

THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL

THE ROLE OF UNITARIANISM IN THE FORMATION OF LIBERAL CULTURE 1775-1851:

A SOCIAL HISTORY

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by

John Seed B.A. (CNA)

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"It is hard for any one to be an honest politician who is not born and bred a Dissenter. Nothing else can sufficiently inure and steel a man against the prevailing prejudices of the world, but that habit of mind which arises from non-conformity to its decisions in matters of religion".

William Hazlitt 'On Court Influence' in Political Essays, With Sketches of Public Characters The Complete Works of William Hazlitt ed. P.P. Howe Vol. VII (1932) pp. 239-40.

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PREFACE

The particular influence of Unitarians in political and intellectual circles in the late 18th and throughout the 19th centuries has been frequently noticed by historians. In the developing reform movement of the 1780s they were often leading figures; they were especial victims of the Pittite reaction of the 1790s - there was, for instance, a Unitarian minister among the 'Scottish martyrs' transported to Botany Bay in 1793 and another among the dozen English radicals imprisoned without trial a year later. Throughout the period there were always a handful of Unitarian MPs, including the constant spokesman for dissent William Smith. The first industrialist to represent the County of Yorkshire - John Marshall, Leeds flax-spinner, in 1826 - was a Unitarian. After the electoral adjustments of 1832 Unitarians moved into parliamentary seats at Leeds, Wakefield, Halifax, Hull, Manchester, Oldham, Wigan, South Lancashire and elsewhere. As the Eclectic Review commented of the Unitarians in 1836: "they had the ear of Ministers; they were the only class of Dissenters known to the political coteries or clubs".¹ In local politics too their involvement was often out of all proportion to their numbers. Unitarians were also ubiquitous in intellectual and cultural activities: "an intellectual aristocracy in the ranks of Liberalism and Dissent", Kitson Clark has called them.² Unitarian ministers like Priestley and Price were major intellectual figures in the last quarter of the 18th century and many young intellectuals passed through a Unitarian phase - among them Godwin, Coleridge, Southey, Hazlitt, Lamb; even Wordsworth attended services at a Unitarian Chapel in Kendal for a time in the 1790s. If some subsequently recanted, other remained

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1. Quoted in G.I.T. Machin Politics and the Churches in Great Britain 1832-68 (Oxford 1977) p. 57
 2. G. Kitson Clark The English Inheritance: an Historical Essay (1950) p. 121

lifelong Unitarians. When George Dyer sent him a Unitarian tract in 1831, Charles Lamb wrote: "Did G.D. send his penny tract to convert me to Unitarianism? Dear blundering soul ! why I am as old a one - Goddite as himself".³ In the early 19th century Unitarians played a key role in the formation of provincial cultural agencies of one kind or another - Subscription Libraries, Literary and Philosophical Societies, Statistical Societies and so on. Their prevalence in the provincial press in the early 19th century was remarkable. Asa Briggs has suggested: "Where Unitarianism was weak in the 19th century, Liberalism lacked a social cutting edge".⁴

Unitarians have always been historically self-conscious and the footnotes to this thesis indicate my debts to the patient empirical labours of a number of Unitarian researchers - Alexander Gordon, Herbert McLachlan, Raymond Holt and a number of writers in the Transactions of the Unitarian Historical Society. The latter journal, since its inception in 1916, has printed a number of local studies and manuscript materials - collections of letters, fragments of diaries and chapel records - which have been particularly useful. However, while Unitarians themselves have done much to clarify their own historical evolution, it remains the case that a broader historical analysis of Unitarianism's social and political meanings has not been written.⁵ This thesis, perhaps rashly,

3. E.V. Lucas The Life of Charles Lamb (1905) Vol. II p.237

4. Asa Briggs Victorian Cities (2nd ed. 1968) p. 202; see also the account of Unitarian influence in early 19th century Merthyr in Gwynn A. Williams The Merthyr Rising (1978) p. 23, 74-5, 228.

5. G.M. Ditchfield Some Aspects of Unitarianism and Radicalism 1760-1810 (University of Cambridge Ph.D. thesis 1968) presents an exhaustive account of Theophilus Lindsey's London Chapel in the late 18th century and is especially useful on radical groupings in London in the 1760s and 70s (see Chapter 2). However provincial Unitarianism stands outside of his frame of reference.

attempts to fill that gap - to specify carefully the kind of social groups to which Unitarianism appealed and the kind of political implications its rationalist faith had in the prolonged period of English crisis dating from the end of the 1770s.

Some methodological provisos need to be made from the beginning. Firstly, the primary focus is not on religion as such - as conceived by the theologian or the faithful - but on the interconnections between religious practice and social and political life i.e. on the secular effects of religion. As a historian I am less interested in the truth value of particular religions than in their social meanings. Defending the sociologist of religion from the outrage of the believer, Peter Berger has argued:

"Questions raised within the frame of reference of an empirical discipline...are not susceptible to answers coming out of the frame of reference of a non-empirical and normative discipline, just as the reverse procedure is inadmissible. Questions raised by sociological theory must be answered in terms falling within the latter's universe of discourse".⁶

I would want to claim the same autonomy for the social history of religion.

Secondly, I have particularly wanted to avoid a common approach to this kind of topic - the focus on a single central figure, to reconstruct his oeuvre and its biographical linkages. Joseph Priestley would have been the obvious candidate here: a central figure in the emergence of both Unitarianism and the broad front of reforming initiatives in this period, a man whom it is difficult not to admire and one whose neglect by historians needs to be remedied. Cases could be made, with more difficulty, for other Unitarians in this period who produced a substantial amount of writing and who exemplify certain broader intellectual traits

6. P.L. Berger The Social Reality of Religion (new ed. 1973) p. 181

of this period - Thomas Belsham, for instance, or James Martineau. While this kind of study, combining careful textual elucidation, history of ideas and biography is perfectly legitimate, even useful, it has its limitations. As Quentin Skinner has argued in a number of important articles, it is not enough to reconstruct the 'thought' of an apparently representative figure without extensive reference to the real world of meanings which shaped that thought: "to understand what any given writer may have been doing in using some particular concept or argument, we need first of all to grasp the nature and range of things that could recognisably have been done by using that particular concept, in the treatment of that particular theme, at that particular time".⁷ Or, as Karl Mannheim has argued: "Strictly speaking it is incorrect to say that the single individual thinks. Rather it is more correct to insist that he participates in thinking further what other men have thought before him".⁸ Men think within groups and against other groups. They articulate not an individual life-experience but that of a group so that social and political experiences and antagonisms are not a matter of background or environment but the very content of consciousness. My aim has been to work in this direction - towards an account of as broad a range of Unitarians in this period as possible rather than a single eminent individual or a few especially coherent and inclusive statements of Unitarianism; towards a social reconstruction of a whole religious grouping over several generations; and towards the precise experiences which constituted their identity.

The thesis is organized as follows. Firstly, a long introduction which presents an overview of the Unitarian body between the 1770s and the 1850s: a sketch of the main theological coordinates of Unitarian

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7. Q. Skinner 'Motives, Intentions and the Interpretation of Texts' New Literary History Vol. VIII No. 2 (1972) p.406; see also his 'Some Problems in the Analysis of Political Thought and Action' Political Theory Vol. II No. 3 (1974) esp. pp 282-3
8. K. Mannheim Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge trans. L. Wirth and E. Shils (1936) p.3.

thinking; an account of how Unitarianism evolved out of religious dissent in the course of the 18th century and the particular contribution of a group of Cambridge churchmen in the 1770s and after; the slow and unstable development of denominational organization is then reviewed, showing in particular the centrifugal tendencies at work; finally, a brief account of the geographical distribution of Unitarian congregations in the 19th century.

With Part Two we move into the substantive concerns of the thesis. Chapter One focuses on the social constituency of emerging Unitarianism in the last quarter of the 18th century, presents detailed studies of half a dozen congregations, and then suggests some of the social processes encouraging a shift away from Calvinist sectarianism towards a more expansive, humanist and secular rationalism. Chapter Two Turns to the political activities of Unitarians and details how they exerted influence on a section of the political elite both through organizational power in their localities and through the influence of Unitarian intellectuals. Chapter Three sketches in the effects of the events of the 1790s on Unitarians - Church and King mobs, state repression of opposition combining with distrust of the populace to seriously damage Unitarian optimism.

Part Three is concerned with Unitarians in early 19th century England. Chapter Four looks at the social constituency of early 19th century Unitarianism, considering first the fate of attempts to emulate evangelical successes among the lower classes, then moving on to the membership of a number of important Northern congregations. Chapter Five gives an account of the Unitarian College at York, where it was based from 1803 to 40. Chapter Six looks at the inner life of the Unitarian chapel - the character of church government, the Sunday Service, ancillary societies. Chapter Seven switches to the secular activities of Unitarians - their involvement in developing cultural institutions for the middle class,

their support for a liberal public sphere outside of state domination and the divisions of sectarian religion, their role in the emergence of a liberal press in many towns and their political involvements.

Of course - and this takes us to a final cluster of provisos - completeness is impossible in historical research. Much of interest and importance remains at the periphery. I have tried to balance the need for a national perspective with the requirement for detailed local studies. The role of Unitarians in the Midlands receives little attention though at Birmingham, Leicester, Nottingham and Derby there were important congregations. Much more could have been written of how Unitarianism fed into popular radicalism, especially in the early 1790s, the years after 1815 in Lancashire and in the late 1830s. The place of Unitarian rationalism within the broader intellectual field of the period - its congruence with utilitarianism and political economy especially warrants careful 'philosophical' study. The relationship between Unitarianism and the changing character of middle class philanthropy, under the influence of political economy and rapid population growth in industrial areas, is important and is neglected in this thesis, though I have discussed it elsewhere.⁹ Finally, chapel records are often very disappointing and yet there is always further source material - another file of correspondence, more relevant secondary material, another town whose chapel would repay scrutiny, yet one more Unitarian sermon. As Levi-Strauss has eloquently testified as to any kind of historical research: "The darkness through which we are groping is too thick for us to make any pronouncements about it; we cannot even say that it is doomed to last".¹⁰

9. John Seed 'Unitarianism, political economy and the antinomies of liberal culture in Manchester 1830-50' Social History Vol. VII No. 1 (1982)

10. C. Levi-Strauss Tristes Tropiques trans. J. and D. Weightman (new ed. 1976) p. 338.

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ABBREVIATIONS

- C Mss - Crewe Muniments
- CR - The Christian Reformer
- CUL - Cambridge University Library
- DNB - Dictionary of National Biography
- DWL - Dr. Williams's Library, Gordon Sq., London
- MCO - Manchester College Oxford
- MR - Monthly Repository
- PRO - Public Record Office
- SCL - Sheffield Central Library
- TUHS - Transactions of the Unitarian Historical Society
- UC Mss: JRL - Unitarian College Manuscripts in John Rylands University Library, Manchester
- Venn Alumni - J.A. Venn Alumni Cantabrigienses: A Biographical List of all Known Students, Graduates and Holders of Office at the University of Cambridge from the Earliest Times to 1900 Part II 1752-1900 (1940-54) 6 Vols.

WCL : JGL - Wakefield Central Library Archives Dept., John Goodchild
Loan Manuscripts

WW Mss Wentworth Woodhouse Muniments

Wyvill Political Papers - Christopher Wyvill Political Papers, chiefly
respecting the attempt of the County of York...to effect a
reformation of the Parliament of Great Britain 6 Vols
(1794 - 1802)

YCA : YAP - York City Library Archives: Yorkshire Association Papers

PART ONE

FROM PRESBYTERIANISM TO UNITARIANISM

AN INTRODUCTION

I

Though antitrinitarian tenets can be traced back into 16th century England and Socinian and Unitarian heresy was not unusual in the 17th century, especially during the Commonwealth,¹ it was only in the course of the 18th century that Unitarianism, emerging out of Protestant Dissent, began to take root in English society. The Unitarian body consisted of people who, despite other differences, rejected the doctrine of the Trinity and hence the divinity of Christ. This distinctive negation of perhaps the central doctrine of Christianity earned Unitarians the venom of other religious bodies and the frequent charge of being atheists. Yet in a number of important respects Unitarians belonged to the protestant dissenting tradition. They accepted God's revelation through the Bible, confirmed by the empirical evidence of the miracles, and that Christ - though a man like other men - had a "divine commission" and rose from the dead. The Bible, they believed, contained the history of divine revelation and provided "a sufficient rule of faith and practice". In these essentials Unitarians could claim to be in line with the English dissenting tradition of the 18th century. In terms of religious practice too Unitarians followed the dominant pattern (unlike the Quakers) - they held religious worship, consisting of prayer, scripture reading and preaching, in a church each Sunday and they had a specialised religious ministry.

But Unitarianism was much more than a small and theologically eccentric sect. Essentially it represented in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, a bold project to square Christian religion with contemporary scientific knowledge. As a leading spokesman of the body, Thomas Belsham put it in 1812: "to recommend Christianity to men of reason and reflection, it must be made to appear a rational thing. Men cannot embrace as sacred truths anything at which their commonsense revolts".² From the mid-18th century

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1. For 17th century Unitarianism see H.J. McLachlan Socinianism in 17th century England (Oxford 1951)
 2. Thomas Belsham Memoirs of the late Revd. Theophilus Lindsey (1812) p. 371

Unitarian ministers wrote against the French Encyclopaedists and English Deists and sceptics yet they based their criticism on similar philosophical principles and used the same rationalist vocabulary. Indeed in 1787 Joseph Priestley noted "the real service that infidelity has been of to Christianity, in freeing it from many things which, I believe, all who have formerly undertaken the defence of it have considered as belonging to it, when they have in reality, been things quite foreign to it and in some cases subversive of it".³

"Christianity", Priestley claimed, "will be no obstruction to anything that is truly rational".⁴ Thus it had nothing to fear from scientific knowledge. Unitarian ministers again and again asserted their complete faith in scientific rationality as progressively revealing the truth of the Unitarian version of Christianity. Only superstition had anything to fear from unreserved intellectual liberty and the progress of science. "Every discovery in natural or moral science, every improvement in art, every addition to human knowledge", a Unitarian minister argued in 1813, "in short every thing which tends in any degree to liberate the human mind from stupid indolence, blind passion and gross sensuality....aids the progress of the gospel and accelerates its salvation".⁵ Where Christian tenets or the text of the Bible were shown by scientific demonstration to be wrong then the former were confidently jettisoned by Unitarians.

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3. Joseph Priestley Letters to a Philosophical Unbeliever (2nd ed. 1787) in The Works of Joseph Priestley edited by John Towill Rutt Vol. IV (1818) p.322. All subsequent references to any work by Priestley are to this Rutt edition of his collected works and will be cited as follows - title of specific work and edition, then Works, volume and page.
 4. Ibid. p. 446
 5. James Yates The Nature, Manner and Extent of Gospel Salvation: A Sermon. (Glasgow 1813) p.24

Thus Priestley was unperturbed by geological evidence that the earth existed long before the Biblical account of the creation made possible: "philosophical Christians", he said, accepted the inaccuracy of the Biblical account.⁶ Belsham noted in 1821: "If the history of creation in the first chapter of Genesis be inspired, then all the discoveries of Kepler and Galileo, of Copernicus and Newton, are false".⁷ The latter was quite clearly impossible. Hence the Bible had to be read with critical discrimination, in the light of modern science. Indeed Unitarian ministers in the early 19th century saw the positive effects of scientific knowledge in enlightening and transforming religious opinion - and geology especially.⁸

For Unitarians the whole image of God which orthodox religion - Catholic, Anglican and dissenting alike - constructed was anathema. He became a dreadful tyrant, irrational and quixotic, often brutal. Such a deity was impossible to love, respect or obey. Indeed, even to portray God in this way was an impiety betraying a great lack of gratitude. Such a God, moreover, contradicted "good sense". He was consonant neither with empirical evidence nor with reason. Both nature and man revealed a rational and benevolent design. Joseph Priestley, for instance, compared the order of the universe to a machine: "that the happiness of the creation was intended by the author of it, is just as evident as that the design of the millwright was that the wheels of his machine should keep in motion, and not that they should be obstructed".⁹ The pains and evils of life on earth - which for most types of religious belief revealed the depravity of man, the flawed essence of nature and the fundamental rottenness of life - were minimised in the Unitarian scheme of things. God was benevolent, the universe offered a benign environment and man was a rational and virtuous

6. Priestley op. cit., pp 451-2

7. Thomas Belsham Reflections upon the History of Creation in the Book of Genesis: A Discourse (1821) p.26

8. See for instance Edward Higginson A Discourse on the Passing of the Dissenting Chapels Act (Hull 1844) pp. 17-18

9. Reflections upon the History of Creation in the Book of Genesis: A Discourse, 346-7

creature capable of infinite improvement. Happiness outweighed misery, virtue vice, health sickness. Such unhappiness and vice as there was was steadily declining. Moreover, the negative aspects of human existence served a rational and useful function. Priestley pointed to the education of children: "How is it possible to teach them sufficient caution against absolute destruction, by falls, burns etc. but by the actual feeling of pain from these circumstances?" Thus greater pain is prevented by lesser pain. This was central to the divine scheme and was the principle which informed the whole of human life - a rational system of pains and pleasures, of rewards and punishments. Virtue and reason in human conduct brought happiness and pleasure. Vice, conversely, brought misery and pain. Apparent discrepancies - the unhappiness of a good man, for instance - were merely temporary. Ultimately, Priestley argued, "the most perfect moral administration" prevailed in the universe.¹⁰

