

‘Wearing the Breeches’? Almack’s, the female patroness, and public femininity c. 1764-1848.¹

**Jennifer Davey is Lecturer in Modern British History at the University of East Anglia.
Correspondence to: University of East Anglia, Norwich, NR4 7TJ; Jennifer.Davey@uea.ac.uk**

Almack’s, a mixed-sex establishment run by a group of female patronesses was a popular meeting place for the aristocracy in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Yet, despite its contemporary appeal, the establishment has received little attention from historians. This article addresses this absence, exploring the varying, and often contentious, social, cultural and political functions and meanings the establishment held. Building on recent historiographical developments, this article demonstrates how certain aristocratic women were able to exercise power and influence at the heart of their class. In doing so, it considers the intersections between gender, urban space and political culture. It argues that the activities of the female patronesses was often highly contested, exposing the narrow, and often blurred, line between legitimate and illegitimate action.

*

In May 1819, the Duke of Wellington had a ticket to attend one of the exclusive Wednesday night balls at Almack’s, a ‘club’ on King Street, in the heart of London’s West-End.² That year, Almack’s was enjoying one of its most popular seasons and the female patronesses who controlled admission were gaining a reputation for their fierce selection process. As the Duke ascended the staircase which fed into the ballroom, the guardian of the establishment turned him away—‘Your Grace cannot be admitted in trousers’.³ Trousers, in fashion following their adoption by the Prince Regent, had not yet been embraced by the patronesses. A fortnight before the Duke’s visit, the newspapers had reported that the patronesses would ‘prevent Gentleman in Trowsers [sic] and *Cossacks* to the balls on Wednesdays—at the same time allowing an exception to those Gentleman who maybe *knock-knee’d*, or otherwise unfortunately deformed’.⁴ Being, one presumes in possession of a good pair of legs, the Duke, did not qualify for an exemption. Almost as soon the Duke headed back down Piccadilly to Apsley House, the episode began to generate commentary. Within a few days *The Morning Chronicle* had printed a satirical verse aimed at the patronesses:

Tired of our trousers are ye grown?
But since to them your anger reaches,

Is it because 'tis so well known,
You always love to wear the breeches.⁵

The episode lived long in the memory; it continued to be satirised and ridiculed throughout the nineteenth century, providing critics a lasting anecdote of the dangers (and frivolity) of female power and influence.⁶ Nor was the episode an isolated occurrence. During Almack's heyday (the opening few decades of the nineteenth century), the club, its rules, and its patronesses generated a large amount of social commentary. In printed ballads, travel writing, music scores, political pamphlets, memoirs, periodicals, conduct literature and private letters, Almack's was a regular source of amusement and attention.

Given this contemporary fascination, and the club's popularity, it is surprising then that Almack's has had little scholarly attention. The limited work there is takes Almack's as a starting point for discussions of either commodity capitalism or the decline of aristocratic female influence.⁷ Yet, there has been no dedicated study of the structure, purpose and understanding of Almack's. In part this might be a symptom of the archive: unlike other private members clubs, Almack's has left no discrete archive.⁸ In this article, I draw on the limited and fractured source material the institution has left behind, from private correspondence to music scores, to give an account of the establishment, charting its inception, popularity and decline. In doing so, this article considers three questions. Firstly, what place did Almack's occupy in early nineteenth century London Society? Secondly, what was the role of the patronesses? And, lastly, how was both the function of the establishment and the influence of the patronesses understood by contemporaries?

In providing a more complete picture of Almack's than has been offered before, this article argues that the establishment should not be understood as solely a marriage market nor as an allegory of declining female influence. Instead, this article develops two lines of analysis. Firstly, that the rules and rituals that surrounded the establishment played a crucial part in the selectivity and exclusivity of London Society and secondly, that the role and function of the patronesses provided contemporaries a tangible example of collective female influence to interpret and to understand. In exploring these threads, this article contributes to the growing historiography which has delineated the roles aristocratic women could play in the cultural, economic, political and social life of their class. Much of this work has sought to explore the interconnections between aristocratic domestic, social and political life. In her study of elite women in the latter half of the eighteenth century, Elaine Chalus has taken 'social politics seriously' and explored the ways women were able to exercise influence as confidantes and partners, clients and patrons.⁹ Similarly, Judith S. Lewis

has drawn attention to the ways in which women were ‘active agents in the acquisition and maintenance of the family economy and the political power that sustained it’ in her study of gender and class in late Georgian Britain.¹⁰ The relationship between the family economy and political life is also a theme explored by Kim Reynolds in her study of Victorian political society, which examines the influence of aristocratic women in a variety of political contexts, including Parish politics, philanthropy, metropolitan political society and the Royal Household.¹¹ Most recently, Hannah Greig has explored the ‘strategies of distinction that demarcated the metropolitan elite’ in the long eighteenth century, drawing particular attention to the ‘world of fashion’, with all its material demarcations of status.¹² Yet, in all these accounts, Almack’s is largely absent. So, one aim of this article is to address this gap, piecing together the surviving archival traces. The second aim of the article is twofold: it examines the opportunities Almack’s afforded aristocratic women and it considers how those actions were perceived and interpreted. In doing so, this article contends that Almack’s was a contested space, which allowed contemporaries an opportunity, often in *public*, to position their opinions on femininity, aristocratic exclusivity, and female political influence.

For some historians, the moment at which Almack’s popularity is at its peak is simultaneously the moment at which the influence of aristocratic women begins to wane. Here, the early nineteenth century represents a period when London Society underwent a significant shift in function and purpose. In her work on London Society, Leonore Davidoff noted that ‘the shift from a society where patronage and familial or client relationship were the norm to a system where individual achievement was rewarded with great wealth and power’ saw ‘the more theatrical and hedonistic functions of Society [...] emphasised’.¹³ In its simplest rendering, the world in which Almack’s existed became a world of performance – rather than a world of power and influence. This interpretation has been developed by both Judith S. Lewis and Peter Mandler who, in different ways, have co-opted Almack’s as an allegory for the declining influence of aristocratic women. In these narratives, Almack’s is considered ‘a theatre in which was played out a sophisticated melodrama of powerlessness’, with the patronesses becoming mere ‘ornaments’.¹⁴ This article makes a different argument. It suggests that Almack’s was not understood in the diminished terms proposed by Lewis and Mandler, and goes on to make two connected arguments. First, it contends that Almack’s was a site of female influence, which allowed the Patronesses to exercise social authority and second, it argues that contemporaries considered Almack’s a powerful representation of aristocratic exclusivity and the dangers of female power.

