Eliza Orme's Ambitions
Politics and the Law in Victorian London

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Cover illustration: Eliza Orme (1889, The Cameron Studio), ©The estate of Jenny Loxton Young. Background: Sketchepedia / Freepik
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2. Before Law, 1848 to 1871

Eliza Orme was born into a family whose members were principled about the wise use of their wealth and privilege. The Ormes were vigorous people who appreciated artistic beauty and good design. They cultivated relationships with some of the leading painters, poets, intellectuals, and illustrators of the period. The father was a successful businessman in the liquor trade. Their London home was on Avenue Road, near Regent's Park and his distillery was in Blackfriars, on the Thames River near St Paul's Cathedral. Oddly enough, we know more about the mother than the father in this family, because the elder Eliza Orme brought a network of high-powered literary and political connections to her marriage, whereas Charles Orme's interests can only be guessed at through the sort of people he entertained and the support he must have given to his wife's political and cultural interests. ('Must have given', because the stereotypical nineteenth-century paterfamilias could and often did shut such interests down. But not this one.)

What follows is the result of hundreds of hours of research, none of it straightforward, much of it a matter of fruitless scrambles down rabbit holes, and a lot of it gleaned from scrutinizing census records that have only become available quite recently. All the relevant people's names, along with birth and death dates and family connections, are listed in the 'Major Figures, and Families' section of the Appendix to this volume.

Eliza Andrews, known as 'Mrs Charles Orme' after her marriage (but I call her Eliza Orme senior) was the daughter of an intellectual clergyman. The Rev. Edward Andrews tutored John Ruskin as that young man prepared to become the polymath critic who dominated the intellectual and artistic worlds of the late nineteenth century. To his credit, the Rev. Mr. Andrews tutored his own daughters too,

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in Greek, Latin, and French. In fact, some of these girls have been credited with introducing Ruskin to the Pre-Raphaelite artists he later championed. Two more of the Andrews sisters married two brothers: Emily, the famous poet Coventry Patmore (which makes Emily the model for the original 'angel in the house' of her husband's poem and of Victorian mythology), and Georgina, George Morgan Patmore. Georgina's husband died in 1856, and she became a member of the Orme household. Whatever Coventry Patmore may have anticipated, this family rejected his poem's vision of cloistered domestic femininity. Flora Masson (Eliza senior's granddaughter and Georgina's great-niece) wrote that 'Among the friends who used to gather in the Avenue Road garden on summer evenings, or round the hospitable dinner-table, were the Tennyson family, the Rossetti family, and the two Pre-Raphaelites, Thomas Woolner and Holman Hunt'. Let me decode that for you: Flora was dropping several of the most distinguished names of the time, older ones like Tennyson in the same breath with some of the latest avant-garde artists.

Eliza Orme senior quickly became a sort of patron of the arts, and especially of the group who called themselves the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. Because of that, I have been able to trace some descriptions of her appearance and personality, and also some references to objects associated with both her and them. The artist John Brett made the charcoal drawing that is probably her portrait (see Fig. 1). Brett described Mrs Orme as 'highly intellectual, cultivated and fascinating.' The writer William Rossetti described her as a 'lady ... of rich physique, with luminous dark eyes.' William's brother, the poet-illustrator Dante Gabriel Rossetti, noted that he and William and their sister Christina had spent several evenings with the Ormes, 'and indeed, I think we may now consider ourselves in the circle of family friends'. Dante Gabriel Rossetti drew a sketch of the sculptor Thomas Woolner and gave it to the senior Eliza Orme because she was Woolner's friend and patron. This sketch portrait remained in the family for decades and is now in the collections of the National Portrait Gallery. Woolner himself made and gave to her a medallion of Tennyson; he also made medallions of the mother and two of her daughters, Rosaline and Helen.

Fig. 1 Portrait of a woman, possibly Eliza Orme senior (1854–55, John Brett), ©The British Museum.

