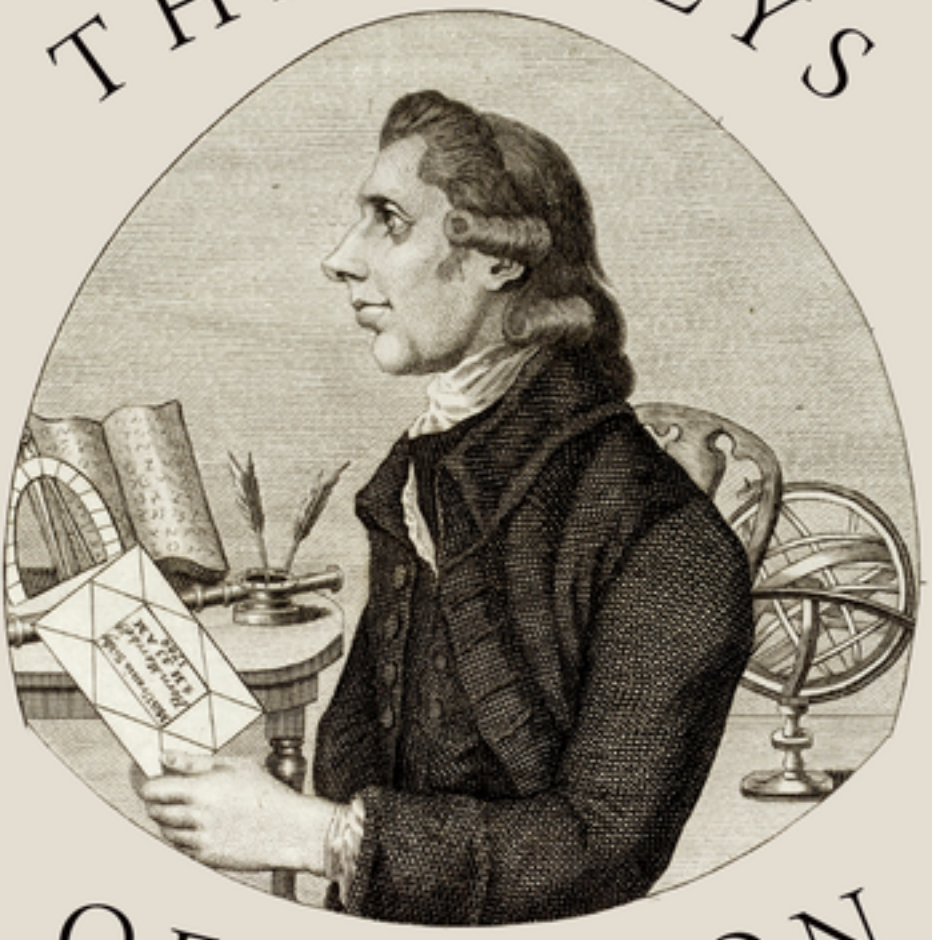
THE SIBLYS OF LONDON



A Family on the Esoteric Fringes of Georgian England

SUSAN MITCHELL SOMMERS

The Siblys of London

OXFORD STUDIES IN WESTERN ESOTERICISM

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This book is dedicated to my men, without whom it simply would not have happened.

Contents

Acknowledgments

AS I COMPLETE REVISIONS of this book, I am simultaneously researching James Anderson (1680–1739), author of *Royal Genealogies, Or the Genealogical Tables of Emperors, Kings and Princes*. When it was published in 1732, Anderson was in financial distress and was understandably keen for affluent gentlemen to buy his book. Perhaps with an eye to enhancing the social cachet attached to both the book and himself as author, he employed a novel device. Rather than simply including a list of "subscribers," as was common in the eighteenth century, he compiled a list of the great and the good who had assisted him in any fashion while he labored to produce the book. These he referred to as "encouragers."

Like Anderson, I too have a long list of encouragers to whom I offer my sincerest thanks, and whose luster I would like to cultivate. Each has lent his or her time, talents, treasure, and support to assist in the work that follows, and thus what is good in it, is good because of them, and of course, what is still not quite right, is entirely my responsibility.

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Rene Kollar
Peter Lineham
Elliott Maloney
Christopher McIntosh
Adam McLean
Paul Monod
Alex Murray
John Odhner
Andrew Prescott
Laurence Principe
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Preface

IN THE AFTERMATH of the 1790 parliamentary election, Ebenezer Sibly (1750–99), known in Ipswich as a freemason and political agent, was burned in effigy.[1] This was a remarkable occurrence, even amid the rough-and-tumble of eighteenth-century campaigns. Thus it caught my eye, thirty years ago, while I was conducting doctoral research into the local politics of eighteenth-century Suffolk. While poring over poll books and struggling to master the technicalities of nominal record linkage, I stumbled across *A Serious Address to Members of the House of Commons and Gentlemen Residing in the Counties of Suffolk, Norfolk and Essex*. The anonymous pamphlet chronicles the extraordinary 1790–91 appearance in Ipswich of "Father Noah" Sibly, who set up a masonic-style lodge and initiated as many electors as possible, using the lodge as a vehicle to ensure John Hadley D'Oyly's election as Member of Parliament (MP).[2] I did not then know much about eighteenth-century freemasonry, but something about the situation seemed profoundly odd. I soon found Sibly was not following the ostensible masonic rules, and his Royal Ark Masons were not "regular" masons at all—a story explored in a later chapter of this study, effigy-burning included.

Parsing Sibly's political machinations in Ipswich was a challenge, but the more I searched, the more enigmatic the rest of his life appeared as well—he and his family, especially brother Manoah (1757–1840), make cameo appearances in popular and scholarly studies of many of the esoteric fringes of contemporary London—including freemasonry, alchemy, astrology, animal magnetism, astrological medicine, quackery, radical politics, practical magic, and Swedenborgianism. In the intervening years, my historiographic lens has

1. William Batley, BL Add. MS 25336, fol. 27.

2. *A Serious Address to Members of the House of Commons and Gentlemen Residing in the Counties of Suffolk, Norfolk and Essex* (London: John Williams, 1790).

shifted from a religiously informed political history of the provincial middling classes (inspired by R. K. Webb and J. H. Plumb, both professors of my own advisor, the late Richard W. Davis), to biographical microhistories of middling Londoners.[3] In my Suffolk study, aside from Sibly, I was most beguiled by the political shenanigans of the weaver-electors of Sudbury. In anticipation of the parliamentary election of 1761, supporters of MP Thomas Fonnereau staged a demonstration to ward off a challenge. They

> assembled at the House of one of their Party, from whence they proceeded with a Coffin, attended by a number of Mourners with black Staffs, Hatbands, & c. intending (as they said) to bury the Opposition Man, notwithstanding no other Gentleman had at that time offered himself as a candidate. They were met on the Market-Hill by a large Body of Free Burgesses, who resenting the attempts that had been made to deprive them of their Rights and Privileges, took the Coffin from them, and after stripping the mourners of their Funeral-pomp, obliged them to return to their respective Homes.[4]

Their "rights and privileges" involved politically-related bribes and treats, and could amount to a considerable sum. Following this incident, some three hundred (out of an estimated eight hundred) freemen entered into an agreement to support any worthy gentleman who would offer himself as a candidate. This amounted to advertising for bidders for the borough, prompting Horace Walpole to remark, "[W]e have been as victorious as the Romans and are as corrupt."[5] Thus, I find I have consistently been drawn to the liminal, and the methodology I employ in both my political studies and biographies emphasizes the significance of these illuminating vignettes.