In reconstructing and exploring the organisation and meaning of Almack’s, this article draws on, and develops, another strong thread of historical inquiry: the intersections between the public

and the private.¹⁵ Almack's occupied an peculiar space in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century London. Physically, it was nestled amongst coffee houses, private members clubs, and associations. These were spaces that, for the most part, sought to exclude women. As a club run by women, for both genders, Almack's was, then, a feminine transgression into a very masculine landscape.¹⁶ Yet, it was also a space that relied on the familiar and the domestic. Its members were drawn from the patronesses' connections, and the club's success relied on the patronesses drawing on their skills as political hostesses, skills that were honed inside the confines of the family home. Almack's operated in a narrow space between the public and the private, which in turn saw the patronesses walk, with varying degrees of success, the thin line between legitimate and illegitimate activity. While recent work has stressed that 'women's access to activities beyond the domestic setting was constantly in the process of renegotiation', focus has tended to fall on the experiences of middle class women.¹⁷ A consideration of Almack's and its patronesses, develops these arguments, which has stressed the 'relational and creative notions of 'space' as it intersects with political agency and aspects of power/knowledge'.¹⁸ Building on these debates, this article considers the specific social, cultural and political meanings Almack's held for the metropolitan aristocracy.¹⁹

So, the purpose of this article is to give an account of the establishment and the social, cultural, and political context in which the patronesses operated. It opens with consideration of the establishment in the closing decades of the eighteenth century, exploring its development into the preeminent meeting place for the aristocracy. The next section explores the unique place the establishment occupied in early nineteenth century Society, considering how it was governed and how its function was perceived. Finally, the article will conclude with a discussion of how the patronesses influence was understood and interpreted by contemporaries. In doing so, this article advocates the need for further explorations of the intersections between gender, urban space and political culture.

'A Considerable Noise': Almack's inception

That Almack's was established (and then thrived) owes a great deal to the particular social and political contexts of the mid-eighteenth century. It has been well-documented that the relationships between Monarch and Parliament, Aristocracy and Court, and Westminster and the West-End underwent a rapid transformation in the decades after 1688.²⁰ In particular, the Glorious Revolution altered the powers of the executive and the nature and scope of Parliament.²¹ Thereafter, Parliament met with increasing frequency and for longer periods of time.²² This transformation to the calendar of official political life was accompanied by a transformation of London's built environment. As the

eighteenth century unfolded, MPs and Lords, who had become accustomed to going up to London for the Parliamentary Sessions alone, began to be accompanied by their immediate families. By 1750, aristocratic families had fallen into the habit of making the annual pilgrimage to London for the 'Season'.²³ This change in the movements of the political elite was met with spatial changes to London's West End. Grand town houses had been a feature of noble living in the seventeenth century, but as Amanda Vickery notes, after 1688 these residences became 'indispensable to noble status.'²⁴ Driven by a desire to display their rank, status, and taste, the great aristocratic families started to commission the iconic Georgian mansions that littered London's West End. Nestled among these family homes were new cultural spaces which are now synonymous with late Georgian society: opera houses, theatres, pleasure gardens and coffee houses.²⁵ The development of London society over the course of the eighteenth century has been the subject of significant historiographical attention. This work has often stressed the interplay between class, gender and experience, with attention being paid to the parliamentary context, the built environment, the service and entertainment industries, the Court and, most recently, material culture. Much of this work has placed 'cultural arenas' at the centre of any interpretation of aristocratic life in the eighteenth century.²⁶

It is within this context, of urban regeneration and reconfiguration, that Almack's must first be understood. Almack's was commissioned in the summer of 1764 and built during the winter of 1764-1765 on King Street, in the heart of St James' (the quadrangle between Green Park and Haymarket to the west and east and Piccadilly and the Mall to the north and south). In the seventeenth century, the district had been a predominately residential area, with a few taverns situated at each corner.²⁷ By the closing decades of the eighteenth century, the entire district had been rebuilt. Out of the dwellings grew the first generation of London clubs. Many of these start life as chocolate and coffee houses, as was the case with Whites, which opened its doors in 1693. Whites was followed by The Cocoa Tree (1746), Boodles (1762), Brooks (1764), and Arthurs (1765). These new sites of sociability ensured that St James was the centre of the new and emerging club land. In the spring of 1764, rumours began circulating that William Almack, a proprietor and owner of several popular establishments in the West End, was going to 'build some most magnificent rooms behind his house'.²⁸ By the winter of 1764, construction had started on a two storey red brick building, designed by the architect Robert Mylne, on King Street.

While William Almack's plans for a highly regulated social space, which allowed for heterosocial mixing fitted into broader patterns of public sociality, it would be his plans for the daily

governance of the establishment that set it apart. On 15 November 1764, Almack placed an advert in *The London Evening Post* in which he outlined the ‘rules’ of his new establishment:

- ‘1. Seven ladies have each of them opened a subscription book.
2. Each book to contain the names of 60 subscribers.
3. Subscription of one Season Ten Guineas.
4. Subscription money to be paid at the first Ball of the Season.
5. Subscription binding for one Season only.
6. Twelve Balls to be given in one Season.
7. The Entertainment of each night to consist of a Ball, in a room 90 feet long, 40 feet broad and 30 feet high; Tea and Cards in a separate room; and a supper in a room 65 feet long, 20 feet broad and 30 feet high, with a concert of music from a separate Orchestra.’²⁹

From the club’s inception, the day-to-day running was handed over to a committee of aristocratic women who had the power to control admission. The inaugural ‘foundresses [sic]’ were Mrs. Fitzroy, Lady Pembroke, Mrs. Meynell, Lady Molyneux, Miss Pelham, and Miss Lloyd.³⁰ In part this was a pragmatic decision by William Almack: he owned the building, but it seems that the land it stood on was leased from the crown.³¹ The committee of seven ‘ladies of high rank’ raised the profile of the club and thus allowed the subscription rate to be set at the artificially high level of 10 Guineas in 1765.³² This admittance fee insured the company was ‘chosen’ and ‘refined’.³³ This refined company set itself apart from the other member’s clubs in the area. When Horace Walpole first heard the rumours of Almack’s plans he reflected to his friend ‘that there is a new institution that begins to make, and, if it proceeds, will continue to make a considerable noise [as] it is a club of both sexes’.³⁴ By admitting both men and women, the establishment offered a meeting place for the aristocracy away from popular homosocial spaces, such as the coffeehouses and first generation gentleman’s clubs.

While a regulated social space which admitted both men and women was welcomed, the establishment struggled to establish itself. On the club’s opening night, in February 1765, the building work was not yet complete leaving the ‘ceilings...dripping wet’ and many guests were ‘afraid to go’.³⁵ The building work continued throughout the Club’s first two years causing considerable disruption to the running of the establishment (the discomfort experienced inside was matched by the chaos outside: the entrance was only accessible through a narrow court making it

difficult for carriages to set down passengers). This ominous start provided competitors opportunity to steal a march on Almack's. Prior to William Almack's commission, fashionable society had flocked to Madame Cornelys, an assembly room based at Carlisle House on Soho Square, where Teresa Cornelys, an opera singer and impresario, hosted a monthly gathering, usually masked balls, during the Season.³⁶ Within a year of Almack's opening, Cornelys' had spent a reported £2,000 redecorating her establishment.³⁷ Although the renovations resulted in a significant debt, they did have the desired effect: Cornelys maintained its position as the preeminent Society venue in the late 1760s and early 1770s. By 1772, another establishment had opened, The Pantheon on Oxford Street, a lavish set of rooms which had at their heart a round room with a domed roof, modelled on the mosques of Constantinople.³⁸ Until 1792, when The Pantheon burnt down, the three establishments (Almack's, Cornelys and The Pantheon) vied for customers, with Almack's often unable to match the popularity of the other two. This is not to suggest that there was no interest in the establishment. Gatherings at the King Street rooms did attract a loyal following, with 200-500 guests on average, and tickets to events were highly sought after.³⁹ Yet, when William Almack died in 1781, the club's popularity was waning. The establishment passed to his son, another William, a barrister, who remortgaged the buildings at the end of century. Following his death, the buildings passed to his sister, Elizabeth Pitcairn. It was Elizabeth who over saw the club's transformation in the opening decade of the nineteenth century.⁴⁰