Rosaline Orme married David Masson, a rather glamorous, up-and-coming young man who brought a more intellectual and political kind of modernity into this artistic household. He was one of the first scholars of English literature (which, believe it or not, was new as a university subject in those days). He was a well-connected editor and journalist as well as an academic. Through Masson the family got to know John Stuart Mill, who later became an important influence on the younger Eliza's political and professional choices. Thomas Carlyle, Douglas Jerrold, W. M. Thackeray, and Giuseppe Mazzini visited too, along with the Pre-Raphaelite artists already mentioned, and a host of lesser-known figures. The Massons' first two children were born at the Regent's Park house. Even after they moved to Scotland, for David to take up the Chair of English Literature at Edinburgh University, the family spent a month every year with their London family, and the London relatives also went north to reciprocate the visit. A few years later another Orme daughter, Julia, repeated her sister's pattern when she married the physician and scientist Henry Charlton Bastian and remained in her parents' home with her professional-man husband and growing family.

The influence of these two live-in brothers-in-law on the young Eliza Orme may have been profound, but this is something I have to speculate about, piecing together the evidence that exists and probing the silences. In Masson's case it seems to have been the people he knew and perhaps his worldly demeanour, rather than his specific subject, English literature. Whereas Bastian was a physician specializing in neurology and psychology; and Eliza went on to study physics and chemistry at university, and later taught chemistry to school children. Two of her brothers were also doctors, so it is quite plausible that either they or Bastian influenced her initial decision to study science, perhaps intending to go into medicine. What we do not know is why she changed her mind and turned to law (although I have my own ideas about that). Meanwhile we do know about the influence of her mother. The elder Eliza Orme was active in the early days of the women's suffrage movement, signing petitions and attending meetings—and sometimes taking her daughter along.

They do not seem to have been an especially religious family. The only evidence I have found on that score is the census records, which indicate that several of the children were christened at Calvinist independent chapels. But with distilled spirits as the foundation of the family's fortunes, and such a disparate, cultured, and sophisticated circle of friends, they do not seem to have been particularly puritanical. Nor, as far as I know, were they pillars of the Church of England.

I write in more detail about each of Eliza's parents and siblings in Chapter 4, but for now let us take a snapshot of the family in 1861, when the census generated its record of a household of seventeen people including twelve-year-old Eliza. Both parents were in their prime: Charles Orme was fifty-four years of age and the elder Eliza was forty-five. All their children were still at home. The eldest, Charles Edward Orme, was a surgeon and unmarried at twenty-seven. Rosaline Masson was twenty-five (David was thirty-eight, and their children Flora and David Orme Masson were five and three). Next in line should have been Helen Foster Orme, who would have been twenty-four, but she had died in 1857. Julia Orme (later Bastian) was twenty-one; her brother Campbell was eighteen. The three youngest sisters were Blanche, Eliza, and Beatrice at sixteen, twelve, and three years old respectively. Georgina Patmore was thirty-four. There were four servants in residence, who must have kept extremely busy taking care of this multigenerational family.

What was Eliza Orme doing and thinking in 1861, at twelve years of age? We know very little and have to speculate (responsibly) and imagine (intuitively) the rest. We do know that she and Rosaline and one other sister attended Bedford College for Women, though not exactly when. It was one of the first two secondary schools for girls in England. This already set them apart from most other girls of their class, but what made Eliza begin to think about pushing the limits of what women could do? Perhaps there were inspirational teachers whose influence has gone unrecorded. But I also wonder what her mother, her aunts Georgina and Emily and her father's sisters Caroline and Emily Orme, had to say about Eliza's ambitions? How much was she troubled by the death of her sister Helen? What were the rivalries and alliances among that large family of siblings and cousins? (The last-born Orme, Beatrice, was younger than the first Masson child, Flora.) Did Eliza enjoy the visits of her parents' and David Masson's worldly friends and colleagues, and listen in to their talk? Did she join in the conversations?

I speculate, and imagine, that there must have been a good deal of support at home for her ambitions. She faced so many obstacles and prejudices during a remarkable career that it is hard to believe such setbacks could have started at home. Especially since there is evidence of strong role models in that home, for intellectual, and even feminist, womanhood. So they were probably supportive when Eliza, at nineteen, decided to be among the first women in England to study at a university. Some of those institutions, under pressure, had begun cautiously to allow this innovation, although they generally postponed the awarding of actual degrees to women until decades later. In May of 1869 the University of London set its first examination for women students to qualify. Eliza Orme was one of nine women (later remembered as 'the London nine') who wrote that rigorous exam, and one of the six who passed it. Around the same time, though, she also applied to be a member of the initial class at Girton College, Cambridge, aiming to take French, Mathematics and Chemistry while politely declining studies in Scripture. So she was still considering her options. We know that she did go to University College London in 1872, first studying the sciences and later switching to law; we do not know why she chose London over Cambridge. It would have been more difficult to pursue a legal education at Cambridge, but she did not decide upon the law until after a couple of years of study.