Thus the whole doctrine of the atonement - whereby human depravity and sinfulness was atoned for by Christ accepting the punishment of crucifixion and delivering a part of humanity from guilt - was rejected by Unitarianism. Men were equipped to find their own path to salvation, Christ was not a sacrificial victim nor did his death have subsequent miraculous effect. As one Unitarian minister, James Yates, explained in 1813, salvation does not occur in a mysterious manner via Christ's atonement. The latter's role was not that of sacrificial victim but that of teacher. Deliverance, Yates went on, "is effected by the operation of principles, which exist in every human breast and which are, among all mankind, the most powerful springs of conduct". These principles were quite simply pain and pleasure: "Thus God, in the dispensation of the gospel, treats mankind as RATIONAL AGENTS, in whom the desire of happiness and the fear of misery are the ruling principles of action, and who are capable of pursuing the one and of avoiding the other".¹¹ This humanism disturbed

10. Ibid. p. 353

11. Yates op.cit., pp 21-4

contemporaries. A leading evangelical dissenter, Robert Hall, declared in 1823 that the Unitarian scheme made vice and sin a very trivial thing; Unitarianism, by stating that man could reform and improve himself, "makes every man his own Saviour".¹²

Since pain and evil were part of God's design of the universe and served a useful function in the moral education of mankind, there was no principle of evil corresponding to the principle of good; in other words, no devil, no Satan. Belief in the devil, according to one Unitarian minister, was "one of those superstitious fears, which are as unfriendly to virtue as to human happiness".¹³ Another argued forcibly that belief in Satan or a devil was unwarranted by the Scriptures, profoundly contradictory, opposed to common-sense, morally harmful and led directly to superstition of the most brutal kind. Satan was a vestige of pre-Christian heathen religions and was utilised by men to relieve them of moral responsibility.¹⁴ And with the devil was jettisoned the predominant notion of everlasting punishment in hell. Priestley suggested that "the pains of this life may suffice for the whole of our future existence, we having now resources enough for a perpetual increase in happiness without any assistance from the sensation of future pain."¹⁵ By 1820 a minister was claiming that Unitarians were "universally agreed" in rejecting the notion of everlasting punishment because it was incompatible with a model of God, as just, benevolent and rational. Unitarianism led inevitably, he said, to the confidence "that there will be a time when all the rational creatures of God will have been purified from every pollution, and made fit for holiness".¹⁶

12. Robert Hall 'Notes on Sermons' in The Works of Robert Hall ed. O. Gregory (1832) Vol. V p.40

13. J.W. 'On the existence of the Devil' in MR Vol. IV (1809) p. 134

14. Richard Wright 'Reasons for exploding the commonly-received opinion of the existence of an evil spirit' in CR Vol. XVIII (1831) pp. 537-43

15. Priestley op. cit., p. 354

16. Lant Carpenter An Examination of Bishop Magee's Charges against Unitarians and Unitarianism (1820) p. 42

Among Unitarians then, there was a steady dismantling of the whole superstructure of orthodox Christianity and its replacement by a kind of scientific humanism in a religious form. However, the preceding sketch is crude and does not suggest the subtlety and complexity of Unitarian theology. Moreover, it has to be understood that Unitarianism was an extremely flexible and open-ended position since it broke with doctrinal authority as such. An irritated clergyman complained in 1825 - like others before and since - of the lack of doctrinal coherence among Unitarians. While it was possible, he said, to get a clear picture of the principal doctrines of any other particular religious denomination by focusing on the writings of their leading preachers, among the Unitarians this was always resisted with arguments that Joseph Priestley, Theophilus Lindsey, Thomas Belsham or any other minister, spoke only for themselves as individuals.¹⁷ This was not a matter of evasiveness. Throughout the second half of the 18th and 19th centuries, Unitarians claimed to be "friends of free enquiry in matters of religion", tolerant of all kinds of intellectual heresy and nonconformity, utterly opposed to any kind of doctrinal authority or uniformity. The most advanced and rational Dissenters, William Enfield argued in 1778, based their dissent from the Church of England on grounds of the freedom of the individual: "the natural right which every man possesses of framing his system of religious faith, and choosing his form of religious worship for himself". Thus, he went on, there should be absolutely no restriction on freedom of investigation into any aspect of religion:

"among Dissenters, whose fundamental principle is the right of private judgement, it would be shameful inconsistency, if every restraint were not removed - if all possible encouragement were not given to the free discussion of every important subject in religion and morals...among them prejudice and bigotry should meet with no quarter and knowledge should make an easy and rapid progress".¹⁸

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17. Clericus Cantabrigiensis 'On the Propriety of adopting some more distinctive Appellation among those who are usually styled Unitarians' MR Vol. XX pp. 22-3.
 18. William Enfield The Principles and Duty of Protestant Dissenters Considered, in a Sermon preached at the Ordination of Rev. John Prior Estlin (1778) p.12

It was inevitable in these circumstances, Enfield suggested, that there should be "diversity of opinions". And this remained the cornerstone of Unitarian dissent. In 1821 one of their ministers pinpointed as the central principles of the Unitarians not any specific theological tenets, but absolute doctrinal individualism; firstly the right and duty of private judgement in matters of religion; secondly the refusal to have anything to do with either State patronage or State persecution of religious belief; and thirdly, the perfect equality of all Christians.¹⁹ A few years later Robert Aspland, one of the denomination's leading voices, stated that the central essence of Protestantism was the right of every individual to judge for himself in matters of religion - "to act up to the convictions of his own mind and the dictates of his own conscience, without molestation, hindrance or interference" - even if this entailed, for any particular individual, the abandonment of Protestantism itself.²⁰ And this was not just a pious hope and aspiration, but represented the outlook of ordinary Unitarian laymen, and laywomen, in this period. Thus in 1811 a Lancashire farmer, a member of the Unitarian congregation at Stand, commented in his diary: "I conceive every man to be right let his faith be what it may, if he reads his Bible for himself gets what knowledge he can, and acts with sincerity up to that knowledge, for I can never think that our salvation hangs on those disputed points which learned and good men have differed about since the world began".²¹

Throughout this period Unitarianism was a highly complex body. It is possible to sketch in some basic common principles - the humanity of Christ, the empirical outlook, the easy-going tolerance of diversity, the scepticism about such orthodox doctrines as original sin, the immaculate conception, the

19. William Hincks 'The Old Crab Stock of Nonconformity' MR Vol. XVI (1821) pp. 660-4

20. Robert Aspland 'Sermon' in The Services at the Ordination of Rev. Robert Brook Aspland MA (Chester 1826) p.63

21. James Mason Bass 'A Farmer's Chapel-Going' TUHS Vol. IX No. 4 (1950) p.209

atonement, the existence of Satan and so on. However, even these consensual views could be interpreted or qualified in differing ways by individuals. This religious individualism was rooted in the history of the Unitarians in England.

II

The 200 or so English Unitarian congregations enumerated in the religious census of 1851 had a range of histories. Most of them had their origins in 17th century Presbyterianism, some in old General Baptist groups. Some were the products of secessions from the Baptists, the Independents, the Wesleyan and the New Connexion Methodists and, in a single but notable instance, from the Church of England.

Liberal Presbyterianism provided the institutional core of 19th century Unitarianism. The Salter's Hall Conference of 1719 was a decisive moment in the transforming of the Calvinism of Presbyterianism into an increasingly rationalist and individualist form of protestant dissent.²² In 1717 the heresy of two Presbyterian ministers - Pierce and Hallet - in denying that Christ was equal with God, caused great controversy among the Dissenting population in and around Exeter. A conference was convened at Salter's Hall in London - involving all three dissenting denominations - to explore the broader implications of this controversy. Did the individual Dissenting minister have the right to freedom of religious opinion, or did he have necessarily to subscribe to a set of fixed Calvinist dogma? The conference ended in deadlock and a split between the majority who supported a compulsory subscription and a minority - mostly younger Presbyterian ministers but including also some leading Independents - who opposed any subscription. Abandonment of subscription from the 1720's opened the way towards

22. Roger Thomas 'The Nonsubscription Controversy amongst Dissenters in 1719: The Salter's Hall Debate' Journal of Ecclesiastical History Vol. IV (1953) pp. 162-86

antitrinitarianism and the abandonment of Calvinist rigour. It allowed heterodox ministers - under the rubric of private judgement - some shelter from the orthodoxy of many of their hearers and - since antitrinitarianism remained illegal - from the attentions of the state.

Anti-trinitarian doctrines circulated throughout Protestant Dissent in the second and third quarters of the 18th century. Arianism - the upholding of a distinction between God and Christ though not going quite so far as to assert the simple humanity of the latter - was everywhere. In 1731 Wesley was warning against the danger of anti-trinitarian heresy.²³ In 1736 a member suspected of denying the "Supream Deity" of Christ was excommunicated from the Castle Gate Independent congregation in Nottingham. The heretic and a group of friends joined the more liberal High Pavement Presbyterian congregation. The Castle Gate minute book referred to the "Aryiane heresy", noting "how much that Dangerouse Error Prevailed in this place to the great Dishonour of Christianity in general and the Dissenting Interest in Particular". At the end of 1739 the Nottingham Independents were so disturbed at continuing antitrinitarianism in the town that people from Presbyterian congregations were barred from membership at Castle Gate until their tenets had been carefully scrutinised.²⁴ William Hutton recalled energetic disputes about the Trinity among the Dissenting community of Derby in the late 1730s: "I was witness to many disputes upon this dark point..... I could easily perceive the contenders were willing to send each other to the devil".²⁵ From the 1740s noted dissenting ministers like Caleb Fleming and Nathaniel Lardner were cautiously preaching the simple humanity of Christ. John Seddon was preaching the simple humanity of Christ in the early 1760s at Cross Street Chapel in Manchester - though he was the

23. John Wesley to Mrs. Pendarves June 1731 in The Letters of Revd. John Wesley, AM ed John Telford (1931) Vol. I pp. 90-1

24. John C. Warren 'Early Records of Presbyterian Congregation: The High Pavement, Nottingham' TUHS Vol. I No. 1 (1916) pp. 79-81

25. 'The Life of William Hutton, written by himself' in Llewellyn Jewitt The Life of William Hutton and the History of the Hutton Family edited from the original manuscripts (no date) p. 125-6

first avowed Unitarian in the area and amazed even the advanced Arians at Warrington Academy.²⁶ Evesham's Presbyterian minister Paul Cardale published in 1767 the 'True Doctrine of the New Testament concerning Jesus Christ', a Unitarian argument which exerted considerable influence among the dissenters of the Midlands.²⁷

However, until the last quarter of the 18th century Presbyterianism had rarely moved as far from Calvinism as to reach Unitarianism. As Priestley observed in 1782: "whole congregations who would not scruple to avow themselves Unitarians are not many".²⁸ What did exist were many Presbyterian ministers who were more or less Unitarian who preached to congregations which included hearers of 'advanced' opinions. The transition to the fully-fledged humanitarianism and individualism outlined in the first section above, was gradual and uneven. At Walthamstow Old Meeting, for instance, there was a gradual transition to the Unitarian position in the late 18th century and a substantial secession of members in 1786 disturbed by the minister's increasing anti-trinitarianism.²⁹ However even among sympathetic members - such as the Solly family - their identity as Presbyterians was retained: Henry Solly (born 1813) recalled the tension between Presbyterian and Unitarian designations in his family:-

"My grandfather and grandmother had an extreme dislike, as I have heard my father say, to the name 'Unitarian', and though my father and mother were somewhat reconciled to it, by their friendship and esteem for Dr. Priestley, they would not have tolerated for a moment the 'Old Meeting' in Marsh Street being called a Unitarian Chapel".³⁰

And yet Walthamstow 'Old Meeting' was from the 1790s served by undisguised Unitarian ministers!

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26. Joseph Priestley Memoirs and Correspondence 1733-87 in Works Vol. I Part 1 p.59; this will subsequently be cited as Memoirs 1 or 2
 27. Alexander Gordon Heads of Unitarian History (1895) p.38
 28. Joseph Priestley The Proper Constitution of a Christian Church...to which is prefixed a Prefatory Discourse, relating to the present State of those who are called Rational Dissenters (1782) in Works Vol. XV p. 46n
 29. H.D. Budden The Story of Marsh Street Congregational Church, Walthamstow (Margate 1923) pp. 29-30
 30. Henry Solly These Eighty Years (1893) Vol. I p.55

The old Presbyterian congregation at Bowl Alley Lane Chapel in Hull, provides another typical instance of gradualist transition. From 1757 the minister was John Beverley and at his ordination the sermon had been preached by William Graham, one of the most heterodox ministers in the county. Yet Beverley avoided theological controversy and kept his own opinions to himself. In 1788 Hadley - an Anglican and a Tory - noted of Bowl Alley Lane that: "The tenets adopted here are represented by most to be Arian, but by some to be Socinian"; but he went on to qualify even this and said that this kind of Dissenter: "assumes the privilege of expounding them according to his own ideas, and few coinciding in every particular".³¹ A local Calvinist minister wrote in his diary on the death of John Beverley in 1812:

"He was a man of amiable and peaceful disposition; if decided, not very clear in his religious sentiments, far from being explicit in public; and in private intimating that all good men meant the same thing. Several of his hearers did not believe that he denied the divinity or atonement of Christ. If he disbelieved them he did not show it openly....."³²

From 1799 Beverley had lived in retirement in Hull. But even his immediate successors at Bowl Alley Lane avoided disturbing the harmony of different positions by avowing Unitarianism from the pulpit. In 1805 Richard Wright preached there:

"To my surprise, I was told by a respectable gentlemen, a leading member of the congregation, that I was the first person who had openly preached Unitarianism in that Chapel: what excited my surprise at hearing this, was my knowing that the ministers who had officiated there for many years had been Unitarians".³³

In many cases a congregation moved relatively smoothly into Unitarianism in the later 18th century in this way, often preserving the older Presbyterian vagueness while in other respects not disguising Unitarian tenets. However there were often acute tensions. For instance at Kidderminster New Meeting between 1796 and 1806 William Severn - a Wesleyan preacher turned Unitarian - struggled to combine and harmonize divergent

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31. George Hadley A New and Complete History of the Town and County of the Town of Kingston-upon-Hull (Hull 1788) p. 801
32. Quoted in W. Whitaker One Line of the Puritan Tradition in Hull: Bowl Alley Lane Chapel (1910) pp 129-30
33. A Review of the Missionary Life and Labours of Richard Wright, written by himself (1824) pp. 81-2

positions on such issues as the humanity or divinity of Christ and the conflict between free will and "philosophical necessity". Eventually, after ten years of tension and conflict he was forced to resign and bitterly commented: "It cannot be denied, that, considering the number of the Society, there is the greatest diversity of opinion and tastes of any in the Kingdom. To suit all there should nearly be as many ministers as there are families".³⁴

In the mid-18th century heterodoxy on doctrines like the trinity, the atonement or original sin, co-existed with traditional Calvinist pieties. Individual ministers and laymen could hold to a vague and quite idiosyncratic version of protestant dissent. Differences of opinion could be tolerated. Joseph Priestley's aunt, for instance, a lady of independent means much taken with religion, was "truly Calvinistic in principle" yet welcomed such heterodox West Riding ministers as William Graham and Thomas Walker, both of whom had publicly questioned orthodox doctrines such as the Trinity: "her home was the resort of all the dissenting ministers in the neighbourhood without distinction, and those who were the most obnoxious on account of their heresy were almost as welcome to her, if she thought them honest and good men (which she was not unwilling to do) as any others".³⁵

However, this inclusive coalition of different positions within the broad tradition of Protestant Dissent began to disintegrate in the last quarter of the century. On the one hand the development towards a much more coherent Unitarian position alienated a section of many Presbyterian congregations - they seceded as a group to found a Calvinist congregation or drifted away individually to other chapels. On the other hand the evangelical revival affected part of protestant dissent and revitalised

34. William Severn to Joseph Hopkins 25 viii 1807: Severn Mss reprinted in A History of the New Meeting House, Kidderminster 1782-1900 ed. E.D. Priestley Evans (Kidderminster 1900) p. 70

35. Priestley Memoirs 1 p. 11

Calvinism.³⁶ Ministers who continued to evince the older rationalism were dismissed from their posts or, more often, replaced after their deaths or removals by orthodox ministers. Thus the development of Unitarianism was in many cases resisted and successfully repulsed. Leading Independent and Baptist preachers opposed the whole intellectual culture of rationalism and denounced the Unitarians as heretics, Deists, infidels and worse.³⁷

This process can be illustrated by a description of changes in dissent in the south-east corner of Yorkshire in the second half of the 18th century.³⁸

36. One West Riding Dissenting minister was complaining in 1765 about "the unhappy Divisions in almost all the Congregations in the Kingdom chiefly occasioned by Methodistical Delusions". Quoted in R.T. Jones Congregationalism in England: 1662-1962 (1962) p. 160-1

