange Coffee-House and Indian Peter’s Coffee-House.

By the eighteenth century, standards of literacy in Scotland had improved. There were many opportunities for the citizens of Edinburgh to be well informed. Coffee-houses became ‘critical forums’ by providing the reading public from many levels of society access to an increasingly free press: newspapers and pamphlets, cheap periodicals and journals. The first edition of the Edinburgh Courant, itself was ‘Printed by James Watson in Craig’s Close, and sold at the Exchange Coffee House’ between 14 and 19 February 1705. In turn, the Courant even instructed anyone who wished to place an advertisement therein to leave it in the Exchange Coffee-House between two and four in the afternoon. Other coffee-houses were essentially ‘penny universities’ where everything from systematic natural history to natural philosophy were discussed.

Libraries and coffee-houses were places where politeness and rational discourse were cultivated. Though books were not widely purchased by private collectors, the circulation of books and journals increased as they were available in the coffee-houses and taverns: both places that witnessed cultural change. The vernacular poet, Allan Ramsay the Elder (1696–1758) set up a circulating library, the first in Scotland, in a building which had been the London Coffee-House at the east end of the Luckenbooths. In 1756 William Grey and Walter Peter set up a circulating library in the Exchange. This was run by Grey from 1758 until he sold the library to Alexander McKay in 1794. A self-financed Edinburgh Select Subscription Library emerged in 1800, after a meeting of ten men in Thomas McLeish’s printing shop in Old Assembly Close. At the same time, the spread of coffee-houses stimulated the creation of several bookshops around Parliament Close and St Giles Cathedral in Edinburgh. Many of them advertised in the Caledonian Mercury. Thus, in 1758, John Milligan frequently publicised his bookshop opposite the Exchange; tickets for a musical concert were sold at Laigh’s Coffee-House and in Mr Gordon, Booksellers, in Parliament Close; and a roup of books run by Alexander Donaldson at the Pope’s Head, opposite the Exchange was advertised complete with a full published catalogue.

There are other instances of links between coffee-houses, publishing houses and musical performances. On 21 May 1768 and again on 13 June 1768, the Edinburgh Evening Courant advertised concerts of vocal and instrumental music by the great Italian professional singer, Guisto Ferdinando Tenducci, to be given at Saint Cecilia’s Hall in the Niddry Wynd, tickets two shillings and sixpence obtainable from Balfour’s Coffee-House as well as from the music-shop in the High Street, run by John Brysson and owned by the music publisher, Robert Brenner (c.1713–89). By 1844, bookshops in the area included Bell & Bradfute Bookshop (formerly Charles Elliot’s bookshop) which was located next to John’s Coffee-House in Parliament Close.

Coffee-houses were respectable informal places for the consumption of coffee where men from all walks of life relaxed to engage in friendly conversation without interference. As the antiquarian and printer, William Smellie (1740–95), wrote:
In Edinburgh, the access to men of parts is not only easy, but their conversation and the communication of their knowledge are at once imparted to intelligent strangers with the utmost liberality. The philosophers of Scotland have no nostrums. They tell what they know, and deliver their sentiments without disguise or reserve. The generous feature was conspicuous in the character of Mr Hume.

Coffee-houses were also used to exchange social and commercial information. For example, masters for ships sailing from Leith would make themselves available in coffee-houses such as ‘Forrest’s Coffee-House’, to enable potential passengers to make interim arrangements (Fig. 7). Coffee-houses were not simply venues for casual encounters. Meetings with creditors were held there for which minutes were sometimes taken. By the early 1700s coffee-houses attracted prominent men and high-ranking officials, middle-class professionals: lawyers, underwriters and insurers of ships’ cargoes. Robert Chambers described how goldsmiths would commission orders in John’s Coffee-House over a dram or a ‘stoup of mellow ale’ with their customers. The Edinburgh Gazette of January 1702 even reported a medical quack who sold his medicines at the Caledonian Coffee-House in Edinburgh. So integrated did coffee-houses become in Edinburgh’s social life that anyone seeking a particular gentleman began by asking at the coffee-houses.

Coffee-houses had further roles. Fund-raising for charitable causes, for instance. An example was recorded in The Scots Magazine of 1777 when funds were raised in Balfour’s Coffee-House to provide for a hundred-year-old gentleman. In 1739, local newspapers requested information about a Cockney girl, Polly Rich, who had apparently eloped. Three guineas were offered to whoever would return Polly ‘to her owner’ at John’s Coffee-House or the ‘Earl of Roseberrie’ in Bristow: ‘and no questions will be asked.’ On the other hand, on 22 December 1789 a fatal duel took place between a Mr Francis Foulke of Dublin, a medical student at the University of Edinburgh, who was killed by ‘Mr G.’, an army officer. After quarrelling, they had ‘posted each other publicly at a coffee house, in the fashion then common and long after.’