'Almack's Tyranny': Almack's and Regency Society

The Almack's that emerged in the early nineteenth century owed much to its eighteenth century predecessor. While William Almack's 'seven rules' remained largely intact, there were some modifications made to the structure and admission processes of the establishment. The club was still controlled by seven Ladies, who were, by 1800, referred to as 'patronesses'. During the establishment's first decades, these seven Ladies often changed season-to-season (with occasionally changes mid-Season), but, during the Regency, a monopoly emerged and the committee remained almost unchanged until the establishment's gradual demise in the mid-nineteenth century. Members of the committee included Lady Cowper, Lady Jersey, Countess Lieven, Princess Eszterhazy, Lady Castlereagh, Lady Sefton and Mrs Drummond Burrell; from surviving correspondence it seems that Ladies Cowper and Jersey did much of the organising.⁴¹ By the early 1820s, the process of each Patroness keeping an individual book had been replaced with one shared book, into which all the successful subscribers were entered.⁴² Although the subscription processes maintained, in the early 1800s, a shift occurred in the subscription pattern: by 1810, it was commonplace for people to apply

for tickets to individual assemblies (each assembly cost seven shillings and six pence) rather than for the whole Season. Although the weekly balls remained, the tea, supper, and cards were gradually faded out. This was, as the Irish writer Maria Edgeworth noted, ‘rather a bold thing to do to put FEASTING out of fashion and to make a seven shilling ball the thing to which all aspired to be admitted, and many without the least hope of succeeding’.⁴³ Charting attendance reports through the national press, it seems that during the 1810s, Almack’s emerged as one of the preeminent meeting places for the aristocracy outside their London homes.

By the early 1820s, an ‘Almack’s tyranny’ had begun to plague the patronesses as people clamored for tickets.⁴⁴ This contemporary demand necessitates explanation: why were people so eager to attend a Wednesday night ball? The clamor for tickets might be understood as a recognition that the entertainment at Almack’s surpassed its competitors. Certainly, the music and dancing had popular appeal often extending far beyond the West End. That Almack’s was the first place in Britain where the waltz was performed gave the establishment an air of innovation. This association between Almack’s and a thriving musical culture was exploited by publishers and musicians who produced music scores bearing the dubious claim that the arrangements had been played at Almack’s.⁴⁵ While the entertainment on offer might have drawn some wider cultural attention, contemporary reports suggest that the rooms were often stuffy, hot and cramped.⁴⁶ As a result, dancing was an unpleasant experience and often halted due to overcrowding. Equally, Almack’s did not earn a reputation as a partisan space (in the way that the patronesses domestic entertaining sometimes did). Although Almack’s had positioned itself on the edge of a politicised social world—a world where ideological, intellectual, familiar and partisanship (such as it was pre-1832) dictated who you socialised with and where you socialised—it had no discernible political or partisan allegiance. This was, it seems reasonable to assume, the result of the varied political sympathies, leanings and ideologies identifiable among the patronesses themselves. This is not to suggest that Almack’s was apolitical. Political gossip did mingle in the air, and the patronesses would sometimes use the public platform Almack’s afforded them to address particular political debates.⁴⁷

There were other pulls. Jane Rendell, in her study of gender and space in Regency London, adopts Almack’s as part of her ‘story of [the] pursuit of pleasure, theoretical and historical, following the rambler’. In this account, Almack’s is understood and interpreted as a marriage market.⁴⁸ Using the work of feminist and structural theorists, notably Claude Levi-Strauss and Luce Irigaray, Rendell explores how Almack’s was ‘represented as a place which had no purpose other

than the establishment of good marriage'.⁴⁹ While there was an undoubtable preoccupation among some aristocratic families to secure admission of their eligible children—as one commentator noted 'many families evince as great anxiety, and make as great exertions, to get their daughters into Almack's, as they do to get their sons into parliament'—the guest lists suggest the majority of guests were married (happily or otherwise).⁵⁰ Yet, this is not to suggest there was no concern with gender balance. The surviving Almack's 'books' reveal the patronesses had a practical preoccupation with the numbers of male and female guests.⁵¹ The ratio of men to women was tightly calculated to ensure that there would be the right number of dance partners. It was surely this preoccupation which dictated the terms the tickets were issued: a gentleman was prevented from transferring his ticket whereas a lady's ticket was transferable between female family members. The possibility of dancing the waltz with Princess Lieven or meeting your match were tangible gains from a night at Almack's, yet these draws were often subsidiary benefits. For many guests, attending one of Almack's Wednesday night balls was a way of expressing your aristocratic credentials to the outside world: 'it stood for the last word of fashion and exclusiveness. To be introduced into that magic circle was considered at one time as great a distinction as to be presented at Court, and was often far more difficult of attainment'.⁵² In this sense it was not the pursuit of individual pleasure that motivated members of the aristocracy to clamber for tickets, rather the desire to be seen.

That Almack's was the apogee of arrivism is born out in a close examination of the admission process. Almack's position as the preeminent meeting place for the aristocracy, was both supported and signified by a convoluted and exaggerated admission process, which developed over the course of the 1810s and 1820s. Prospective applicants filled in a three-cornered note or triangle ballot with their name, and either sent the application direct to the rooms on King Street or sent a servant down to Almack's to place the application into wicker baskets kept inside the entrance. One afternoon a week, during the season, the patronesses would meet at Almack's to discuss the many hundreds of applications they had received. As the patronesses discussed each applicant, the ballots were divided into two piles—ayes and nos. If an application was rejected there was no recourse: the procedure could not be appealed and the patronesses were keen to stress that no amount of money would secure admittance on the night. For those rejected the feeling of being excluded was compounded by the process of disseminating this news. Instead of sending individual letters, the names of failed applicants were gathered together and placed on a printed circular. This circular was left at Almack's, leaving it up to individuals to inquire about the fate of their application. It was a

public ritual which served as a striking symbol of establishment exclusivity.⁵³ Successful applicants received a voucher, which had their name and date of the ball they had subscribed to printed on.⁵⁴

As the club's popularity increased the procedures for securing admission became more elaborate. In 1820, Lady Cowper told her youngest brother that people were 'as mad as ever after Almack's...and plague me with their applications'. To keep this 'Almack's tyranny' in check the Ladies had 'started upon half a score of new rules to keep them in order'.⁵⁵ Some of these new 'rules' were practical. The doors to Almack's were opened at 10pm and would be shut at midnight: anyone who turned up late would not be admitted. Following a series of embarrassing evenings for the patronesses when they were forced to turn away their own husbands, a caveat was introduced that ensured that members of either House of Parliament were allowed in after the midnight curfew.⁵⁶ Some of the new rules displayed a little more pretension. The Prince Regent's recent pronouncement for trousers had been met with horror from the patronesses, who promptly banned admittance to any man wearing trousers or cossacks, with the exception made for those gentleman who 'may be knock-kneed or otherwise deformed'.⁵⁷ As I noted at the beginning of the article, this particular rule achieved notoriety when the patronesses turned away the Duke of Wellington for wearing trousers.

