Recent criticism is now fully appreciating the nuanced and complex contribution made by Dissenters to the culture and ideas of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Britain. This is the first sustained study of a Dissenting family – the Aikins – from the 1740s to the 1860s. Essays by literary critics, historians of religion and science, and geographers explore and contextualize the achievements of this remarkable family, including John Aikin senior, tutor at the celebrated Warrington Academy, and his children: poet Anna Letitia Barbauld, and John Aikin junior, literary physician and editor. The latter’s children in turn were leading professionals and writers in the early Victorian era. This study provides new perspectives on the social and cultural importance of the family and its circle – an untold story of collaboration and exchange, and a narrative which breaks down period boundaries to set Enlightenment and Victorian culture in dialogue.

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Foreword

This study of the Aikin–Barbauld circle is the fourth volume to result from the work of the Dr Williams’s Centre for Dissenting Studies. Established in September 2004, the Centre is a collaboration between the School of English and Drama, Queen Mary, University of London, and Dr Williams’s Library, Gordon Square, London. Its objectives are to promote the use of the Library’s unique holdings of Puritan, Protestant Nonconformist and Dissenting books and manuscripts; to encourage research into and dissemination of these resources; and to increase knowledge and understanding of the importance of Puritanism and Protestant Dissent to English society and literature from the sixteenth century to the present.

To further these aims the Centre has developed an extensive programme of conferences, seminars, workshops and publications. The annual one-day conferences have led to five volumes of essays: *Joseph Priestley, Scientist, Philosopher, and Theologian* (2008), and *Dissenting Praise: Religious Dissent and the Hymn in England and Wales* (2011), both edited by Isabel Rivers and David L. Wykes; *Women, Dissent, and Anti-Slavery in Britain and America, 1790–1865* (2011), edited by Elizabeth J. Clapp and Julie Roy Jeffrey; and *Dissent and the Bible in Britain, 1650–1950* (forthcoming), edited by Scott Mandelbrote and Michael Ledger-Lomas, all from Oxford University Press; and now *Religious Dissent and the Aikin–Barbauld Circle* from Cambridge University Press. In addition the Centre’s postgraduates have published the following electronic editions online: *The Letters of Joseph Priestley to Theophilus Lindsey, 1769–1794*, edited by Simon Mills (2007); *A Bibliography of the Writings of William Hazlitt, 1777–1820* (2009) and *New College, Hackney, 1786–96: A Selection of Printed and Archival Sources* (2010), both edited by Stephen Burley; and *Dissenting Education and the Legacy of John Jennings, c.1720–c.1729*, edited by Tessa Whitehouse.

The Centre’s Dissenting Academies Project, in association with the Sussex Centre for Intellectual History, is funded by the Leverhulme Trust and the Arts and Humanities Research Council. It will produce both print
Foreword

and online publications: *A History of the Dissenting Academies in the British Isles, 1660–1860*, edited by Rivers and Wykes, with Richard Whatmore as associate editor, to be published by Cambridge University Press, and two relational databases to be published online on the Centre’s website. The Centre is also supporting the publication of a new edition of *Reliquiae Baxterianae* by Neil Keeble, John Coffey and Tim Cooper, to be published by Oxford University Press, as well as a number of other major initiatives such as an edition of Henry Crabb Robinson’s diary and correspondence.

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