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Elements in Eighteenth-Century Connections

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SCIENCE AND READING IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

*The Hardwicke Circle and the Royal
Society, 1740–1766*

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Science and Reading in the Eighteenth Century

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Abstract: *Science and Reading in the Eighteenth Century* studies the reading habits of a group of historians and science administrators known as the Hardwicke Circle. The research is based on an analysis of the reading recorded in the 'Weekly Letter', an unpublished private correspondence written from 1741 to 1766 between Thomas Birch (1705–66), Secretary of the Royal Society, and Philip Yorke (1720–90), later second earl of Hardwicke. Birch and Yorke were omnivorous, voracious and active readers. The analysis uses the Weekly Letter to quantify the texts with which they engaged and explores the role of reading in their intellectual life. The research argues that this evidence shows that, in the early 1750s, the Hardwicke Circle pivoted from a focus on early modern British history to a new concern with the reform and renovation of British intellectual institutions, especially the Royal Society.

Keywords: reading, science, Thomas Birch, Hardwicke Circle, Royal Society

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Contents

Introduction: Reading History and the Royal Society	1
1 The Hardwicke Circle and the Royal Society	5
2 The Weekly Letter Reading Database (WLRD)	19
3 Acts of Reading	30
4 Reading Literature and History: Case Studies	39
5 Science, the Royal Society and Learned Journals	56
Conclusion: Reading and the Royal Society	72
Bibliography	77