The sometimes forensic technique used in the current study is motivated, not by a vain hope of recreating lives and *milieux* "as they really were," but by the conviction that with the tools, techniques, and sources now available, we no longer have to settle for erroneous, impressionistic assertions about even relatively modest folk who led historically significant

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3. Carlo Ginzburg, "Microhistory: Two or Three Things That I Know about It," trans. John Tedeschi and Anne C. Tedeschi *Critical Inquiry* 20, no. 1 (Autumn 1993): 10–35; Susan Mitchell Sommers, *Thomas Dunckerley and English Freemasonry* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2012).

4. *Ipswich Journal*, 28 February 1761.

5. Lewis Namier, *The Structure of Politics at the Accession of George III* (New York: Macmillan, 1929), 158.

or illustrative lives. An apt example is the brief entry on Ebenezer Sibly by Patrick Curry for the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Though engaging, the article relies on derivative and flawed secondary sources, and as a result is rife with biographical errors.[6] More seriously, Curry is led to draw unsound conclusions about Sibly's careers in astrology and medicine. As a result, he perpetuates a hagiographic representation of Sibly as "a formidable polymath in medicine, natural philosophy, and occultism," while missing the opportunity to examine more factually intriguing aspects of his life, such as his career as a quack doctor and masonic impresario.[7] We cannot pretend to make reliable evaluative generalizations about movements and populations if we cannot first establish the basic biographical facts of our exemplars.

Much has changed since Curry's Sibly research of the 1980s.[8] My investigation of the Siblys has happily coincided with a proliferation of electronic resources, providing unprecedented access to both primary and secondary materials, though I am most interested in elusive primary references that illumine the dark corners of the Siblys' London. I have found a constellation of interrelated types of electronic resources particularly valuable: catalogs of institutional collections, open-access indexes of various sorts, genealogical databases, and searchable text repositories—though both of the latter are often hidden behind paywalls.[9] The existence and usability of these resources means it has never been so easy or rewarding to research the middling classes of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Britain as it is today. This is possibly true for their contemporaries in other parts of the West as well, but my work on the Sibly family focuses on London and Londoners, and for them the array of relevant resources is staggering.

Reliance on electronic resources, while far from exclusive, has permitted progress on "Sibliana" when time in the archives has not been possible. Thus stalwarts such as the UK National Archives, the Wellcome Library, the

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6. Especially problematic is that two of the three secondary articles are antiquarian discussions of Sibly's masonic career: D. Timson, "Ebenezer Sibly: Freemason Extraordinary," *Transactions Lodge of Research* 2429 (1964–65): 62–67; Eric Ward, "Ebenezer Sibly: A Man of Parts," *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum* [*AQC*] 71 (1958): 48–52.

7. Patrick Curry, "Sibly, Ebenezer (1751–*c.*1799)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (*ODNB*) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). s.v.

8. Patrick Curry, *Prophecy and Power: Astrology in Early Modern England* (Lawrenceville, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 132–37.

9. Of particular is the *Eighteenth Century Collections Online* (2017). For information see, http://www.gale.com/primary-sources/eighteenth-century-collections-online.

British Museum, and the British Library have supplied welcome electronic as well as traditional archival support. In addition to detailed catalogs, these institutions have developed online repositories of graphic images, searchable texts, interpretive guides, and essential bibliographic information. At one remove from institutional catalogs, resources such as Copac, WorldCat, and ArchiveGrid have also been critical, especially since the current study is organized around the Siblys' changing relationships with books, manuscripts, and print culture.[10]

Specialized online indexes and text repositories offer another innovative source of otherwise elusive evidence. In telling the Siblys' stories, the family of databases sponsored by The Digital Humanities Institute | Sheffield (formerly HRI Online Publications), has been of inestimable value—beginning with *Old Bailey Online*, and extending to *Connected Histories* and *Locating London's Past*.[11] Similarly, the online portals for the Centre for the Study of the Legacies of British Slave-ownership, *The London Gazette*, and the *Clergy of the Church of England Database*, have been useful in tracing the curious "professional" lives of the Siblys and their friends.[12] Another electronic way of knowing the Siblys not available to previous researchers, academic or otherwise, has been created by the spectacular opening of masonic repositories. The Library and Museum of Freemasonry of the United Grand Lodge of England has led the way, sponsoring or cosponsoring *Masonic Periodicals Online, Lane's Masonic Records 1717–1894*, and the *Grand Lodge Membership Registers, 1751–1921*, available through the genealogical service Ancestry.[13] Ebenezer Sibly was an eclectic freemason, as were many of his associates, and these various resources have enabled me to uncover and clarify their affiliations

10. *Copac* (2017), http://copac.jisc.ac.uk/; *WorldCat* (2017), http://www.worldcat.org/; I have used the following extensively: *Internet Archive* (2017), https://archive.org/index.php; *HathiTrust's Digital Library* (2017), https://www.hathitrust.org/; and the *University of Pennsylvania's Online Books Page*, especially the *Gentleman's Magazine* (2017), http://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/webbin/serial?id=gentlemans.

11. *Old Bailey Online* (2017), https://www.oldbaileyonline.org/; *Connected Histories* (2017), http://www.connectedhistories.org/; *Locating Lodon's Past* (2017), https://www.locatinglondon.org/index.html.

12. *Legacies of British Slave-ownership* (2017), https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/; *The Gazette* (2017), https://www.thegazette.co.uk/; The Clergy of the Church of England Database (2017), http://theclergydatabase.org.uk/.

13. *Masonic Periodicals Online* (2017), http://www.masonicperiodicals.org/; *Masonic Records 1717–1894* (2017), https://www.hrionline.ac.uk/lane/index.php; *Ancestry* (2017), http://ancestry.com. More resources are available through the website of Quatuor Coronati Lodge No 2076 in London: (2017), https://www.quatuorcoronati.com/.

and activities, tracing important "brotherhood" networks, as detailed in later chapters of this study.

Once archivists and historians looked down their noses at genealogists. No longer. Since the 1980s, a surge in the craft of genealogy has brought tremendous effort and investment to establishing a constantly evolving battery of resources that are a boon to family researchers and academics alike. In North America, this has been driven in large part by the particularities of doctrines of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and their free website, Familysearch, was a pioneer in microfilming and digitizing an array of sources, particularly for Britain and Western Europe.[14] Another invaluable service is provided by Ancestry, which includes digital images of a range of resources necessary to this study: apprenticeship records, masonic memberships, wills, tax records and ratebooks, in addition to the expected baptism, marriage and death registers.[15] In Britain, Findmypast partners with both Familysearch and a number of national institutions, including the British Library, National Archives, and the Society of Genealogists.[16] I will stop now, lest my readers think they should abandon traditional archives and libraries, which is far from my intent—but let me emphasize that these resources continue to grow and become more reliable, and scholars are understandably enthusiastic.

Though I want to highlight the opportunities presented by the digital humanities, the preceding discussion has barely touched on where the Siblys "are" in the secondary literature of the eighteenth century. Simply put, they are on the furthest of fringes of studies that themselves often deal with marginal or marginalized aspects of Georgian England, such as William Wink's *Lives of Illustrious Shoemakers*, which presents the brothers as cobblers who made good, or Richard Sha's "Medicalizing the Romantic Libido," which discusses Ebenezer in the context of antimasturbation literature.[17] Of all the family, only Ebenezer remains sufficiently well known to have a popular reputation. Just what that is depends on what one happens to be reading, but most current scholars argue something along these lines: Ebenezer was a practicing astrologer and regular physician who made an earnest attempt to

14. *FamilySearch* (2017), https://familysearch.org/.

15. *Ancestry* (2017), https://www.ancestry.com/.