Those years of the late 1860s and early 1870s were exhilarating ones for people with progressive ideas, about politics, about law, about women's rights. John Stuart Mill's *The Subjection of Women* was published in 1869. Sheldon Amos, writing anonymously in the *Westminster Review*, opined that 'With the appearance of this work, we trust the old era of female subordination has finally passed away' and in the next paragraph went on to comment favourably on a new edition of Barbara Bodichon's *Brief Summary in Plain Language of the most important Laws of England concerning Women*. The Orme family not only knew Mill and Amos, they knew Bodichon, too, and both the elder and the younger Eliza Orme were connected to the movement centred in Langham Place of which Bodichon was a leader. In Chapter 3 of this book, I speculate that the seeds of Eliza Orme's commitment to the study and practice of law might even have planted by Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon.

As the next census came around, when Eliza Orme was twenty-two in 1871, most of the rest of the family were still at home, but she was away at work, teaching chemistry in Lydia Millicent, a village near Swindon in Wiltshire. Along with a companion (or perhaps it was more of a chaperone), she lived in the home of a retired barrister and his wife, Joseph and Mary A. Snowe. The person described as 'companion of a lady' was Jane G. Scales and apart from young Eliza there seems to have been no other 'lady' in the household requiring companionship or a chaperone. I have not yet been able to identify any more connections among these people than the census record, nor any information as to why Eliza Orme travelled from London to Wiltshire for work. Perhaps there was an advertisement and she merely applied, or perhaps someone in her vast family network facilitated the arrangement. A few years later, Frances Buss, one of the pioneers of girls' education, was counting on help with science classes at the Camden School for Girls from Miss Orme and a Mr Aveling. Perhaps Miss Buss knew something it took me a long time to find out: that Eliza Orme had already had experience as a teacher of science.

I want to pause for a moment over this path Orme did not take, towards a career in the hard sciences: chemistry or physics or mathematics. Having passed the University of London's rigorous Special Examination in 1869, she wrote another examination for women in 1870, this time for a Special Certificate in Physics and Chemistry. The

latter, presumably, qualified her for the teaching job in Wiltshire. When she began to consider moving to the study of law in December 1872, just before her twenty-fourth birthday, she was still intending to take similar certificates in three subjects the following spring: Mathematics, Mechanics, and Political Economy. Certificates like that were hardly the equivalent of the formal degrees that women were still denied, but they were useful preparation and credentials for teaching and might lay the groundwork for later work or further study.

If this book were a novel, the main character's decision to move from the hard sciences to the study of law might be a turning point, and some compelling reason for it would be expounded and justified. As it is, we have to speculate. Perhaps, least original but still plausible, someone might advance the theory of a love affair that ended badly. Or perhaps Eliza had been encouraged towards medicine, by parents or brothers-in-law or other family members, but came independently to a new ambition while away from home. She may have shaken off the influence of a mentor, some man of science whose influence waned as she grew more confident and mature, or as she got to know him better. Was her Wiltshire host Joseph Snowe's practice of law an influence? Or did she face there the realization that teaching was not her métier, though for a woman it was inevitable as the foundation for a career in science? This is not a novel, and we do not know why Eliza Orme forsook mathematics and science for law, only that she did so.

If this were a conventional work of history or biography, the lack of hard evidence about Orme's apparent interest in science, mathematics, and/or logic would make it difficult to incorporate those subjects in the narrative. Knowing the end of the story, too, the plot seems to arc already towards the law and public service and beyond. What I am trying to do here is to leave the possibilities open, and to exercise a bit of imagination. For all I know, she wanted to be an artist, or a creative writer, or even a wife and mother ... or an engineer. There is so little evidence for anything, it is dangerous to put too much emphasis on what is there. If she had not happened to be living in the Snowe household on census day in 1871, my story would be different.

In any case, within a few months of the census-taking, Eliza Orme reappeared in London, and a year later she was a university student. There were formidable advisors available to her at University College.