37. This persistent antagonism has given rise to historical misrepresentation of what actually occurred in this period of transition for dissent. In 1812 the Dissenting historians Bogue and Bennett, spoke of the emergence of Unitarianism as "a devouring pestilence". And this has often been the language in which more scrupulous historians have spoken of Unitarianism in this period. Skeats spoke of 18th century Presbyterianism as being "tainted" by Arianism, followed by a "lapse" into Unitarianism. Clark wrote of "the contagion of heresy" and even an outsider like Elie Halevy picked up the idiom, describing how Unitarianism "infected" the Presbyterian body. In recent years Alan Gilbert has suggested that Unitarianism "usurped the original English Presbyterian tradition". I have attempted in this account to suggest that both Unitarians and the evangelical Independents and Baptists preserved different parts of the tradition of old dissent just as both in their different ways broke with it. David Bogue and James Bennett History of Dissenters from the Revolution in 1688 to the year 1808 Vol. IV (1812) p. 319. H.S. Skeats History of the Free Church of England (revised edition with C.S. Miall: 1891) p. 752; Henry W. Clark History of English Nonconformity (2nd edition New York 1965) Vol. II p. 196; Elie Halevy A History of the English People in the 19th Century: England in 1815 (2nd revised edition 1949) p. 405; Alan D. Gilbert Religion and Society in Industrial England: Church, Chapel and Social Change 1740-1914 (1976) p. 48

38. The following paragraph is based on J.G. Miall Congregationalism in Yorkshire (1868) 'Appendix Synoptical History of Yorkshire Churches'; Whitaker op. cit., passim; John G. Patton A Country Independent Chapel: Swanland, East Yorkshire, Congregational Church (1943) esp pp. 33-7

Here in the early 18th century there had been substantial Presbyterian congregations at Hull, Beverley, South Cave, Swanland, Howden, Ottringham and Bridlington. By the end of the century only the most important - the Chapel at Bowl Alley Lane in Hull remained. Elsewhere the impulse towards Unitarianism was resisted and defeated. At Cottingham the minister from 1756 to 65 Benjamin Clegg, was an Arian. His successor Edward Dewhurst caused a split in the congregation by his liberalism and the separatists were preached to by local Calvinist ministers. After Dewhurst's death in 1784 - his headstone was placed upside-down by his bearers, testament of the degree of bitterness against him - the congregation re-united in Calvinist orthodoxy. At Swanland the liberal John Angier - who had preached at Bowl Alley Lane on many occasions - was succeeded in the 1770s by an orthodox Calvinist called Bottomley. A number of members seceded but the congregation remained henceforth locked against heterodoxy. At Bridlington in the 1750s the minister's anti-trinitarianism caused a split and he was subsequently excluded by the trustees. In the 1770s the Arian minister at South Cave was compelled to resign. The liberal element at Beverley were defeated and the congregation moved into the Calvinist Independents by the 1780s. At Howden the minister, Jotham Fouljambe, successfully overcame resistance to his Unitarianism, but members drifted away, numbers declined and the chapel was eventually closed down. Elsewhere the same development occurred again and again in the late 18th century: a minister moving beyond the majority of his hearers in theological rationalism, resulting secessions and withdrawals leading to serious numerical decline - a reassertion of Calvinism with a new minister and growing affiliation to the Independents. This process in terms of the numbers and geographical distribution of Unitarian congregations will be examined in some detail in a later section of this chapter. The main point here is to stress the complex and uneven emergence of Unitarianism from the old Presbyterian body.

However if the bulk of Dissent increasingly diverged from Unitarianism towards a revitalised evangelical Calvinism - especially in the 1790s - there was a constant stream of individuals who broke from their Calvinist upbringing and found their way to Unitarianism. A succession of leading Unitarian ministers - Joseph Priestley, Thomas Belsham, Robert Aspland, W.J. Fox among many others - were brought up, educated and trained for the ministry among the orthodox Dissenters. At Daventry Academy in the 1780s Thomas Belsham found again and again that his lectures against Unitarianism convinced his students of the correctness of the Unitarian position. A lesson which Belsham took to heart, adopting Unitarianism himself in the late 1780s.³⁹ Such dissidents were welcomed into those Presbyterian congregations which remained firmly attached to rationalism.

If the Presbyterians provided the main institutional base on which Unitarianism was gradually built during the last quarter of the 18th century, the General Baptists were in the forefront of rationalising initiatives. As William Turner suggested in 1846: "there is reason to think, that a considerable portion of this body had adopted Arian principles, at a time when such opinions were not openly professed among the Presbyterians, by any except the more learned and inquisitive".⁴⁰ Antitrinitarian doctrines were already being debated among the General Baptists in 1700 and in Matthew Caffyn (1628-1714) they had a prominent rationalist voice. They generally took the liberal side in the early 18th century disputes about subscription and, despite their small numbers, their isolated chapels generally in rural areas and their lack of wealth, they increasingly converged to Unitarianism. According to Richard Wright in 1824 - and he had preached among the General Baptists a great deal: "They never were Calvinists, have always had antitrinitarians among them, and were distinguished by their liberality in times far less liberal than the present".

39. John Williams Memoir of Thomas Belsham (1828) pp. 390, 411.

40. William Turner 'Unitarianism in England' in Unitarianism Exhibited in its Actual Condition ed. by John Rely Beard (1846) p. 157; see also E. Morse Wilbur A History of Unitarianism in Transylvania, England and America (Cambridge, Massachusetts 1952) p. 263n.

When Wright first joined the General Baptist Assembly in the 1790s they included a majority of antitrinitarians, some who had gone as far as rigorous Unitarianism and a few who remained trinitarians: "Since that time the assembly at large has become Unitarian."⁴¹ By the early 19th century the General Baptists were frequently affiliating to Unitarian organizations, looking on Unitarian periodicals such as the 'Monthly Repository' and the 'Christian Reformer' as their own and in some cases - in Hull, York and Newcastle-upon-Tyne for instance - fusing with larger and more prosperous Unitarian congregations of Presbyterian descent. At the same time they preserved elements of their own identity. They continued to gather at the General Baptist Assembly in London each year and many General Baptist congregations preserved their own autonomy quite separate from the Unitarians.⁴²

No other section of religious dissent provided an institutional environment in which Unitarianism could prosper. Nevertheless within the ranks of orthodox Calvinism there was a continuing undercurrent of rationalism. The orthodox notions of original sin and eternal damnation were particular points of difficulty. When the American preacher Elhanan Winchester came to England in 1787 to preach his own doctrine of Universal Restoration - the ultimate salvation of all men - he found of course a welcome among 'rational dissenters'. He met Price, Priestley, Belsham and other leading Unitarians and did a good deal of preaching among the General Baptists.⁴³ Less expectedly he also found individual ministers among the Calvinistic Baptists and Wesleyans who were sympathetic. One minister near York told Winchester in 1790 that he knew ten ministers besides himself who believed in the final salvation of all men but were forced to keep silent: "Most of us ministers who fall in with your

41. Richard Wright op. cit. pp 221-2; see also Ian Sellers 'The Old General Baptists 1811-1915' in Baptist Quarterly Vol. XXIV No. 1 (1971)

42. For the broader Baptist context in this period see A.C. Underwood A History of English Baptists (1947)

43. Edwin Martin Stone Biography of Revd. Elhanan Winchester (1836) (reprinted New York 1972) pp 106-7, 184.

sentiments, are afraid of confessing them publicly for this reason, our people would thrust us out of the synagogues, and we and our families might suffer thereby".⁴⁴

Despite repression this heretical undercurrent often surfaced, there were conflicts and expulsions and a number of dissident Baptist and Methodist groups moved into the orbit of Unitarianism. In 1793 William Vidler and his congregation were expelled from Calvinistic Baptists for their acceptance of universalism. Moving to London Vidler became an important figure in radical dissent in the late 1790s preaching, writing, editing a universalist magazine, bookselling - all in the cause of anti-Calvinism. At the same time he shifted closer to the Unitarians and in 1802 publicly declared his rejection of the doctrine of the Trinity.⁴⁵ Vidler was simply the best known of a number of Calvinistic Baptist ministers in these years, who suffered expulsion for preaching universalism and/or Unitarianism and who founded new Unitarian groups among some of their hearers, for instance John Platts at Boston expelled in 1803, James Lyons forced to resign as Hull in 1807, Kay at Kendal in 1810; Thomas Finch expelled from King's Lynn in 1811 and so on.

Among the Methodists similarly universalism was often a factor in the splitting away of a number of autonomous groups who subsequently formed new Unitarian congregations. Richard Wright - who had himself moved from strict Calvinism through various kinds of heretical dissent to Unitarianism by the 1790s - found many cases of universalism and antitrinitarianism among the Methodists and in 1814 argued: "The Methodists have in a considerable degree prepared the way for the Unitarians".⁴⁶ In 1806 several hundred Wesleyans left their churches in the Rochdale area after the expulsion of a local preacher Joseph Cooke, for preaching against original sin and the atonement. They established a number of autonomous congregations and went

44. Ibid. p. 206

45. Ibid. pp. 210-12; M.D. Conway Centenary of the South Place Society (1894) pp. 11-21

46. Richard Wright 'Missionary Tour in Cornwall' MR Vol. X (1815) p. 770

on to abandon the doctrine of the trinity, becoming known as the 'Methodist Unitarians'. In 1811 expulsions from the Wesleyans in Cornwall led to the founding of new Unitarian congregations at Falmouth and Flushing. At Alⁿwick in Northumberland in 1816 an independent congregation was formed out of a Methodist New Connexion Chapel and before long embraced an uncompromising Unitarianism.⁴⁷

The Quakers were also affected by antitrinitarian and Deistic heterodoxy in the closing years of the 18th century.⁴⁸ In the late 1790s Hannah Barnard - a noted American Quaker preacher - travelled throughout the British Isles surprising Quakers by her advanced views, gaining followers among younger Quakers and enemies among the older. Her rationalism - for instance, criticising the truth-value of parts of the Bible and questioning the authenticity of the miracles - eventually brought about her silencing by the London Yearly Meeting of Quakers.⁴⁹ Some Unitarians were sympathetic. Theophilus Lindsey sent her some Unitarian tracts and subsequently she had called on him. Their discussions revealed a divergence on some theological points, but Lindsey saw her influence as salutary: "tho' she has been extremely ill used and rejected by the quaker-society, I trust her appearance among them will excite many amongst them to investigate the question of orthodoxy and to relinquish their trinitarian notions to which they seem to be bound by a very slender tye".⁵⁰ Hannah Barnard subsequently joined the Unitarians back in the United States.

In the next few years the Quakers were affected by Unitarian heresy. A series of resignations and expulsions among Irish Quakers attracted

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47. These mainly working class additions to the Unitarian body will be examined in more detail in Part III of this thesis.
48. There had already been some antitrinitarianism among Quakers in the early 18th century, see Wilbur op.cit. p. 263
49. Rufus M. Jones The Later Periods of Quakerism (1921) Vol. I pp. 299-308
50. Theophilus Lindsey to Robert Millar 26 viii 1801 DWL Mss 12.46(31). See also same to same 3 vi 1801 Mss 12.46(28) and 29 ix 1801 DWL Mss 12.46(32)

attention. An influential Liverpool Quaker, William Rathbone - who worked closely with local Unitarians in political and cultural activities - was disowned in 1805 specifically for writing a sympathetic account of the Irish dissidents. "You know it was an event which caused me no surprise", Rathbone told the Unitarian minister Thomas Belsham soon after, "nor on my own account, any concern. Indeed, I felt myself more unshackled as a Christian, and more independent as a man, than I had ever done. I trust I have never temporized or prevaricated; but while I was one of the Society I thought it right to concede in many respects, and with regard to some opinions to preserve silence, where the contrary might have no other effect but to raise the arm of power rather than of reason."⁵¹

Subsequently the Rathbone family played a central role in Liverpool Unitarianism throughout the 19th century. In 1812 Thomas Foster, a wealthy London Quaker, got into trouble for subscribing to a Unitarian Book Society and evincing "low views of the Person of Christ". His subsequent disownment by the London Yearly Meeting stimulated a lively Quaker-Unitarian debate to which Foster contributed with several pro-Unitarian tracts.⁵² Though, according to the most recent historian of the Quakers, in this period there is evidence of a continuing undercurrent of Unitarian thinking among 19th century Quakers it was not until the 1860s that it gave rise to significant public conflict.⁵³ Among the Quakers, as among the Independents and Baptists, Unitarian influence was resisted and repressed.

Hence Unitarianism emerged primarily within the old Presbyterian congregations but had evolved slowly and absorbed groups and individuals from a range of backgrounds. At Hanover Square Chapel in early 19th century Newcastle-upon-Tyne, for instance, an old Presbyterian congregation

51. John Williams op. cit. p. 604. See also Emily A. Rathbone Records of the Rathbone Family (1913)

52. Robert Brook Aspland Memoir of Robert Aspland (1850) p. 234n. This is afterwards cited as Memoir of Aspland (1850)

53. Elizabeth Isachei Victorian Quakers (1970) pp. 27-8

had a Unitarian minister, William Turner, its members came from various religious backgrounds - many from traditional English liberal Presbyterianism, a group of local Baptists, a number of former Scottish Presbyterians, several from Anglican families. Thus there was a wide diversity of belief within the congregation. For instance, a majority were in favour of Infant Baptism; a considerable group believed in the necessity of Adult Baptism and a few followed Gilbert Wakefield in holding that Baptism was designed only for converts and thus quite unnecessary for children of Christian parents. Hence, as William Turner explained in 1811, religious individualism was the cornerstone of the congregation "Its members....desire to be considered as a Voluntary Association, not of Episcopalians, Presbyterians, or Independents, with respect to discipline - not of Calvinists or Arminians, Trinitarians or Unitarians, Baptists to Paedobaptists, with respect to doctrine - but of Individual Christians; each one professing Christianity for himself according to his own views of it, formed upon a mature consideration of the Scriptures, and acknowledging the minister's right to do the same; and necessarily united in nothing but a desire to worship the Supreme Lord of all as the disciples of one common Master....."⁵⁴

William Wilberforce in 1797 was neither the first nor the last to complain that Unitarianism had the advantage over orthodoxy of not having a fixed set of theological dogmas to defend or justify. Thus, he went on, it could be held as a temporary resting-place or a halfway house between all kinds of different heretical alternatives.⁵⁵ Diverse groups and individuals were often assimilated into Unitarian congregations. Refugees from Wesleyan Methodism, radical Baptist groups, isolated Jewish families, small groups of "Free-thinking Christians" and other dissidents frequently entered the Unitarian orbit and found there a tolerance and sympathy they were unlikely to find elsewhere. Particularly in the hostile environment

54. William Turner A Short Sketch of the History of Protestant Nonconformity and of the Society Assembling in Hanover Square Chapel, Newcastle (Newcastle 1811) pp. 29-31.

55. William Wilberforce Professed and Real Christianity (1797) p. 476

of Tory England between the 1790s and 1830s, Unitarian churches offered shelter for all kinds of rationalists, sceptics and even Deists. In 1818 one Unitarian minister, having thoroughly criticised infidelity argued that it was in a state of collapse and ill-repute: "the wandering disciples of unbelief, the votaries of the mysteries of infidelity, have taken advantage of the candour and liberality of the Unitarian Church, and have sought protection from it....."⁵⁶ "The Unitarian body", Thomas Arnold said in the 1830s, "consists of elements the most dissimilar, including many who merely call themselves Unitarians, because the name of unbeliever is not yet thought creditable".⁵⁷

In such congregations religious tolerance was not simply an intellectual grace but was absolutely central to their survival. Individual members were all highly sensitive to any threat to their individual freedom of opinion and united in opposition to orthodox Christianity's authoritarianism. At Northgate End Chapel in Halifax - a Unitarian congregation descended directly from 17th century Presbyterianism - the congregation had never had a doctrinal designation in any formal trust deed. And this caution was endemic: thus, for instance, a resolution at a Vestry Meeting in 1817 carefully described the congregation as "the society of Christians usually denominated Presbyterians, assembling in the North Gate-end Chapel at Halifax".⁵⁸ Other congregations similarly avoided making Anti-Trinitarian beliefs binding upon succeeding generations. At Mosley Street Chapel in Manchester in 1831 the congregation was divided over the exact wording of the Trust Deed: some members proposed that their title should simply be 'Protestant Dissenters' while others wanted the term 'Unitarian' included. After much wrangling it was decided that the term 'Unitarian' be included

56. John Platts Unitarians not Infidels;A Sermon (5th ed. Doncaster 1818) p.10

57. Thomas Arnold Principles of Church Reform (4th ed. 1833) p. 36

58. F.E. Millson Two Hundred Years of Northgate End Chapel 1696-1896: A Sketch. (Halifax 1896) p. 12; Northgate End Chapel Minute Book in Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Libraries, Archives Department, Halifax: NEC/1

in the deed but it was stipulated that: "there should be no Doctrinal limitation as to the use of the Chapel in after times beyond what would be conveyed by the words 'Protestant Dissenters' worshipping one God through his son Jesus Christ".⁵⁹

Unitarianism's complexity and fluidity was reinforced by its congregationalism. From its beginning English dissent had been predominantly congregationalist - tending towards the autonomy and independence of each congregation. At the opening of the opulent new Presbyterian Chapel in Norwich in 1756 the minister John Taylor - a leading figure in the rationalising of old dissent and later Principal of Warrington Academy - asserted his congregation's refusal of any larger denominational affiliation: "We are Christians and only Christians..... We disown all connection, except that of love and good-will, with any sect or party whatever".⁶⁰ Often congregations continued in the 19th century to refuse a denominational title for their chapels - retaining the designation Presbyterian or simply Protestant Dissenting or, in many cases, using the traditional title of their chapel such as 'the Great Meeting' (Leicester), 'Cross Street Chapel' (Manchester) or 'Hanover Square Chapel' (Newcastle-upon-Tyne). This sometimes made the Unitarian congregation an obscure and private grouping. As late as 1840 - by which time Unitarianism was no novelty - there was a complaint that in one unspecified town the Unitarian chapel was a mystery to local inhabitants: "Unitarians have been discovered within a mile from the spot, who were unaware of its existence". The writer strongly advocated giving such chapels "an appropriate and sufficiently conspicuous name".⁶¹ But in response to this plea another correspondent - 'Presbyter' - confirmed the old Presbyterian aversion to a sectarian designation.⁶² This was a widespread feeling, among the older and more opulent urban congregations especially. Affiliation on the basis of theology to a larger denomination

59. Minute Book of Meetings of Mosley Street Congregation 1819-37 in MPL:M30/1/3/1

60. Quoted in J. Drummond and C.B. Upton Life and Letters of James Martineau (1902) Vol. I p.12

61. CR, 2nd series Vol. VII (1840) p. 104

62. Ibid. p. 177

tended to suggest - anathema to the traditions of old Dissent - the existence of a higher court of doctrinal authority.