16. *Findmypast* (2017), http://www.findmypast.com/content/our-partners.

17. William Winks, *Lives of Illustrious Shoemakers* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Earle & Rivington, 1883); Richard Sha, "Medicalizing the Romantic Libido: Sexual Pleasure, Luxury, and the Public Sphere," *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 27, no. 1 (2006): 31–52.

reconcile late Renaissance esotericism with the newest discoveries in contemporary Newtonian science, and in the process amassed a remarkable library of ancient works that was passed on to inspire the nineteenth-century occult revival. History is less attentive to Manoah, who, after working as a bookseller and shorthand taker, secured a position at the Bank of England and became a Swedenborgian minister. Aside from a sketchy *ODNB* article by Peter Lineham, in which he is dismissed as "a rather inward-looking pedant," Manoah makes only brief and laudatory appearances in New Church histories.[18]

This book is arranged chronologically, following the occupational and spiritual transformations of the Sibly men (including their father, Edmund, and brother, Job), documented principally through their relationships to the books they read, sold, published, transcribed, and wrote.[19] Ebenezer's adult life forms the basic framework for the study, and it was divided into several distinct phases, after each of which he moved on to a sometimes dramatically different venue and occupation—and often a new relationship to books. We will follow him as he moves from making shoes in the 1760s and 1770s, to becoming a bookseller and storefront astrologer, and then publishing *An Illustration of the Celestial Science of Astrology*, often described as the most important compendium of astrology, magic, and related arcana published in the second half of the eighteenth century.[20] In 1784, Ebenezer experienced his "esoteric turn" and began to publish and practice astrology at the same time he became a freemason—an important avocation he followed for the rest of his life. In 1788, he tried his hand at being a professional esotericist, but London was not enthusiastic. During the 1790 parliamentary election, Ebenezer worked briefly as a political agent in Suffolk. This episode was primarily a business arrangement so far as Sibly was concerned, and afterward he returned to London to build a medical career, publishing a new edition of *Culpeper's Herbal*, acquiring a medical degree, taking out a patent on his proprietary formula, *Dr Sibly's Reanimating Solar Tincture*, and publishing books on astrological medicine to encourage sales. In his last years, Ebenezer, who died before he turned fifty, became interested in alchemy and began a collection of related texts.

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18. Peter Lineham, "Sibly, Manoah (1757–1840)," in *ODNB*.

19. Monod's assertion that religious change was the most significant stimulus for esoteric thinking holds true in this case. Paul Monod, *Solomon's Secret Arts* (Padstow, UK: Yale University Press, 2013), 228.

20. This particular work appears with many variations in title and publishers.

Unsurprisingly, given his restless reinventions, Ebenezer appears most often in secondary literature, and he is also the Sibly for whom the most "fractured" story emerges. The fissures separating aspects of his biography open along disciplinary, spiritual, and scholarly fault lines, ranging from the *ODNB* article I just cited, to a website on how to become a vampire by taking *Dr Sibly's Reanimating Solar Tincture*.[21] Ebenezer's occupational compartmentalization is symptomatic of his impatient ambition—he applied himself with intensity, but only until he found something more likely to serve his purpose—but his frequent change of focus is not reflected in either popular or academic literature, and it turns out to be a major obstacle to understanding his place in Western esotericism. The occult, as it was called in Sibly's time, long shunned by Western academics, stirred to life most significantly for this study in Ellic Howe's 1967 *Astrology: A Recent History*. Howe's treatment of Sibly lacks biographical context, and he notably passes on without comment the inflated professional claims Ebenezer made for himself.[22] More recent authors are surprisingly even less skeptical and fall into an error identified by Paul Monod in his impressive study of Sibly's century, *Solomon's Secret Arts: The Occult in the Age of Enlightenment*. Monod observes that "scholars of esoteric religion have a tendency to interpret whatever they are studying with the greatest seriousness, so that hucksters or charlatans turn into philosophers."[23] This is also true of students of other esoteric, and even exoteric systems, as reporting on the Siblys' careers demonstrates. After Howe, the first prominent academic to consider Ebenezer was Allen Debus, and while he expresses some doubts as to Sibly's credentials, he argues Sibly was a "practicing physician of the Enlightenment" who defended formal medical education, which is exactly what Ebenezer wanted his customers to believe.[24] It is with Wouter Hanegraaff's important *Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture* that we see Ebenezer for the first time in a comprehensively esoteric context, presented intriguingly as a collector and compiler of late Renaissance occult into a "compendium of rejected knowledge,"

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21. Caroline Rance, "How to Become a Vampire: 4 Victorian Medicines for the Aspiring Undead," *The Airship* (blog) (December 2013), http://airshipdaily.com/blog/12032013-how-to-become-a-vampire.

22. Ellic Howe, *Astrology: A Recent History Including the Untold Story of Its Role in World War II* (New York: Walker and Company, 1967), 25–27.

23. Monod, *Solomon's Secret Arts*, 10.

24. Allen Debus, "Scientific Truth and Occult Tradition: The Medical World of Ebenezer Sibly (1751–1799)," *Medical History* 26 (1982): 262, 278.

rather than as an esoteric practitioner per se. Hanegraaff also describes him rather imprecisely as a physician who was involved in Swedenborgianism.[25] Neither of which are entirely correct—Ebenezer was a quack who sold venereal nostrums, and it was his brother Manoah who was a member of the Swedenborgian New Church. These points are not so fine that they should be glossed over.

To further complicate the picture, roughly three-quarters of the secondary works consulted for this study that reference Ebenezer discuss only one aspect of his career, *virtually to the exclusion of any other facets*, as though they had simply not happened. He is best remembered as an astrologer and secondarily as an esotericist, with roughly half of the sources focusing solely on his real or alleged contributions (literary or otherwise) to astrology, magic, the Kabbalah, alchemy, and scrying (divination using crystals). Another third of the sources focus on Ebenezer's identity as a physician (with overlap in the area of astrological medicine). If we accept as genuine the key role played by *An Illustration* in cultivating a new reading public for traditional astrology, as I will argue we should, questions of Ebenezer Sibly's intent, acumen, intellectual engagement, and character are still very much open. These are considerations of surprising weight, and a fuller account of his biography goes a long way toward addressing those points.

Thus a one-dimensional reading of either Manoah or Ebenezer, such as is found elsewhere, is misleading. Manoah largely fades away, becoming much less the agent of change than I argue he truly was. Ebenezer, on the other hand, is likely to be taken as a gifted magus, scholar, philosopher, or physician—none of which he ever was, nor, I argue, did he make the attempt to become one. Masonic scholar Michael Baigent, writing in the *Astrological Journal* about Ebenezer's controversial "Nativity of America," claims Sibly "was always very careful with his astrological data and it would have been completely out of character for him to have invented it."[26] And yet Martin Gansten argues in his analysis of Sibly's "Horoscope of an unknown lady" that Ebenezer's figures are wildly inaccurate.[27] Paul Monod considers Ebenezer's esoteric activities and concludes, "Sibly may have been an enthusiastic self-promoter who made unbelievable claims, but he was not a

25. Wouter Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 230, 237–38.

26. Michael Baigent, "Ebenezer Sibley and the Signing of the Declaration of Independence," *Astrological Journal* 26, no.1 (Winter 1983–84): 44.