Those professors who were open to working with women students must have recognized her intelligence and ambition, and some of them may have known her family. The three mentors I am aware of were John Elliott Cairnes and Leonard Courtney, both political economists, and William Alexander Hunter, a barrister-politician. She was in the first mixed-sex class in political economy at University College, taught by Cairnes. He was a highly respected scholar who, with his wife Eliza Cairnes, later facilitated Eliza Orme's approach to Helen Taylor about studying law with a view to practice. Orme mentioned Courtney years later during an interview with the *Law Journal*, and he was possibly influential in her achieving a coveted appointment in 1892. As for Hunter, Orme acknowledged his influence on her study of both Roman law and jurisprudence when she wrote an entry on his life for the *Dictionary of National Biography*. He and she were both on the executive committee of an Association to Promote Women's Knowledge of the Law (around 1878), and much later Hunter was editor of a weekly newspaper to which she contributed leading articles. While there must undoubtedly have been professors who undermined Orme's confidence and impeded her academic progress, these three recognized and supported her ambitions.

When I first started to construct the narrative of Eliza Orme's life in her early twenties, I imagined her as a full-time student at University College, plunging joyfully into learning about law and political economy. But it was not so simple. She had already been forced into an awkward position. As I learned when I consulted the complete works of John Stuart Mill, her name was put forward, by Mill and a colleague, to take leadership in feminist politics. This happened at a time when she was still very young, and when the invitation came at the suggestion of a powerful and highly respected man. Even now, that kind of invitation is difficult to decline, and for an ambitious person in 1871, presumably impossible. As I see it now, she must have looked like what people call 'a safe pair of hands' who would be sensible, pragmatic, and (most importantly) deferential to those to whom she owed her position.

Here is what happened. (And the level of masculine condescension involved is eye-watering!) There was a nasty split in the still-very-new women's suffrage movement, between the London Committee for Women's Suffrage and a group in Manchester. The London leadership

included Helen Taylor, stepdaughter to Mill, and a young woman called Caroline Ashurst Biggs. The Manchester leadership were proposing to link the women's suffrage movement with a different, and very controversial, feminist campaign—for the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts. Biggs agreed with the Manchester group, while Mill and Taylor wanted to insulate the suffrage movement from the inevitable charges of impropriety that would be associated with a campaign concerned with human sexuality. Mill wrote to a male ally of the movement, proposing that Eliza Orme should replace the unreliable Miss Biggs as the London Committee Secretary. He told his friend: 'I repeat that you need have no fear of Miss Orme not being able to do the work. She would very quickly learn all that is really necessary, and we may hope would be free from that feverish bustle which has made what work has been done seem twice as laborious as it really need be'. Miss Biggs apparently was 'far from judicious' and must have seemed over-endowed with 'feverish bustle', as indeed Mill regarded the people in Manchester collectively.

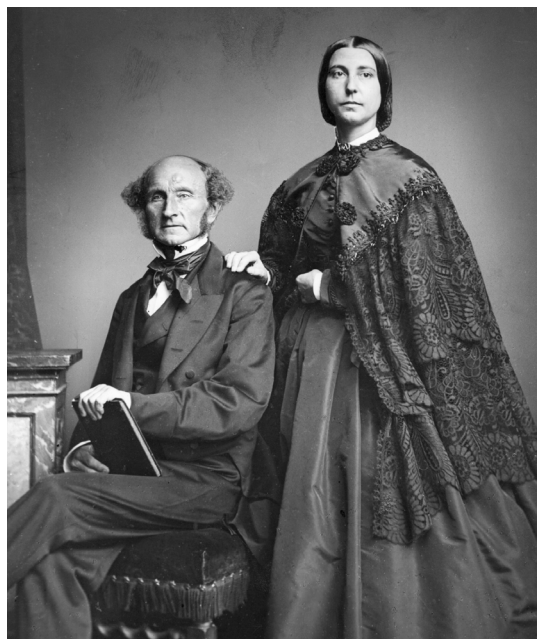

Fig. 2 John Stuart Mill and Helen Taylor (n.d., photographer unknown), Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:J_S_Mill_and_H_Taylor.jpg, CC-PD-Mark.

