

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-08277-8 - The Gladstones: A Family Biography, 1764-1851

S. G. Checkland

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

The Gladstones  
A Family Biography  
1764-1851

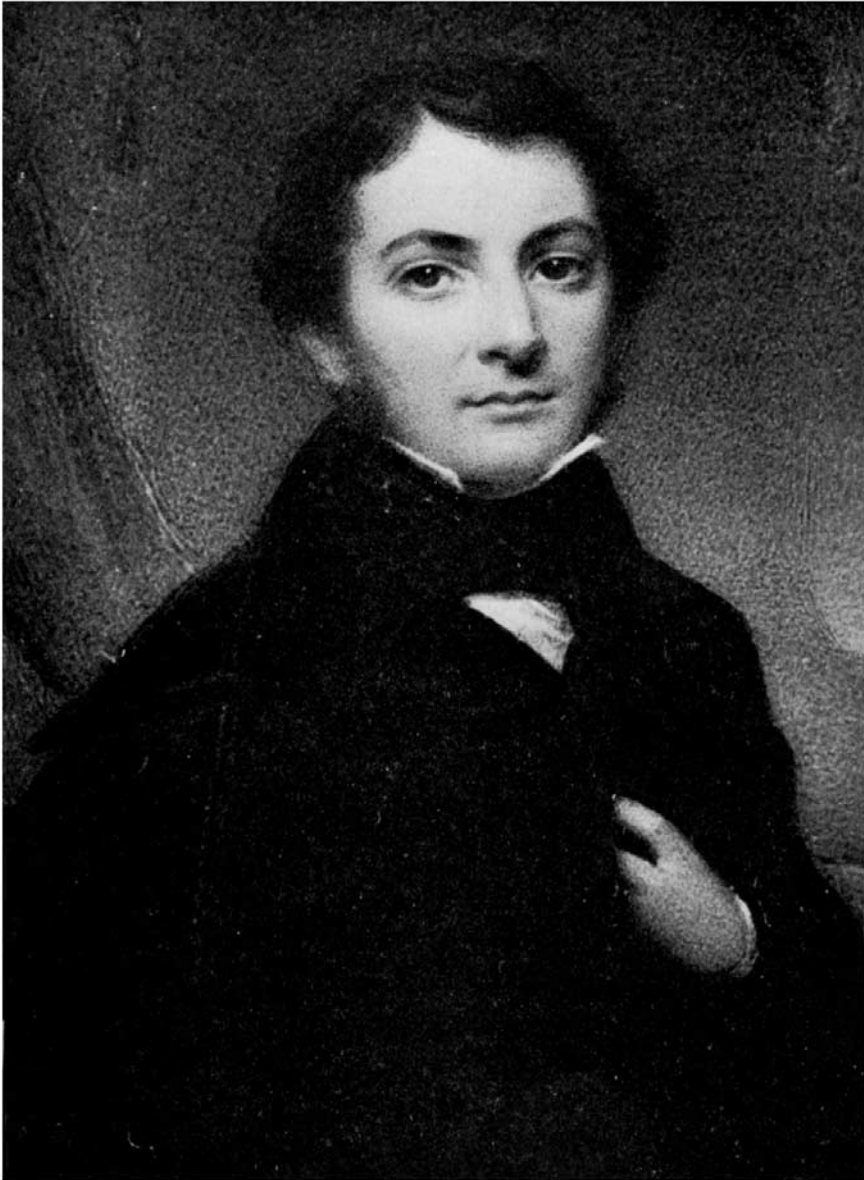
Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-08277-8 - The Gladstones: A Family Biography, 1764-1851

S. G. Checkland

Frontmatter

[More information](#)



WILLIAM EWART GLADSTONE

*c.* 1829 *act.* 20

miniature by Hargreaves

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-08277-8 - The Gladstones: A Family Biography, 1764-1851

S. G. Checkland

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

# The Gladstones

---

## A Family Biography

### 1764–1851

S. G. CHECKLAND

*Professor of Economic History,  
University of Glasgow*

CAMBRIDGE  
At the University Press

1971

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-08277-8 - The Gladstones: A Family Biography, 1764-1851