However - before examining in some detail the development of denominational organisation among the Unitarians in the early 19th century - it is necessary to focus on the emergence of Unitarianism among a small grouping of churchmen. Their uncompromising rationalism, untrammelled by the particular traditions of English dissent, was instrumental in the establishment of publicly avowed Unitarian chapels and the beginning of national organization of Unitarians.

III

During the 18th century a section of the Church of England was no less liberal and rationalist than the Presbyterians. Arian doctrines circulated in the Establishment well before the Salter's Hall controversy among the Dissenters. In 1710 William Whiston, a noted disciple of Newton, was deprived of his Cambridge Professorship in Mathematics for publicising his Arian beliefs. A few years later his friend Samuel Clarke published 'The Scripture Doctrine of the Trinity' effectively dismantling the orthodox doctrine.⁶³ After Salter's Hall - in the 1720s and 30s - some of the most liberal of the young Presbyterian ministers - perhaps as many as 50 - conformed to the establishment finding there not only material advantages but a cooler and more tolerant environment.⁶⁴ Even princes of Walpole's church - men like Bishop Hoadly - leaned towards antitrinitarian heresy. And there was a broader convergence between a section of the church - the so-called Latitudinarians - and the most rationalist of the Dissenters. Both shared the style of Locke in matters of religion. They aimed for simplicity and lucidity. Optimistic and complacent, they conceived of the

63. For both Whiston and Clark see DNB. For useful contextualisation of religious currents in this period see Margaret C. Jacob.

The Newtonians and the English Revolution 1689-1720 (Hassocks, Sussex 1976)

64. Duncan Coomer English Dissent under the Early Hanoverians (1946) p.14

universe as the rational construct of a wise and benevolent deity.⁶⁵

In the words of Professor Plumb: "Evil and guilt, sin and redemption - the whole personal drama and appeal of religion - was forgotten or rationalized away and the euphoric optimism of politicians pervaded the teaching of the Church".⁶⁶

However, by the 1770s - in the changing and tenuous climate of those years - some churchmen had gone as far as Unitarianism and had begun to link this with political demands for major reforms both in the church and the Universities. Though few in number they were an important influence on the late 18th century church and contributed to the emergence of a separate Unitarian denomination. Theophilus Lindsey was the prime mover in this latter process.⁶⁷ Born in 1723, the son of a Cheshire mercer and salt-works owner, he was distantly connected to the Marlboroughs and after graduating at Cambridge, aristocratic patronage helped his career in the Church. However in 1763 he turned his back on preferment and settled in the isolated North Yorkshire village of Catterick.

In 1769 Joseph Priestley and William Turner, Unitarian minister at Wakefield, met him at the home of Archdeacon Blackburne in Richmond and found him "uneasy in his situation" and considering leaving the church. Priestley advised him to "make what alteration he thought proper in the offices of the church, and leave it to his superiors to dismiss him if they chose" rather than to voluntarily resign.⁶⁸ A correspondence with both Priestley and Turner ensued - not calculated to pacify Lindsey's doubts.

The movement among Anglican clergyman for relief from subscription to the 39 Articles moved Lindsey to energetic campaigning. He collected signatures from clergymen as far away as Kendal, York, Newcastle-upon-Tyne

65. D.G. Wigmore-Beddoes Yesterday's Radicals: A Study of the Affinity between Unitarianism and Broad Church Anglicanism in the 19th century (1971) Chapter One; Gerald R. Cragg The Church and the Age of Reason 1648-1789 (1970) Chapter 9

66. J.H. Plumb England in the 18th century (1714-1815) (Pelican History of England Vol. 7, new ed: 1963) p.44

67. Biographical information is taken from Belsham's Memoirs of Lindsey - already cited - unless otherwise stated.

and Wakefield but was disappointed with the numbers of clergymen who were sympathetic to the campaign, yet refused to sign the petition out of fear for their career prospects. Lindsey travelled to London in February 1772 and sat through the Commons debates on the issue. The defeat of the motion and the refusal of the reforming group of clergymen to make a further application to parliament, finally decided Lindsey that total withdrawal from the Church was necessary. In November 1773 he finally sent his formal letter of resignation to Dr. Markham, the Bishop of Chester, and resolved to establish his own Unitarian congregation in London. This public gesture attracted a good deal of attention, especially among liberal Presbyterians. But some influential political grandees were interested. Priestley's patron the Earl of Shelburne offered support and Priestley reported to Turner: "All my friends are very sanguine in favour of Mr. Linsey's Unitarian Chapel. Dr. Franklin says he knows several persons of distinction who will wish to encourage it, and several have proposed to subscribe to it".⁶⁹

On Lindsey's arrival in London in January 1774, Joseph Priestley and Richard Price rallied their friends to help, finding a room for church services on Essex Street on the Strand. "Dr. Priestley is indefatigable in his endeavours", Lindsey told Turner three weeks after, "and to him, Dr. Price and other friends of theirs, it will be owing that the matter is brought to bear at last".⁷⁰ But he was disappointed that most of his supporters were dissenters rather than churchmen.

There were initial difficulties. Lindsey was subjected to a number of attempts to dissuade him from opening a chapel. Two M.P.s had tried to argue him out of it. There was talk of prosecution if he went ahead. The Westminster magistrates hesitated to grant a license and their obstructionism delayed the opening, until John Lee - politically influential barrister and a Unitarian friend of Priestley - came, according to Lindsey,

68. Priestley Memoirs 1 p. 82

69. Belsham op. cit. p. 94

70. Ibid. p. 101



"like a lion" and forcefully told the magistrates that they had no right to oppose the granting of a license, threatening them with legal action. They relented, promising that a license would be prepared. Lee advised Lindsey to go ahead. Finally in mid-April 1774 the temporary chapel on Essex Street was opened. According to John Lee there were ten coaches at the door and among those attending were Benjamin Franklin, Joseph Priestley, Lord Despensers, the Dukes of Norfolk and Richmond, several barristers and clergymen: "All the rest were to all appearance persons of condition, and in the whole were I think near two hundred, and mostly of the Establishment".⁷¹

There were continuing pressures. Prosecution was again threatened. A government spy was known to attend services and forward information to the government. However Lindsey continued to have powerful supporters. The Duchess of Northumberland called on Lindsey and offered him her protection. Soon the government spy was withdrawn. By 1777 enough money had been raised (£1900) to purchase Essex House outright. Extensive alterations - costing over £2000 - were made and the refurbished chapel was reopened at the end of March 1779. It had 301 seats, let at one guinea per annum each. Lindsey's congregation over the next twenty years or so included a number of Cambridge Fellows, a significant number of MPs from the Whig opposition, influential figures in City politics and a number of lawyers and barristers. Thus Lindsey's single-minded aim was fulfilled and the first congregation of churchmen and dissenters - uniting solely on the ground of complete freedom of religious opinion, had been established as an explicitly Unitarian church.

It was believed that a substantial section of the Anglican church were in principle Unitarians and that others would follow Lindsey's lead. Joseph Priestley in 1782 commented on the "great numbers" of Unitarians inside the Church of England: "Were all the speculative Unitarians in the

71. Ibid. p. 111n.

Church of England to become serious Christians, and consequently, think it their duty to leave it, the destruction would be very conspicuous and alarming".⁷²

And this belief was kept alive by a number of influential individuals inside the Church in these years, all of them with Cambridge connections, some of whom seceded and others of whom kept up a rearguard action from within. John Jebb, born in 1736 the son of a clergyman, followed Lindsey's example and in 1775 resigned his ecclesiastical preferments - he was rector of Homersfield and vicar of Flixton in Suffolk - and publicly declared his Unitarianism. For Jebb this was the final episode of a prolonged struggle for reform. In 1764 he had sacrificed his Peterhouse Fellowship by disregarding the rules and getting married. He remained at Cambridge, lecturing and campaigning for university reform. He was also active in the campaign against Subscription in the early 1770s. On his abandonment of the Church in 1775, Jebb moved to London but declined Lindsey's invitation to join him as co-minister at Essex Street Chapel. He studied medicine, established a profitable practice, was a member of Lindsey's congregation and noted radical leader in the City until his premature death in 1786.⁷³

Over the next few years several clergymen resigned from the Church on the basis of a conscientious refusal to subscribe to trinitarian dogmas. In 1778 Edward Evanson resigned his Tewkesbury living, moved to Mitcham in Surrey where he ran a school and wrote a number of radical religious studies. His study "The Dissonance of the Four Generally Received Evangelists" published in 1792 was an extremely rationalist study of the Biblical texts which earned him a gooddeal of notoriety and social

72. Joseph Priestley The Proper Constitution of a Christian Church...
op. cit. p 48

73. DNB; Obituary in The Gentleman's Magazine Vol. 56 Part i
(1786) pp. 267-8; John Nicholls Literary Anecdotes of the
18th century: comprizing Biographical Memoirs etc.....
Vol. VIII (1814) pp 366-7

excommunication.⁷⁴ A year later Gilbert Wakefield, 23 years old, resigned his curacy, vacated his Cambridge Fellowship and refused subscription to the 39 Articles: shortly afterwards he accepted the post of tutor at Warrington Academy, most rationalist of the Dissenting Colleges up to that date.⁷⁵ In 1782 Edward Harries - M.A. of Magdalen College, Cambridge - resigned his living on conscientious grounds, but inheriting the family estate settled down to the comfortable life of a Shropshire squire.⁷⁶ Two years later Theophilus Houlbrooke - another Cambridge graduate - resigned his Worcestershire living on Unitarian grounds.⁷⁷

At Essex Street Chapel Lindsey was in touch with these developments and was interested to recruit an assistant minister. He wanted a firm Unitarian with a Cambridge University background. Various possibilities had been broached: one man he was advised not to touch because of his instability (Wakefield?), another was an Arian, a third had shown a regrettable capacity for compromise by attending Anglican worship with the family who employed him as a tutor.⁷⁸ Then in 1782 Lindsey's own brother-in-law John Disney came under consideration. Born in 1746 into a wealthy family of Lincolnshire landowners, his great-grandfather Daniel Disney had been an important and generous patron of Dissent in the early 18th century but his grandfather and father had both been Churchmen. John Disney was educated at Cambridge and intended for the bar. However his health broke down, he was ordained into the Church of England and presented with the living of Swinderby by his father in 1770. But he had already imbibed the liberal heterodoxy of Cambridge at this period. At

74. H. McLachlan Letters of Theophilus Lindsey (Manchester 1920) pp. 109-10. This over-edited selection of letters is hereafter cited as Letters of Lindsey. I have consulted the original files of Lindsey's letters in Unitarian College Manuscripts, John Rylands University Library in Manchester, but have tried as far as possible to cite McLachlan's selection where applicable. The original Lindsey letters are referred to hereafter as UC Mss, JRL

75. DNB

76. Venn Alumni

77. Ibid.

78. Lindsey to William Tayleur 10 x 1782 UC Mss, JRL

Swinderby he changed the church service, omitting the Trinitarian parts he disapproved of. Finally in 1782 Disney took steps to leave the Church altogether.⁷⁹ Lindsey told a friend that Disney had "long disoblged great friends by not putting himself upon the lists for that preferment they offered to procure for him" and was now finally willing to give up "an agreeable though not highly beneficial situation in the church".⁸⁰ In November 1782 he preached to Lindsey's congregation and impressed them: several members decided to increase their subscriptions (one by as much as £50 per annum) and Disney was offered the post of Lindsey's assistant minister with a salary of £150 per annum. He accepted, resigned his living and inscribed in his parish register: "Liberavi animam meam". In January 1783 he was installed in London with wife and three children. Ten years later, on Lindsey's retirement, Disney took over as sole minister at Essex Street Chapel.⁸¹

An important group of Unitarians at Cambridge University remained within the Church throughout the 1780s - though in the face of increasing pressure from the authorities.⁸² William Frend (born in 1757) was subsequently the best known but there was also Robert Tyrwhitt, another Fellow of Jesus College; Theophilus Browne and Thomas Pearne, both of Peterhouse; Robert Edward Garnham, Richard Porson and James Lambert of Trinity College; John Hammond of Queen's College. Serious scholars and moralists, appalled by the anti-intellectualism and debauchery which prevailed in late 18th century Cambridge they saw themselves as reformers. They all admired Lindsey's stand and had links with his London congregation. None, however, saw the need to follow his example though they did nothing to conceal their Unitarian affinities.

Robert Tyrwhitt was the oldest of this grouping: born in 1735 into

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79. DNB; Venn Alumni; J.C. Warren 'From Puritanism to Unitarianism at Lincoln' TUHS Vol. II No. 1 (1919) pp. 24-6.
80. Lindsey to Tayleur 10 x 1782. UC Mss JRL.
81. Belsham Memoirs of Lindsey pp 155-7.
82. For a useful account of Cambridge University in the late 18th century see Ben Ross Schneider Wordsworth's Cambridge Education (Cambridge 1957)

a family of eminent churchmen - his grandfather was a bishop, his father a canon of St. Paul's - he had campaigned with Jebb for abolition of subscription to the 39 Articles and for University reform. In 1777 he resigned his Fellowship on religious grounds and ceased to attend the college chapel, though he remained resident in the college. In 1784 he published two tracts defending Unitarianism, was in touch with Disney and Lindsey and a member of the London 'Unitarian Society for Promoting Knowledge of the Scriptures' - set up at Essex Street Chapel in 1783.⁸³ James Lambert was also a member of this group and a correspondent of Lindsey and Disney. These Cambridge Unitarians read and sometimes wrote for Priestley's 'Theological Repository'. They were zealous in disseminating their Unitarian ideas. As the two main booksellers for the University refused to stock "heretical books" a group, led by Frennd, induced a smaller bookseller to keep a shelf of heterodox theology for them - they undertook to cover him for any losses.⁸⁴

Also in the background there were a number of influential senior figures sympathetic to the Cambridge Unitarians. Richard Watson, since 1782 Bishop of Llandaff and also holder of the King's Chair of Divinity in the University, was a Unitarian in theology.⁸⁵ The young Thomas de Quincey was astonished a few years later to find that Watson "talked openly, at his own table, as a Socinian".⁸⁶ He was a useful supporter, though unreliable and often inaccessible on his distant Westmorland estate. Edmund Law, who died in 1787, was another Bishop who was Unitarian in theology, offered moral support, and a member of Lindsey's 'Unitarian Society' in 1783.⁸⁷ In the later 1780s some of the radical political implications of their Unitarian position began to show. At the same time the authorities began to stir themselves. Frennd's public avowal of his

83. DNB; Venn Alumni; Obituary in Gents Mag (1817) p.285; full list of members of this short-lived society in Lindsey to Tayleur 4xii 1783, UC Mss.

84. Letters of Lindsey p. 127

85. For a recent sketch of Watson see Timothy Brain 'Richard Watson and the debate on toleration in the later 18th century' in The Price-Priestley Newsletter No. 2 (1978) pp. 4-26

86. Thomas De Quincey Recollections of the Lakes and the Lake Poets: Coleridge, Wordsworth and Southey (Edinburgh 1862) pp. 105-14.