By 1827, one journalist reflected that 'admissions to Almack's are more fiercely contested than County elections'.⁵⁸ That the franchise for County elections was very similar to the franchise for Almack's would not have been lost on contemporary readers. The surviving guests lists scrawled in Lady Jersey's Almack's 'books' and the printed reports in the daily newspapers reveal the dominance of the 'establishment': peers and their families mixed with the diplomatic corps and members of the Royal Court.⁵⁹ As one contemporary remarked, you needed 'same certificate for admission [to Almack's] as for the entree to the King's drawing rooms!'⁶⁰ Yet, the criteria for securing either a subscription or a weekly ticket could be opaque and decisions often arbitrary. One episode struck a cord with contemporaries. In 1822, the Duchess of Rutland had returned to London, having spent the winter in the country. She had made the (fatal) mistake of not visiting any of the patronesses when she returned to town in the spring. During the following season, she 'could not at her utmost need get a ticket from any one of them and was kept out to her amazing mortification'.⁶¹

The process and practice of applying to Almack's, with its elaborate rules and rituals, illuminates how the nature of aristocratic sociability (and segregation) was understood by both its practitioners and its observers. At the height of Almack's popularity a series of copycat clubs were being established in both Britain and the emerging Empire. In the early 1820s, rumours reached

English shores that an ‘Almack’s’ was being planned for Calcutta. Contemporaries greeted this news warmly, it would, they felt, be ‘a most edifying improvement to the society of that place’. As, in their words, ‘the best society of Calcutta is composed indiscriminately of all persons’, it was felt that the appearance of an Almack’s, which controlled admittance in a similar way as its London namesake, might guard against ‘barbarous’ and ‘vulgar’ society.⁶² This discourse that linked Almack’s with aristocratic social exclusivity is evidenced in other contemporary commentary. In 1852, *Punch* magazine printed satirical instructions to the new Ambassador to Washington, one of which read—‘never permitting the atmosphere of a monarchy and more especially the intoxicating and deleterious atmosphere of Almack’s’.⁶³

This preoccupation with Almack’s within a wider context of aristocratic dominance also held strong in London, as the poet Luttrell noted ‘If once to Almack’s you belong. Like monarchs you can do no wrong: But banished thence on Wednesday night, by jove you can do no right.’⁶⁴ The patronesses ‘selection with a vengeance’ was ‘the very quintessence of the aristocracy’.⁶⁵ As one contemporary noted with ‘three-fourths of nobility knock[ing] in vain for admission. Into this sanctum sanatorium of course the sons of commerce never think of entering.’⁶⁶ A night at Almack’s was one way of avoiding ‘a great deal of brass—your tradesmen, your walking gentleman, your creditors of much more drossy characters’.⁶⁷ That Lady Jersey, owner and partner of the bank Child &co., was the Patroness most against granting tickets to the ‘sons of commerce’ was irony not lost on contemporaries: in 1839, *The Satirist* noted that ‘the origin of some of these ladies, and their husbands, are not so very remote as to challenge or defy examination’.⁶⁸ The admissions process, coupled with the competition for tickets, demonstrated the particular meanings contemporaries attached to Almack’s: to be sure, it was a place of frivolity away from the confines of the family home, but it also served as both a symbol and instrument of aristocratic exclusivity and sociability.⁶⁹

‘Female Despots’: Almack’s and the language of influence

Almack’s, then, operated at the intersection of the public and the private. On the one hand, the establishment was supported by familiar networks and acquaintance relations; securing admission often relied on a social connection to one of the patronesses. On the other, Almack’s was situated among the impersonal urban space of London’s West End; to enter the building, guests would have to walk through a crowded courtyard (the archway entrance being too small for carriages) and were sometimes confronted by a mob.⁷⁰ That women were at the forefront of this establishment opens up

a further, significant line of enquiry. How was their power and influence understood by contemporaries?

Following the club's inception, there had been some chatter about the 'female coterie' that controlled admission, but it was often isolated. Rather, it was William Almack & his male staff, who were the focus of any sustained social commentary. Yet, by the opening decade of the nineteenth century the tenor of this commentary was beginning to shift. Increasingly, the focus fell on the female patronesses. In part, this was symptomatic of the club's ownership. In 1809, Elizabeth Pitcairn inherited the business from her brother. Pitcairn has left few archival traces, but it is possible to track her growing commercial success through her insurance policies. By 1830, she had built up a healthy commercial property portfolio, with a number of business in and around Pall Mall.⁷¹ Yet, unlike her father or her brother, it seems that Pitcairn was not closely associated with Almack's. This shift is identifiable in the absence of Pitcairn in the advertisements for subscriptions and tickets placed in the national press at the beginning of each Season. Both her father and brother had placed these adverts themselves, but after 1809, it was the female patronesses who were named in the press. The shift from owner to patronesses signifies a broader change. From the 1810s, contemporary commentary about Almack's was increasingly concerned with the patronesses as a collective unit. Despite the considerable reputation each female Patroness often possessed individually, the patronesses were often considered and judged together. This discursive preoccupation with the collective governing body of Almack's was underpinned by particular concerns about aristocratic femininity and female political power.⁷²

That Almack's sat in-between the public and the parochial left the patronesses in a precarious position. Neither operating on behalf of familiar interests, as was the case with most electioneering efforts, nor fully transgressing into the public—a *mistake* Lady Jersey made during her defence of Queen Caroline—the patronesses became a focal point for contemporary discussions around contested notions of femininity.⁷³ One strain of these discussions, which stressed both aristocratic status and feminine qualities, came to the fore in the processes to appoint a new female patronesses. If a new patroness was needed, as it was after Lord Castlereagh's suicide and Prince Lieven's recall to St Petersburg, the position was often advertised. The competition often 'caused more rivalry than the speakers Chair', for as Lady Jersey reportedly pointed out to George IV, 'Kings may do much but they can not govern Almack's'.⁷⁴ Often, newspapers and periodicals would report on the procedures, outlining the eligibility for the post. For instance, a birth certificate needed to accompany the application, as evidence that the applicant was a 'complete member of the

peerage'. Similarly, an applicant could not be known to be someone's mistress—that many of the patronesses were well known mistresses, often with the same men, was clearly overlooked. Some publications went further. In 1823, John Bull, printed a satirical advert, which outlined the ideal qualities for a patroness. The applicants had to be a 'person of undeniable character, quick parts, good address and well know', she needed a 'good memory, running hand and arithmetic' ability. 'No very good natured person need apply as it takes too much time to get rid of this quality'. Instead her manners must be 'decided' and she must be able to 'practice with precision the art of cutting'.⁷⁵ This public consideration of the ideal feminine traits of future patronesses shifted attention towards the particular position these women occupied.