With the rise in popularity of coffee-houses, the social standing of taverns and ale-houses was gradually lowered yet they both remained important as business venues — as did the open spaces near...
Saint Giles Cathedral. The area around the Mercat Cross (Fig. 11a and b), a small turreted octagonal building, near Saint Giles on the High Street in Edinburgh was surrounded by bookshops as well as coffee-houses. As Robert Kerr described in his memoir Smellie: ‘all the coffee houses and booksellers’ shops, the usual lounges of literary idle hours, were then around the Cross.’

Religion and secular institutions intermingled. In the early eighteenth century, merchants frequented the coffee-houses and bookshops in the Royal Exchange complex or the streets and coffee-houses near the Mercat Cross to make their business dealings rather than use the Exchange. Though the Cross was torn down in 1756 when Lord Provost George Drummond ordered the widening of the thoroughfare, respectable inhabitants of Edinburgh also continued to gather there between 1 pm and 3 pm to socialise and discuss the topics of the day, especially on Wednesdays, and the number of coffee-houses increased in this congested part of the Old Town.

The Royal Exchange on the High Street

In Edinburgh, coffee-houses served as busy communication hubs for merchants, much as they did in London. Yet, unlike London, there were probably not enough coffee-houses in Edinburgh to serve the
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entire business community. The Royal Exchange in Parliament Square was in the heart of the city law chambers and contained several coffee-houses. It was rebuilt around 1702 and designed for merchants to conduct their businesses. After the Union of 1707, the antechamber of the Outer House of Parliament House contained book stalls and coffee stalls as well as a small sheriff court. There were also various offices in the building including that of James Bailie WS, who had chambers about the Exchange in 1729.

The next Royal Exchange building was designed by John Adam (Fig. 12), and its foundation stone was laid on 3 September 1753 by George Drummond, then Grand Master of the Freemasons. Detailed specifications, a plan and a drawing of the front of the building were published in 1754. The new building was completed in 1760 (Fig. 13 a and b), itself curiously built over the plague-infested St Mary's Close. Coincidentally, Alexander Drummond was consul in Aleppo from 1751 to 1758 and wrote letters home to his family in Edinburgh. These accounts may well have inspired Alexander’s elder brother, Lord Provost George Drummond. Furthermore, their uncle, John Drummond of Quarrel (1676–1742), a Director of the East India Company from 1722 to 1734, had been involved in the coffee trade from Mocha. The Royal Exchange was built to accommodate forty shops, three coffee-houses, ten dwellings, a Customs House and a piazza. Adam Smith (1723–90), the famous Scottish Enlightenment economist and philosopher, had his office in the Customs House on the second floor.

Coffee-house proprietors became arbiters of taste and fashion and could also make considerable profits. Take the famous Indian Peter’s Coffee House, sometimes called the American Coffee-House or

Peter’s Tavern, outside Edinburgh’s former Parliament Hall (known as the Old Parliament Building), in Old Parliament Close, a favourite with the lawyers and the literati of the day. It was managed by ‘Indian Peter’ Williamson (1730–99), a ploughman’s son who had been abducted, aged thirteen, from Aberdeen, and taken to the American colonies as an ‘indentured servant’ (Fig. 14a and b).

In his back rooms, lawyers, merchants met to discuss the news of the day. Benjamin Franklin probably visited this coffee-house when he visited Edinburgh in 1759 and 1771, for India Pete displayed ‘Chief Jacob’s night cap’, which he claimed Franklin had given him. An extraordinary character and versatile genius, a publisher and entrepreneur, Williamson wrote about his travels in his French and Indian Cruelty (1757). This autobiography reads like an inversion of colonial expansion: from an indentured servant on a Pennsylvania mixed-farming plantation to providing luxuries for the coffee-houses of Edinburgh. Williamson set up a printing and publishing house behind his coffee-house and later opened a tavern in Old Parliament Close, ran a weekly magazine, The Scots Spy, set up Edinburgh’s penny post and published its first street Directories between 1771 and 1792. Intriguingly, in Tobias Smollett’s The Expedition of Humphry Clinker, published in London in 1771, the main character, Lieutenant Lismahago, a ‘self-conceited pedant, awkward, rude and disputatious’ who held preposterous views on ‘war, policy, belles lettres, law and metaphysics’ was half Adam Ferguson, and half ‘Indian’ Peter. The novel, lampooning high-minded Edinburgh society, is virtually a comic shadow-play of Edinburgh Enlightenment philosophers. But there is no mention in any of David Hume’s writings of ‘Indian Peter’ or his adventures.