Thus it was that when Eliza Orme eventually took on positions of leadership in both the women's movement and the Liberal Party, she had behind her the awkward experience of having been parachuted into a job in order to suit someone else's agenda. In some ways, no doubt, it was beneficial. But my hunch is that in 1871, at twenty-two, the appointment as Secretary was too much, too soon, and the resulting challenges may have influenced some of the decisions she made later. At a practical level, she took advantage of the relationship with Taylor and Mill when the time came to make her move to embark on the study of law. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that when those two powerful, celebrated, feminists put her in charge, they were not working in the best interests of Eliza Orme, but in their own.

Later, when we see how Orme's life ended up, we might identify this moment as a liminal, or perhaps transitional, point in her experience, putting her on the way to becoming a leader either in the women's movement or in the Liberal Party, though perhaps not both. (And in the end, as it happened, neither.) Only after the events of a full long life are known is it possible to recognize where the unalterable choices were made, and which accidents of fate turned out to make a difference. In my own career, the research that forms the backbone of this book was to all intents and purposes abandoned for several decades.

Eliza and Me, 1989–2016

With one important exception, my initial period of intense interest in Eliza Orme ended about 1989, when my postdoctoral fellowship application on women lawyers failed and my *Atlantis* article about Orme was published. That article seemed to drop down a hole, as far as any broader interest in Orme was concerned. It was not quoted or cited, and I was never invited to speak on the subject. It was not much more than a line on my *curriculum vitae*, one of several publications to show that I was a productive historian. Orme's part in the history of women and law was not part of my professional discourse, but it simmered away privately, on a scholarly back burner, with one exception. That was generated by the revival of the Victorian *Dictionary of National Biography*, with plans during the early 1990s for significant expansion of the project. As a beginning, the *DNB* editors planned a *Missing Persons*

volume, inviting contributions on some of the many individuals who had been left out of the original publication or its series of supplements. (Orme had contributed biographies of her mentor W. A. Hunter and two other men in the 1901 supplement.) I immediately wrote and suggested her as a subject, and my *Atlantis* article turned out useful after all, as academic legitimation for the proposal. The editors accepted, and the essay appeared when the volume came out in 1993.

On a summer research trip to England, maybe about 1995, I visited the Fawcett Library (later the Women's Library) that was then located in the East End of London at London Guildhall University. This was a quick visit in search of Eliza Orme, research sandwiched in between the 'real work' on my Kegan Paul and International Scientific Series projects. I found a few scraps, and that was exciting, but when I got home there was no time to do anything with them and the notes and photocopies began to fade, untouched. The same went for the letters between Orme and Helen Taylor, which later became so useful. Those were lodged at the London School of Economics, in their British Library of Political and Economic Science. I did get to sit there, just for a day, as far back as the summer of 1990, and transcribe some of the letters—until my time ran out—and vowed to myself that I would go back and finish the job, and then find a way to use them. Some day. That time finally came in 2021, after I had returned to finish the transcription and use it in my chapter about Orme in the edited volume *Precarious Professionals*. But for a long time, those pencilled notes sat fading and abandoned in a file folder.

When I secured a limited-term appointment at the University of Windsor in 1993, it was on the strength of my *Cheap Bibles* monograph and my interest in social and cultural history, including the history of the book. During those first five Windsor years, until 1998, I had the postdoctoral research on the Kegan Paul firms to finish and publish, the planned collaboration on the International Scientific Series to pursue, and the initial stirrings of ideas about applying the ideas of book history to history books. But primarily, for those five years, I was focused on the job market and my academic future—not only applications for appointments elsewhere, but a feverish preoccupation with the possibility that my limited-term appointment at Windsor might be converted to one with tenure. There were, in those days, a few competitions every year where universities advertised for expertise in modern British

history. People in my cohort thought the market was terribly tight, and we scrambled for every possibility. (Now in the 2020s the contest has become unimaginably tougher, with many highly trained and qualified applicants vying for only a scant handful of positions.) I discovered to my chagrin that it had not been a good career move to declare myself a book historian. The field was still too new to be recognized by many historians, and its interdisciplinarity was suspect. (I was asked 'Why not go to English?' while a colleague with similar interests whose PhD was in English was told that he should take his application to History.) Even *Cheap Bibles* did not mean much to historians. It was in a Cambridge University Press series on Printing and Publishing History, and book history was not yet mainstream. I applied for everything that looked reasonable and a few things that did not. I travelled two or three times to the annual conference of the American Historical Association, where preliminary interviews were held. I applied to positions at the University of British Columbia and the University of Toronto, and others I can no longer remember. Most of these were the coveted tenure-track posts; a few were for limited-term appointments. If I never got hired, I was going to be in the precarious position of an 'independent scholar' without an institutional base of support. And I did not even get an interview. In the midst of applying for jobs and writing chapters on London publishers, there was not much time to spare for a woman whose position, a century earlier, had been so much more precarious then than mine was now.