While some commentators congratulated the patronesses for creating a 'temple of taste and a shrine of elegance', others were more critical of the femininity on display. In 1832, *The World of Fashion and Continental Feuilletons*, explored the conspicuous activity of the 'political ladies' of Almack's. While 'female politicians' were noted for their enthusiasm, the paper noted that 'we dislike to see them emerge from the retirement of private life, and interfere in public business, for which they cannot possibly be capacitated'. Instead, 'Almack's should be the sphere of those noble ladies' exertions and their politics the politics of the *ton*'.⁷⁶ Criticism often focused on the dichotomy between ideals of domesticity and femininity and the position of patronesses. In 1839, *The Satirist*, a frequent critic of Almack's, felt compelled to point out 'a curious fact...almost all the committee are celebrated for the most tyrannie [sic] domestic sway, or to use a homely idiom, have hen-pecked husbands'.⁷⁷

That the patronesses were considered unable to balance their public role with contemporary ideals of femininity is, of course, a trope that extends beyond the confines of Regency Britain. Yet, it was not just failures of domesticity that preoccupied observers. Significantly, the activities of the patronesses were appropriated by commentators as a means of articulating their own unstable notions of female influence. *The Morning Chronicle's* satirical observation accusation that the patronesses 'always love to wear the breeches' following the Duke of Wellington's incident spoke to wider commentary. The apparent control the patronesses exercised over London society was simultaneously ridiculed and criticised. By the late 1810s, the rhetoric surrounding Almack's was permeated with notions of power. In some quarters, this often took the form of a recognition of the influence some aristocratic women could hold. For instance, in 1831, *The Times* reporting a rumour that the Kings Guards were going to be disbanded referred to the patronesses of Almack's as 'female politicians', alongside members of the Royal Household.⁷⁸ While some publications merely sought

to recognise the influence of the patronesses, others were more critical. When Marianne Spencer Stanhope Hudson published her three volume 'Almack's: A Novel' in 1826, she ran the dedication:

TO THAT MOST DISTINGUISHED AND DESPOTIC CONCLAVE.
Composed of their High Mightinesses
THE LADIES PATRONESSES OF THE BALLS AT ALMACK'S,
The Rulers of Fashion, the Arbiters of Taste,
The Leaders of Ton, and the Makers of Manners,
Whose sovereign sway over "the world" of London has long been established on
the firmest basis.
Whose Decrees are Laws, and from whose judgement there is no appeal;
To these important Personages, all and severally.
Who have formed, or who do form, any part of that
ADMINISTRATION,
USUALLY DENOMINATED
THE WILLIS COALITION CABAL,
Whether Members of the Committee of Supply,
or
CABINET COUNSELLORS,
Holding seats at the Board of Control,
THE FOLLOWING PAGES,
Are, with all due respect, humbly dedicated by
AN OLD SUBSCRIBER.

The images of power invoked by Hudson was indicative of wider discourse which sought to criticise and ridicule the influence of the patronesses. Throughout the first three decades of the nineteenth century, newspapers and periodicals likened the patronesses to the Spanish inquisition, and the Venetian council of ten⁷⁹ and they were considered to be 'part of the British constitution', 'a Cabinet',⁸⁰ 'a secret conclave',⁸¹ 'a coalition cabal',⁸² 'despotic',⁸³ 'select freemasonry',⁸⁴ 'despots', a 'board of control' and 'Cabinet counsellors'.⁸⁵

This cultural commentary, underpinned with explicit metaphors of influence and power, functions as an indicator of the anxiety that surrounded female influence. That the language of uncontrolled power dominated contemporary discourse about the patronesses was symptomatic of their own layered identities. At Almack's, the Patronesses acted as gatekeepers for elite London society, deciding who was and who was not worthy of a ticket. In this sense, the Patronesses were transgressors in the homosocial world of London's clubland, and as result, were able to play their own part in the formation of their class. Outside Almack's, the patronesses had their own particular, and often political, identities. To varying degrees and in varying ways, the women were often involved in local, national, and international politics. For instance, Lady Castlereagh acted as advisor for her husband, Ladies Cowper and Jersey were eminent hostesses, advisors, and confidants for a number of leading politicians, and Princesses Lieven and Eszterhazy were prominent figures in European politics, with Lieven often involved in British domestic politics.⁸⁶ These individual identities did not compete with the collective identity of the patronesses, rather it produced a confluence which allowed contemporaries an opportunity to express their particular concerns about the role and function aristocratic women should or could play in Regency society.

Conclusion

By the early 1830s, some commentators were beginning to call time on Almack's. In 1831, under an article entitled 'Reform', *The Satirist* noted that Almack's was 'thinly attended', indicative of 'a very sensible change taking place, and the reign of the "Exclusives" appears to rapidly on the wane'.⁸⁷ Here, there was an explicit link made between the calls for Parliamentary Reform and the popularity of Almack's, the assumption made that the weaker the hold of the aristocracy on Westminster politics the less need for exclusive establishments like Almack's. The *Quarterly Review* reached a similar conclusion in 1840, when it reflected on the falling popularity of Almack's: 'a clear proof that the palmy days of exclusiveness are gone by in England; and though it is obviously impossible to prevent any given number of persons from congregating and re-establishing an oligarchy, we are quite sure that the attempt would be ineffectual, and that the sense of their importance would extend little beyond the set.'⁸⁸ Other commentators looked not towards reform, but towards the throne. For some contemporaries, the accession of Queen Victoria 'made it more difficult for powerful ladies of the aristocracy to sustain that leadership of fashion'.⁸⁹ There was some accuracy to these predictions. From the early 1840s, Almack's struggled to maintain its social dominance. Despite efforts to revive interest in the weekly balls, by the 1840s these had been largely replaced with high-profile philanthropic events, such as the relief held for Polish refugees in

the wake of the 1848 Revolution and for the fundraiser for distressed needlewomen. These philanthropic events, which barely featured in Almack's calendar before 1832, fit into wider gendered discourses about feminine propriety that Jennifer Hall-Witt has identified in her consideration of opera and elite culture.⁹⁰ Gradually, the building was opened up for meetings, debates, and talks that seemed at odds with its heritage as a site for an aristocratic oligarchy. While the establishment itself struggled through the mid-century, re-emerging in 1871 as the Willis's Rooms, it did become a site of contested memory. The gossip that had surrounded the club during its heyday transformed into rumour and hearsay. In particular, the anecdote about the Duke of Wellington turning up at Almack's in trousers got told and re-told throughout the Victorian period, often being muddled up with a different rumour about Lord Londonderry being turned away for being late.⁹¹ Almack's would also become a literary trope for aristocratic exclusivity, providing suitable Regency landscapes in silver-fork novels.⁹² Here, fiction intimates life: Almack's afterlife as a symbol of aristocratic oligarchy closely mirrored its contemporary understanding. It is clear, then, that by the mid-nineteenth century Almack's was no longer a site of aristocratic female influence. Yet, we should be cautious in co-opting Almack's as an allegory for the demise of aristocratic female influence. Indeed, as Kim Reynolds has explored, aristocratic women—some of whom had been patronesses—were able to exercise political and social influence throughout the Victorian period, in a variety of different contexts.

But, as one contemporary put it, 'what is it to us, to the world, that the constitution of the place is ridiculous?'⁹³ Almack's was both a site and symbol of aristocratic exclusivity for almost a century, and its history offers an extension of our understanding of both aristocratic society and female elite public activity in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Its organisation, function and influence resulted in particular social and gendered meanings. Depending on the gaze, it was a bastion of aristocratic exclusivity, a stronghold of female influence, a symbol of aristocratic corruption, a warning of female frivolity or a display of aristocratic respectability (and sometimes, it was a combination of all these things). This article has considered these layered understandings of Almack's, and, in doing so, has provided a different picture to the one currently present in the historiography. First, it has argued that the internal organisational structures of Almack's allowed the patronesses the opportunity to exercise social influence at the heart of London Society. Second, it contends Almack's was understood as a site and symbol of aristocratic exclusivity (and not just a marriage market). And third, it suggests that Almack's should be considered as one site of aristocratic female power in the early nineteenth century, not a symbol of powerlessness. More

broadly, it suggests the need for further research into the shifting contours of aristocratic female influence across the opening of the nineteenth century.