S. G. Checkland

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi

Cambridge University Press

The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)

Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9780521079662](http://www.cambridge.org/9780521079662)

© Cambridge University Press 1971

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 1971

This digitally printed version 2008

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library*

*Library of Congress Catalogue Card Number: 72-134611*

ISBN 978-0-521-07966-2 hardback

ISBN 978-0-521-08277-8 paperback

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-08277-8 - The Gladstones: A Family Biography, 1764-1851

S. G. Checkland

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

To E.O.A.C.  
in Love, Favour and Affection

## Contents

List of illustrations	<i>page</i> ix
Acknowledgments	x
Preface	xi
List of abbreviations	xvi

### PART I: THE SELF-MADE TRADER, 1764-1812

1 The grandfather of a Prime Minister: Thomas Gladstones	3
2 The young trader of Leith: John Gladstones, 1764-87	10
3 The life of a Liverpool corn dealer, 1787-9	16
4 The American adventure, 1789-90	22
5 The challenge of Liverpool, 1790-1800	27
6 The widower and the provost of Dingwall's daughter, 1800	38
7 War, business and family, 1800-5	43
8 Politics and parenthood, 1806-12	48

### PART 2: THE LIVERPOOL MERCHANT PRINCE, 1812-22

9 1812: The critical election	59
10 The great war: the last phase, 1812-15	71
11 The Gladstones at Seaforth House, 1815-22	82
12 Canning as protégé, 1812-22	99
13 John Gladstone and Canning on the nation's needs, 1812-22	109
14 Shipowner, trader, planter and philanthropist, 1815-22	119
15 The four sons: Eton and Glasgow Colleges and the navy, 1817-22	129

### PART 3: AMBITIONS, PERSONAL AND PARENTAL, 1822-30

16 Gladstone, Finlay, Canning and Huskisson, 1822-9	143
17 Frustration, illnesses and the tragedy of Anne, 1822-9	162
18 Railroads, charities, politics and fortune, 1822-9	172
19 Sugar and slaves in the West Indies, 1823-9	185
20 William at Eton and Oxford, 1822-9	201
21 The leaving of Liverpool, 1829-30	222

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-08277-8 - The Gladstones: A Family Biography, 1764-1851

S. G. Checkland

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Contents*

## PART 4: THREE UNSETTLED YEARS, 1830-3

22	Politics and business by post	227
23	William at Oxford and Westminster	239
24	Slave emancipation	263

PART 5: THE AGED SCOTTISH LAIRD AND HIS POLITICIAN  
SON, 1833-51

25	The laird of Fasque and Balfour, 1833-40	281
26	William at Westminster: his wooing and his writing, 1833-40	296
27	India and China; the coolie system; railways, 1833-40	316
28	Family, investments and advice to Sir Robert Peel, 1841-6	329
29	William Ewart Gladstone as Peel's lieutenant, 1841-6	344
30	The ancient baronet, 1846-51	357
31	The dissolving family	375
	Epilogue: The making of Mr Gladstone	381

## Appendixes

	I. Two Polonius letters	407
	II. The Gladstone fortune	413
	Bibliography	417
	Index	427

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-08277-8 - The Gladstones: A Family Biography, 1764-1851

S. G. Checkland

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## Illustrations

---

The public entry of the 'back bone' of Liverpool	<i>page</i> 67
An abolitionist view of slavery, 1838	270-1
William Gladstone's calculation of his father's slave compensation from Guiana	320

### PLATES

William Ewart Gladstone, miniature by Hargreaves	<i>frontispiece</i>
The Gladstones grandparents	<i>between pages</i> 64 and 65
The Robertson grandparents	64 and 65
The Gladstone parents	64 and 65
Seaforth House near Liverpool	64 and 65
Brothers and sisters: Anne and Thomas, William and Helen	64 and 65
John Gladstone's political protégés: George Canning and William Huskisson	64 and 65
Five of the Gladstone children, <i>c.</i> 1828-9	<i>facing page</i> 240
The House of Commons meeting in the old chamber, 1834	241
Thomas and William Gladstone in the Commons	241
The freeing of the slaves, 1838	272
Plan of the Oxford estate, Jamaica	273
The <i>John O'Gaunt</i>	336
William as the free trade Icarus	337
William and Sir Robert Peel's government	337
William and his wife and sister	368
Sir John Gladstone, <i>c.</i> 1843-5	369



Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-08277-8 - The Gladstones: A Family Biography, 1764-1851

S. G. Checkland

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## Acknowledgments

---

THE AUTHOR and publisher would like to thank the following for granting permission to use material in their possession: Sir William Gladstone for the portraits of William Ewart Gladstone, the Gladstone grandparents, the Robertson grandparents and the Gladstone parents, for the portraits of Anne, Thomas, William and Helen Gladstone as children, the portrait of William Huskisson, the portraits of Anne, Thomas, Robertson, John Neilson and Helen Gladstone, of Catherine Glynné Gladstone, William and Helen Gladstone, and for the plan of the Oxford estate; Lorna and Honora Keating for the portrait of George Canning; T. S. Gladstone for the picture of the *John O'Gaunt*.

The calotype of Sir John Gladstone is reproduced by permission of the Scottish National Portrait Gallery and the cartoon 'The public entry of the "back bone" of Liverpool' by courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-08277-8 - The Gladstones: A Family Biography, 1764-1851

S. G. Checkland

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## Preface

---

THIS BOOK is an attempt to understand one of the most interesting and best documented families of the nineteenth century. The dates of the birth and death of John Gladstone, 1764 and 1851, define the span of time. Within these years he created a fortune, married and raised his children. As his own curve of energy and creativeness passed its zenith, his youngest son was rising in fame through Eton, Oxford and the Parliaments of the eighteen-thirties and forties. It was in these years that Britain underwent her industrial revolution and moved well into the railway age. John Gladstone was one of the business men responsible for this; William Ewart Gladstone was one of the eager young intellectuals who had to adjust their ideas to the new society that was forming as they were. The book covers almost the first half of William Gladstone's life, taking a closer view of his formative years than have previous studies. It is based on much new material on John Gladstone, William and the other members of the family.

It was hoped by John Gladstone's children that Samuel Smiles would do a biography. But they were disappointed. No study has appeared of this formidable man with his business interests, his politics, his philanthropy and his extraordinary family. A Scotsman born in Leith, he became one of the leading merchants of Liverpool. Without the help of others he built one of the most notable fortunes of his time. As one of those who traded with great skill in the difficult conditions of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars he made great profits. As a major slave owner he was deeply embroiled in the troubles of the West Indies, in the debates on slavery and in the emancipation struggle; he was one of the foremost lobbyists among the planters, resisting this first step within the British Empire toward turning slaves into a wage-earning labour force. He was among the first to exploit a new source of labour for the West Indies, bringing coolies from Bengal, so contributing to the racial complexity of the British Caribbean. As a pioneer free trader first to India and then to China he played his part in the commercial opening of the East. As an urban developer and agricultural improver and as a sponsor of the railway age he hastened the coming of the urban-industrial society. His life offers a rare opportunity to trace the growth, vicissitudes and dispersal of a large fortune, the economic basis of his son William's political career.

As a politician manipulating the pre-Reform electorate of Liverpool for two decades John Gladstone represented that order of men of the northern cities who were acquiring new power both regionally and in

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-08277-8 - The Gladstones: A Family Biography, 1764-1851

S. G. Checkland

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Preface*

Parliament. It was his greatest pride to be known as the friend of Mr Canning, and later of Mr Huskisson. His relationships with these men and with others, and the uses to which he put them, are revealing of the politics of the time. His greatest political ambition for himself was to be joint Member of Parliament for Liverpool with Canning or Huskisson. But Liverpool refused to have him. As an active pamphleteer and political projector he developed his own view of the proper lines of policy for Great Britain, both economically and politically.

John Gladstone also affords a study in philanthropy as practised by a self-made merchant prince. His many projects, some of them self-financing, reflected his view of himself and of society and of the mutual obligations involved.

Because he was a Scotsman who having spent more than forty years of his adult life in England lived a further eighteen active years in Scotland, his story combines those of the two countries.

