

THE LIBRARY OF GEORGE III: COLLECTING FOR CROWN OR NATION?

by Robert Lacey

Through the centre of the modern British Library in the Euston Road rises the crystal tower of George III's books, piercing no fewer than six storeys. The prevailing orthodoxy on how this royal collection became the heart of Britain's national library was set out by John Brooke in his influential and revisionist biography of George III in 1972:

The King was one of the great book collectors of his age and a founder of the British national library ... He began to collect books before he came to the throne ... The library was not acquired for his personal use but as the nucleus of a national library ... The King's library was designed for scholars and was open to all ... Its value today is incalculable. The King bequeathed the library to his successor, who in 1823 presented it to the British Museum.¹

Brooke rebuked the British Museum for not putting up a bust to commemorate George III among its great benefactors,² and this accepted wisdom has been spread by several general histories of the Museum. On the audiotape guide to the recent exhibition at the Queen's Gallery, *George III and Queen Charlotte, Patronage, Collecting and Court Taste*, Jane Roberts, the Royal Librarian, discusses George III's library and describes how it ended up as part of the British Museum, 'in precisely the way that I think George III had intended'. In his recent monograph, *George III: An Essay in Monarchy*, Grayson Ditchfield wrote 'his large collection of books was intended ultimately for the nation'.³ The eighteenth century scholar Professor John Cannon states unequivocally in the new *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*: 'George III had an important influence on national cultural life. On ascending the throne he determined to add to the library given by his royal predecessors to the British Museum'.⁴ The purpose of this article is to show that, in reality, what eventually happened to George III's books was precisely the opposite of what he had intended.

As the magnificent 2004 exhibition at the Queen's Gallery proved, George III and his wife Queen Charlotte were generous patrons of the arts, in a very personal fashion. In the exhibition you could, for example, read in the King's own handwriting his instructions for assembling and disassembling a watch:

Hook the Chain into the Barrel / Mount the Main Spring Put your finger on the Barrel to prevent the Chain from coiling among the Wheels ... be careful the Chain goes into the Worm of the fusee, NB keep your hand on the Contrate Wheel.⁵

¹ John Brooke, *King George III* (London, Constable, 1972), pp. 304-305.

² Brooke, pp.306-307.

³ Grayson Ditchfield, *George III: An Essay in Monarchy* (London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p. 7.

⁴ Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (2004), vol 21, p. 848.

⁵ Jane Roberts, ed., *George III & Queen Charlotte; Patronage, Collecting and Court Taste* (London, Royal Collections, 2004), p. 288.

George III was abreast of the latest thought in science and philosophy; he sponsored Joseph Banks's botanical research in the South Seas with Captain Cook; he was a theatregoer (though he tended to comment too loudly on the plays he was watching); he was a fair architectural draftsman; he wrote articles on agricultural improvements under the pseudonym, Ralph Robinson, the name of one of his shepherds; he could turn out a workmanlike ivory button on a lathe; he studied military prints and he could recite the names of all the ships in his navy by heart. He could even be spotted sitting on a high stool at Charles Knight Senior's Windsor bookshop browsing through the latest publications. Once he was seen reading Tom Paine's *Rights of Man* for more than half an hour – without any sign of displeasure, according to one source.⁶ According to another, however, drawn to my attention by Frank Prochaska, author of *The Republic of Britain*, the King put the book down when he came to the passage in which his capacity was likened to that of a parish constable.⁷

Even as a boy, the future George III was an enthusiastic book collector. He showed interest in the arts, particularly painting, music and literature, as well as in science, like his father, Frederick, Prince of Wales, who died in 1751 following an injury from a cricket ball (not a tennis ball, as reported by Horace Walpole).⁸ As Prince of Wales himself, aged only eighteen, George seems to have been involved in the early negotiations to purchase the library of Joseph Smith, the British Consul in Venice. Two years after he succeeded his grandfather, George II, in 1760, he concluded the negotiations for acquiring Smith's library, along with the Consul's paintings, which included his collection of Canalettos.

The new King's eagerness to build up a large and impressive collection of books is presumed to have been prompted by his grandfather's decision to hand over the contents of the existing royal library to the British Museum on its foundation in 1757. This library, known today as the 'Old' Royal Library, contained volumes going back as early as the reign of Edward IV. From 1662 it had been one of the copyright libraries to which all new publications were theoretically supposed to be sent. But it had not been well maintained. Having survived a fire in 1731, the library had reposed, in some disorder, in the Old Dormitory of Westminster School, alongside the manuscripts of Sir Robert Bruce Cotton, which his grandson had bequeathed to the nation in 1700.