¹ I am grateful to the London Metropolitan Archives for granting me permission to reference their collections. A very early version of this paper was given at the Gender in the European Town Conference – I would like to thank the audience members for their enthusiastic and helpful questions and feedback. Finally, I am grateful to Emma Griffin and Andy Willimott for reading earlier versions of this article, as well as the two reviewers for their careful and helpful suggestions.

² While Almack's did not have the same procedures and structures as other members clubs in London, but contemporaries would often refer to it as a 'club'.

³ Edwin Beresford Chancellor, (1922) *Memorials of St James' Street, together with the annals of Almack's*, (London: Grant Richards LTD), pp. 209-210

⁴ *The Morning Chronicle*, 28 April 1819

⁵ *The Morning Chronicle*, 13 May 1819

⁶ For example, see, *Pall Mall Gazette*, 31 August 1899 and *Daily News*, 28 December 1900.

⁷ See, Jane Rendell (2002) *The Pursuit of Pleasure: Gender, Space, and Architecture in Regency London* (London: The Athlone Press), in particular Chapter 4: Almack's Assembly Rooms - Exchanging Property pp. 86-103; Judith S. Lewis (2003) *Sacred to Female Patriotism: Gender, Class, and Politics in Late Georgian Britain* (New York: Routledge); Peter Mandler, From Almack's to Willis's: Aristocratic Women and Politics, 1815-1867, in Amanda Vickery (Ed.) (2001) *Women, Privilege, and Power: British Politics, 1750 to the Present* (Stanford: Stanford University Press) pp. 152-167

⁸ A number of London clubs have left comprehensive archives, containing membership books, betting books, and minutes of meetings. Some of these are still held by the institutions themselves (see, for instance, the holdings for Athenaeum Club, Carlton Club, Garrick Club and Reform Club), while others are held in public record offices (the London Metropolitan Archives holds the archives for the Army and Navy Club and Brook's, among others).

⁹ Elaine Chalus (2005) *Elite Women in English Political Life, c. 1754-1790* (Oxford: Clarendon) p. 5

¹⁰ Lewis *Sacred to Female Patriotism* p. 3

¹¹ Kim Reynolds (1998) *Aristocratic Women and Political Society in Victorian Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press).

¹² Hannah Greig (2013) *The Beau Monde: fashionable society in Georgian London* (Oxford: Oxford University Press) p. 27

¹³ Leonore Davidoff (1973) *The Best Circles: Society Etiquette and the Season* (London: Croom Helm) p. 17

¹⁴ Mandler, From Almack's to Willis's, Vickery (Ed.) *Women, Privilege, and Power* p. 160; Lewis *Sacred to Female Patriotism* p. 95

- ¹⁵ The historiography on the relationship between women and the public and the private spheres is vast. The following provide key overviews of the debate: Leonore Davidoff & Catherine Hall (1987) *Family Fortunes: men and women of the English middle class, 1780–1950* (London: Routledge); Linda K. Kerber (1988) *Separate Spheres, Female World, Woman's Place: the rhetoric of women's history*, *Journal of American History*, 75(1), pp. 9–39; Amanda Vickery (1993) *Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronology of English Women's History*, *The Historical Journal*, 36(2), pp. 383–414; Leonore Davidoff (2003) *Gender and the Great Divide: public and private in British gender history*, *Journal of Women's History*, 15(1), pp. 11–27; [3]; Kathryn Gleadle (2007) 'Revisiting Family Fortunes: reflections on the twentieth anniversary of the publication of L. Davidoff & C. Hall (1987) *Family Fortunes: men and women of the English middle class, 1780-1850*', *Women's History Review* 16, pp. 773-82; Susie Steinbach (2012) *Can We Still Use 'Separate Spheres'?* *British History 25 Years after Family Fortunes*, *History Compass*, 10(11), pp. 826–837.
- ¹⁶ For discussions about the nature of male-only members clubs see: Anthony Lejeune (1979) *The Gentleman's Clubs of London* (London: Macdonald and Jane's); Lejeune (1993) *White's: The First Three Hundred Years* (London: A & C Black); Amy Milne-Smith (2006) 'A Fight to Domesticity? Making a Home in the Gentlemen's Clubs of London, 1880-1914', *Journal of British Studies*, 45, pp. 796-818; Milne-Smith (2009) *Club Talk: Gossip, Masculinity and Oral Communities in Late Nineteenth Century London* *Gender & History*, 12, pp. 86-106
- ¹⁷ Kathryn Gleadle (2009) *Borderline Citizens: Women, Gender, and Political Culture in Britain, 1815-1867* (Oxford: Oxford University Press) p. 65
- ¹⁸ Kathryn Beebe, Angela Davis and Kathryn Gleadle (2012) 'Introduction: Space, Place and Gendered Identities: Feminist History and the Spatial Turn' *Women's History Review* Vol. 12, No. 4, pp. 523-532 p. 528
- ¹⁹ The metropolitan aristocracy enjoyed a particular social and cultural life that set them apart from some other members of the landed aristocracy. For a discussion of the particular social norms and characteristics of this group see Greig *Beau Monde* particularly pp. 1-32.
- ²⁰ For a discussion of these developments see: Greig (2013) *The Beau Monde*; George Macaulay Trevelyan (1938) *The English Revolution 1688-1689* (London: Taylor and Francis); Frank O'Gorman, *The Long Eighteenth Century: British Political and Social History* (London: Bloomsbury Academic); Peter Jupp (2006), *The Governing of Britain 1688-1848: The Executive, Parliament and the People* (London: Routledge); Paul Langford (1991) *Public Life and Propertied Englishmen, 1689-1798* (Oxford: Oxford University Press); Amanda Vickery (2009) *Behind Closed Doors: At Home in Georgian England* (New Haven: Yale University Press).
- ²¹ For detailed information about these developments see Jupp *The Governing of Britain* pp. 1-102
- ²² For full details of parliamentary sessions see Langford, *Public Life and Propertied Englishmen, 1689-1798* pp. 141-2
- ²³ For the most recent account of the London Season see: Greig, *The Beau Monde*
- ²⁴ Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors* p. 135
- ²⁵ For a discussion of English culture see John Brewer (2000) *Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Harper Collins)
- ²⁶ Greig *The Beau Monde* p. 233
- ²⁷ For a description of King Street during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century see: F. H. Sheppard (ed.) (1960) *Survey of London: Volumes 29 and 30, St James Westminster, Part 1* (London: London County Council) pp. 295-307
- ²⁸ Mrs Harris to the Earl of Malmesbury [her son], 5 April 1764, in *A Series of Letters of the First Earl of Malmesbury, His Friends and Family from 1745-1820*, Vol. 1 (London: Richard Bentley) p. 107. For full biographical details of William Almack see, Philip Carter, *Almack, William (d. 1781)*, Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, (2004, online ed. 2008).
- ²⁹ *London Evening Post*, 15 November 1764
- ³⁰ John Timbs (1866) *Club Life of London with Anecdotes of the Clubs, Coffee-Houses and Taverns of the Metropolis during the 17th, 18th and 19th Centuries*, Vol. 1, (London: Richard Bentley) p. 87