27. Martin Gansten, "Notes on Ebenezer Sibly's Horoscope of an Unknown lady," October 2016.

con man."[28] This judgment would have come as a surprise to the electors of Ipswich, or to Sibly's Bristol customers who purchased forged lottery tickets at his shop.[29] Or one can argue, as does Debus, that Ebenezer was "a physician who was well read in the scientific and medical literature of his own day," and who "thought of himself as a member of the medical establishment."[30] Yet, the officials at King's College, Aberdeen, where he purchased his MD, acknowledged he was a quack.[31] The challenge, then, is to put the various facets of the man back together, to reconstruct as much of his life as possible, to better understand his life and motivations, but as important, to help us understand the context of his times, and how the Siblys were formed by them, informing them in turn.

I argue, then, that a careful examination of contemporary records presents a different story than is suggested by the secondary literature. The character and careers of both men "flatten out" in retelling—the effect of this is that Ebenezer is repeatedly portrayed as something more than he was: more earnest, more honest, more engaged, more engaging. Manoah, on the other hand, is made to seem less interesting and experimental than I argue he actually was. With primary evidence added in, Ebenezer can be recognized as a man more motivated by financial gain than learning, and perfectly willing to cut corners—by plagiarism, forgery, even bigamy—when it furthers his goals. Manoah, on the other hand, is also transformed by this technique. He is little known outside of Swedenborgian circles, even to the extent that Manoah's astrological publications of the late 1780s are frequently attributed to Ebenezer. When Manoah does appear in the secondary literature, it is almost always in the context of his long New Church ministry, and in the character of that "venerable and exemplary minister of our church, the Rev. Manoah Sibly."[32] Primary sources show him as a professional shorthand writer, keeping company with the radicals of the London Corresponding Society, "borrowing" an astrological translation for financial gain, at length securing a lucrative and prestigious position at the Bank of England, and ultimately turning his

28. Monod, *Solomon's Secret Arts*, 279.

29. *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal*, 14 January 1786.

30. Debus, "Scientific Truth," 259.

31. Michelle Gait, Wolfson Reading Room, Special Collections Centre, University Library, King's College Aberdeen, to S. M. Sommers, email, 11 July 2012, referencing MS K48, Kings College Minutes; MS K15, MDs 1654–1800.

32. *Intellectual Repository*, 43 (January, 1837), 380.

back on one religion to help found another.[33] Thus I argue on his behalf that Manoah lived a more dynamic, radical, and politically risky life than secondary sources recount—and is revealed as a more plausible model than Ebenezer for how ambitious, middling contemporaries might undertake personal reinvention while achieving social respectability. Welcome to both their stories—and those of their families and friends, on the esoteric fringes of Georgian London.

33. Thomas Erskine, *The Genuine Speech of the Hon. Thomas Erskine, in Defence of Thomas Hardy, Tried by Special Commission on a Charge of High Treason. Accurately Taken in Short Hand by Manoah Sibly, Short-Hand Writer to the City of London* (London: J. S. Jordan, 1795); *Astrologer's Magazine*, August 1793, 19–21; Bank of England Archives, Salary Ledger E41/8, E41/10; Swedenborg Society London, Library, Archive of the General Conference of the New Church, H/6, Minute Book of the Society for Promoting the Heavenly Doctrines of the New Jerusalem Church Eastcheap London, 7 May 1787–7 November 1791.

Introduction

EBENEZER SIBLY WAS, beyond any shadow of a doubt, dead. His absence must have come as a relief to Charles Wilson Saffell (1747–1816), the most recent of Sibly's string of business partners, coexecutor of his will, and author of the probate inventory that illustrates much of the following story. Sibly had his talents, but lacked a knack for the daily grind of business. Without Sibly, Saffell could build up their enterprise unencumbered by Ebenezer's impracticalities. Unfortunately, Sibly's death also posed an obstacle to the health of the business. Ebenezer Sibly, MD, was the inventor and patent-holder of *Dr Sibly's Reanimating Solar Tincture or Pabulum of Life*—a panacea advertised for its many applications, including restoring the newly dead to life if applied promptly and according to the doctor's specifications. It would be difficult to explain, then, that the doctor himself died before he turned fifty, surrounded by dozens of bottles of the stuff and sheaves of the instructional pamphlets he distributed with the medicine.[1] The only solution, Saffell reasoned, was not to let the public know Sibly was dead.

If Ebenezer Sibly's death left Saffell with a dilemma, it was the dramatic backdrop for distressing personal revelations for his brother and coexecutor of his estate, Manoah.[2] Manoah Sibly had been Ebenezer's companion in their early days—discovering astrology and moving into bookselling together. But they had drifted apart in the early 1790s, when the astrology that once drew them together became incompatible with Manoah's status as a respectable New Church minister and Bank of England official.[3] When Manoah was

1. Ebenezer Sibly, *Observations on the Virtues and Efficacy of Dr Sibly's Reanimating Solar Tincture, or Pabulum of Life* (London: printed for the author, 1792).

2. Peter Lineham, "Sibly, Manoah (1757–1840)," in *ODNB*.

3. Monod, *Solomon's Secret Arts*, 12.

asked to execute his brother's will, which, along with urging the executors to somehow find the funds to continue manufacture of *Solar Tincture*, also left legacies for multiple and concurrent wives as well as an illegitimate son whose name Ebenezer could not quite recall, Manoah was probably genuinely shocked. Manoah, perhaps the man most responsible for shepherding the recently established New Church from the radical sectarian fringe into solid bourgeois respectability, found his brother's record of financial and moral indiscretions so upsetting, and the burden of pursuing the patent medicine business so onerous and morally questionable, that he presented the will and codicils for probate, swore to their authenticity, and immediately resigned his executorship.

Ebenezer's death in 1799 brought a premature conclusion to a colorfully chaotic life, one lived on the fringes of various fascinating and interconnected esoteric subcultures meandering through late eighteenth-century London. Sibly was not the only interesting member of his family, and as they appear in retrospect to have been a tightly knit and entertaining clan, this biography of Ebenezer necessarily deals with the rest as well. The primary difficulty in tracing the histories of father Edmund Sibly and his progeny is their relative insignificance. They began and largely lived their lives in profoundly ordinary circumstances. Edmund was a shoemaker and cordwainer. He was literate, but his successive wives made their marks in the marriage registers. They were Calvinist or Particular Baptists, and so did not baptize their children as infants, leaving us to guess about their respective birthdates.[4] None of the men had much, if any, formal education. The Siblys left no correspondence of which to speak. Ebenezer and Manoah only left one holograph letter each, and both letters are typical. Ebenezer's is about a court case in which he was expecting to be sued, and Manoah's appropriately concerns publication of one of Emanuel Swedenborg's manuscripts.[5] Although, as this suggests, Ebenezer was nearly brought to law from time to time, the family generally managed to stay out of trouble, eliminating most legal records from the historian's repertoire of sources.

However, the Siblys were intelligent and ambitious for more than birth had destined them. Londoners, they were sensitive to the pulse of the city

4. Alan Sell, *Testimony and Tradition: Studies in Reformed and Dissenting Thought* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2012), 73.

