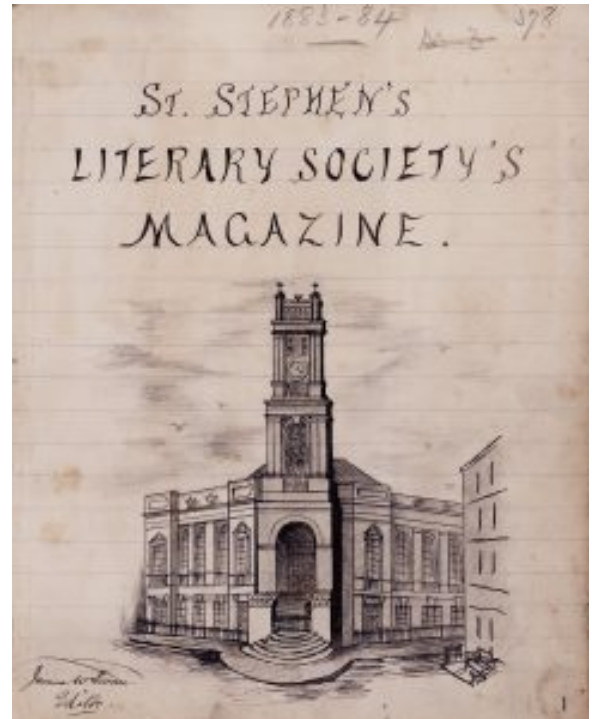


# St. Stephen's Literary Society's Magazine; also St. Stephen's Young Men's Guild, Magazine of Literary Section



St Stephen's Literary Society, *St. Stephen's Literary Society's Magazine*, [title page], 1883-84, p. 1 (National Records of Scotland, CH2/607/122).

## Overview

St Stephen's Church is located at 105 St Stephen Street in Edinburgh. (For further details about this church, see the article, '[Saint Stephen's Stockbridge](#)', on the [Edinburgh-Stockbridge.com](#) website.) The information that we currently have on this group comes from the manuscript magazine that was produced by a society of young men who were associated with the church.

The contributions to this magazine were originally read aloud at society meetings dedicated to the purpose called 'Magazine Nights'. These were meetings that were

devoted to the reading of original essays (or occasionally poems) written by group members that were submitted to the Magazine Editor beforehand. The Editor would be responsible for collecting, occasionally selecting, and reading the pieces aloud to the group (more rarely this was done by the contributor him/herself) on the appointed night. This would be followed by 'criticism' — or discussion on the piece's positive *and* negative points — by the group members.

After the meetings, these contributions were sometimes bound and saved in the society's library (if they had one, and the St Stephen's group did) or would be kept by one of the office bearers. In these cases, it was intended that the magazine was to be preserved and that group members would have access to it at a later date. It is of note that literary and mutual improvement groups used the term 'magazine' to refer to the oral as well as the material medium.

There are four extant issues of this society's magazine, with the last issue (1889-90) having two parts. Each issue has a variety of articles, essays, original poems and artwork. The contributions are signed by their respective authors/artists using either pen-names, their own names, or sometimes with presumably identifiable initials.

Following each piece in the 1883-84 issue (at least; in the later issues, it is unclear if the blank pages, where present, were intended specifically for criticisms, as very few remarks were added), there are blank pages left for readers to write their 'criticisms', a practice that a number of societies encouraged. While some pieces have several readers' responses, the pages following others were left blank.

The comments run from serious remarks of literary criticism, offering praise and/or ways in which authors might improve their pieces, but it was not uncommon for the reader/writer to speak in jest. For example, after reading a (parodic?) love poem entitled, 'My Grace', by 'A Member', J.M. wrote, 'a purer specimen of doggerel was never found printed on the outside of a tea-bag'. Similarly, J.R. wrote:

'We would consider it very bad Grace did we not express our indebtedness to the author of "My Grace" for his graceful effusion. We laughed so heartily over it, that a severe attack of toothache from which we were suffering was entirely removed. We therefore gracefully record our thanks [...]' (St Stephen's Parish Church, *St. Stephen's Literary Society Magazine*, 1883-84, pp. 27-9).

The light, breezy tone of some of these comments suggest that the members knew each other's handwriting, style and/or pen-names, and that whilst the magazine was a forum for the 'improvement' of members' writing skills, it could also be used for

entertainment and amusement.

**Name of Club, Society or Group That Produced the Magazine**

St. Stephen's/Stockbridge Parish Church (Edinburgh)

**Date of Existence**

1883?-1890?

**Dates of Magazine**

1883/1884; 1887/1888; 1888/1893; 1889/1890

**Number of Issues**

4

**Manuscript/Published Magazine**

Manuscript

**Contents and Contributions**

Advertisements (humorous); Essays; Fiction/Narratives; Letters to Editor; Poems (original); Readers' Criticisms; Tables of Contents; Title pages

**Repository**

National Records of Scotland

**Reference**

CH2/607/122;

CH2/607/123;

CH2/607/124;

CH2/607/125/1-2