Unitarianism in 1787 and his resignation as vicar of Maddington, near Cambridge, caused some ripples. The master of Jesus, Dr. Beadon, took his tutorship away from Frend in April 1788 on these grounds. Frend, to the delight of Lindsey, loudly complained about this. Lambert, less sanguine, informed the latter of the rising anger of the establishment against the small Unitarian grouping: "the lions begin to roar" he said. There had been a number of aggressively anti-Unitarian sermons in Cambridge and Lambert warned that the expulsion of Frend not just from his tutorship but also from his Fellowship, would have been welcomed by a majority. There was continuing pressure on Frend. In October 1788 Lindsey reported: "many expect they will try to eject him from his Fellowship, while others suppose they will let him alone for fear of the noise it will make, and he will certainly not be silent under persecution".⁸⁸

Unintimidated Frend set up a Unitarian society in the town which by November of 1790 numbered between twenty and thirty members.⁸⁹ But by this time Burke's attacks on the Unitarians - in print and from the floor of the Commons linking them to the French Jacobins - Lindsey feared: "will tend to inflame and excite the zeal of churchmen and set us at a greater distance from Reformation. I am afraid it may cool the earnestness and stop the efforts of some who but now were very forward. But let me not make bad omens".⁹⁰ Bad omens were, however, increasingly appropriate. Some of the most influential Cambridge Unitarians, surprised by the growing intolerance of the authorities in the early 1790s, withdrew into stoicism, keeping a tactful silence. Tyrwhitt was very influential, with important friends and a large independent income. Lindsey wrote to Frend in 1790: "He is useful, highly so in his present high station (for many notice and look up at him) and will always be so: I trust he will be induced to come

87. Letters of Lindsey pp 107-9

88. Letters of Lindsey pp 127-8

89. Theophilus Lindsey to William Frend 31 v 1790 and 2 xi 1790 CUL Additional Manuscripts 7886/155 and 162

90. Lindsey to Frend 2 xi 1790 Add Mss 7886/162

forth and show himself to the world more at large to edify the present and future generation".⁹¹ However Tyrwhitt increasingly distanced himself from his former friends and after 1791 seems to have had little to do with Unitarian circles in London. James Lambert similarly chose to remain within Cambridge's security. He refused preferment in the Church and attended the Unitarian Chapel at Newcastle-upon-Tyne on his frequent visits to the town.⁹² But he refused to publicise his Unitarianism: in 1808 Frennd proposed publishing a selection of Lambert's sermons but the latter prudently declined.⁹³

Another notable figure who caused some disappointment to the Unitarians in these years was Christopher Wyvill. Like Lindsey a member of St. John's College at Cambridge and a clergyman, he was actively involved in the anti-subscription campaign. Inheriting a substantial estate in the North Riding he ceased to officiate as a clergyman, leaving his Essex living in the hands of a curate and concentrating his energies in reforming politics in Yorkshire. But he kept his distance from Lindsey's stand, as Catherine Cappe bitterly commented in 1774: "Mr. Wyvill has now got a large fortune, and much will be in his power; time was when he talked largely of resigning - with what propriety then might he assist those who had the courage to practice what he only preached".⁹⁴ In fact for a number of years Wyvill refused to even subscribe to Essex Street Chapel - though in 1779 he relented.⁹⁵ Though his involvement in radical politics brought him into close personal relations with a number of Yorkshire Unitarians and he retained his sympathy with rationalist religion, Wyvill never publicly broke with the Church of England - justifying this in terms of political calculation.⁹⁶

91. Lindsey to Frennd 22 iv 1790 CUL Add Mss 7886/154

92. William Turner A Sermon in Hanover Square Chapel, March 25th 1827 (Newcastle 1827) pp 24-5

93. James Lambert to William Frennd 14 ii 1808 CUL Add Mss 7886/123

94. Catherine Harrison (later Mrs. Cappe) to William Turner 3 iv 1774 DWL Mss

95. Letters of Lindsey p. 139

96. See the letters between Lindsey and Wyvill in 1792 in Christopher Wyvill Political Papers V. p.12

Closer to Cambridge affairs, Bishop Watson reacted to the growing pressure on individuals like Frennd by hiding on his Westmoreland estate. The role of his deputy in Cambridge, Dr. Kipling, in denouncing Frennd from the chair of the Senate apparently caused him such distress that he vowed never to occupy that chair again. Theophilus Lindsey commented sharply: "I should have thought he would have taken the quite contrary resolution" - in other words, replace his intolerant deputy at once.⁹⁷ Though in 1792 he promised to support in the Lords the bill ending the illegality of anti-trinitarianism if it passed the Commons, he was increasingly unwilling to leave his Westmoreland fastness.⁹⁸ As De Quincey wrote:

"He was a lord in Parliament, and for many a year he never attended in his place; he was a Bishop, and he scarcely knew any part of his diocese by sight, living three hundred miles away from it: he was a professor of divinity..... and for 30 years he never read a lecture, or performed a public exercise".⁹⁹

If such individuals as Tyrwhitt, Lambert, Wyvill, Watson and others caused disappointment to more militant 'rational Dissenters' like Lindsey by their willingness to compromise with the Church of England - others, conversely, caused Unitarians a good deal of embarrassment. Gilbert Wakefield's "vehemence" was already commented on in the early 1780s when he was still a tutor of Warrington Academy: Lindsey said he did not wish to be responsible for "one whose passions are so violent".¹⁰⁰ In 1790 there was a good deal of trepidation when he was put forward for a place as tutor at Hackney College. His Cambridge background and his reputation as a Classical scholar made Wakefield a useful acquisition to a College which had to be commercially viable. However, as Lindsey wrote to a friend: "There were some objections at first on account of his temper as being haughty and contemptuous, and ill to live with, chiefly drawn from

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97. Lindsey to Tayleur 15 viii 1788 UC Mss, JRL and in May 1791 he told Dr. Percival how he was enjoying his retirement, though avidly reading Burke, Priestley and Paine - Edward Percival "Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Thomas Percival" in Works: Literary, Moral & Medical of Dr. Thomas Percival (1807) Vol. I p.clxix
98. Lindsey to Frennd 13 iv 1792 CUL Add Mss 7886/168
99. De Quincey op.cit. p. 111
100. Letters of Lindsey p. 135

the cast of his writings.¹⁰¹ Though as rationalist as any Unitarian, Wakefield was averse to aspects of Dissenting culture. At Hackney he caused disruption and after his brief sojourn there further disturbed Unitarians by a series of attacks on their college, its tutors and supporters and such eminent figures as Richard Price. His fiery controversialism in religion and in politics ended in his imprisonment in 1799 and his premature death from typhus shortly after his release two years later.¹⁰²

A number of the younger radicals at Cambridge toyed with the Unitarian ministry. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, of course, preached in many Unitarian Chapels in the mid-1790s and in 1797 was almost appointed permanent minister at the chapel in Shrewsbury.¹⁰³ The intervention of the Wedgewoods - themselves Unitarian - providing an annuity of £150, enabled him to continue as a full-time writer.¹⁰⁴ George Burnett, involved with Southey and Coleridge in the pantisocracy scheme, abandoned his studies at Oxford and his intended career in the Church: he served in 1798 as Unitarian minister at Yarmouth as part of an erratic career which led from failure to failure, ending in 1811 with his death in a Workhouse Infirmary.¹⁰⁵ Stephen Weaver Browne and Theophilus Browne, both Cambridge graduates and young clergymen, abandoned the Church of England in the late 1790s and served as ministers to Unitarian congregations for longer periods.¹⁰⁶ But to Lindsey's annoyance, other more

101. Ibid. p. 136

102. Ibid. pp 137-8; Priestley Memoirs 2 pp 121-2

103. See Coleridge's correspondence throughout 1795 and 96 for details of various Unitarian groups through which he moved, in E.L. Griggs (ed) Unpublished Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1932) Vol. I, passim.

104. See Coleridge to Josiah Wedgewood 27 xii 1797 5 i 1798 in ibid. pp. 84-9. See also E.L. Griggs 'Coleridge and the Wedgewood Annuity' in Review of English Studies Vol. VI (1930) p. 67ff.

105. Orlo Williams 'A Study in Failure' Blackwoods Magazine CLXXXIX (1911) pp 324-33.

106. For S.W. Browne Unitarian minister at Birmingham Old Meeting then in two London chapels see Venn Alumni; Gents Mag. Vol. 102 part i (1832) p. 91; Emily Bushrod The History of Unitarianism in Birmingham from the middle of the 18th century to 1893 (University of Birmingham M.A. thesis: 1954) p. 242. For Theophilus Browne minister at Warminster, Norwich, Congleton and Gloucester see DNB; Obituary in CR 2nd series Vol. II (1835) p. 507ff.

influential Cambridge Unitarians though abandoning the Church, also abandoned the religious ministry. Richard Porson, since 1782 a Fellow of Trinity, refused Holy Orders in the Church and subscription and thus lost his Fellowship in 1792; however he settled in London as a literary dogsbody, sinking into bitterness, intemperance and an early death.¹⁰⁷

John Hammond settled on his Huntingdonshire estate and lived a gentlemanly life of cultured solitude.¹⁰⁸ William Frend, after his expulsion from

Cambridge in 1793, combined successful involvement in the insurance business with radical politics, though he was always active in Unitarian organizations in London. Lindsey expressed his disappointment in 1795 that the dissident Anglicans had not followed his lead in forming alternative independent congregations: "I am sorry to observe to you, that the turn of too many, who of late, have quitted the Church of England for scruples and on conscience on account of its unscriptural subscriptions and service, has been such as to make it appear as if the motive with them had been to be more at liberty to mix with the world and follow its diversions and amusements".¹¹⁰ John Disney's sudden and unexpected

retirement as minister at Essex Street Chapel in 1805 - on inheriting the substantial Hollis estate - was a further blow. Disney immediately assumed the role of country gentleman, displaying considerable coolness towards his Unitarian friends. James Lambert wrote to Frend in 1808:

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107. Robert Spears Memorable Unitarians (1906) pp. 302-7. Lives of Eminent & Illustrious Englishmen from Alfred the Great to the Latest Times, On an Original Plan ed. George Godfrey Cunningham (Glasgow 1837)
108. Venn Alumni; Gents Mag. Vol. 100 part ii (1830) pp. 88-9; Letters to William Frend from the Reynolds Family of Little Paxton and John Hammond of Fenstanton 1793-1814 ed. Frida Knight Cambridge Antiquarian Records Society (1974) pp. 69,72, 81-2.
109. An Account of the Proceedings in the University of Cambridge against William Frend MA, Fellow of Jesus College, for publishing a pamphlet entitled Peace and Union (1793)
110. Lindsey to Millar 7 ii 1795 in DWL Mss 12.46(7)

"I was much less surpris'd than sorry at the account you give of Dr. D -. I would gladly hope that the coldness you complain of may have arisen from the difficulty he found to express his real feelings, but I am afraid that a mind which has given way to selfish habits seldom recovers its sensibility of generous emotions and social sympathies".¹¹¹

Disney was succeeded as minister at Essex Street by Thomas Belsham, from a dissenting background and a former independent minister.

There were individual cases of clergymen refusing subscription or of resigning from the Church and publicly avowing their Unitarianism. Philip Le Breton for instance - Oxford graduate, son of the Dean of Jersey, to which position he succeeded - resigned his positions in the Church in 1814 and avowed his Unitarian convictions, subsequently becoming an active committee-man among the London Unitarians.¹¹² However such individual secessions were few and far between and a matter of isolated individuals. In 1816 a Unitarian minister still claimed that within the Church of England there were "thousands" of Unitarians.¹¹³ However there was little sign of their existence.

Theophilus Lindsey's resignation from the Church of England in 1773, despite the controversy and interest it aroused among Anglicans - and despite the large number of Latitudinarian clergymen who had a good deal in common with his Unitarian theology - did not initiate a significant upheaval within the state church. His chapel on the Strand - important though it was - remained the single Unitarian foundation to emerge from the Church and the Universities. There was not, as some Unitarians hoped, a chain reaction by which Anglicanism was radically liberalised and a whole network of new congregation established uniting churchman and dissenter. Yet the contribution of Lindsey and the other Cambridge Unitarians was not irrelevant. Lindsey's chapel provided a central focus in the 1770s and 80s

111. Lambert to Frennd 7 xi 1808 CUL Add. Mss 7886/124; John Hammond to Frennd 28 i 1811 in Letters to William Frennd... op.cit. (1974) p.89

112. Information in 'Notes & Queries' in TUHS Vol.IV No.2 (1928) pp 199-200

113. Israel Worsley Observations on the State and Changes in the Presbyterian Societies of England during the last half century; preceded by a Sermon on the Rev. Dr. Joshua Toulmin (1816) p. 62-3

for the scattered ranks of "rational Dissent". Priestley in 1787 called it "the head-quarters of Unitarianism, the great mother-church".¹¹⁴ Its uncompromising assertion of its Unitarianism led the break from what was at times evasion on the part of liberal Presbyterians. It also countered the traditional Dissenting aversion to a national perspective. The two societies which Lindsey and Disney founded - the Society for Promoting Knowledge of the Scripture in 1733 and its more ambitious successor the Unitarian Society for Promoting Christian knowledge and the Practice of Virtue by the Distribution of Books in 1791 - were the first steps towards a national Unitarian organization. And finally, it contributed to the move of numbers of laymen from the rationalist quiescence of Cambridge Anglicanism into the orbit of Unitarian dissent - in some cases as wealthy and politically influential chapel members, in other cases as sympathisers willing to associate with Unitarian dissenters socially and cooperate with them in cultural and political initiatives.

IV

In 1791 the Unitarian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge and the Practice of Virtue by the Distribution of Books was the first step towards a national organisation of Unitarians - set up in London largely at the instigation of Theophilus Lindsey. Its ostensible aim was to provide an efficient mechanism for the publishing and distribution of Unitarian writings. However, more fundamentally it sought to shake Unitarians out of their lethargy and caution. The Unitarian Society's preamble to its rules and list of subscribers was forthright: "Rational Christians have hitherto been too cautious of publicly acknowledging their principles and this disgraceful timidity hath been prejudicial to

114. Priestley Memoirs 1 p. 410

the progress of truth and virtue. It is now high-time that the friends of genuine christianity should stand forth and avow themselves.¹¹⁵

It was however a bad historical moment for such avowal. From its very inception the Unitarian Society was unpopular. Relations between Britain and revolutionary France were steadily worsening in 1791 and everywhere Unitarianism was identified with French principles and Jacobin politics. This was exacerbated by the radical speeches and toasts made at its first public meeting in April 1791, which gave it a wider notoriety.¹¹⁶ A further problem arose from its assertive Unitarian stance. The preamble to the rules, drafted by Belsham, termed those orthodox christians who worshipped the person of Christ as "idolatrours".¹¹⁷ This had the support of Priestley, Price and Lindsey but many others were less happy. Lindsey told Turner: "You would hardly credit the accounts I have had, from some liberal Christians, of objections to our calling ourselves an Unitarian Society, as if it was making ourselves a party in religion; but the objection, I persuade myself, has more frequently originated in a secret apprehension, perhaps unknown to themselves, of appearing in print as Unitarians".¹¹⁸

Among those unhappy with the Society's doctrinaire humanitarianism were some of the influential Cambridge University Unitarians. Tyrwhitt had initially been interested and had suggested a change in the original title; as Lindsey noted: "Mr. Tyrwhitt's emendation of Christian for religious knowledge was very proper, as we are already called a Society of Deists".¹¹⁹ But Tyrwhitt, along with William Frend and James Lambert, was unhappy with reference to the worship of Christ as "idolatrours".

115. Unitarian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (1791) p. 3
This pamphlet is hereafter cited as U.S.P.C.K. (1791)

116. Belsham Memoirs of Lindsey p. 302

117. U.S.P.C.K. (1791) p. 2

118. Lindsey to Turner 9 ii 1791 UC Mss; Memoirs of Lindsey pp. 298-9

119. Lindsey to Frend 14 ii 1791 CUL Add. Mss 7886/165

Frend suggested a softening of the language of the preamble and a broadening of the scope of the Society. A meeting of Lindsey, Belsham, Garnham and Dodson rejected these suggestions. Lindsey explained to Frend: "it was not our view to induce men of very discordant opinions to join us, for then our preface would have been very differently worded if that had been the case, but those who held the divine unity and proper humanity of Christ, or who had no objections to rank themselves with such".¹²⁰ In fact, at the general meeting a month or so later a few specific epithets were criticised and changed but the preamble remained uncompromisingly antagonistic to trinitarian 'idolatry'. Another withdrawal was John Prior Estlin, minister at the important Lewins Mead congregation in Bristol. He wrote to Belsham that his doubts about the simple humanity of Christ forced him to withdraw his name: "Tho' I should have the same objection to connect myself with a society whose fundamental principle was the pre-existence of Jesus Christ, and tho' I wish the spread of Socinianism as the system to which I have the least objection, yet I cannot present myself to the world as one who had no doubts on this subject or do what would be considered as a voluntary subscription to the Socinian hypothesis". In other respects, he went on, he was in complete harmony, abhorring the doctrine of atonement and believing firmly in the benevolence of the deity. Meanwhile he was studying hard.¹²¹

Despite the growing unpopularity of anything remotely resembling French ideas the Unitarian Society was established in 1791 with a list of over 150 subscribers embracing leading Presbyterian preachers, Anglican Unitarians and wealthy and influential laymen with close links to one or both bodies. As well as Richard Price, Joseph Priestley, Belsham and Andrew Kippis there were half a dozen London dissenting ministers and ministers representing nearly twenty Presbyterian congregations, including those at York, Bolton, Exeter, Portsmouth, Wakefield, Shrewsbury,

120. Same to same 12 iii 1791 CUL Add Mss 7886/166

121. J.P. Estlin to Belsham 27 ii 1791 DWL Mss 12.48 (12)

Liverpool and Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Of the Cambridge University connection - as well as Lindsey and Disney of course - there was Evanson, Garnham, Hammond, Harries, Fyshe Palmer and, after all, William Frend. And among influential laymen there were several M.Ps - William Smith, James Martin and Richard Slater Milnes; barristers; a number of doctors; the Whig historian William Belsham; the radical Thomas Brand Hollis; landowner, radical and literateur Capel Llofft; wealthy dissenting landowners like William Tayleur of Shrewsbury; and a number of influential figures in local politics and commerce in such towns as Portsmouth (the Carters), Manchester (Robert Philips, Thomas Walker), Bristol (Benjamin Hobhouse) and Birmingham (William Russell).¹²² The admission fee of one guinea and the annual subscription of a guinea restricted it to men of property whatever their religious background.