³¹ See Rendell *The Pursuit of Pleasure* p. 92

³² By comparison, the subscription rate at the Pantheon was 6 Guineas and it was 5 Guineas at Mrs Cornelys. For details of the Pantheon subscription rate see: F. H. W. Sheppard (ed.) (1963) 'The Pantheon', in *Survey of London: Volumes 31 and 32, St James Westminster, Part 2*, ed. F H W Sheppard, pp. 268-283; Details of the subscription rate for Mrs Cornelys are harder to come by, 5 Guineas is suggested here: F. H. W. Sheppard (ed.) (1966) 'Soho Square Area: Portland Estate, Carlisle House, Soho Square', in *Survey of London: Volumes 33 and 34, St Anne Soho*, pp. 73-79. There was also a 5 Guineas subscription rate for the Bach-Abel concerts promoted by Mrs Cornelys, for more information see Simon McVeigh (1993) *Concert Life in London from Mozart to Haydn* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) pp. 13-15

³³ Timbs *Club Life* p. 87

³⁴ Timbs *Club Life* p. 87

³⁵ An account of Almack's opening night can be found in Chancellor *Memorials of St James's Street*. The volume reprints a letter sent by Horace Walpole to Lord Hertford on 14 February 1765, in which Walpole expressed his disbelief that the Duke of Cumberland was in attendance: 'there is a vast flight of steps, and he was forced to rest two or three times. When he dies of it and how should he not? It will sound very silly, when Hercules or Thesus ask him what he died of, to reply, 'I caught my death on a damp staircase at a new club-room'. The Duke died the same year that Almack's opened (see p. 199).

³⁶ The competition between Almack's and Corneyls is discussed in Gillian Russell (2007) *Women, Sociability and Theatre in Georgian London* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) pp. 63-87

³⁷ For information about the refurbishments carried out at Cornelys see: F. H. W. Sheppard (ed.) (1966) 'Soho Square Area: Portland Estate, Carlisle House, Soho Square', in *Survey of London: Volumes 33 and 34, St Anne Soho*, pp. 73-79. Similar information can also be found in Chancellor *Memorials of St James's Street* p. 199

³⁸ Initially, The Pantheon adopted a similar organisational model to Almack's, with admission secured on the basis of a recommendation of a titled woman. This qualification was dropped shortly after opening.

³⁹ For the growing popularity of Almack's during its early years see: L30/14/188/6 Frederick Howard, 5th Earl of Carlisle, to Thomas Robinson, 2nd Baron Grantham, 19 January 1773, where he describes how 'Almack's is much improved' and L30/14/226/9 Mr Thomas Lockhart to Thomas Robinson, 10 March 1773, where he describes how 'Almack's flourishes'. Both letters are held at Bedfordshire and Luton Archives and Records Service.

⁴⁰ Very little seems to be known about Elizabeth Pitcairn. Following her husband's death in 1809, Elizabeth was the rate payer for Almack's until her death. Through records of Sun Fire Insurance it is possible to trace Pitcairn's properties. In 1809, this included Ransom and Co Bankers on Pall Mall, Moore's in Crown Yard (near King Street), and Griffiths and Harbold in Crown Mews. Twenty years later, she also owned the Travellers Club on Pall Mall, and more businesses in Crown Yard. For more details see MS 11936/522/10943575; MS 11936/448/832077; MS 11936/566/1308091, Records of Sun Fire Insurance, London Metropolitan Archives.

⁴¹ It is difficult to piece together substantial evidence about the day-to-day organisation of Almack's. In part, this will be because there are no records of the weekly meetings the patronesses had. There is also a paucity and irregularity to the surviving archival traces the individuals have left. While there are enough references in the archival collections of Lady Sarah Jersey, held at the London Metropolitan Archives, and in the collections of Lady Emily Cowper's correspondence held at the British Library and the University of Southampton Library to suggest that they were heavily involved in the day-to-day organisation of Almack's, it is very difficult to uncover sufficient archival holdings for the other patronesses.

⁴² Notebook, 1830 London Metropolitan Archives ACC 1128/204; Notebook bound in red leather inscribed 'Almack's' 1836 LMA ACC 1128/205

⁴³ Letter from Maria Edgeworth to Charles Sneyd Edgeworth, 12 April 1827, in Augustus J. C. Hare (ed.) (1894) *The Life and Letters of Maria Edgeworth*, 2 vols (London: Edward Arnold), II, pp. 150-51.

⁴⁴ Lady Cowper to Frederick Lamb, 4 May 1820, in Tresham Lever (Ed.) (1957) *The Letters of Lady Palmerston: Selected and Edited from the Originals at Broadlands and Elsewhere* (London: John Murray) p. 33

⁴⁵ Some of the first scores that carry claim that they were performed at Almack's appear in the 1770s (see, for instance, David Rutherford, *Complete Collection of one hundred & twelve of the most celebrated Minuets with their Bases ... which are now ... [...] Perform'd at Almack's and the Pantheon, etc.*) (London: John D. Rutherford.) Music scores held at the British Library suggest that the peak of these publications is between 1815 and 1835. During these years, at least one music score a year is published carrying the claim that it had been performed at Almack's.

⁴⁶ Since its inception, Almack's had hot cramped rooms: Bedfordshire and Luton Archives and Record Service, L30/14/145/5 Lady Mary Grey to Lady Mary Forbes, 11 May 1780.

⁴⁷ For instance, Philipp Von Neumann, an Austrian diplomat, learnt about the Government's decision to bring forward the Pains and Penalties Bill at Almack's. See: John Bew (2011) *Castlereagh: Enlightenment, War and Tyranny* (London: Quercus) p. 489; The patronesses sometimes used the establishment to publicly engage with particular causes. For instance, for the benefit of the Spitalfield weavers (see: *John Bull* 23 March 1829); for distressed needlewomen (see *The English Gentleman*, 2 May 1846) and to the assist Polish Refugees following the 1848 Revolutions (see *The Times*, 2 March 1848; *John Bull* 3 June 1848)

⁴⁸ Rendell *The Pursuit of Pleasure* pp. 86-92

⁴⁹ Rendell *The Pursuit of Pleasure* p. 92

⁵⁰ 'Almack's' in *Chambers Edinburgh Journal* (Edinburgh: William and Robert Chambers) Vol. VI no. 261-312 (1838) p. 125

⁵¹ Notebook, 1830 London Metropolitan Archives ACC 1128/204; Notebook bound in red leather inscribed 'Almack's' 1836 LMA ACC 1128/205

⁵² Chancellor, *Memorials of St James' Street* p. 222

⁵³ A discussion of the subscriptions procedures can be found here: 'Almack's' in *Chambers Edinburgh Journal* (Edinburgh: William and Robert Chambers) Vol. VI no. 261-312 (1838) pp. 125-126

⁵⁴ Due to the ephemeral nature of the tickets, very few have survived. There is a surviving voucher that once belonged to the Marchioness of Buckingham for Wednesdays in April 1817: The Huntingdon Library, Stowe Papers, STG Misc Box 7 (Almack's Voucher).