5. British Library [BL], Add. MS 23670, fol. 353; Swedenborg Society Library, K/148; 3 January 1839.

and followed its trends. William St. Clair argues the House of Lords' 1774 decision definitively overturning the practice of perpetual copyright had an electrifying effect on London print culture.[6] Whatever the impetus for the dynamic growth of publishing and ancillary trades in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, the Siblys responded. By the late 1770s, Edmund and his three sons, Ebenezer, Manoah, and Job, saw the blossoming of publishing and bookselling taking place around them and en masse abandoned shoemaking for the world of books. They spent the next several decades first reading and selling books, and then writing and publishing them as well. Each of the Sibly men developed his own particular interests—from the seventeenth-century herbal physician Nicholas Culpeper to the nearly contemporary Emanuel Swedenborg, and from alchemy and magic to Quaker sermons—the Siblys pursued their specialties with diligence. Manoah, who lived until 1840, continued translating and publishing into old age.[7]

Thus it is primarily by their books, and their engagement with the printed word, that we can trace Ebenezer Sibly and his family through the byways of Georgian London. Aside from the entertainment this family provides, their interests positioned them to become historically significant for modern students of early manifestations of romanticism in England. There were better-known quack doctors than Ebenezer, as George Rousseau's work on John Hill and that of Roy Porter on James Graham the sexologist demonstrate.[8] There were Swedenborgians with more of a flair for self-aggrandizement, as is exemplified in Robert Hindmarsh's apologia, *Rise and Progress of the New Jerusalem Church*.[9] The most unique of the Siblys may have been the youngest brother, Job, who was only perhaps unintentionally a thorn in the side of prominent Quakers, as he piously (and with a sly wink), took down their sermons in shorthand for unauthorized publication and sale. But if we consider the Sibly family collectively, their myriad personal connections

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6. William St. Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), see especially 103–21. His argument is influential, but not uniformly accepted. For a different view of the Lords' decision, see Richard Sher, *The Enlightenment & the Book* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), 25–34.

7. *New Jerusalem Magazine* 14 (Boston: Otis Clapp, 1841): 311.

8. George Rousseau, *The Notorious Sir John Hill: The Man Destroyed by Ambition in the Era of Celebrity* (Lanham, MD: Leigh University Press, 2012); Roy Porter, *Health for Sale: Quackery in England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989).

9. Robert Hindmarsh, *Rise and Progress of the New Jerusalem Church*, ed. Edward Madeley (London: J. Hodson & Son, 1861).

and professional activities provide us with a privileged and perhaps singular insight into how various esoteric trends in late eighteenth-century fascination and belief affected the lives of people who lived just outside our usual range of vision. The Siblys were neither rich nor famous, nor were they desperate criminals, and thus it is their ordinariness that makes them such valuable filters through which to view the era in which they lived.

It is tempting and largely appropriate to term the Siblys and much of their milieu "romantic," but in their context, what does that mean? Certainly the timeframe of the current work, 1770–1840, fits broadly within our understanding of the romantic era, though arguably historic and intellectual trends within various London subcultures were less dependent on clearly defined chronological periods than they were on spiritual, artistic, and intellectual developments. In the case of the Siblys, the romantic urge first manifested itself as a distinct spiritual restlessness. As Raymond Brown explains, by mid-century, many Particular Baptists lamented the "abstruse high Calvinism" and "arid debate" of the sermons they endured, and were increasingly tempted away by the warmly enthusiastic preaching of John and Charles Wesley, and their colleague George Whitfield.[10] By the early 1770s, the Sibly men joined many of their brethren and took spiritual flight, looking to be "strangely warmed" by their own version of the inner light. Manoah left the most explicit account of his faith journey, but both his brothers and father followed suit. As they moved away from their Particular Baptist upbringing, the Siblys reached out to books for spiritual guidance and for new livelihoods. Manoah, who along with his wife, Sarah Lack Sibly (1755–1829) and eldest daughter, Sarah (later Sarah Allum, 1781–1846) operated a bookstore from 1779 until at least 1817, was reported to have "bought books chiefly that he might read them, and when he had made them his own by a diligent perusal, he sold them that he might buy others; but he gradually became a regular bookseller and stationer."[11] This process was surely familiar to his father and brothers as well.

We can also see the Siblys' publishing niches develop as mirrors of their individual affinities, for each man selected a subtly different route. Edmund published and sold Methodist works, including a hymnal for the Countess of

10. Raymond Brown, *The English Baptists of the Eighteenth Century* (London: The Baptist Historical Society, 1986), 76.

11. *New Jerusalem Magazine* 14: 810.

Huntingdon's (Calvinist) Connexion, and at least one book of fairly labored Methodist poetry by Hannah Wallis.[12] Manoah had a more esoteric and adventuresome turn of mind, joining the Theosophical Society to read the works of Emanuel Swedenborg in 1787, just as its members took the radical sectarian step to transform themselves into an entirely separate and new entity—the New Church signified by the New Jerusalem in the Revelation.[13] This cumbersome name was a dramatic introduction to a faith that claimed "the Doctrines of the Old Church and New Church do not agree together, NOT IN ONE SINGLE POINT OR INSTANCE, however minute."[14] Manoah embraced the "marvelous light" of the New Church, and was ordained as one of the denomination's earliest ministers on 7 April 1790, leading a congregation until his death in 1840.[15] Manoah diligently published and sold the works of Swedenborg as well as his own exegetical sermons—which he produced at the rate of two a week for most of his long career.[16] Gadfly Job Sibly is the least well documented of the brothers, as he flitted around the edges of various Quaker meetings, taking shorthand notes of sermons and publishing them with the object of "spreading the Gospel truths [they] contained."[17] Insofar as he professed any religion, Ebenezer Sibly embraced a Christian-tinged natural philosophy and pursued astrology. Closer to his heart, however, his probate inventory reveals the presence in his home of a small laboratory, suitable for manufacturing the nostrum he patented as *Dr Sibly's Reanimating Solar Tincture*. His publications range from astrology and

12. Selina Hastings Huntingdon, *A Select Collection of Hymns, Universally Sung in All the Countess of Huntingdon's Chapels* (London, 1793); Hannah Wallis, *The Female's Meditations* (London: printed for the author, 1787); Roger Lonsdale, *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets: An Oxford Anthology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 407.

13. He was balloted on 4 February 1788; Swedenborg Society London, Library, Archive of the General Conference of the New Church, H/6, Minute Book of the Society for Promoting the Heavenly Doctrines of the New Jerusalem Church Eastcheap London (New Court, Middle Temple, London), 7 May 1787–7 November 1791.

14. Emanuel Swedenborg, *Brief Exposition of the Doctrine of the New Church*, n. 96, n. 103. (According to *General Index* of Swedenborg's quotations.) Swedenborg, and John Clowes, *True Christian Religion* (London: J. Phillips, 1781), n. 648.

15. *New Jerusalem Magazine* 14: 313.

16. Thomas Clarke Shaw, *A Sermon Preached at Friar Street Chapel, Doctor's Commons on Sunday, January 3, 1841 on the Occasion of the Removal into the Spirit World of the Rev. Manoah Sibly* (London: F. Alvey, 1841), 12–13.

17. Francis Taylor, *Life of William Savery of Philadelphia, 1750–1804* (New York: Macmillan, 1925), 443.

astrological medicine to puffs for his *Solar* and *Lunar Tincture*s, but Ebenezer also laboriously copied out a potentially important collection of early modern alchemical manuscripts. Thus the Siblys experienced their romanticisms in profoundly personal ways, living it through their books and spiritual allegiances, as well as in other ways we will examine in greater detail later in this study.

1

Dramatis Personae

TRACING THE SIBLYS is a challenge. Frugal Manoah Sibly, who rose early, was faithful to his wife, tended a bookstore, took shorthand for the City of London courts, worked for the Bank of England, and ministered to a congregation for fifty years, is the easiest to document.[1] Accounts of his life are also tedious in an early nineteenth-century hagiographic sort of way. The primary subject of this study, Ebenezer, was a cad and a character who lived fast and died relatively young. Ebenezer was frequently on the verge of trouble but was never hauled before the bench, except in 1794 when he was called to answer for bankruptcy. Ebenezer shows up fleetingly in histories of sexual education, freemasonry, quack medicine, astrology, alchemy, practical magic, politicking, and lottery frauds. He was also a plagiarist and "editor" on a massive scale, while writing very little of the thousands of pages he published. Ebenezer makes for a fascinating biographical subject, but as Lincolnshire "Cunning Man" John Parkins observed of Sibly's several concurrent wives—one simply could not live with the man.[2] The youngest brother, Job, leaves scarcely any record at all.