The new society made little progress in the hostile environment of the 1790s. By 1805 its subscription list had fewer than 150 names and an annual income of less than £200.¹²³ However, a number of local Unitarian book societies were set up, following the 'Unitarian Society's' lead. In 1792 the Western Unitarian Society was set up with 31 subscribers in the Devon and Somerset region. It was enthusiastically welcomed by Lindsey: "I shall rejoice at your having many subscribers, but still more at the like societies being erected in different parts of the kingdom by your example, which I trust will be the case."¹²⁴ The Western Unitarian Society - according to Timothy Kenrick, radical minister of St. George's meeting in Exeter- had originated "in the zeal of some laymen of property in our neighbourhood".¹²⁵ Church and King reaction was powerful in the Exeter area but in August 1793 Kenrick reported that the Society was weathering the storm and "gradually increasing": "the late violence of

122. U.S.P.C.K. (1791) pp. 9-14. See appendix one below for original membership list.

123. Memoir of Aspland (1850) p. 186

124. Lindsey to Timothy Kenrick 29 v 1792 in DWL Mss - printed in 'Record Section' of TUHS Vol. IV No. 1 (1927) p.75

Kenrick 1 vi 1792 in Ibid. p. 75

the time gave it some check but it begins to revive again".¹²⁶ By 1805
it had more than 116 subscribers.¹²⁷

No other regional Unitarian book society was established during the rest of the 1790s. Only after 1800 did others follow - the Southern Unitarian Book Society (1801) with its headquarters on the Isle of Wight; the Birmingham Unitarian Tract Society (1806). Still large parts of the country remained untouched by these developments. Moreover, in terms of the formation of a denomination these book societies provided only a very fragile organizational structure. Concentrating primarily on the publishing of difficult works of theological discussion by the likes of Priestley, Price and Belsham - and in some cases costing as much as a successful artisan's weekly income - these book societies were restricted to the wealthy patriciate.¹²⁸

The next initiative in denominational development came from a very different part of the religious and social world. A shoemaker, David Eaton, leading member of a poor Baptist congregation in York which had developed towards the Unitarian position in the 1790s,¹²⁹ was dissatisfied with the apathy and timidity he found among the liberal Presbyterians. Pointing to the success of the Methodists he attempted to persuade the local Unitarian Minister Charles Wellbeloved of the need for an organisation to establish missionary preaching. Wellbeloved drew back though Eaton's argument, drawn up on paper, was sent to Lindsey in London. Lindsey welcomed the scheme and offered his support. In 1802 Eaton moved to London and his missionary scheme was mooted in Unitarian circles, again meeting with sympathetic discouragement.¹³⁰ Eventually, however, it came to the notice of two other Unitarians who had similarly emerged from

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126. Same to same 1 viii 1793 *ibid.* Vol. IV No. 3 (1929) p. 299
127. Society of Unitarian Christians, Established in the West of England (1805) pp 8-11
128. For list of all the Unitarian Society's publications and their prices see 'Catalogue' in Rules of the Unitarian Society for promoting Christian Knowledge and the Practice of Virtue by the Distribution of Books (1818)
129. David Eaton Scripture the only Guide to Religious Truth: A Narrative of the Proceedings of the Society of Baptists in York in Relinquishing the Popular Systems of Religion, from the Study of the Scriptures.... (York 1800)
130. 'Mr. Eaton's Account of the Rise and Progress of the Unitarian Fund' MR Vol. XX (1825) pp 338-40, 480-1

working class Baptist backgrounds. Richard Wright and William Vidler had already discussed the urgent need for missionary preaching of Unitarianism and with Robert Aspland, Unitarian minister at Hackney, they set up a discussion group in 1805 - involving also Eaton, John Simpson and John Marsom.¹³¹ The project was publicised in Vidler's 'Universal Theological Magazine' in September 1805 and in Aspland's newly-established 'Monthly Repository' in 1806. In February of 1806 a meeting of interested parties set up a committee to prepare a Constitution.¹³²

The new organization - which became known as the Unitarian Fund - met with some scepticism and even hostility from other Unitarians. As Robert Aspland commented at the first half-yearly meeting in May 1806: "It is to be regretted that the Society is regarded by some of our Unitarian brethren with a dubious sort of feeling, bordering upon suspicion and dislike. They think we shall degrade the Unitarian cause and put ourselves on a level with the Methodists".¹³³ Many Unitarians believed their complex intellectual position was only to be reached by the educated and that any attempt to simplify would necessarily entail distortion and compromise with popular superstition. Even a political radical like Jeremiah Joyce had his reservations and gave the Fund no active support, telling Belsham in 1808 that: "Unitarianism is not the doctrine that can make its way, in the same manner that Methodism is gaining ground: the one can only appeal to the reason and understanding, the other by dealing out damnation to all around - terrifying thousands to profess a faith in what they know not".¹³⁴ However, the Unitarian Fund also attracted a good deal of support. By the end of 1806 it had nearly 200 subscribers, including leading ministers such as Lindsey, Toulmin and - after initial reservations - Belsham. By 1813 subscribers numbered 442

131. Richard Wright op.cit. pp. 84-5

132. Memoir of Aspland (1850) pp 195-6

133. Ibid. p. 198

134. Jeremiah Joyce to Belsham 2 xii 1808 DWL Mss. 12.58 (20)

and by 1816 had reached nearly 480.¹³⁵ The managers of the fund re-opened closed chapels, helped increase the income of ministers to poor Unitarian congregations, sent out missionary preachers on lengthy tours to different parts of the country - to Cornwall, to Scotland, to the Potteries and so on - helped struggling new congregations. Seeing these beneficial effects many Unitarians changed their attitude to the Fund. One minister, Thomas Howe of Bridport, told another in October 1811 of the shift in his view of the Unitarian Fund: "I must own I was among those who were not friendly to it". But the missionaries he had met had all impressed him and he was now convinced to the Fund's great value: "It appears to me to be one of the best means that can be devised for diffusing the principles of pure religion among the lower class of mankind".¹³⁶ And a year later Thomas Belsham described the different assessments of the Unitarian Fund:

"This being a new experiment, in which unlearned ministers were chiefly employed, many of the more learned and regular members of the body stood aloof, and declined to give countenance to a proceeding of the prudence and propriety of which they stood in doubt. Some do not yet approve it and others who wish well to the design do not regard it as within the field of their personal exertions. But after the success which has attended the efforts of this Society, no person who is a real friend to the cause can consistently be hostile to its principle".¹³⁷

As David Eaton himself observed in 1825, the Unitarian Fund "has united a large class of Christians, who, before it existed, had no union and no associations of any kind, as a distinct class of Christians". "This Society" he went on, "by its influence has done great good to ourselves as a body; it has animated us into life and action; it has united, strengthened and edified us; it has given scope to our zeal, talents and knowledge".¹³⁸

135. See subscription lists appended to Rules of the Unitarian Fund established in 1806, to which are added a statement of the Society's Accounts and a List of Subscribers for 1812 and 13. (Hackney no date) pp 11-26 and Rules of the Unitarian Fund etc...for 1816 and 17 (Hackney 1816) pp 11-31

136. Thomas Howe to James Hews Bransby 8 x 1811 in Bransby Mss - UC Mss, JRL

137. Memoirs of Lindsey pp. 308-9

138. 'Mr. Eaton's Account etc....' loc. cit. p. 483

In 1809, as an adjunct to the Unitarian Fund, Aspland and Lant Carpenter led the setting up of a Christian Tract Society. This aimed to supply the needs of an uneducated lower class readership. Following the lead of Hannah More and Mrs. Trimmer it produced simple moral tales which avoided theological complexities. More than 50,000 tracts were printed and distributed in the new Society's first year and by 1830 it could boast that it had been responsible for the circulation of more than half a million tracts.¹³⁹

Other local organizations developed in this period to raise funds, coordinate activities, cement stronger links between congregations. Associations of Unitarian ministers met regularly: the Presbyterian ministers of the Manchester area, for instance, gathered together in the town each quarter from 1808 - exchanged information and advice, discussed denominational activities, offered support to younger and inexperienced ministers. Following the lead of the London-based Unitarian Fund and Christian Tract Society, local and regional associations for helping poor groups, financing missionary preaching and distributing tracts were set up. To the Southern Unitarian Society was added in 1815 the Southern Unitarian Fund. In 1811 the Lancashire Unitarian Book and Tract Society was set up in Manchester and in 1824 the Manchester Unitarian Village Missionary Society was established. Tract and Book societies were set up on Tyneside in 1813, in East Anglia in the same year and in the West Riding in 1815. District Associations, where representatives of each congregation met; quarterly or half-yearly to discuss problems and initiatives, were set up in many parts of the country in these years - for instance 'The Kent and Sussex Unitarian Christian Association' (1812), 'The Hull, East Yorkshire and North Lincolnshire Unitarian Association' (1818). By the 1820s the country was criss-crossed by a variety of uncoordinated associations at various levels. This provided a context of denominational

139. See for instance MR Vol. XX (1825) pp. 242-3; CR Vol. XVII (1831) pp. 234-5, 271-2.

contact much wider than the individual congregation and was important in alleviating isolation. The secretary of the Somerset and Dorset Unitarian Association commented in 1831:

"To Unitarian Christians, who are not always permitted to grasp the friendly hand of their brethren of other persuasions, such opportunities of intercourse as are afforded by Associations like the present, are a source of comfort, gratification and encouragement, and the means of increased attachment to that great and good cause with which they are identified".¹⁴⁰

A third London-based denominational organization was set up in 1818 - 'The Unitarian Association for Protecting the Civil Rights of Unitarians'. This emerged largely because of tensions between Unitarians and the rest of religious Dissent. The former were increasingly unsure of the unity of Dissent against the state and hence of the solidity of the Protestant Dissenting Disputies. The attempted prosecution of the radical Liverpool Unitarian John Wright and the Wolverhampton case, both in 1817, were indications of specifically anti-Unitarian feeling among a section of the establishment. Eldon, the Lord Chancellor, was an especially virulent enemy of Unitarianism. A group of influential London Unitarians set up a defensive pressure group. Its rules specified that committee members should live close to London so that they could respond quickly and efficiently in the expected emergencies. The committee included a number of barristers and lawyers - Edgar Taylor, Thomas Noon Talfourd, Christopher Richmond, M.D. Hill and John Bowring - with good political connections. It was also supported by individual subscribers throughout the country and over 70 Unitarian congregations. Over the next few years the Unitarian Civil Rights Association acted as a ginger group - initiating and collecting petitions on a number of issues, strengthening parliamentary links and floating a private bill to change the law on marriage ceremonies. It criticised sharply the "lukewarmness and indifference" of the rest of Dissent with regard to opposing the Test acts and agitated for the Dissenting

Deputies to be more active in demanding the repeal of all legislation which discriminated against Dissenters.¹⁴¹

However, despite the proliferation of Unitarian associations of various kinds in the early years of the 19th century there was continuing dissatisfaction in some quarters about the lack of denominational unity. A Unitarian writer argued vigorously in 1824: "We are yet but in the infancy of our efforts, there is yet a want of combined exertions, we are still but a rope of sand, and many congregations are as ignorant of the societies of their brethren, as if they were planted in the sterile region of Kamschatka. The ignorance that prevails amongst us on these matters is indeed astonishing, and what is worse, disgraceful".¹⁴²

In the following year, in an attempt to coordinate diverse denominational activities, the Civil Rights Association and the Unitarian Fund combined together to form the British and Foreign Unitarian Association. This new London-based body aspired to unite into a coherent national structure the whole range of Unitarian associations, congregations and active individuals: "thus constituting that union and concentration of power and exertion which has long been desired by the more influential and active members of the Unitarian body".¹⁴³ An office with a full-time under-secretary was established, so that business could be transacted quickly and efficiently. The new Committee particularly stressed "the advantage of unity and simplicity in the management, so essential in some cases to promptitude, and in all cases to effectiveness".¹⁴⁴ The Unitarian Society and the Christian Tract Society kept their independence and the new Committee, while disclaiming any hostility, observed - "in the fair spirit of benevolent competition" - that the preservation of separate organizations

141. For this whole paragraph see Report of the Yearly Meeting of the Unitarian Association for Protecting the Civil Rights of Unitarians for the years 1821, 22 and 24

142. Christian Reflector Vol. V (1824) p. 81

143. The British and Foreign Unitarian Association: Address (Hackney 1825) p. 5. In subsequent footnotes this association is abbreviated to BFUA.

144. Ibid. p. 4

seemed illogical when a single organization, the British and Foreign Unitarian Association, could handle the work within its existing resources.¹⁴⁵ In 1826 Lindsey's old Unitarian Society joined the new body but the Christian Tract Society preserved its autonomy, claiming that many of its subscribers were not Unitarians and that its aims were not confined to particular sectarian purposes.¹⁴⁶

By the end of the first year of the Association's existence 34 congregations and four district associations had affiliated.¹⁴⁷ Subscriptions steadily increased and the total thus raised reached £830 in 1829.¹⁴⁸ However in the course of the 1830s there was a gradual decline in support at every level. The total annual sum raised by subscription wavered around £750 for several years and then in 1835 dipped to £699. The affiliation of many congregations lapsed and the number of district associations fell from six to two. The initial enthusiasm for missionary enterprise soon faded and in 1830 it was decided that helping existing groups to survive was a more efficient use of resources than further proselytising. Increasingly in the 1830s the British and Foreign Unitarian Association became confined, firstly, to the distribution of Unitarian books, sermons and tracts and, secondly, to a parliamentary pressure group involved in legal issues surrounding the Lady Hewley Case, Dissenting marriages, civil registration of birth and deaths and so on.¹⁴⁹

The essential individualism which, as noted above in sections one and two, characterised Unitarians proved to be one of the factors in the continuing difficulty of establishing a national organization. Unitarian associations of all kinds had to be very careful to emphasize the

145. Ibid. p.5

146. MR Vol. XX (1825) p. 242. In 1860 the Christian Tract Society was finally dissolved and became part of the BFUA.

147. The First Report of the BFUA with the proceedings of the Annual General Meeting etc. (1826)

148. The Fifth Report of the BFUA... (1830) p. 28ff.

149. See annual reports of the BFUA for the years 1831-36.

non-doctrinal and non-sectarian basis of their unity. At the first annual meeting of the Scottish Unitarian Association in 1813 Thomas Southwood Smith disclaimed any doctrinal authority whatsoever for the new organization - members did not even have to accede to the particular beliefs of Unitarians: "The very constitution of our society is such as perpetually to keep us in mind that no individual has a right to dictate a creed to another, and that even the opinion of the Society as a collective body is no more binding upon an individual, than the opinion of an individual is authoritative to the body".¹⁵⁰ One of the rules of the West Riding Religious Tract Society - which tactfully avoided any reference to Unitarianism in its title but which combined only Unitarian congregations in the area - stated: "That union with this society shall in no way be considered as implying approbation of all the books which are admitted into the catalogue".¹⁵¹ From the start the British and Foreign Unitarian Association was very careful to emphasise that affiliation to it by any association or congregation entailed no loss of autonomy: "There is no wish to dictate or even to instruct".¹⁵² Contributors were even permitted to control into which branch of activity their donations were invested: "a choice should be left to societies and individuals as to the particular objects to which their liberality should be applied". Thus as well as a general fund the Association had separate funds for missionary preaching, for publication of Unitarian books and tracts, for helping sympathisers overseas and for protecting and extending the civil rights of dissenters.¹⁵³

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150. Thomas Southwood Smith 'The Objects of the Association' in James Yates The Nature, Manner & Extent of Gospel Salvation: A Sermon preached... before the first Annual Meeting of the General Association of the Unitarians of Scotland (Glasgow 1813) pp. 37-8.
151. The First Report of A Religious Tract Society, In the West Riding of the County of York (1816) p.2
152. The BFUA: Address (Hackney 1825) p.7
153. Ibid. pp. 3, 12.

