In 1807, when Wilbraham Egerton (d. 1856) married his first cousin Elizabeth Sykes, he was already involved in the aggrandisement of Tatton Park, Cheshire with the assistance of the architect Samuel Wyatt (d. 1807). Just as Sledmere, the Yorkshire mansion of his father-in-law Sir Christopher Sykes, was famed for its magnificent library, so William Egerton focused his attention on Tatton’s library, which featured more prominently than any other room in the many ground plans drawn up for the house initially by Samuel Wyatt and later by his nephew Lewis Wyatt (d. 1853). It was not only to house a superb book collection, dating back three centuries to a nucleus formed by the sixteenth-century Lord Chancellor Egerton, but was also to serve as a fashionable living room. The comfortable library portrayed in John Buckler’s watercolour of 1820 not only incorporates the family’s 1789 Joseph Kirckman harpsichord but has books and objects scattered around (Figure 1). Its informality is in marked contrast to Sledmere’s library as featured in Thomas Malton’s 1790 watercolour with sparse furnishings apart from a desk.\(^1\)

Indeed the Egerton library, serving as a book-lined living room, demonstrates the fashion noted in 1811 by the French-American Louis Simond in a house near London that ‘Tablets, sofas and chairs were studiously deranges about the fireplaces, and in the middle of the rooms . . . Such is the modern fashion of placing furniture, carried to an extreme, as fashions are always, that the apartments of a fashionable house look like an upholsterer’s or cabinet-maker’s shop’.\(^2\) Indeed leading cabinet makers and upholsterers such as the London and Lancaster firm of Richard and Robert Gillow & Co. supplied their clients with detailed room plans or watercolours to indicate the new manner of placing of furniture to introduce informality, comfort and utility.

The Egerton’s library, created for their superb collection of classical authors and books on the arts, forms the heart of their magnificent villa. It runs parallel with the Ionic-columned banqueting hall, whose architecture corresponds to that introduced by George, Prince of Wales, later King George IV at Carlton House, London, where Lewis Wyatt had been appointed as the Office of Works’ Labourer in Trust in 1800. And, while displaying the chaste elegance of the Wyatt style, the library also introduced the Arcadian park and garden through five south-facing windows that run to the ground, and a screen of Corinthian columns that supported its temple pediment.

Golden-framed overmantel-mirrors, which reflected the sublime vista, also served at night to enhance the light from two Roman-style bronze lanterns hanging from ceiling rosettes. Appropriately this mosaic stuccoed ceiling, designed in 1809, recalled the nature goddess Venus as it partly derived from Rome’s Temple of Venus, whose rich coffering of flowered lozenge compartments provided one of the most admired ceilings of antiquity. The symbolism of Wyatt’s Etruscan-coloured, laurel-wreathed and
flower-trellised Axminster carpet, was designed in 1812 in keeping with the ceiling, and recalled the triumph of Apollo, as god of Poetry and leader of the Muses of Artistic inspiration on Mount Parnassus. It was conceived in the antique manner promoted by the connoisseur Thomas Hope’s *Household Furniture and Interior Decoration* 1807, and its two large rosettes, fronting the fireplaces, were framed by Apollo’s sunburst badge and ringed by moons, stars and Zodiac signs. This Lyric theme continued with Wyatt’s green verde antico marble chimney-pieces, whose bronze enrichments included oak-garlanded freizes centred by Apollo-Lyres and festive muse masks. Relating to a Roman bronze maenad mask then in the collection of Richard Payne Knight, they were described as representing Thalia (Comedy and Pastoral poetry), Euterpe (Music and lyric poetry), Calliope (epic poetry) and Erato (love poetry), while their accompanying enflamed torches or ‘caduses and flames’ recall Mercury’s role as Cupid’s tutor and inventor of the lyre. These ‘2 setts of very handsome large bronze alto relievo ornaments’ were invoiced in June 1812 by Benjamin Lewis Vulliamy (d. 1854), who served as ‘Furniture Man’ or *marchand mercier* to George IV when Prince Regent. Their steel grates, with acanthus-wrapped and lion-footed trusses, derive from the Pantheonic sarcophagus known as the ‘Tomb of Agrippa’, and correspond to a pattern
attributed to George Bullock (d. 1818) of Liverpool and London, who was involved with Vulliamy in the execution of chimney-pieces at that period.4