The idea that George III lamented his grandfather's disposal of the old royal library raises the question of evidence. George III's voluminous published correspondence concentrates on political matters, and there is virtually nothing that reveals what he felt about his books. There is, however, persuasive contemporary evidence in the royal accounts. As Samuel Johnson said, 'no man is a hypocrite in his pleasures', and the library records showed payments to booksellers and bookbinders totalling some

⁶ Christopher Hibbert, *George III: A Personal History* (London, Viking, 1998), p. 200.

⁷ Ingram Cobbin, *Georgiana, or, Anecdotes of George the Third*, (London, 1820), pp. 11/12, cited in Prochaska, *The Republic of Britain* (London, Allen Lane, 2000), p. 15.

⁸ I am grateful to Dr Martin Postle, Keeper of British Paintings at Tate Britain, for his considered verdict on what killed 'Poor Fred' in the paper he delivered to the Society on 13 December 2004: *'Poison in Our Sight': Reynolds and the Court of George III*.

£1,000 - £1,500 a year (very roughly £130,000 in modern terms).⁹ The King made regular payments to booksellers who bid on his behalf in the auctions that were a feature of the period – Sotheby's was founded as a book auction house in the 1740's – and British diplomatic missions abroad were instructed to give the King good notice of important book sales in the countries to which they were accredited.

In 1762, the twenty-four year old King purchased, in the same year as the Consul Smith collection, the Thomason collection of over 30,000 Civil War tracts and pamphlets. George Thomason was a London bookseller who, in the 1640's and 1650's, at no little personal risk, collected publications, sermons and newspapers, sometimes only a single sheet flyer, which were seditious to both King and Parliament. George III paid £300 for this remarkable collection, which provides today one of our major sources of information about the English civil war and interregnum, and presented it to the British Museum.

In 1773, the suppression of the Society of Jesuits by Pope Clement XIV threw some valuable Jesuit libraries onto the European market, and the royal librarian Frederick Augusta Barnard set off in search of bargains. Five years earlier, Dr Johnson had met Barnard and written him a famous letter of advice as to the books he should purchase:

A Royal Library should have at least the most curious edition, the most splendid and the most useful ... Things of which the mere rarity makes the value, and which are prized at high rate by wantonness rather than by use, are always passing from poorer to richer countries . . . It will be of great use to collect in every place maps of the adjacent country and plans of towns, buildings, and gardens.¹⁰

This reference to maps reminds us that George III's personal interest in geography and topography was reflected in his superb collection of early and contemporary maps, views and charts. These were the foundation of the British Library's map collection, which is today one of the finest in the world and forms the subject of a most interesting article¹¹ by Peter Barber, who is the curator of the collection.

In 1762, George III acquired Buckingham House to the west of St James's Palace, and set about remodelling it into a domestic residence known as the Queen's House – fourteen of his fifteen children were born there. The Queen's House was so-called because it theoretically replaced the old Somerset House as the Queen's dower house. But some of the principal features of the remodelling by William Chambers provided space for the King's library – originally four rooms built as a southern extension to the house, with three further rooms, the finest of which was the large, domed, Octagonal Library. Along with his books, these galleries contained the King's collections of maps, coins, drawings, and ship models – and the King insisted that his own bedchamber should be located as close as possible to - indeed, right against - the main rooms of the library.

⁹ *Report from the Committee on Papers Relating to the Royal Library which His Majesty has been graciously pleased to present to the British nation* (London, House of Commons, 1823), pp. 4-5.

¹⁰ Letter from Samuel Johnson to F.A. Barnard, 28 May 1768, first published in F.A. Barnard's introduction to his *Catalogue of The Royal Library* (1820), p.vi.

¹¹ Peter Barber, *Royal Geography: The Development and Destiny of George III's Geographical Collections*, to be published.

George III's personal affection for and knowledge of his books is made clear in an anecdote that Sir Walter Scott recounted in the obituary of the King that he wrote in February 1820 for the *Edinburgh Weekly Journal*. Scott seems to have heard this story from the book-loving John, third Duke of Roxburghe (1740-1804), whom Scott described as a 'well-known ... bibliomaniac'. Both Roxburghe and the King owned first editions of the first book printed by Caxton, his 'Book of Troye'.