It is also distressing we know so little about the women in the family, and nearly all of that was circumscribed by their status as wives and daughters. Father Edmund married either three or four times, but was apparently more regular in his matrimonial practices than Ebenezer, and was married to only one woman at a time. We know only a little about his daughter Charity

1. Manoah preached three years before accepting ordination.

2. Francis X. King, *The Flying Sorcerer* (Oxford: Mandrake, 1992), 40; Parkins (1771–1830) is another curious character, about whom little is known. He may have been the John Parkins imprisoned in Grantham, Lincolnshire for a year in 1819, convicted of fraud. The National Archives [TNA] HO/27/17, 429; *Gentleman's Magazine*, January 1830, 93.

(1772–1847), who married William George, a print publisher who eventually took over Edmund's bookstore on Brick Lane and remains in the directories at that address through 1823.[3] After George died, Charity married William Anderson, with uncle Manoah and cousin Sophia standing as witnesses.[4] More can be said with some conviction about Edmund's eldest daughter, Kezia. When she died in childbirth in 1787, her brother Ebenezer published a decumbiture of her final illness, along with a fascinating character sketch.[5] Manoah's wife, Sarah Lack, was two years his senior.[6] She appears as an invaluable helpmeet who embraced Swedenborg's teachings, presided over the family bookstore, and bore Manoah eleven children. Aside from her exemplary piety and maternal dedication, little is known about her as an individual. Of Job's wife, virtually nothing is known but her name—Mary Chapman. One wishes for more information, especially because she made her mark rather than signature in the parish register when she married Job in 1782, but apparently worked alongside him in their shop and continued the business after his death.[7] The question of her literacy is fascinating, especially in this bookish family. Mary bore at least four children, three of whom lived to be baptized. In keeping with Ebenezer's caddish persona, he had three wives and at least one other liaison, all more or less at the same time—though he generally lived alone. His daughter, Urania (1782–1878), is the best documented of the Sibly women. She never married, but eventually took at least partial control of the patented *Solar Tincture* recipe, which she manufactured and sold until her own death, aged ninety-six. Of these

3. www.londonlives.org (2012), LL ref: t18010218-23, LL ref: t18090626-56; http://bookhistory.blogspot.com/2007/01/streets-b.html; London Metropolitan Archives [LMA], St. Peter le Poer, Register of marriages 1771–1812, P69/PET2/A/01/Ms 4094/2.

4. LMA Saint Mary at Lambeth, Register of marriages, P85/MRY1/403. Ancestry.

5. A favored technique of medical astrologers, especially Culpeper, a decumbiture is a diagnostic and predictive star chart based on when a patient first takes to bed with an illness. It is also used to indicate effective therapies, especially herbal preparations. Dylan Warren-Davis, "An Introduction to Decumbiture, Part 1," (2006), http://www.skyscript.co.uk/decumbiture1.html.

6. Sarah (1752–1829) was the daughter of Josias Lack and Elizabeth Hines, married in 1737 at St Leonard Shoreditch. Her sister Elizabeth was baptized in 1739, and Ann in 1749. Josias died in 1791; LMA St Leonard Shoreditch, P91/LEN/A/008/MS07498, Item 001; St James, Clerkenwell, P76/JS1/009; St Mary, Islington, P83/MRY1/1167. Ancestry.

7. *Exeter Working Papers*, "The London Book Trades, 1775–1800: A Topographical Guide. Streets: C," (28 February 2002), http://bookhistory.blogspot.com/2007/01/streets-c.html. Mary is probably erroneously listed under Manoah's name: Mary Sibley, bookseller, at 4, Carthusian Street, Aldersgate 1817.

worthy Sibly women, only Urania left enough of a documentary imprint to fill a chapter in this study.

Having dealt briefly with the family as a whole, we now need to turn to slightly more detailed introductions to several individual members of the Sibly family. They are treated in birth order, with the exception of Ebenezer himself, whose biography should appear between those of Kezia and Manoah—but whose details are woven into the subsequent narrative of the book.

Father Edmund Sibly

Edmund Sibly was the patriarch who set the pattern for the religious, educational, and economic activities of the family during his apparently long life. It is disappointing that a man who sold books left such a thin paper trail about himself. His birth and death dates are not known with certainty, though we may possibly fix his death between April and June 1799. Edmund is listed in William Holden's 1799 trade directory, which indicates on its title page that it was corrected at the end of April of that year.[8] However, he is not mentioned in Ebenezer's 1799 will, which was probably written in early June. Because Ebenezer names all his other close living relatives in the will, we can presume Edmund died in the interim. *Our* Edmund may have been the Edmund Sibly who married Mary Cunningham at St Giles-without-Cripplegate in 1742, and he was certainly the Edmund Sibly who married Mary Larkholm of Stoke Newington in 1747 within the confines of the Fleet Prison.[9] Either marriage probably places his birth in the 1720s, and firmly locates the family in London. Though it is not clear who his parents were, there were several families in the parish of St Giles-without-Cripplegate who shared masculine first names (Job, Edmund, William), and were leather workers of one sort or another. Edmund was probably part of this extended clan, and he first appeared in tax records in 1758, living in Rose Court within that parish.[10] His wife Mary Larkholm was the mother of Edmund's two eldest surviving children, Kezia and Ebenezer. Edmund married again in 1754, this time to Charity Standard from Misterton, Somerset. Banns were read both in London and Somerset,

8. William Holden, *Holden's Triennial Directory, 1799* (London: W. Richardson, 1799), titlepage.

9. TNA RG 7, Clandestine marriage registers, Wyatt's register, 24 April 1747.

10. LMA *London Land Tax Record*, MS 11316/Vol 178, St Giles-without-Cripplegate, Forestreet, Rose Court, 1758. Ancestry.

and their marriage was celebrated on 22 July in Misterton.[11] We can identify Charity as the mother of Manoah and Job, but there may have been other children whose names have not been preserved. Manoah tells us Charity died in 1768, possibly in childbirth, as an infant burial is recorded that November in Bunhill Fields, a London burying ground favored by Nonconformists.[12] In 1769, Edmund was married a final time, to Elizabeth Read.[13] The William Sibly who served as a witness may have been Edmund's brother, and he was probably the William that son Job was named after—Job appears as "Job Wm" in the 1805 London land tax assessment.[14]

The 1772 birth of Edmund and Elizabeth's daughter, Charity Sibly, was recorded in 1780 in the Nonconformist registry at Dr Williams's Library.[15] This registry, which the family used intermittently, was instituted in the early 1740s by the Dissenting Deputies to enable Nonconformists who practiced Believer's Baptism to nonetheless document births. From what we know of her, Charity is an intriguing figure. She managed to acquire leasehold possession of her father's home in Spitalfields, and buy up leases to some neighboring properties as well, so that by the early 1840s she is identified in the land tax ledgers as the proprietor.[16] In the 1830s, she is listed in directories as a bookseller in her own right, and she is recorded in various parish and tax records until her death in February 1847.[17] Ebenezer was fond of her, standing witness at her first marriage and leaving her a bequest of £80 in his will.[18] Though Charity probably never received that gift, she returned the favor, leaving £75 to "my dear niece Urania Sibly."[19] Charity outlived all her siblings,

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11. The register shows that she made her mark, rather than signing. Somerset Heritage Service; Taunton, Somerset, England; *Somerset Parish Records, 1538–1914*, D\P\mis/2/1/2.