When the University of Windsor hired me that first time, in the summer of 1993, it was initially for a two-year limited-term appointment, to teach Modern British History and the European survey course. I rented an apartment in Windsor, but home and family were still a four-hour journey away in Toronto. The appointment existed because its incumbent had become Dean, but there was no immediate institutional appetite for making it permanent for me. So Neil stayed with his civil service job in Toronto; Jessica was at McGill doing her undergraduate degree; we were together at weekends and holidays. This new life was a bit complicated, but also liberating and exciting. After two years, I had a respected place in the department and most students seemed to like me well enough. Being at a university gave me a good base to apply for research fellowships and conference panels. It was in these years that SHARP was founded (the Society for the History of Authorship,

Reading, and Publishing) and I attended its first meetings in New York (1993), Washington DC (1994) and Edinburgh (1995) and joined its Board of Directors in 1997. I went to Ireland for the first time, for a bit of Kegan Paul research, and fitted holidays in among the visits to libraries.

The best thing about arriving at Windsor, though, was that I became fully a historian, in a way I never quite had as a graduate student or postdoctoral fellow, oriented as I had been to the interdisciplinarity of book history. My Windsor colleagues (at least those of my own academic generation) were thrilled to have an active and ambitious scholar in their ranks, someone interested in sharing new approaches to cultural history, to women's history. At the same time, though, they were tenured and I was not even tenure-track. It was through our shared enthusiasm for what we all meant by 'history' and our ambitions for teaching and research (and counterposed by the simultaneous lack of enthusiasm for my c.v. on the part of hiring committees) that I began to understand the position of our discipline within book history. (Briefly: in book history, historians are intellectually central but numerically subordinate, outnumbered by literary scholars and librarians.) So the experience of academic precarity, including its partial alleviation, became part of my intellectual development and eventually helped me understand Eliza Orme's precarious position with respect to the practice of law. For both of us, being competent, intelligent, and energetic was not enough in the face of an implacable system. As it happened, I was the best-published and most active scholar in my department, but this did nothing to change the fact that my appointment came to an end in 1995 and I had to compete and interview to be rehired for a further limited term. And again in 1997. However, that cycle could not go on for ever. The collective agreement between the University and its Faculty Association stipulated that limited terms could not extend past five years, and the provost still showed no interest in creating a tenure-track appointment in its place. My local colleagues liked my work, but the system was structured in such a way that they were powerless, as I was, to change the situation.

The story of my precarity had a happy ending, although it came with a painful twist that made job security difficult to celebrate. The University kept me on tenterhooks until the very end. By the summer of 1998, even if they had advertised a further Limited Term appointment, I would not have been eligible, because I had been employed on those

terms for a full five years. From Windsor's point of view, it was going to be either a new LTA or (if the provost would approve) a tenure-track appointment. From mine, it was either the latter or nothing. There were a few weeks of optimism, then the news that the provost had decided against awarding the appointment to History. Desolation: tears in my office, crying on the shoulder of my friend who was the department head and later at home on Neil's. And then, a miraculous change of heart. The tenure-stream line was opened, I applied, interviewed once again, was hired and duly tenured. But job security did not guarantee a straightforward research agenda because, within a few months, there was another debacle. My collaboration with Michael Collie broke down and we decided to go our separate ways with what had been a joint project. It took me a while to realize how significant was 1998: in that year, my career became secure and I untied myself from the intellectual apron-strings of a mentor.