In the mid-eighteenth century, there was a fashion amongst proprietors of taverns and coffee-houses to issue small denomination unofficial promissory...
paper notes. Through his coffee-house Williamson also set up an ingenious form of credit, squib or spoof that he named the ‘Ready Money Bank’ whereby loans of 1s., were to be paid in ‘books, coffee, or ready money’ during the bank hours of 10.00 am and noon. He was not the only coffee-house banker: James Smiton or Smieton, a coffee-house keeper in Edinburgh, issued notes of 5s. or less, exclusively on demand. Smiton’s notes were only to be used by his coffee-house clients and guaranteed that he would the bearer ‘on demand, in money or drink, two shillings and sixpence sterling’ and were marked on the backs ‘with receipts for mugs of porter or pints of beer or ale’ or presumably for coffee, chocolate or tea.

Clubs and societies in coffee-houses

Some clubs in Edinburgh were essentially professional bodies. The Juridical Society, for example, was founded about 1770 with twelve members, most of them apprentices to Writers of the Signet, the senior member being John Russell WS, junior (1753–92 or 1803). They met ‘for the encouragement of the study of law’ in the Scots’ Law class-room in the College every Saturday at 7 am but also in John’s Coffee-House, Forrester’s Coffee-House and the Exchange Coffee-House’. They not only held discussions about legal issues but created a law library and collated the various systems of styles of legal documents, leading to a publication in 1786. Harry Cockburn made a survey of social clubs in Edinburgh and where they met in the early nineteenth century. Cockburn’s description of the Wig Club, founded in 1775, demonstrates the interdependence of clubs on taverns and coffee-houses, the latter being considered by Arnot to be a ‘species of tavern’. This club, like the Poker and Friday Clubs, met at Fortune’s Hotel or Tavern, in Stamp Office Close off
the High Street, a public house that had been most fashionable in the 1750s, and then at the 1 Royal Exchange Coffee-House. By 1810 the Wig Club had moved to Fortune’s Tontine Tavern in the New Town. Fifteen years later, this Club again met in the Old Town.

The Poker Club was created in 1762 by the literati of Edinburgh as a successor to the Select Society to provoke discussion on the possible need to form a militia in the town. Its exclusive members, never more than sixty-six, included John and David Hume, Adam Ferguson, Reverend Dr William Robertson, Lord Dundas and the Earl of B Buccleuch. It largely met for the entertainment of its members who met to dine, drink and socialise and only secondarily for them to discuss political matters. At first, they met in Thomas Nicholson’s Tavern near the Mercat Cross and later moved to Fortune’s Tavern. The Poker Club had a critical role in the Scottish Enlightenment and continued until 1784, to be transformed into the exclusive gentlemen’s Edinburgh New Club which first met in Bayle’s Tavern and Coffee-House in Shakespeare Square, 1 Princes Street, north side, in the New Town, in 1787 but built its own premises in 1837, complete with a coffee-room. It is still active.

These clubs became important conduits of the philosophies, perspectives and values of the Scottish Enlightenment to the town’s literati. In 1716 or 1717 an influential cultural group, the Rankenian Club, was set up and survived until 1774. It was based at Thomas Ranken’s Coffee-House on the west side of Hunter Square. Organised by leading members of staff and graduates in divinity and law, the Club engaged in metaphysical and philosophical discussions. A place of congenial fellowship, it advocated sound literary taste and the importance of English style. In 1722 the proprietor of John’s Coffee-House and Tavern near the Cross, in the north-east corner of Parliament Close in Parliament Square was Jamie Balfour, ‘a man of infinite humour’, who by the 1730s and 1740s was successfully attracting the men of letters, judges and lawyers, professors, as well as leading poets, song-writers and dandies of the town. Balfour’s customers also included the Romantic poet Allan Ramsay the Elder.

The habits of polite life, and the subjects of fashionable conversation, were familiar, at this time, to the citizens of Edinburgh, from the papers of Addison and Steele; the wits of Balfour’s Coffee-house, Forrester, Falconer, Bennett, Clerk, Hamilton of Bangour, Preston, Crawford, were a miniature of society which was to be met with Will’s and Button’s.