In 1838 a special meeting of leading Unitarians gathered in London to consider practical means of reviving the British and Foreign Unitarian Association and bringing Unitarians into a more effective union. But once again attempts to make denominational organization more effective were resisted by the fundamental congregationalism and individualism of English Unitarians. Thus one of the resolutions stated: "That this meeting recognises and acknowledges the complete and thorough independence of our separate Religious Societies, as to all matters of Internal Arrangement and Discipline; and whilst recommending Union, contemplates no measures which can interfere with this great and essential Principle".¹⁵⁴ The tensions between London and northern Unitarians, and between the older Priestleyan/Belshamite theology and the new transcendentalism influenced by Channing and German philosophy compounded the centrifugal pressures. As John Kenrick remarked: "I see little chance that any plan of union among Unitarians should be accomplished, when in doctrine and in practice, in politics and religion our manifest tendency is to increasing disunion".¹⁵⁵ George Harris, minister at Glasgow, complained that the Aggregate Meeting of 1838 had failed to offer practical measures because of "a jealousy for religious freedom which was not endangered" and "a morbid dread of sectarianism, as irrational as futile".¹⁵⁶

The Aggregate Meeting, while it signalled the complexity and diversity within the Unitarian body and its fundamental congregationalism, achieved nothing to prevent the continuing difficulties of the British and Foreign Unitarian Association. Subscriptions continued to decline and the number

154. Report of the Proceedings of an aggregate meeting of Unitarians held at Essex Street, London, convened to take into consideration the present state of the denomination....(1838). See also the account in James Drummond & C.B. Upton Life & Letters of James Martineau (1902) Vol. I pp. 94-7

155. John Kenrick to George William Wood 17 vi 1838 Kenrick Mss at MCO

156. George Harris The Question, What should Christian Unitarians do? Answered (1839) p.8

of individual congregations affiliated similarly declined. A writer to a Unitarian periodical in 1841 noted the dangers of declining income; "if the Association be not better supported, some of our small and poor congregations must inevitably become extinct". The problem, as he saw it, was one of a failure in communication: Unitarians in general knew little about the work of the British & Foreign Unitarian Association and were unlikely to subscribe to a distant body in which they felt no involvement and no interest: "I feel that if our body generally were only thus made acquainted with the urgent necessity for increasing the funds of the Association, they would come forward and do that which alone can prevent the speedy extinction of some of our congregations".¹⁵⁷ When two representatives of the Association travelled in the north of England in the Spring of 1845, visiting chapels at Nottingham, Derby, Halifax, Bradford and Leeds, they found that "ignorance, both of the plan and objects of the Society and of the work done by it, existed to a much greater degree than could have been supposed". They found many Unitarians "who knew little more than that a Unitarian Association existed in London, having looked upon it as a metropolitan institution for metropolitan purposes".¹⁵⁸ By 1866 the number of congregations affiliated to the Association had declined to a mere 13 and anti-sectarianism finally triumphed when affiliation at the congregational level was ended.¹⁵⁹ The British and Foreign Unitarian Association ceased to even aspire to be an organization of a religious denomination and it became what in effect it had primarily been from the beginning - an association of individuals. "You have been erroneously described as 'joining the Unitarian body' "

Nottingham's Unitarian minister R.A. Armstrong wrote to Stopford Brooke

157. CR 2nd series Vol. VIII (1841) pp. 492-3

158. The Twentieth Report of the BFUA...(1845) p.12

159. E.M. Wilbur op.cit. p. 373.

in 1880 on the latter's secession from the Church of England: "This you could not do if you wished, for there is ecclesiastically no 'Unitarian body' in this country, and there is no mode of 'joining' even that group of Churches in which a Unitarian theology prevails, since their communion together is one of sympathy only, and is in no way formulated".¹⁶⁰

V

That Presbyterianism declined numerically as it developed into Unitarianism was a source of delighted comment among the proponents of other types of dissent. In 1793 Andrew Fuller observed that where Arianism or Unitarianism prevailed in Old Presbyterian and General Baptist congregations numbers "have generally dwindled away, and there are scarcely enow left to keep up the form of worship".¹⁶¹ In 1812 Bogue and Bennett argued that Unitarian heresy had wrecked the Presbyterian body, forcing its adherents either into the Church of England or into other dissenting chapels: "Like the devouring pestilence, arianism and socinianism have with few exceptions, carried desolation with them into every congregation where they have obtained an entrance".¹⁶²

The Evans list¹⁶³ - mostly compiled around 1718 - revealed that there were in England at that time 637 Presbyterian congregations compared to 203 Independent, 206 Particular Baptist and 122 General Baptist. Even at its peak in the early years of the 18th century Dissent

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160. L.P. Jacks Life & Letters of Stopford Brooke (1917) Vol.1 p.328; see also James Martineau's similar pronouncements in a letter to William Knight 17 vi 1872 in Inter Amicos: Letters between James Martineau & William Knight 1869-72 (1901) pp 79-80
161. Andrew Fuller The Calvinistic & Socinian Systems examined and compared As to their Moral Tendency: in a series of letters Addressed to the Friends of Vital & Practical Religion (revised edition: 1802) in The Principal Works and Remains of the Rev. Andrew Fuller (1852) p.334
162. D. Bogue and J. Bennett op. cit. Vol. IV pp 319-20
163. John Evans List of Dissenting Congregations and Minister 1715-29 in DWL Mss 34.4 - hereafter abbreviated to Evans List. For a succinct summary see Michael R. Watts The Dissenters: Vol. I From the Reformation to the French Revolution (Oxford 1978) pp 268-70.

as a whole numbered only about 300,000 individuals - around 5% of the total population. By the mid-18th century this had been more than halved. Notwithstanding standard explanations that the 'virus' of antitrinitarian heresy was the source of this decline, it is clear that all types of religious dissent declined numerically in the second and third quarters of the 18th century. In London, for instance, there had been 46 Presbyterian and Independent Chapels in 1717, by mid-century 20 were extinct and more than half of these had remained firmly Calvinist, untouched by anti-trinitarianism.¹⁶⁴ (In the Church of England the same loss of adherents seems to have occurred in this period). An estimate of 1773 revealed that nationally there were around 10% fewer dissenting chapels than half a century earlier.¹⁶⁵

However, things were already changing by that date. Influenced by the example of the Wesleyans, there emerged in the last quarter of the 18th century a new type of dissent, which marked a sharp break with the whole culture of old dissent. It abandoned intellectual sophistication and rational discourse for conversionist zeal, passionate emotional preaching, symbolism. Personal religion replaced mere "speculative opinion". The effects of popular preaching and ceaseless sectarian energy were startling. There is evidence of a revival among Independents and Baptists in the 1770s and 80s. In 1801 the Independents had 914 chapels and this increased by between a quarter and a third in each subsequent decade. By 1831 they had 2,000 chapels and by 1851 over 3,200. Particular Baptists showed a similar pattern of growth in the early 19th century.¹⁶⁶

164. F.W. Powicke 'Apology for the Nonconformist Arians of the 18th century'. TUHS Vol. I No. 2 (1917) pp 106-7; E.S. de Beer 'Places of Worship in London in 1738' in Studies in London History, presented to P.E. Jones ed. by A.J. Hollander & W. Kellaway (1969) p. 397f.

165. A.D. Gilbert op.cit. p.35

166. Ibid p. 35ff; Religious Census 1851 in PP Vol. LXXXIX Session 1852-3 (1690) Tables 17 and 18 pp. cxliv f.

Presbyterianism, however, did not reverse its decline. In 1812 Bogue and Bennett argued that in the early years of the 18th century the Presbyterians had constituted two-thirds of Protestant Dissent (an exaggeration) but had sunk to a small sect on the periphery: "at present they perhaps do not exceed a twentieth part of the three denominations". They estimated that 252 chapels remained within the fold at that date.¹⁶⁷ The religious census of 1851 showed that there were barely more than 200 Unitarian congregations in England, three-quarters of them originating before 1800.¹⁶⁸ The missionary efforts of the Unitarian Fund from 1806 succeeded in helping a number of small Unitarian groups consolidate themselves into a solid congregations. However it had not had the kind of success which brought so many new congregations into existence among evangelical dissenters. Indeed the success of the latter contributed to the decline of liberal Presbyterianism.

As was already briefly observed above (part two) many old Presbyterian congregations were intercepted in their development towards Unitarianism by the new evangelicalism and absorbed into the Independent nexus. Joseph Bowden, minister at Call Lane Chapel in Leeds, told Thomas Belsham in 1811:

"When I came hither, six and thirty years ago, there were four or five and twenty congregations within no very extended miles around this town, loosely united together under the name of Presbyterianism, with ministers attached to them of almost every diversity of common opinion, except High Calvinism. Their sole bond was a liberal attachment to the right and duty of private judgement".¹⁶⁹

But in the intervening years, he went on, more than half of these chapels had gone to the Independents, three or four had collapsed, a couple were more or less Arian and the rest had become Unitarian. Looking at the broader situation of Yorkshire Presbyterianism, the list

167. Bogue & Bennett op. cit. Vol. IV p. 329

168. Religious Census 1851 pp cxxi, clxxix.

169. Joseph Bowden to Belsham 6 xii 1811 DWL Mss 24.107 (16 a & b)

of congregations which collapsed is short enough. However the number of chapels which were swallowed up by the Independents was considerable and included: Bingley, Bridlington, Cleckheaton, Idle, Keighley, Low Row in Swaledale, Mixenden, Morley, Northowram, Ossett, Pontefract, Pudsey and Warley.¹⁷⁰ In a number of cases Presbyterian congregations had reached the verge of annihilation before evangelical dissenters intervened. At Eastwood, near Todmorden, for instance - where David Simpson had been forced to resign in 1784 for Arian heresy - only four members remained when students from the orthodox Idle Academy intervened and revived the congregation.¹⁷¹ Bowden in 1811 saw signs of decline everywhere: "While pure Unitarianism is dispensed at York, Halifax, Bradford and Selby to little more than walls and pews; at Leeds and Wakefield it is preached to declining numbers and in short the cause....is rapidly sinking into nothing".¹⁷² Bowden's defeatism was premature. Yet even in a developing industrial centre like Bradford an old established congregation of rational Presbyterians was in difficulties in 1813: Charles Wellbeloved told an important Unitarian layman: "If care be not taken the Independent interest will prevail - and Presbyterianism....will be lost". Discovery a few weeks later that the chapel's trust deed specified Presbyterian Dissenters brought relief.¹⁷³

Other parts of England showed the same process at work in the course of the 18th century - gradual decline in numbers followed by either closure or absorption into the Independents leaving a depleted remnant of congregations who became Unitarian. In the late 17th century Kent there had been 32 Presbyterian congregations. However decline was steady. In 1770 for instance, the once important chapel at Dover was closed down. At the

170. Summarised from J.G. Miall op.cit.

171. Ibid. pp 257-8

172. Bowden to Belsham 6 xii 1811 loc.cit.

173. Charles Wellbeloved to George William Wood 13 iii 1813
Wellbeloved Mss MCO

end of the 18th century Edward Hasted, in his 'History & Topographical Survey of the County of Kent' wrote: "The Presbyterians formerly were the most numerous sect throughout this county, but they are greatly diminished of late years". By the early years of the 19th century only two Unitarian congregations remained - at Maidstone and Tenderden.¹⁷⁴

In Staffordshire Presbyterian chapels closed down at Lichfield in 1753, at Uttoxeter in 1760, and at Burton-on-Trent in 1803. In 1790 it was reported that the Stafford congregation was "composed principally of aged persons, some of them married but without families, others in a state of celibacy". It was eventually closed down in 1808 and sixteen years later it remained vacant and the chapel building was "going to ruins". By the 1850s only four functioning congregations remained in the county, and two of these were very small.¹⁷⁵

Even in the heartlands of Presbyterianism decline was considerable. The Evans list enumerated 76 dissenting meeting houses in Devon and nearly 22,000 hearers (around 20% of the total population). Decline was rapid. Within a generation whole congregations were extinct. By 1835 Jerome Murch's 'History of the Presbyterian and General Baptist Churches in the West of England' catalogued the virtual collapse of the Presbyterian body in the whole region. Thirty-five chapels survived until the 1851 Census in the six counties of the far West but few could boast a membership of more than 200 by that date. Henry Solly's taxonomy of

174. Evans List; pp 53-6, 116. Alan Everitt The Pattern of Rural Dissent: the 19th Century (Leicester 1972) pp.13n, 16n; John B. Jones Annals of Dover (Dover 1916) p. 194; G.E. Evans 'Dover: Presbyterian Congregation 1703-76' TUHS Vol. III No. 1 (1923) pp 64.5

175. R.D. Woodall Midland Unitarianism 1662-1962 (1962) p. 19; George Hadfield The Manchester Socinian Controversy, with Introductory Remarks and an Appendix (1825) pp 165-6; The Unitarian Almanac for 1854 (1853) p. 31

chapels in the area was simple: "decaying or extinct".¹⁷⁶ Even in the industrial North-west there was decline. In Cheshire for instance the 20 Presbyterian congregations of the early 18th century had declined by the early 1850s to 13, several of which had no permanent minister and few members. In 1827 Rev. Joseph Hunter bemoaned "the decline of the Presbyterian interest, which as early as 1790 was in a low state and is now worse".¹⁷⁷ In 1809 a writer noted the decline of Presbyterian congregations even where - as at Liverpool - they possessed every material advantage:

"a pastor of great respectability, private worth, and talents, and what is perhaps more important, of considerable affluence - an elegant building furnished with every accommodation that can minister to the ease of the luxurious; exquisite music, vocal and instrumental, the sanction of many individuals of wealth and consequence, yet notwithstanding the combination of so many favourable circumstances, even here the seeds of decay may be observed, and if I mistake not, will be found to have taken deep root".¹⁷⁸

The 1851 religious census, for all its limitations, provides useful data on the size of Unitarian congregations and their geographical distribution in the mid nineteenth century.¹⁷⁹ The general picture of Unitarian distribution in England in 1851 is of a religious denomination with its centre in the industrial North, especially around Manchester:

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176. Evans List pp. 26-31; Jerome Murch History of the Presbyterian & General Baptist Churches in the West of England (1835) passim; Arthur Warne Church and Society in 18th century Devon (1968) p. 93f; Religious Census 1851 Tables B & C; Henry Solly op. cit. Vol. I pp. 340-1
177. Evans List; pp. 12-14; Unitarian Almanac 1854 p. 31; Alexander Gordon Cheshire Classis Minutes 1691-1745 (1919) p. 110
178. 'B' 'On the Decline of Presbyterian Congregations' MR Vol. IV (1809)p.323
179. The following paragraphs are based on information in the Religious Census 1851, Detailed Tables. See Appendix II of this thesis for some detailed tables constructed from Census data. There is an extensive and rapidly growing literature surrounding the Religious Census of 1851, raising questions about its use as a basis for historical interpretation. See for instance K.S. Inglis 'Patterns of Religious Worship in 1851' in Journal of Ecclesiastical History Vol. XI (1960) David M. Thompson 'The 1851 Religious Census: Problems & Possibilities' Victorian Studies Vol. XI (1967); R.W. Ambler 'The 1851 Census of Religious Worship' Local Historian Vol. XI (1974-5)

nearly one third of all congregations were located in Lancashire, Cheshire and the West Riding. Of congregations in England with an overall attendance of more than 250 no less than 40% were in this area. There was a second clustering around Birmingham with 26 congregations in the counties of Warwickshire, Worcestershire and Staffordshire - five of them with attendances of 250 or more. A third clustering was more diffuse - in the old Presbyterian heartlands of the South-west: Devon, Somerset and Dorset had 24 congregations altogether, five of them with attendance of 250 or more.

Conversely, there is a visible absence of Unitarian congregations in broad expanses of the country, and especially in the rural south and east. In the whole swathe of rural counties around London, in the Home Counties and the South Midlands, there are only ten congregations. Unitarianism was not represented in Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire or Essex. Berkshire, Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire each had a single weak congregation with attendance respectively of 100, 70 and 134. Surrey's two chapels were both in London - at Southwick and Lambeth. Hertfordshire's two congregations were both insubstantial: that at St. Alban's returned no information to the Census office, an indifference which augurs weakness, and the other at Royston - a small chapel only founded in 1832 - had an attendance of 106. Kent's two congregations were more substantial with attendances of between 150 and 200. The Unitarian chapel in Oxfordshire - at Banbury - was unique in this whole district in being both numerically strong and politically influential.

East Anglia and Lincolnshire were similarly weak in Unitarian congregations. There were only three in Suffolk and one of these failed to gather as many as 50 hearers at any service. Of Norfolk's seven congregations, two were similarly unable to attract this number to any service. Only the congregations at Ipswich and Norwich were numerically and socially substantial. The whole county of Lincolnshire could not claim a single important congregation: its five Unitarian chapels included

three which could not raise more than 30 hearers at any service and only one - at Boston - which could scrape into treble figures. The average Unitarian attendance in the county was a meagre 47.

In the North of England - outside the industrial areas- Unitarianism was no stronger than elsewhere. There were six congregations in the East and North Riding - but apart from the old Bowl Alley Lane congregation in Hull - none of them reached treble figures at any service. The far North was similarly unfavourable for Unitarianism. Cumberland and Westmoreland possessed a single small congregation each. Northumberland and Durham numbered three Unitarian chapels each but only one of them - at Newcastle-upon-Tyne - was of any significant size or social influence. Indeed, out of the eight congregations in these four northernmost counties, no less than five were incapable of attracting as many as 50 people at any service on census Sunday and several of these were on the verge of total collapse.