But the King examined his own with such accuracy as enabled him to prove to demonstration, that though both copies were of the same edition, that in the Royal Library must have been more early thrown off than [that in] the Duke's, because a leaf in the former [royal edition] was what is technically called 'locked' (such is the phrase when, by an error at the press, the reverse is printed on the side of the leaf which should have presented the obverse, so that page 32 precedes page 31), an error which had been discerned and corrected in the Duke's copy. So that His Majesty triumphed that his own copy of the first book (we believe) of the English press, was also the earliest printed.¹²

George III's passion for collecting early editions of Caxton was also described in 1812 by the book-loving clergyman, Thomas Frognall Dibdin. He was a friend of George Nichol, the Covent Garden bookseller who frequently bid on the King's behalf at auction, and Nichol described for Dibdin the twenty-three day sale in 1793 of the library of James West, the former president of the Royal Society. Nichol told Dibdin that he had been criticised in the newspapers of the time for buying up 'nearly the whole of the Caxtonian volumes in this collection' for His Majesty's library – although, according to the bookseller, 'His Majesty, in his directions to Mr Nichol, forbade any competition with those purchasers who wanted books of science and belle-lettres for their own professional or literary pursuits.'¹³

In an age before mass publication and public circulating libraries, a gentleman's library was his sole source of information, and it was in this tradition of the working library that George III himself acquired some extraordinary treasures. At the James West sale of 1773 he bought the Mainz *Catholicon*, a thirteenth century Latin grammar and dictionary. His early Caxtons included the 1476 edition of *The Canterbury Tales*, for which he paid £47 17s. – this can now be viewed in its entirety on the British Library web-site. And in 1800 he bought Charles I's copy of Shakespeare's Second Folio (of 1632) in which the King had taken it upon himself to rename many of the plays with titles that he considered more appropriate. Feeling himself qualified to correct and improve upon Shakespeare, Charles I renamed *Much Ado about Nothing* 'Benedick and Beatrice'. *As You Like It* became 'Rosalind' and *Twelfth Night*, 'Malvolio'.¹⁴

George III also added a corrective note of his own to the folio, although in an altogether more humble fashion. The folio had once belonged to Sir Thomas Herbert, and a subsequent owner had confused Sir Thomas with Sir Henry Herbert, Master of the Revels. George III corrected the error in his own handwriting. As a lover of books,

¹² Walter Scott, *The Miscellaneous Prose Works of Sir Walter Scott* (Edinburgh, Robert Cadell, 1847), vol. I, p. 418.

¹³ Thomas Frognall Dibdin, *Bibliomania or Book-Madness* (London, Chatto & Windus, 1876), p. 382.

¹⁴ T.A. Birrell, *English Monarchs and Their Books: From Henry VII to Charles II [The Panizzi Lectures, 1986]* (London, British Library, 1987), p. 45.

he loved meeting the scholars and others who, on application to the librarian, were admitted to the Royal Library. In 1783, John Adams, the first emissary to London of the newly independent United States of America (and later, Washington's successor as their President) described his visit to the four libraries of the Queen's House:

I wished for a week's time, but had but a few hours. The books were in perfect order, elegant in their editions, paper, binding, etc., but gaudy and extravagant in nothing. They were chosen with perfect taste and judgement; every book that a king ought to have always at hand ... In every apartment of the whole house, the same taste, the same judgement, the same elegance, the same simplicity, without the smallest affectation, ostentation, profusion or meanness. I could not but compare it, in my own mind, with Versailles, and not at all to the advantage of the latter.¹⁵

The most famous meeting in the library was in 1767, when Dr Johnson was spotted by the librarian sitting by the fire deep in the study of a book. Barnard went straight to tell the King, who rose immediately, following the librarian down a dark corridor with a candle to a private door, which the King opened with his own key.

'Sir, here is the King,' Barnard whispered in Johnson's ear, and the Doctor leapt to attention. The two men then embarked on a lengthy conversation about books and literary journalism. The King observed that he supposed Dr. Johnson must have read a great deal, to which Johnson – then aged 56 – replied that nowadays he spent more time thinking than reading, but he had indeed read a great deal 'in the early part of his life'.

'His Majesty enquired if he was then writing anything [Boswell is describing the occasion.]. He answered he was not, for he had pretty well told the world what he knew and must now read to acquire more knowledge.'