12. TNA *Bunhill Fields Register, from 1766 to 1771*. "November 1, 1768 Mr Sibly child from Towerhill in a grave." Ancestry. *New Jerusalem Magazine* 4: 310.

13. LMA P69/GIS/A/01/Ms 6421/1, St Giles Cripplegate, Marriages, 1754–1781, P69/GIS/A/01/Ms 6421/1. Ancestry.

14. LMA *London Land Tax Record*, St Luke's Oldstreet, Glasshouse Yard & Goswell Street, 1805. Ancestry & FMP.

15. Dr Williams's Library, *General Register of Births*, RG 5/21/54. Ancestry. When James Lampard's birth was registered in 1798, the date of his birth was given as 14 November 1780.

16. *London Land Tax Record*, Christchurch, Brick Lane, 1843. Ancestry & FMP.

17. John Pigot, J. Pigot & Co, *Pigot and Co.'s Directory of London and Its Suburbs* (London: Michael Winton, 1839), 43

18. TNA PROB 11/1334, first codicil, E. Sibly, 1799. Ancestry.

19. TNA PROB 11/2049, will, C. Anderson, 1847. Ancestry.

and with no children herself, left myriad modest bequests to nieces, nephews, the grand and great-grandchildren of her second husband, and especially to friends and Nonconformist charities and chapels. By the time of her death, she was affluent, leaving properties on Brick Lane and on Church Road in Stoke Newington to her executors, and instructing them to give £130 toward the construction of a new chapel in Stamford Hill and bury her plainly at George Burder's Meeting House in Fetter Lane.

In 1826, Manoah Sibly was the subject of a sketch in the *New Jerusalem Magazine*, which identified his parents as Particular Baptists.[20] We can document that Edmund Sibly lived most, if not all, of his adult life in the city. He undoubtedly worshipped there as well, attending one or more of the Particular Baptist congregations described in Walter's history of Nonconformist churches in and around the metropolis.[21] Wilson documents dozens of Baptist congregations, many of them short-lived.[22] Most left scant records, and it is not at all clear with which Edmund and his family affiliated. We can speak more specifically about Manoah, whose biography focuses on a spiritual journey that we may take as roughly consistent with those pursued by his father and siblings, though probably Manoah's was more complex and ultimately more satisfying.

As a young man, Manoah explored the new congregations that had been called into being by the First Great Awakening, before 1750. The history of this movement is better known in the American colonies, but it also involved much of Protestant Europe in the 1730s and 1740s, and can be particularly seen in the activities of the Wesley brothers and George Whitfield.[23] In 1777, Manoah published a sermon preached by Colnbrook preacher William Walker at the founding of a new Particular (Calvinist) Baptist congregation meeting at Coachmakers-Hall in Noble-Street. Walker was involved in the short-lived (1775–82) Eastern Association of Baptists, one of several organizations attempting to reinvigorate Baptist preaching and find a theological basis for cooperation between Particular and General Baptists.[24] Manoah

20. *New Jerusalem Magazine and Theological Inspector* (London: Thomas Goyder, 1826): 1.

21. Alexander Gordon, "Wilson, Walter (1781–1847)," rev. K. D. Reynolds, in *ODNB*.

22. Walter Wilson, *The History and Antiquities of Dissenting Churches and Meeting Houses, in London, Westminster, and Southwark*, 4 vols. (London: W. Button and Son, 1810).

23. Frank Lambert, *Inventing the "Great Awakening"* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

24. Christopher Stell, "The Eastern Association of Baptist Churches, 1775–1782," *The Baptist Quarterly* 27 (1977): 14–26.

moved on to worship with the Particular Baptists in Red-Cross-Street in the early 1780s. There he listened to the sermons of Thomas Mabbott (1742–1800), whose high-Calvinist preaching Manoah later reported left him in "great distress of mind, approaching to the despair of ever possessing real spiritual knowledge."[25] Ultimately rejecting Calvinism in favor of universal restitution, Manoah left the congregation around 1786 and joined a small group that met for independent services. Finally, and probably through his proprietorship of a popular esoteric bookstore, Manoah met Alexander Wilderspin (1722–93), who introduced him to the circle of Swedenborg's readers in London in 1787. Like Manoah, Wilderspin was a man of modest education, but inclined to an intellectual form of mysticism.[26] Thanks to Wilderspin, Manoah soon felt certain he had found his spiritual home and an earthly community in the separatist Church of the New Jerusalem, which we shall call the New Church in this study, to avoid confusion, and to differentiate it from the wider body of believers in Swedenborg's revelation, which will be identified as the New Jerusalem. "Swedenborgian" continues to be a useful term outside of these relatively small circles, encompassing both readers and even some nonreaders who were more generally influenced by Swedenborg and his ideas, such as Ebenezer Sibly, who references Swedenborg in *An Illustration*.

Over the years, the Siblys have often been identified as Bristol natives, but all extant records place *this* Sibly family in and around London for most of their lives.[27] Only Ebenezer is known to have lived elsewhere. He was in Portsmouth from 1779 to 1784, Bristol from 1784 until sometime in 1787 when he was run out of town, and even in Ipswich in Suffolk for the duration of 1790.[28] In their youth, all three sons learned shoemaking, and engaging, if largely fictitious, sketches of Ebenezer and Manoah appear in two nineteenth-century histories of distinguished practitioners of the craft.[29] Job is described in the late 1790s, albeit by a critic, as an impoverished and nearly

25. *New Jerusalem Magazine* 14: 312.

26. Phillip McCann, *Samuel Wilderspin and the Infant School Movement* (Beckenham, Kent: Croom Helm Ltd., 1982), 3.

27. Patrick Curry, "Sibly, Ebenezer (1751–*c.*1799)," in *ODNB*.

28. W. Batley, BL Add. MS 25336, fol. 27.

29. W. Winks, *Lives of Illustrious Shoemakers*, 287–90; *Crispin Anecdotes* (London: Hamilton & Adams, 1827), 85. Job is described as "a very poor man, a shoemaker," in F. Taylor, *William Savery*, 422–23.

illiterate cobbler.[30] There remain no official apprenticeship records for any of the brothers, but Edmund is described as a shoemaker and cordwainer in the apprenticeship books, paying duties on apprentices in the 1750s and early 1760s, so it is likely his sons learned the trade from him.[31] One of Edmund's former apprentices, Hezekiah Harwood, stood as a witness at Ebenezer's first marriage in 1770, so we can be confident this cordwainer is the correct Edmund Sibly.[32]

When Edmund's wife Charity died in 1768, Manoah recalls he and his brothers were taken out of school and left to their own devices in terms of academics. This would not have been a burden for Ebenezer, who at seventeen was on the verge of manhood, and already destined to be a shoemaker. It was more problematic for Manoah, who was a precocious eleven, and Job, who was only eight. What happened next is indicative of the powerful inclination toward autodidacticism in the Sibly family, and again we know about it largely because of Manoah's adult reminiscences, shared and later published for the benefit of his coreligionists. His 1840 obituary relates,

> He lost his mother at the age of eleven; upon which his father, who had no idea of the advantages of regular instruction, immediately took him from school; so that thenceforward he had to become his own instructer; and although he encountered numerous obstacles, his active and industrious mind enabled him to overcome them all. He would rise at three or four o'clock in the morning, and wrapping himself in a blanket, would study for two or three hours.[33]

The obituary notes that a wealthy man once offered to send Manoah to "college" to prepare for the ministry. Edmund refused his permission, saying "that he left it to God Almighty to make ministers: he should not."[34] Since the English universities would not have welcomed Manoah as a Nonconformist,

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30. Robert Smith, ed., "William Savery's Letter to His Wife, respecting the Printing His Testimonies," *The Friend: A Religious and Literary Journal* 24 (1851): 415.