The furnishing of the room was entrusted to Richard and Robert Gillow & Co. of Lancaster and Oxford Road, London, whose close family and working relationship with Lewis Wyatt continued that established between the latter’s uncle Samuel Wyatt and Robert Gillow (d. 1796). Their room-plans for the Library and adjoining Drawing Rooms survive amongst the firm’s early nineteenth-century drawings and watercolours preserved at the Victoria & Albert Museum. Included amongst the various wall elevations are patterns for richly fringed and tasselled curtains and the continuous pelmets that Buckler depicted draped across the library’s mirrored window-piers. These green curtains, the table-cloth and the leather upholstery all harmonised with the colour of the walls as well as the verde antico marble. The same marble featured on the pier ‘commodes’, which were embellished with flowered patteras and reeded friezes and pilasters and were fitted with shelves at the front and ‘sash corners’. They were made by one of Gillow’s craftsmen named S. Bryham and invoiced at £35 14s. od.5

Open-shelved bookcases filled the East and West walls, and the former incorporates ‘sham volumes’ fitted to a concealed door leading into the Withdrawing Room. The North wall was fitted with three glazed and Pompeian-columned bookcases, each comprised of double centre cases flanked by single cases, while further recessed double cases were fitted to the central one, which is over 18 feet long. These bookcases are embellished with flowered paterae and freize tablets veneered with a richly striated South American timber, which was called ‘Venatica’ by Gillow. Palms wrap their reeded demi-columnettes and accompany acanthus-wrapped trusses that harmonise with those on the steel grates. Their upper doors are panelled with hollowed corners and fitted with elliptic-arched ‘brass treillage’ after the French manner. The bookcases’ base doors are sunk with a broad ribbon framing richly figured mahogany that Gillow noted as being of ‘fine curious [richly] Feather’d wood’. Their manufacture is itemised in detail in Gillow’s Estimate Book running from September to December 1811, and the total cost for ‘A large Elegant Mahogany Library Bookcase’, ‘2 Bookcases to suit’ and ‘2 Bookcases to fill each end of Room’ amounted to £840.6

The sofas, standing out from the fireplaces at each end of the room, were accompanied by elliptic-ended sofa-tables, whose trestles also harmonised with the grates. Their trussed legs, carved with Roman foliage and terminating in bacchic lion-paws, reflect the robust style promoted by Charles Heathcote Tatham’s, Etchings of Ancient Ornamental Architecture drawn from the Originals in Rome and other parts of Italy, 1800; and by George Smith’s Collection of Designs for Household Furniture and Interior Decoration, 1808. The influence of these publications is also demonstrated by the ‘claws’ of the cheval fire-screens, which have ‘lion-monopodia’ in the manner of Roman candelabra. The central cloth-covered and circular ‘Loo’ table, designed en suite with the sofa-tables, was likewise conceived in the Hope manner as a tripod-altar with hollow-sided plinth.

Hope’s influence can also be seen in the room’s principal piece of furniture, which was a great library table surmounted by brass-ribboned verde antico marble. It is richly carved with Grecian palms, flowered-volutes and plinth-supported trestles terminating in lion-paws, and relates closely to a marbled seat pattern of 1804 published by George
Smith, 'Upholder' to George, Prince of Wales, in his *Collection of Designs* (pl. 34). As well as a writing/games table, with pillar and 'claw' supports, the room was furnished with caned and leather-cushioned armchairs, and a set of twelve cane-seated library chairs. These 'Handsome' chairs with their Grecian-scrolled and 'twisted-reed' backs, enriched with flowered tablets and libation patteras, followed by Gillow’s pattern invented for the Revd H. Holland Edwards of Pennant in Wales and were invoiced at £31 10s. od.7

At this period Gillow’s extensive warerooms in Lancaster were famed for being stocked ‘with every article of useful and ornamental mahogany furniture . . . and said to be the best-stocked of any in this line, out of the metropolis’.8 Their success at Tatton can be judged by Lady Belgrave’s comment: ‘I always like being at Tatton, the Egertons are always so very kind . . . and the house is so pleasant and handsome and gentleman like with every comfort, bodily and mental, of chairs, sofas, books etc.’.9 Elizabeth Egerton’s own aspirations can be gleaned from two titles listed in her ‘Commonplace Book’. One was ‘On the choice of Company and Conversation’, and the other ‘On the Simplicity and Industry of the Ancients’.

2. The Tatton Park Library today, showing Gillow’s great library table supported on carved scroll trestles in the foreground

*The National Trust Photographic Library/Cheshire County Council*
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4. The Fashionable Fireplace, Temple Newsam House, 1985, no. 22; and G. de Bellaigue, op. cit., p. 189.
7. Goodison, op. cit., pls 9a and 9b.
8. Clark, Historical and Descriptive Account of Lancaster, 1807.