"Only Connect": Learned Societies in Nineteenth-Century Britain. By *William C. Lubenow*.
Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2015. Pp. x+316. $99.00.

In this well-written and engaging study, William C. Lubenow brings to life the intriguing and neglected life of learned societies in nineteenth-century Britain. The nineteenth century is often identified as the age of university reform and the establishment of the academic profession. As Lubenow shows, however, until late into the century, the key sites of intellectual innovation and knowledge formation in Britain were not its universities but rather the bewildering array of learned societies flourishing in both metropole and province. The book clearly demonstrates the extent to which knowledge was produced, organized, and communicated in social settings, in contexts of sociability that had more in common with the conviviality of the gentleman's club than the rarefied world of the university.

Lubenow's study challenges the familiar narrative of a shift from the loosely organized intellectual relations of the early modern period to the familiar world of institutionalized structures and formal disciplinary boundaries of modern academia. Instead, he shows convincingly how the informal associational bodies that dominated intellectual life in early nineteenth-century Britain were not some relic of the eighteenth-century Republic of Letters, but rather characteristic and constituent of modernity itself. Chapters focus thematically on various aspects of these learned societies—the types of bodies that existed, their relationship with the universities, their members, their work and activities, their procedures and practices, their sociability and their relationship to existing power structures and the public sphere. Lubenow recreates a complex, overlapping, and cross-disciplinary world of learning that embodied and promoted a spirit of individualism and a new type of status, resting not on birth or wealth, but on perceived intellectual ability and moral character. He also shows how the different elements of this world were not tightly and formally bound together, but "differently and loosely tethered," reflecting the similarly porous boundaries between recognized bodies of knowledge existing at the time.

As well as critiquing contemporary assumptions about the established categories of knowledge in nineteenth-century Britain, *"Only Connect"* also calls into question the decision of historians to carve up the history of knowledge itself. Its emphasis on the cross-disciplinary nature of the work of learned societies across the nineteenth century challenges the prevailing tendency to divide the history of knowledge into opposing camps, most notably, the history of science, on the one hand, and, more recently, the history of the humanities on the other. There is a strong case for arguing that the binaries historians so often employ when writing about intellectual life in nineteenth-century Britain are themselves the product of a much later, twentieth-century higher education system separated formally into distinct academic disciplines. Reflecting upon the porosity of knowledge boundaries in Britain's learned societies challenges us to rethink the necessity and permanence of contemporary academic disciplines. *"Only Connect"* seems to call for a history of knowledge per se—how it is produced, organized, and communicated, how it functions as a determinant of status and symbol of modernity.

Lubenow draws particular attention to an atmosphere of "commensurability," a shared set of social and intellectual attitudes, practices, and procedures that transcended knowledge boundaries. In doing so, he gives body and form to the notion of a "common context" for early Victorian intellectuals, first referred to by Robert Young in 1980.[1] In most

[1] R. M. Young, "Natural Theology, Victorian Periodicals and the Fragmentation of a Common Context," in *Darwin to Einstein: Historical Studies on Science and Belief*, ed. C. Chant and J. Fauvel (London, 1980), 69–107.

cases, however, this "common context" is cited only to emphasize the extent to which it disintegrated and disappeared in the later nineteenth century, how it "fissured into discrete specialisms."[2] By contrast, Lubenow reveals the continued vitality of this shared context, this commensurability, through the medium of learned societies.

Despite the book's clear focus on learned societies, their variety and vitality, it also succeeds in explaining how they overlapped with, and were integrated within, a broader public and intellectual world that included the universities, private houses, the publishing industry as well as Britain's political institutions. It is, above all, an embedded history.

With a study so large in scope, covering learned societies in Britain across a whole century, there are inevitably, perhaps, some limitations. It is hard not to feel that the book attempts too much. In places, the reader is met with so many different learned societies, introduced one after the other, that their complex relations to each other are somewhat obscured. The decision to adopt a thematic structure, focusing in turn on different aspects of the life and culture of learned societies, also makes it difficult, at times, to trace broader chronological shifts and developments. While such a structure lends itself to emphasizing the continuity in the cultural life and significance of learned societies over the course of the nineteenth century, it renders more challenging the drawing out of change over time. This difficulty is somewhat exacerbated by another tendency of the text to jump relatively frequently from one part of the nineteenth century to another. While this is useful for pointing out certain shared features and similarities between periods, it may also result in the extent of change over time being underplayed. An appendix listing the different societies covered in the book, their dates of operation, chief officers, and key members, would have been a useful addition to help the reader make sense of the many different societies dealt with in the text.

Overall, though, this is a valuable, erudite study of a neglected area of Britain's intellectual life in the nineteenth century. It highlights the long-standing importance of learned societies as sites of intellectual innovation and knowledge production and deserves to be read, not only by intellectual historians, but by all those interested in the formation and organization of knowledge, both now and in the past.

Heather Ellis

University of Sheffield

Disraeli: The Novel Politician. By *David Cesarani*. Jewish Lives. Edited by *Anita Shapira* and *Steve Zipperstein*.
New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016. Pp. viii+292. $25.00.

Benjamin Disraeli—Jewish outsider, dandy, novelist, sometime-imperialist, and perhaps the most improbable leader ever of the Conservative Party—has of course an enduring and familiar place in the popular history of the Victorian era. If Disraeli was never wholly convincing as the statesman-founder of modern, one-nation Conservatism (his political philosophy can seem enigmatic at best and at worst mere vaporish mystification), what survived in popular memory was an intriguing personality whose sly opportunism, novelistic self-fashioning, and sense of politics as a great game were grounded somehow in the (self-promoted) mystique of his Hebrew character. Before and after his death, his early biographers, for and against, often saw his Jewishness as the central fact of his political life.

[2] Lawrence Goldman, "Victorian Social Science: From Singular to Plural," in *The Organization of Knowledge in Victorian Britain*, ed. M. Daunton (Oxford, 2005), 112.