31. TNA IR 1/22, Hezekiah Horwood, 24 December 1759; Will Cooper, 13 June 1761. James Lackington describes Ebenezer as a shoemaker in his 1792 memoir. James Lackington, *Memoirs of the First Forty-Five Years of the Life of James Lackington* (London: J. Lackington, 1792), 56.

32. LMA St Giles Cripplegate, Marriages, 1754–1781, P69/GIS/A/01/Ms 6421/1, 1 May 1770. Ancestry.

33. *New Jerusalem Magazine* 14: 310.

34. *New Jerusalem Magazine* 14: 140.

one of the newly established Baptist academies must have been intended. Ultimately, the only one of the brothers to acquire a university degree was Ebenezer, who purchased one. Despite Manoah's lack of formal education, by the time he was twenty he published *A Critical Essay on Jer[emiah], XXXIII. 16*, which demonstrated proficiency in Hebrew, and on the title page he claimed to be a teacher of Greek, Hebrew "&c."[35]

Kezia Sibly Lampard

Edmund's eldest surviving child was a daughter, Kezia. She was the daughter of Mary Larkholm, and was Ebenezer's only full sibling. Kezia was born in 1748 and died in 1787 of complications following childbirth. Her rather younger husband, James Round Lampard (b. 1757), came from a family long active in City of London trade and government.[36] Lampard and his father Leonard Lampard were cordwainers.[37] Kezia and James married in February 1780, and unusually for Sibly women, she signed the register rather than making a mark. Their first child, a son they named James, arrived almost precisely nine months later, and his birth was eventually recorded at Dr Williams's Library.[38] Kezia and James had at least five children, but only James and his sister, Rebecca (b. 1785), seem to have survived childhood.[39] James is mentioned in Ebenezer Sibly's will, and James and Rebecca received bequests from their aunt Charity (Sibly, George) Anderson. One of the persistent frustrations of researching family histories is the paucity of records about women. Even when the distaff appears in official records, she frequently lacks a complete name, often appearing simply as "Mrs" or by her given name, without a surname attached. But for her brother's loving (and knowing) sketch, we would know very little

35. Manoah Sibly, *A Critical Essay on Jer. XXXIII. 16* (London: George Keith, 1777).

36. Emanuel Matthews, *A True and Exact List of the Right Honourable the Lords Spiritual and Temporal, and Commons of Great Britain* (London: Emanuel Matthews, 1727), 78.

37. In 1788, James is described as a carpenter in the parish register.

38. TNA, *General Register Office: Birth Certificates from the Presbyterian, Independent and Baptist Registry and from the Wesleyan Methodist Metropolitan Registry; RG 5: 21* Extract: "These are to Certify that James Lampard Son of James Round Lampard and Kezia his wife, who was Daughter of Edmund & Mary Sibly was Born in Beach [Beech] Lane in the Parish of St Giles Cripplegate Without in the County of Middlesex this 14th day of November in the year 1780 at whose birth were present Mary Reynolds, Hannah Smith. Registered at Dr Williams's Library, in Redcrcoss-Street, near Cripplegate, London, June 13, 1798."

39. Rebecca Lambert, 2 September, 1785. Baptist Beulah Chapel, St George in the East, Stepney, London. Familysearch.

about Kezia. Over 1784–90, Ebenezer published the volumes of *A Complete Illustration of the Celestial Science of Astrology*.[40] A massive work, it contains the nativities of historical figures and individuals chosen as "typical" examples of various situations. Most of the celebrity nativities were derived from John Gadbury's seventeenth-century work, *Collectio Geniturarum*, but some of the common examples were people Sibly knew.[41] Sibly chose Kezia as one of his exemplars—that of a mother dying in childbed.

According to Ebenezer, Kezia Lampard was born on 7 October 1748.[42] Chalking it all up to her natal stars, Sibly describes his sister as a "female of a sharp wit, and lively disposition." He describes her as being of

> middling stature, inclining to brevity, hot, and fiery temper, rash and invincible in all disputes, and ungovernably violent in hasty quarrels, yet soon appeased by good nature and submission, which at all times induce her to be tractable and industrious, and for the most part sober and frugal.[43]

One can sense Ebenezer had felt Kezia's wrath, especially since Manoah, many years her junior, describes her as being the dominant maternal figure in the household of his youth. Manoah's obituary records,

> After the death of his mother, her place was supplied by an elder sister, to whom he applied in every difficulty, and to whom he was so affectionately attached, that when she married, and subsequently died in childbirth, and he was informed of the circumstance, so great was his emotion that he fell senseless on the floor.[44]

Ebenezer describes Kezia as being "only moderately handsome," with natal stars that ensured "a mean and obscure life."[45] Whether it was due to alignment of the stars, as Ebenezer argued, or family duties, as Manoah suggests, Kezia did not marry until she was thirty-one, in 1780. She and

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40. E. Sibly, *An Illustration*.

41. John Gadbury, *Collectio Geniturarum* (London: James Cottrel, 1662).

42. E. Sibly, *An Illustration*, 817–20.

43. E. Sibly, *An Illustration*, 818.

44. *New Jerusalem Magazine* 14: 140.

45. E. Sibly, *An Illustration*, 818.

her husband lived in St Giles-without-Cripplegate but were at one point connected with the Particular Baptist Beulah Chapel in the parish of St George's in the East, Stepney. A year after Kezia's death, Lampard married Esther Preston, a widow. Repeating a curious naming pattern we see elsewhere in the family, James and Esther named their first daughter after his late wife. This Keziah died in infancy, and was buried at St George in the East.

Manoah Sibly

Manoah Sibly tells us he was born in London in 1757 to Edmund's wife Charity Standard. Though he shared a mother with his younger brother, Job, he seems to have had a closer relationship with Ebenezer, with similar intellectual interests and the ambition to leave shoemaking. Thus, much of his personal story is intertwined with Ebenezer's, and it belongs in later chapters. Still, a brief sketch here will simplify explanations later on.

If his adult reminiscences are to be believed, it must have been apparent early on that Manoah lived to read and loved language. As a young adult, he struggled to find an occupation that indulged his intellectual passions. Making shoes was out, but happily he acquired shorthand. Joscelyn Godwin claims Sibly invented his own method based on Hebrew, which is intriguing but cannot be substantiated, as no examples of his shorthand manuscripts survive.[46] Godwin's suggestion might have been based on Manoah's genuine interest in Hebrew, demonstrated in his first published work, a retranslation of Jeremiah 33:16.[47] Still, such stenographic innovation is unlikely, given the variety of systems readily to hand in eighteenth-century London. Isaac Pitman's *History of Shorthand* estimates as many as seventy systems might have been in use in English at the end of the eighteenth century.[48] A brief survey of the titles available in Eighteenth Century Collections Online reveals at least forty named systems in print in Britain, some of which went through a dozen or more editions over the course of the century. By the time Manoah and Job plied the trade, the system developed by Thomas Gurney dominated London practice. His book *Brachygraphy* appeared in numerous editions, making its

46. Joscelyn Godwin, *The Theosophical Enlightenment* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 106.

47. M. Sibly, *A Critical Essay*.

48. Isaac Pitman, *A History of Shorthand*, 3rd ed. (London: Isaac Pitman & Sons, 1891), 13–14.