Frustrated in politics himself, he passed on to his sons his ambitions and his code of ideas. For them he opened new social and political vistas, using his great wealth and powerful connections. His search for parliamentary seats for himself and his sons is illustrative of this seamy and complex aspect of British politics both before and after the first Reform Bill. He so placed his four sons that they might all have sat in Parliament together, forming a consolidated and powerful political family. In this great hope he was disappointed. His failure to establish a political dynasty derived partly from the diversity of character of his sons as formed within the family and partly from the rejection by two of them of his political philosophy.

John Gladstone was an indomitable man, fearless amid the violence and brutality of the hustings, accepting with fortitude the dreadful unaesthetised operations on his eyes, forming his own views of policy and persisting in their advocacy. To his nieces and nephews he was known as the Juggernaut. It was his strength of feeling and 'torrents of affection' that stuck in his son William's mind long after he was gone. But he was assertive and quarrelsome, a man who bickered over matters great and small, who had an overpowering need to be vindicated, who caused his wife much secret weeping through his many quarrels. Like a Highland chief, he regarded himself as the head of his clan (including his wife's kinsfolk).

Mrs John Gladstone was a woman of frail and luminous beauty, with an intense Evangelical piety that pervaded her family. In contrast to her robust and assertive husband she was always delicate, sinking ever further into invalidism. Her husband's position as a major slave owner and a leading advocate of the planters was such that most Evangelicals could only condemn. But Mrs Gladstone was far from being a non-

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-08277-8 - The Gladstones: A Family Biography, 1764-1851

S. G. Checkland

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

### *Preface*

entity. It was from her that all the Gladstone children received their intense religious conditioning based upon a compelling sense of sin. Religion was paramount in family life and in the lives of all her children as adults.

There was much happiness in the homes created in Liverpool and at Seaforth by this Lowland Scot and his pious Highland wife. There was disappointment also, and tension, and indeed tragedy, especially for the two daughters. One of them died young, sadly unfulfilled, her memory haunting the family as that of a saint of whom they were all unworthy. The other passed through a phase of opium addiction and dementia to spend the rest of her life as an eccentric exile, wandering about England and the Continent, causing continuous uneasiness and occasional embarrassment to her brothers. Of the brothers two conformed to the religion and politics of their upbringing: both were worthy men but entirely without distinction. The other two chose their own way in matters of Church and State, moving strongly in a liberal direction.

The two sisters and the four brothers were closely bound together within the family circle. The character development of each may be seen in terms of the need to relate to parents, to one another and to the world outside. Painful divisions appeared among them which John Gladstone and his wife strove to heal.

The Gladstones provide an illuminating example of the bourgeois family of the early nineteenth century trying to reconcile their wealth and privileges with the demands of their intense Evangelicalism.

William, the fourth son, began very early to show powers denied to his brothers or stifled within them. His extraordinary ability became increasingly apparent as he passed through Eton and Oxford to Westminster, making his peculiar mark at each place and developing the character that was to make him for some the ornament of the Victorian age, for some its enigma and for some its anathema. Mr Gladstone's early life is here viewed within the family context in which he was raised, the education it provided and the world of politics that it opened to him.

In the Epilogue an attempt is made to summarise William Ewart Gladstone's early life and his efforts to adapt the intensely conservative world view he had arrived at during his formative years to the realities with which he had to deal as a major politician. Neither Morley nor Magnus provides an account of Mr Gladstone's background that draws upon the full range of sources or attempts to see this phase of his life in its own terms. Morley, though he wrote at length, was reticent and pre-Freudian; Magnus, in his engaging effort to encompass the immense length of Mr Gladstone's career in a book of reasonable size, disposed pretty briskly of this part of the story.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-08277-8 - The Gladstones: A Family Biography, 1764-1851

S. G. Checkland

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

### *Preface*

The material for a study of the Gladstone family is vast. Both John Gladstone and William conducted an immense correspondence and both were letter hoarders. Hundreds and indeed thousands of John's letters have survived. In addition there are ledgers and papers that show the remarkable growth of his business and his fortune and which further amplify his character. His wife, sons and daughters contributed to the enormous documentation. A good many of William's letters to his parents and his brothers and sisters have turned up. Moreover the mind of William Ewart Gladstone in these years is now illuminated by Professor M. R. D. Foot's splendid edition of the first two volumes of William's diaries. Between them and the letters there is often an inverse relationship: matters dealt with in the letters are often not mentioned at all in the diaries (only the writing of the letter is recorded). It is almost as though William expected the recipients of his letters, especially the members of his family, to preserve them as he preserved all that he received.