'Sir, they may talk of the King as they will,' Johnson said to the librarian after George III had made his exit through his private door, 'but he is the finest gentleman I have ever seen.'¹⁶

By the time of his death in 1820, George III had built up one of the most impressive libraries in Europe, comprising some 65,000 books and 450 manuscripts. During the last ten years of his life – when the King was blind and deaf, floating in an Alzheimer's-like haze, with his son ruling as Regent – the level of spending on the royal library actually increased from £1,500 annually to some £4,500, much of the money going on the expense of preparing a printed catalogue. The Prince Regent appears to have readily accepted the spending recommendations of Frederick Barnard, who supervised the staff of six other librarians and the royal bindery.

But two years after George IV came to the throne in January 1820, the newspapers of the time offer a more cynical explanation as to why the new King might have wanted a printed catalogue. They reported rumours that the former Prince Regent was planning to sell his father's cherished collection of books to Alexander I, Tsar of Russia.

¹⁵ Brooke, p. 306.

¹⁶ Hibbert, p. 61.

On March 26 1822 the *Morning Chronicle* published ‘a report which is exceedingly prevalent in the literary circles that the Emperor of Russia is at this moment negotiating for the purchase of the Royal Library at Buckingham House’.¹⁷

In the following days the paper reported that the King had instructed Barnard to bundle up the library of Kew Palace to be included in the sale of books to ‘the Autocrat of the North’ – and the story was taken up by other papers, all of which reacted with outrage. The *Literary Chronicle*, however, took a different approach: ‘Confidently as this report is circulated, we cannot believe it.’

The allegation that George IV was planning to sell off his father’s library remains controversial, and I am most grateful to John Goldfinch of the British Library who has uncovered these contemporary newspaper references. Thirty years later, in 1850 and 1851, the story resurfaced in two Victorian journals¹⁸, with the suggestion that George IV’s go-between with the Tsar had been Princess Lieven, the Russian Ambassador’s wife. A contemporary had already recorded the story. On Wednesday January 8 1823, Charles Greville, Clerk of the Council to George IV (and later to William IV and Queen Victoria) went out shooting with Frederick, Duke of York. The Duke complained that the new King had pocketed his father’s money – as well as all their mother’s jewels – for his personal use. He protested that the King had ‘no right thus to appropriate their father’s property, but that it belongs to the Crown’, and went on to complain: ‘The King had even design of selling the library collected by the late King, but this he was obliged to abandon, for the Ministers and the Royal Family must have interfered to oppose so scandalous a transaction. It was therefore presented to the British Museum.’¹⁹

Greville does not say if this ‘design of selling the library’ was to the Tsar – the final verdict on that must remain unproven – but at this point rumour and speculation meet solid fact. A letter in the Royal Archives of that month, dated 15 January 1823, a week after Greville’s conversation with the Duke of York, conveys the following message from George IV to his Prime Minister Lord Liverpool:

Dear Lord Liverpool, The King, my late revered and excellent father, having formed during a long series of years a most valuable and extensive library, consisting of about one hundred & twenty/ thirty thousand volumes, I have resolved to present this collection to the British Nation.²⁰ [In fact, there were only some 65,000 volumes in George III’s library.]

The records do not tell us how Lord Liverpool and his colleagues induced George IV to make this donation, nine months after the reports that the King was planning to sell the books for his personal profit, as he had previously sold his mother’s jewels. Most historians have concluded that a secret deal was arranged. For several years – for some time before his accession, in fact – the new King had been formulating grandiose plans for the rebuilding of Windsor Castle by Jeffrey Wyatville. By 1823 he was also refining the equally grandiose and expensive redevelopment of what would

¹⁷ Cited in the paper delivered by John Goldfinch to the Madden Society included in the collection of essays *Libraries Within the Library*, to be published by the British Library.

¹⁸ *The Quarterly Review*, vol. 88, December 1850 (London, John Murray, 1851), p. 143: and in several editions of *Notes and Queries*, 1851.

¹⁹ *Greville Memoirs*, Part I, vol 1(London, Longmans Green, 1874), pp. 65-67.

²⁰ RA GEO/22923. George IV to Lord Liverpool, 15 January 1823.

become Buckingham Palace. Nash's plans for the Palace had no space to accommodate 65,000 books, and both of the rebuilding projects would consume enormous sums of public money.