In 1754 his son, the famous portrait painter Allan Ramsay the Younger (1713–84), set up the exclusive Edinburgh Select Society to debate anything ‘apart from revealed religion and Jacobitism’. It became a debating club for the intellectual elite of Edinburgh that continued until 1764. Members of the Select Society included David Hume, Adam Smith, James Boswell, gentry, clergy, physicians, lawyers (sadly not Alexander Russell’s eminent brother, John Russell CS of Roseburn whose application was rejected), professors and other elitist literati. The Select Society began in the Exchange Coffee-House, but its members also met in the Customs Coffee-House or John’s Coffee-House. The Wagering Club also met at the Exchange Coffee-House well into the 1830s.

Clubs and coffee-houses were forums for intellectual exchanges: public spaces for a discourse of polite ‘sociability, civility and improvement’ and good taste. Not only venues for business transactions, it was there that merchants, professional men and artisans alike were able to hear and debate political intelligence, rumours and gossip. Yet, in the seventeenth century, there were various attempts by Edinburgh town council to suppress the coffee-houses. In 1681, there was an official campaign to stop coffee-houses or ‘houses of intelligence’ distributing news which resulted in a court case against John McClurg and Umphray Clerk in January. On 15 November 1692 the Privy Council ordered Gilbert Fyfe and James Marforibanks, owners of the Exchange Coffee-House, to close their establishment ‘in respect of the seditious news vented in and dispersed from the said coffee house’. In 1702 the Edinburgh town council tried to regulate the posting of placards in the city’s coffee-houses in an attempt to control the flow of information about shipping movements in and out of Leith and tried to hand over the task of poster posting solely to the keeper of the Exchange. No attempts to suppress the coffee-houses came to anything so they continued to disseminate news as before.

As a reflection of the political role of coffee-houses, several examples are outlined. First, there was a pamphlet written for the general public by John Bannatyne, minister of Lanark, to encourage support for the Union published in Edinburgh in 1706 entitled An answer to some queries, &c. relative to
the union: in a conference betwixt a coffee-master, and a country-farmer. Secondly, some coffee-houses served as meeting places for political groups. The Old Revolution Club, which met to celebrate the 1688 Revolution and the Hanoverian Succession, met in Smieton’s Nether Bow Coffee-House, later renamed the Revolution Coffee-House. Defoe also reported that John’s Coffee-House was where opponents to the Union met to ruminate on proceedings in Parliament House and to scheme accordingly. Thirdly, illegal political pamphlets were circulated in coffee-houses from the 1690s and especially during the Jacobite uprisings of 1715 and 1745 but it is unlikely that records of Jacobite meetings in the coffee-houses would have been kept at the time. In coffee-houses political debates, satirical pamphlets, false news and rumours no doubt circulated among militants and sympathisers on both sides.

As time passed, there were different foci of debate in the coffee-houses. The production of West Indian coffee was largely dependent on slaves though those enjoying a cup of coffee in Edinburgh would not necessarily have associated this pleasure with the injustices of slavery. Yet, towards the end of the eighteenth century, Edinburgh coffee-houses also played an important role in anti-slavery campaigns (Fig. 15).

Between January and March 1792, the Scottish anti-slavery writer, William Dickson (1751–1823) of the ‘Society at Edinburgh for the purpose of effecting the Abolition of the African Slave Trade’, prodigiously canvased church congregations and Quaker meeting-houses; customers and intellectuals in the coffee-houses (including Gordon’s Coffee-House) and universities; and Edinburgh newspapers such as the Caledonian Mercury and Edinburgh Evening Courant. The result was a massive petition that was sent to Parliament with 10,885 signatures.

Fig. 15. Anti-Slavery campaigning in coffee-houses. the Caledonian Mercury 15 March 1792. ©The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved.

The Act to Abolish the Transatlantic Slave Trade was passed in 1807.

Conclusions

The popularity of the Arabian Nights, themselves exotic, stimulating imagination, was entwined with the triumphant progress of coffee. Providing enough coffee beans from Yemen, Java or the West Indies to satisfy the Edinburgh market was a major commercial achievement, especially in the face of high excise duties. In dietary matters too, Enlightenment culture became one of pragmatic good taste: sipping exotic coffee was in tune with an enlightened diet, one that exhibited restraint, elegance and decorum. Likewise, Edinburgh coffee-houses were not only venues for commercial transactions and political debate. They also facilitated the cultivation of polite good taste, sober respectability and genteel refinement, distinctive features of Scottish Enlightenment thought.

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