However reluctantly tenure was granted, both its security and intellectual independence had beneficial effects on my confidence and my fortunes. Perhaps the first international recognition was the invitation to become a Trustee of the Cambridge Project for the Book, and the second was to be General Editor of a series on book history for the University of Toronto Press. I also got hold of the idea of putting my two research specialties together and studying the publishing history of history books. That led to a research grant, and later another one. I had my first sabbatical in 2000 and presented some ideas about the essential interdisciplinarity of book history at the SHARP conference in Mainz that year. There was vague talk of a collection of essays on various disciplinary approaches to be published by the U. of T. Press, of which my contribution would be a chapter. The vague talk went on for a good few years, and eventually the project was abandoned. I proposed to the Press that instead I expand my own chapter, and my own ideas, to make a little book that would stand alone. This was published in 2006, *Old Books & New Histories*, and it is still widely read and has been translated. It is the best-known of any of my academic work. That very same year—I was reading proofs for *OBNH* in Oxford—I was accorded the tremendous honour of the Lyell Readership in Bibliography at the University of Oxford. This meant presenting a series of five lectures (eventually five chapters of my next book, *Past into Print*, on the

publishing of history in Britain) over a period of two-and-a-half weeks at the Examination Schools. Not to mention being fêted at a reception in the Divinity School, the magnificent medieval building attached to the Bodleian Library. That was all tremendously thrilling, although it had also been pretty stressful, not only in 2006 but for two or three years leading up to the moment.

Something else happened in 2006, and I missed it. Mary Jane Mossman's book, *The First Women Lawyers: A Comparative Study of Gender, Law and the Legal Professions*, came out. With a whole chapter on Eliza Orme. And I missed it. I had even corresponded with Professor Mossman, who was in the Osgoode Hall Law School of York University where I did my PhD. Looking back, I wonder if I might have evaded the knowledge of that book, perhaps looked away from reviews that might have come across my field of vision. I did keep Eliza Orme in mind, or thought I did. If I were in an academic bookstore like Heffer's in Cambridge or Blackwell's in Oxford—or at a conference publisher's booth—and came across a book about nineteenth-century women, I always checked the index for her name. And I filed away the notes of those references. Speaking at the SHARP conference in 2006 in the Netherlands, I was asked to reflect on a still-very-new phenomenon called Google Books. I used the opportunity to search that database on the terms 'Eliza Orme' and 'Miss Orme' and even discovered something I had not known before. But that was all. For most of my career in Windsor, which lasted from 1993 to 2014, I thought of myself as a book historian. Sometimes I imagined that I might return to Eliza Orme when I had retired.

Neil retired first, at the end of 2008, when he was sixty, but we decided I would stay on at Windsor until mid-2014, when I would be sixty-seven. I loved my work, challenging as it was, and he really did not love his. I might have stayed longer if the university had been able to be flexible about teaching loads and give me more time for research, even at a reduced salary. But that was not possible, and I was ready to leave teaching behind. But not research. Even then, though, I still was not talking about going back to Eliza Orme. I had written *Past into Print* but felt I had more to say; I envisioned writing 'a big book about history books' (as I characterized the project) once I was out of the classroom and Neil and I had moved back in Toronto.

A few things changed my mind about the return to Eliza Orme, and two of them happened at conferences right around my retirement. In 2014 'the Berks' was in Toronto. This was the Berkshire Conference on Women's History. I had attended one while still in graduate school and loved the feminist energy of historians of women all gathered in one place. Once or twice I got together with a colleague to propose a Berks session on 'women and the book' but it was always turned down. So this time I was simply attending, not presenting. I went to a session on the history of women in law and heard a paper by Mary Jane Mossman about her work on the first generation of Ontario women who became lawyers. I introduced myself to her afterwards, and we were both thrilled to meet at last. She told me about a new book on George Gissing with new information on Eliza Orme. And we agreed to meet and talk some more.

Then in 2015, the North American Conference on British Studies was in Little Rock, Arkansas. Someone I knew in England asked me to offer commentary on a session where his students were presenting. Their papers were on 'precarious professionals', women in the nineteenth century who were doing work that required specialized knowledge and expertise, but whose gender precluded them being straightforwardly identified as professional with all that implied. In my comments, I mentioned very briefly that Eliza Orme might qualify for that designation, too. The young women went home to England, put together a plan for an edited book on the topic, and asked me to contribute a chapter. That chapter—eventually published in 2021—marked the beginning of my return to studying Eliza Orme.

One more thing happened to switch my research in the direction of Eliza Orme. In the summer of 2016, a year after we had moved from Windsor to Toronto and begun to settle into retirement, Neil was diagnosed with a very aggressive cancer. He died in September. I abandoned the project I had been working on when he first got sick, but another three years went by, and a global pandemic began, before I started working seriously on Eliza Orme, first producing a chapter and an article, and then this book.