One source²¹ suggests it was the veteran politician, Lord Sidmouth (the former Henry Addington) who persuaded the King. Two years previously Sidmouth had been the government's go-between in the scandalous public battle between the King and Queen Caroline, and we know that George IV felt overawed by the former Prime Minister. It seems likely that Sidmouth was entrusted with the task of explaining to His Majesty that the taxpayer could hardly be expected to finance the rebuilding of two extravagant palaces, while the King sold off some of the palaces' most glorious contents for his personal financial benefit.

There was some debate as to where the King's books should be housed. One suggestion was that they might be located in the Banqueting Hall in Whitehall 'of easy access to members of Parliament [and] to the Public Offices'.²² If this had happened, George III's library might have started the British equivalent of the Library of Congress, a great centre of learning linked to the legislature. But the British Museum was quick to move. On 8 February 1823 the Trustees proposed that the Museum was the best place for the King's Library and proposed it should be kept separate from the rest of the collections with a new building and extra staff. On 23 April 1823 a Committee of the House of Commons accepted this proposal, and the following year voted £40,000 to start the construction of the wing designated to contain the King's Library.

Whether George III himself envisioned, or would in any way have welcomed, the transfer of his books to the British Museum is open to question. When his grandfather gave away the old Royal Library in 1757, the old King created a significant gap in the royal inheritance, and in 1762 George III started filling the gap with the first of his great acquisitions – the Consul Smith Collection. Here was the foundation of a library befitting an enlightened king, to grace an enlightened palace. It seems significant that when, in this same year, the King purchased the Thomason Collection of Civil War tracts and pamphlets, he did not keep this collection for himself, but presented it at once to the British Museum. This surely demonstrates a clear distinction in George III's mind between the Royal Library and the National Library.

The instructions he gave to George Nichol, his book agent, confirm this. The fact that the King told Nichol to hold back when he was bidding against a private collector who was purchasing for his own library shows a view of himself as one gentleman among others – he did not wish to abuse his position as King. But, if George III had indeed been building a library for the nation, then he surely would not have had any scruples about outbidding private gentlemen. On the contrary, he would have wanted to buy every treasure on the market in order to include them in the national library.

If George III was building up his collection of books in order to hand it over to the nation after his death, what sort of role did he see for the Royal Library in the future?

²¹ *The Quarterly Review*, vol 88, December 1850 (London, John Murray, 1851), cited in Arundell Emdaile, *The British Museum Library: A Short History and Survey* (London, George Allen & Unwin, 1946), p. 192.

²² W.R.Hamilton to Robert Peel, 25 March 1827, cited in Peter Barber, *Royal Geography*, p. 23.

Was it his vision that his successors should do the same, so that it would in effect become every monarch's duty to create a revolving repository of books that would be handed over at the end of every reign, with the next monarch filling the void again from scratch?

This prospect is nonsensical, and it is significant that in November 1834 his third son, William IV, added his own hand-written codicil to his will – 'that all the books, drawings and plans collected in all the palaces shall forever continue their appurtenance to the Crown and on no Pretence whatever to be alienated from the Crown.'²³ To me, this clearly reflects the anger that William and his siblings felt at their elder brother's disposal of their father's books, and it is, indeed, on the basis of this codicil that the modern royal library has been built up since the 1830's. The modern Royal Library at Windsor is, in fact, the *third* royal library – and, I would argue that, if it had not been for George IV, it would be the second.

In 1791, a German preacher resident in London, Dr Frederick Wenderborn, who was a great admirer of the British Museum, referred in his guide book *A View of London* to 'the very valuable and magnificent books' of 'the King's private library ... which, as it is said, will be one time or another joined to those of the British Museum.'²⁴ We are told by Edward Edwards, the nineteenth century historian of the British Museum, that Dr Wenderborn was known to Queen Charlotte, who may have put this idea into his head. But if the Queen was thinking this way, there is nothing to suggest that her ideas were shared by the King. When Frederick Barnard, George III's loyal and long-serving librarian, came to sum up the purpose of the library in the months immediately after his master's death in 1820, he described it as 'a perpetual monument of the munificence, judgement and liberal taste of the Royal Founder, and may in future times become a splendid ornament to the Throne.'²⁵

'Throne' is surely the key word. As an enlightened eighteenth century gentleman, George III was concerned to create a library that would reflect his own enlightenment. But as an enlightened eighteenth century monarch, he was also creating a library that would contribute to the lustre of his throne. European kings of the Enlightenment saw a splendid royal library as being essential to their own *gloire*, and I would argue that we should understand George III's library-building in these terms. Concepts of national ownership and entitlement clearly played a part in the negotiations between King and Government in 1823 – George IV made his donation 'to the British Nation'. But that was the new King talking, at a time when he wanted some of the British Nation's money. It was not the voice of George III.