I am greatly indebted to members of the Gladstone family, including the late Sir Albert Gladstone, the late Charles Gladstone and especially Sir William Gladstone of Hawarden and Fasque, for most generous help and hospitality and for a continuing interest in the book. A good deal of the documentation used, particularly the papers of Sir John Gladstone, is on loan to the University of Glasgow by the courtesy of Sir William. John Gladstone of Capenoch has provided material on his branch of the family and has shown many kindnesses.

The penultimate draft of the manuscript has been read by Professor Foot. Though there remain aspects of Mr Gladstone's early life which we interpret differently, I wish to express my gratitude for the generous help he has given in so many ways.

Among Glasgow colleagues Stanley Alstead of the Chair of *Materia Medica* has provided information on the state of medical practice in the first half of the nineteenth century, Arthur W. Shirley has commented upon the psychological aspects of the discussion, and James J. Tumelty has given advice on the political background.

My miscellaneous debts are so numerous that I can only list, with grateful thanks, those to whom they are owed: David Alexander, Donald Allan, Sister Mary Annette, O.P., Bernard Aspinwall, George and Adriana Bishop, John Butt, Thomas E. Carruthers, William Couper, C. J. Fordyce, Terence Gourvish, Elizabeth Jack, the Misses Keating of Plas-yn-Rhiw, John Kellett, J. R. Harris, Sheena Houlston, John Imrie, Brian Lambie, Iwo Lominski, Edgar Lythe, Margaret Martin, Jennifer Moir, William Rivière, Ian Sellers, Joyce Souter, Mary Sullivan, H. S. Tallamy, Linda Tan, Andrew MacLaren Young, the Librarian, Picton Library Liverpool, and the Warden and Sub-Warden

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-08277-8 - The Gladstones: A Family Biography, 1764-1851

S. G. Checkland

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

### *Preface*

of St Deiniol's Library and the County Archivist, Flintshire County Records Office. I am grateful to Wing-Commander R. F. Pemberton for making the index.

My own family has contributed much to the long writing of this book. To my wife, to whom it is dedicated, I owe many fruitful conversations on the actions and experiences of the Gladstone family. In addition she has transcribed a great deal of the material, as well as carrying out many other tasks. All of our children – John, Stephen, Deborah, Sydney Clare and Sarah Jane – have in one way or another helped – by sorting papers, by cataloguing, by looking up references, and by tolerating their parents' preoccupation with the Gladstones. I have worked from my late father's copy of Morley's *Life*, a relic of my own background in a strongly Liberal family (albeit in Ottawa), in which Evangelicalism and Mr Gladstone were pervasive influences.

*Glasgow, March 1971*

S.G.C.

## Abbreviations

---

A.M.G.	Anne Mackenzie Gladstone
BM	British Museum
Catherine G.	Catherine Gladstone
CB	Cash Book of John Gladstone
D	M. R. D. Foot, ed. (1968). <i>The Gladstone Diaries: Volume I, 1825–32; Volume II, 1832–39</i> (Oxford).
E.C.	Edgar Corrie
G.C.	George Canning
G.G.	George Grant
H.J.G.	Helen Jane Gladstone
Hugh G.	Hugh Gladstone
J.G.	John Gladstone
J.N.G.	John Neilson Gladstone
K.F.	Kirkman Finlay
LC	<i>Liverpool Chronicle</i>
LM	<i>Liverpool Mercury</i>
Mrs G.	Mrs Anne Gladstone
PJ	Private Journal
PL	Private Ledger, J.G.
R.G.	Robertson Gladstone
Robt. G.	Robert Gladstone
SP	Session Papers
T.G.	Thomas Gladstone
Thos. G.	Thomas Gladstones
W.E.G.	William Ewart Gladstone
W.H.	William Huskisson