⁵⁵ Lady Cowper to Frederick Lamb, 4 May 1820, in Lever *The Letters of Lady Palmerston* p. 33

⁵⁶ See Chancellor, *Memorials of St James' Street* pp. 216-217; *The Morning Chronicle* 28 April 1819

⁵⁷ The importance of good limbs (and knees) was expanded in G. Yates (1829) *The Ball; or a glance at Almack's in 1829* (London: Henry Colburn).

⁵⁸ *The World of Fashion and Continental Feuilletons*, 1 June 1827

⁵⁹ It is quite hard to extrapolate the precise social make up of gatherings at Almack's for the surviving sources. For some details see: : Notebook, 1830 London Metropolitan Archives ACC 1128/204; Notebook bound in red leather inscribed 'Almack's' 1836 LMA ACC 1128/205; for examples of the reports of guests at Almack's see *Morning Post*, 7, 15, 21, 28 March 1817.

⁶⁰ *Bell's Life*, 25 July 1824

⁶¹ Maria Edgeworth to Mrs Edgeworth, 3 April 1822, in Hare (Ed.) *The Life and Letters of Maria Edgeworth*, Vol. 2 p. 71. The previous year, Lady Rutland had been a frequent visitor to Almack's and also managed to get her friend, Sir Rowland Hill, a ticket: Sir Rowland Hill to Mrs Hill, 23 May 1821, 811/1 Shropshire Archives.

⁶² *The Morning Chronicle*, 28 September 1822

⁶³ *Punch*, 18 September 1852

⁶⁴ This poem by Luttrell is printed in Chancellor (1922), *Memorials of St James's Street*

- ⁶⁵ Article in *The New Monthly Magazine* printed in Chancellor (1992) *Memorials of St James Street* p. 210
- ⁶⁶ First written in the *New Monthly Magazine* (1824) reprinted in Edward Walford, 'St James Square: neighbourhood', in *Old and New London: Volume 4* (London, 1878), pp. 191-206. The same quote also appears in 'Almack's on a Friday' *The Atheneum; or the Spirit of English Magazines* Vol. 1 Second Series, April to October 1824 (Boston: Munroe and Francis) p. 118
- ⁶⁷ *The World of Fashion and Continental Feuilletons*, 1 June 1827
- ⁶⁸ *The Satirist*, 2 June 1839
- ⁶⁹ That Almack's became an easy metaphor for aristocratic exclusivity was quickly picked up. Pamphleteers, protesting about the amount of power and influence held by the aristocracy often highlighted Almack's as one of society's afflictions. See, for instance, Richard MacKenzie Bacon (1835) *Aristocracy in England: A Reply to Isaac Tomkins, Gent.* (London: Hatchard and Son) p. 19; John Smith (1849) *Expenditure of the State, and the Taxation of the People* Financial Reform Tracts, no. 16, Cowen Tracts held at Newcastle University; Anon. (1831) *Lays for the Lords* (London: Effingham Wilson) Hume Tracts held at University College London. Almack's was also used by the aristocracy as a way to try and define their own class: The Duke of Richmond used the establishment as an example during the Corn Laws debates in Parliament: Hansard, HL Deb 12 June 1846 vol 87 cc294-374 c. 371
- ⁷⁰ *The World of Fashion and Continental Feuilletons*, 1 May 1832
- ⁷¹ see MS 11936/522/10943575; MS 11936/448/832077; MS 11936/566/1308091, Records of Sun Fire Insurance, LMA
- ⁷² This shift is easily identified in the announcements in *The Morning Post*. For instance, the announcement placed on 5 June 1804 opens with 'James and W. M. Willis respectfully inform the Nobility and the Gentry the Subscription Ball will be this day, the 5th June, under the Patronage of: Her Grace the Duchess of St Albans; Her Grace the Duchess of Devonshire; The Marchioness of Salisbury; and the Countess of Westmoreland. Tickets are ready for delivery to the Subscribers at the Thatched House, St James Street'. By the early 1820s, announcements of the balls begin to be replaced by reports and commentary about Almack's and the Patroness. See here, *The Morning Post* 4 July 1817; 3 August 1820; 13 July 1821; 15 March 1822. These kind of reports continue throughout the 1820s and 1830s. In print, then, the staff and owners of Almack's disappear from public view and are replaced by the patronesses.
- ⁷³ For a discussion of Lady Jersey's role in the Queen Caroline Affair see James N. McCord (2002) *Taming the Female Politician in Early-Nineteenth Century England: John Bull versus Lady Jersey* *Journal of Women's History* Vol. 13 No. 4 Winter pp. 31-53
- ⁷⁴ *The World of Fashion and Continental Feuilletons* 1 March 1835
- ⁷⁵ *John Bull*, 3 February 1823
- ⁷⁶ *The World of Fashion and Continental Feuilletons* 1 May 1832
- ⁷⁷ *The Satirist*, 2 June 1839
- ⁷⁸ *The Times*, 13 June 1831
- ⁷⁹ Chancellor *Memorials of St James's Street* p. 209
- ⁸⁰ *John Bull* 28 June 1840
- ⁸¹ *Lays for the Lords* (1831) (London) p. 37
- ⁸² *Chambers Journal* p. 126
- ⁸³ Chancellor *Memorials of St James's Street* p. 209
- ⁸⁴ *Ladies Cabinet of Fashion*, date unknown?
- ⁸⁵ Marianne Spencer Stanhope Hudson (1826) *Almacks: A Novel* Vol. 1 (London: Saunders and Otley) p.vi

⁸⁶All these women deserve further academic study. The social and political role played by Ladies Palmerston and Jersey are explored in Reynolds *Aristocratic Women and Political Society in Victorian Britain*. The most recent study of Princess Lieven's time in London is John Charmley (2005) *The Princess and the Politicians: Sex, Intrigue and Diplomacy 1812-1840* (London: Viking). There is some information about Lady Castlereagh's role as her husband's advisor in Bew *Castlereagh*. All five women have left extensive personal archives which historians have yet to fully explore.

⁸⁷ *The Satirist* 8 May 1831

⁸⁸ *Quarterly Review* (1840) taken from Timbs *Club Life* pp. 88-89

⁸⁹ Chancellor *Memorials of St James's Street* p. 261. How, if it all, the accession of a female monarch altered the scope of what was possible and permissible for aristocratic women during Queen Victoria's reign is a question that merits further consideration. Although it is limited to the Royal Household, the best chapter on the subject is Reynolds 'A busy and Suspicious "Cabal"' or 'Head Housemaids': *The Ladies of Queen Victoria's Household in Aristocratic Women and Political Society* pp. 188- 221

⁹⁰ See: Jennifer Hall-Witt (2007) *Fashionable Acts: Opera and Elite Culture in London, 1780-1880*, (Lebanon, NH: University of New Hampshire Press)

⁹¹ See, for instance, Lady Clementina Davis (1872) *Recollections of Society in France and England*, Vol. 1 (London: Hurst and Blackett) p. 99.

⁹² For discussion of the contemporary use of Almack's in literature see Cheryl A Wilson (2012), *Fashioning the Silver Fork Novel*, (London: Pickering and Chatto). Almack's also makes a number of appearances in the novels of Georgette Heyer.

⁹³ 1 January 1827, *The World of Fashion and Continental Feuilltons*