The Wills of sovereigns are not usually available for public scrutiny, but the Royal Archives hold three versions of George III's Will – one dated 1770 concerning his English possessions, and two unsigned Wills of 1808. There is also a draft Will of 1808. These are here discussed for the first time in relation to the King's library.

None of these Wills are signed, but the document dated 1770 is presumed to be a copy of the Will that became effective when George III died, since his property was distributed according to its terms. So far as his library was concerned, the King held

²³ British Library, Add. MS 30,170 D.

²⁴ Edward Edwards, *Lives of the Founders of the British Museum* (London, Thruener, 1870), p. 485.

²⁵ Frederick Barnard, introduction to *The Catalogue of the Royal Library*, 14 December 1820, p. ix.

back some volumes at Richmond Lodge that were destined for his second son, Frederick Duke of York, but he left all the remainder of his books 'of what nature, sort, or kind so ever',²⁶ to his oldest son, George, Prince of Wales, without condition or reservation. It was thanks to this Will drawn up in 1770 that George IV was able to give away his father's library in 1823 – and the gap of more than half a century is significant.

In 1770 George III's eldest son, George, Prince of Wales, was just eight years old, and presumably showed little sign of the vices for which he would become notorious. By 1808, however, the Prince had become embroiled in a succession of scandalous liaisons culminating in his secret marriage to the Roman Catholic Mrs FitzHerbert; he had plotted with his father's enemies to take advantage of the King's mental collapse in 1789; and he was in debt.

Small wonder that George III should have pondered redrafting his Will, and this brings us to what is surely the crucial evidence as to the intentions that George III had for his library. They are set out in all three versions of his unsigned 1808 testament, which have lain in the Royal Archives for nearly 200 years:

As to our Books, which are in the Libraries at Windsor Castle & the Queen's House (they being of the same collection) and which are particularised in an Inventory made of them & kept at the Queen's House, we do hereby direct that the same shall be enjoyed by our dearly beloved son, George, Prince of Wales, & *after his demise we do direct that the same shall in like manner be enjoyed by the Person, or Persons who shall be entitled to the Crown.*²⁷ [My italics].

There is no suggestion here of the books being George IV's personal property to dispose of as he wishes. On the contrary. The old King makes clear that he sees his libraries at Windsor and at Buckingham Palace as being part of the same collection – a royal collection – precisely defined by its own inventory, and destined for the enjoyment, but not the personal ownership, of his son and all his successors. George III shows he is aware of a very clear distinction between personal and crown property. When he talks of 'the Person, or Persons who shall be entitled to the Crown', he seems to be providing for the possibility of another joint sovereignty like that of William and Mary. He wanted to cover every eventuality and to make sure that his beloved library remained safely and perpetually royal.

However, the ailing King was not careful enough to arrange for any of these three redraftings to be properly signed and witnessed – they fell victim to the darkness that descended in the last ten years of his life. According to his son Frederick, George III 'appointed a day to sign [his new Will], but when the Chancellor brought it one of the witnesses was absent . . . Other days were afterwards fixed for this purpose, but before the signature was affixed the King was taken ill, and consequently the Will never was signed.'²⁸ This episode of the abortive signing was revealed when Greville's *Memoirs* were published later in the nineteenth century, but Greville and

²⁶ RA GEO/17495-6.

²⁷ RA GEO/17500.

²⁸ *Greville Memoirs*, vol 1, pp. 65-66.

his source, the Duke of York, said no more than that. Historians have wondered precisely what it could have been in his original Will that King George III was so anxious to change. Now we know. It is clear from his attempt to alter his Will in 1808 that George III wanted his books to stay vested in the Crown, to 'be enjoyed by the Person, or Persons who shall be entitled to the Crown'.

The donation of the King's library is therefore due less to George III than to his dissolute son and, perhaps above all, to the often-derided Lord Liverpool and his government, since it seems to have been the politicians of the day who persuaded an extravagant monarch to do his duty. The nation got the library. George IV got two new palaces.

Robert Lacey

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