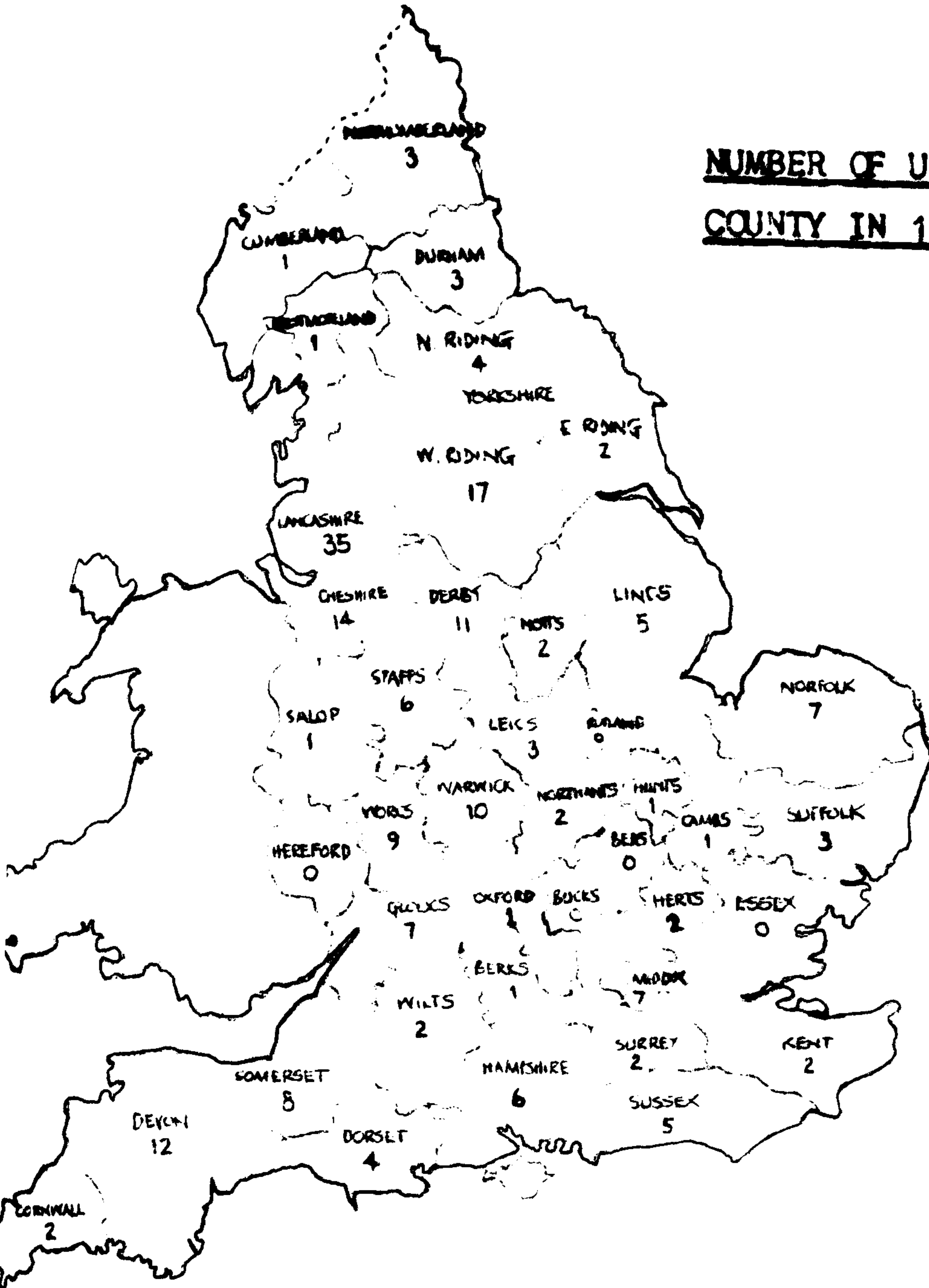
Census figures of attendance at religious worship on a single Sunday in March 1851 are of only limited value. They do not permit a distinction between a congregation's real constituency, its active core of members, and those who merely attended on a casual and irregular basis. They do not take into account that in many chapels (of all denominations) Sunday School pupils were taken to one or both services, though in the vast majority of cases, nether they nor their parents had any religious affiliation to that congregation. Nor does a raw attendance figure indicate a congregation's real importance in terms of its cultural, political or social influence: a small congregation, as later chapters will verify, can far outweigh its large neighbours in real influence. A whole range of important qualitative questions cannot then be handled within the limited terms of the census data. However, these figures do provide an overall picture of Unitarianism's weakness - hardly represented in many parts of the country; its congregations sparse, often declining, geographically isolated in a hostile environment. This is reinforced by the number of empty pews

in Unitarian Chapels on Census Sunday: while all dissenting chapels had less than half of their seats occupied, Unitarianism had only 24% of its available seats occupied (only the Quakers had emptier spaces).

At the same time within this situation of overall weakness there were concentrations of strength in urban centres. There might, for instance, be only two Unitarian chapels in the whole of Nottinghamshire in 1851, with an overall attendance on Census Sunday of 700 - clearly a small percentage of religious attendance in the county as a whole; yet over 600 of these people filled the High Pavement in Nottingham itself at a single service: as a percentage of the economically and politically strategic population of the Nottingham middle class, this Unitarian congregation begins to take on a quite different weight.¹⁸⁰ As Map One shows, most of England's most important commercial and industrial centres had substantial Unitarian congregations, containing men and families of political, social and economic influence. To elucidate the real historical influence of Unitarians requires detailed local studies of ministers and laymen.

180. Alan Everett has been rightly critical of attempts to analyse the social significance of 19th century religion on the basis of broad sketches of numerical and geographical distribution of attendance, and county by county comparisons. The county of Lancashire - including industrial towns, ports, stretches of barren moorland and isolated peasant holdings, large farms, decaying market towns - can hardly constitute a significant unit of analysis. He argues for detailed study of the type of local community and regional economy. Everitt op.cit. p. 10n.

NUMBER OF UNITARIAN CONGREGATIONS IN EACH COUNTY IN 1851



UNITARIAN CONGREGATIONS IN 1851 WITH A MEMBERSHIP OF 250 OR MORE



PART TWO

RATIONAL DISSENT 1775 - 1800

1. THE SOCIAL WORLD OF RATIONAL DISSENT IN THE LATE 18TH CENTURY

"Are there not, in our societies, persons who are as much dissipated and luxurious in their manner of living; - as much bent up making a splendid appearance in their dress and furniture and equipage; - as much addicted to worldly pleasures and fashionable amusements, by which the vitals of religion are destroyed, as any of those from whose mode of worship we dissent?"¹

In this chapter I want to focus on the ways in which the emergence of Unitarianism in the late 18th century was related to broader social and cultural developments. It is not enough to concentrate solely on theological arguments and debates, forgetting the other and decisive dimension - the laity and how their religious affiliation was linked to their social experience. In crucial respects the minister responded in the pulpit to the demands of his hearers, fulfilling their expectations, refurbishing and legitimating their view of the world. One of the key differences between church and dissent in England was that the ministers of the latter were dependent on their hearers for their income - a direct constraint on how they performed their role. Among the Presbyterians the situation in the 18th century tended to be complex. As one writer put it: "Not being established by law, their minister is always elected, and his residence in that capacity is *durante beneplacito populi*; at least the people of substance and influence in the society".² Everything, of course, pivots on the final qualifying clause here. Only those who paid rent for a pew in the chapel were members - but with great inequalities in the amount of rents and subscriptions, some had more influence than others. Similarly those more affluent members who could be relied on to make substantial contributions to special subscriptions (for chapel repairs, a new clock or whatever) had correspondingly greater influence. These inequalities of power and wealth within congregations were institutionalised in the form of church government among English Presbyterians. Essentially these congregations in the 18th century were

1. Anon 'Dissenters Admonished' The Protestant Dissenters Magazine Vol. I (1794) p. 105

2. E.G. 'Distinction between the Independent and Presbyterian Denominations' Ibid. Vol. VI (1799) p. 297

dominated by a patriciate of trustees.³ Men of secure property and social standing, the trustees were a self-selecting oligarchy who managed chapel funds and made all important decisions. Their powers were often reinforced because many congregations had by the end of the century accrued a number of trust funds through the wills and bequests of earlier generations - sometimes amounting to more than the annual subscriptions. Such resources reinforced the gap between the ruling oligarchy and the ordinary membership, giving the latter less power. Of course the trustees often consulted the broader constituency of pew-renters but largely as a matter of diplomacy, to ratify what had been already decided. A Presbyterian minister in the 1790s made explicit the extent to which this congregational power structure corresponded to the 18th century Whig constitution: "There is the minister or president to whom the executive part is committed, the trustees who answer to the aristocratic part of the constitution, and the people who vote in their own persons".⁴ Of course the real people, the vast majority of unpropertied individuals in 18th century England figure nowhere in this tripartite structure: just as they generally had no vote in parliamentary elections, so in Presbyterian chapels their place was to sit silently in the few uncomfortable free pews provided.

In the first section of this chapter, in examining the social characteristics of the membership of a number of late 18th century congregations, I have been most assiduous in focusing on the trustees and the wealthiest members - not out of a preference for history 'from above' rather than history 'from below' but because these were the men whose influence was most active in shaping the character of rational dissent. The second part then goes on to discuss some of the complexities and nuances of rational dissent and especially its complex relationship to the social values of specific social groups.

3. See for instance C.E. Pike 'The Evolution of Church Government in an English Presbyterian Congregation' in TUHS Vol.III No.1 (1923) p. 43ff. The particular congregation here is Bridgwater.

4. Benjamin Carpenter A Letter to the Revd. R. Foley MA, Rector of Old Swinford, In Answer to the Charges brought again the Dissenters in Stourbridge with a Concise View of the Principles of Dissenters(Stourbridge no date,c 1791)

I

Hostile writers in the early 18th century often claimed that Dissenters were rebellious and turbulent groups from among the lowest class. Dissenters, one writer claimed in 1719, "are generally of the lowest rank, mechanics, artificers and manufacturers".⁵ The Evans list provides a picture of a much more diverse social constituency. Note the different social strata coexisting within the following three Presbyterian congregations in early 18th century Cheshire:⁶

	Gentlemen	Tradesmen	Yeoman	Labourers	County Voters	Total Membership
Nantwich	10	29	23	23	28	300
Chester	38	75	16	15	35	1000
Macclesfield	20	90	52	44	48	500

The Evans list, and other sources, showed that while Presbyterian congregations often had a substantial core of tradesmen and yeomen, they also included a number of wealthier merchants, gentlemen, even landed gentry. At Whitehaven, for instance, there were four dissenting merchants worth more than £4000 each.⁷ The immense influence of "Trading Dissenters" was reported from Exeter.⁸ Presbyterian dissent, more than half a century after the Restoration, still retained supporters among the landowning elite. To give a couple of detailed examples: in Cheshire the Dukinfield family, led first by Sir Robert then by his son Sir Charles, were important supporters of Presbyterian congregations at Dukinfield and Knutsford

5. Quote in Hermann Levy Economic Liberalism (1913) p. 12

6. The John Evans List of Dissenting Congregations and Minister 1715-29
DWL Mss 34.4 pp. 12-14.

7. Ibid. p. 19

8. Ibid. p. 31

throughout the first half of the 18th century.⁹ At Platt near Manchester two gentry families - the Worsleys of Platt Hall and the Siddalls of Slade Hall - were supporters of the Platt Chapel into the 19th century and one writer recalled: "This little chapel had an aristocratic appearance, looking like an appendage to Platt Hall.....In the rear used to be a sort of transept, fitted up with fireplace and dignified looking chairs, forming a grand pew for the great people at the hall".¹⁰ A number of landed gentry had their own Presbyterian chaplains in the early 18th century.

However it is widely accepted among historians that the links between religious dissent and social influence were dissolving in this period. Bebb wrote: "first the socially distinguished, then the economically powerful sections of early 18th century Nonconformity almost disappeared".¹¹ "By 1740", according to a more recent historian, "social prestige had largely been eliminated from Dissent. Gentry were rarely found among its members".¹² This has been confirmed by detailed research into the social base of the Baptists and Independents in the later 18th century and early 19th century: their congregations consisted primarily of artisans, small manufacturers, craftsmen and shopkeepers.¹³

The social character of rational dissent in major urban centres in the late 18th century does not, however, conform to this profile. Many, if not

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9. Alexander Gordon Cheshire Classis Minutes 1691-1745 (1919) p. 154; R.B. Aspland 'History of the Old Nonconformity in Dukinfield' - Appendix to Aspland A Sermon preached...when the old chapel was re-opened for worship' (Manchester 1845) pp. 17-23
 10. Edwin Swindells The History of Platt Chapel (Withington 1949) pp. 5-6; J.T. Slugg Manchester Fifty Years Ago (1881) p. 177
 11. E.R. Bebb Nonconformity and Social and Economic Life (1935) p.57
 12. Charles Wilson England's Apprenticeship: 1603-1763 (1971) pp. 340-1
 13. Alan D. Gilbert Religion and Society in Industrial England: Church, Chapel and Social Change 1740-1914 (1976) p. 60ff

all, of the old gentry had gone - but counterbalancing this there were new generations of wealthy Presbyterians for whom increasing business success brought upward social mobility, fine town houses and sometimes landed estates. This new wealth and social influence - detailed in the following accounts of six Presbyterian congregations in the North of England - begins to point towards explanations of the social significance of rational dissent.

i. MANCHESTER

Cross Street Chapel in Manchester was not the only dissenting chapel in late 18th century Manchester but it was the oldest and certainly the most opulent. A contemporary Lancashire minister described it as "one of the largest, most wealthy, and respectable Congregations among the Protestant Dissenters, of what is called the Presbyterian denomination in this kingdom".¹⁴ Its trustees in the 1770s and 80s were by and large established men whose families had been part of the local Presbyterian community for a generation or two. More than a third of the trustees in 1782 were, for instance, the sons of men who themselves had been trustees in the 1740s and 50s. The majority of these trustees were involved in the textile business: nearly half described themselves merely as merchants but a few indicated that they were also involved in production as well as dealing - there was, for instance, a merchant and fustian manufacturer, a silk and cotton manufacturer, and a merchant and check manufacturer. Also among the trustees there was a doctor, a solicitor, a West Indies merchant and two landed gentlemen.¹⁵

There was a good deal of intermarriage among leading Presbyterian families so that the congregation was in some respects an extended family structure. Thus the sister of Dr. Thomas Percival (a trustee) married

14. Joseph Bealey 'Memoir of Dr. Thomas Barnes' in Gents. Mag. Vol. 80 part ii (1810) p. 106

15. For full list of chapel trustees with biographical information see Thomas Baker Memorials of a Dissenting Chapel (1884) passim.

Richard Naylor (son of a trustee) and their son became a Unitarian minister at Sheffield for twenty-five years and then himself a businessman in Manchester and a chapel trustee. Thomas Percival's daughter Anne married Nathaniel Heywood (a trustee) and all three of their sons became trustees - one of them marrying the daughter and sister of chapel trustees. Two daughters of Robert Hibbert (d.1762) married into Cross Street families, one of them to a trustee (Thomas Robinson), and their son in turn became a trustee.¹⁶ Such examples of interlocking kinship structures within the congregation could be multiplied.

However this should not lead to the assumption that the ruling elite of Manchester Presbyterianism were only inward-looking, parochial, like the Quakers standing apart from the world, turning - in Hazlitt's words - "the solitary cells of the religious orders into counting houses, their beads into ledgers".¹⁷ In 1795 John Aikin noted that in the early 18th century, Manchester businessmen had accumulated a little capital but more from their own parsimonious mode of life than from high rates of profit. However, after the 1730s there were the beginnings of "luxury" as trading links extended and profits grew, leading in the final quarter of the century to the emergence of the town as an international centre. Manchester, Aikin claimed, "has now in every respect assumed the style and manners of one of the commercial capitals of Europe".¹⁸ The Presbyterians of Cross Street Chapel had played a leading part in this transformation and had shared in its effects: as an American visitor noted in 1777: "The Dissenters are some of the most wealthy merchants and manufacturers here...."¹⁹

16. Ibid. passim.

17. William Hazlitt 'On the Tendency of Sects' in The Round Table (1817) in The Complete Works of William Hazlitt ed. P.P. Howe Vol. IV (1930) pp 50-1

18. John Aikin A Description of the Country from Thirty to Forty Miles around Manchester (1795) pp. 181-4

19. Journals and Letters of the late Samuel Curwen.... ed. G.A. Ward (New York 1842) p. 136

Thomas Touchet, for instance, originally a Warrington pin-maker set up in Manchester in the early years of the 18th century as a manufacturer and merchant of linen and cotton goods, and was particularly involved in trade with the West Indies. By the time of his death in 1745 he was described as "the most considerable Merchant and Manufacturer in Manchester" and left his sons the sum of £20,000. While one son Samuel (c.1705-73) made a spectacular show in London - becoming a ship-owner, an insurance broker, a sugar-merchant, a slave-trader and an M.P., crashing in 1763 with debts of £300,000 - the other three Touchet brothers remained in Manchester as prosperous merchants, providing in the late 18th and early 19th centuries a succession of trustees for Cross Street Chapel and for the old Presbyterian Chapel at nearby Stand.²⁰ Many other dissenting merchants and manufacturers similarly made considerable sums of money in the course of the 18th century - transforming families from small capitalists into the equals or even the superiors of the gentry. Many of them bought small estates in the countryside around Manchester and built themselves substantial houses, becoming a sort of merchant gentry: Robert Hibbert at Stocksfield House; Josiah Birch at Failsworth Lodge; James Touchet at Broome House, Pendleton; Thomas Robinson at Woodlands in Crumpsall; John Jackson at Clowes Court ("a substantial brick built mansion"); Henry Norris at Davyhulme, purchased from the bankrupt banker William Allen in 1788. Though as dissenters and comparative newcomers (not to say 'upstarts') they were kept by and large outside the charmed circles of the governing elite, nevertheless there were some signs of social acceptance. One Cross Street trustee, Henry Norris, became a magistrate. Several trustees served as Constable of Manchester:

20. For the Touchets see Baker op.cit. pp 91, 102; E. Axon 'Harrison Ainsworth's Maternal Ancestors' in Transactions of the Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society Vol. XXI (1911) pp 111-13; Lewis Namier and John Brooke The House of Commons 1754-90 (1964) Vol. III pp. 533-6; R.T. Herford Memorials of Stand Chapel (Prestwich 1893) pp 73-4, 86.

Robert Hibbert in 1759, Robert Hamilton in 1763, Josiah Birch in the following year, Henry Norris in 1783, John Jackson in 1799.²¹ The Bayleys exemplify that it was even possible to move from the rank of tradespeople to that of county gentlemen within a couple of generations while retaining affiliation to dissent.

The Bayley family had been connected with Cross Street Chapel from its origins and remained so throughout the 18th century and into the 19th. In the 17th century the Bayleys had been small-scale silk-weavers in Manchester. The estate of Thomas Bayley on his death in 1688 had totalled a mere £13. 4s. 11d. His son James (1673-1753) however built up a substantial business in early 18th century Manchester, providing a base of wealth which enabled his sons James, Daniel and Samuel to move freely between business and county society, church and dissent. James, of Withington, married a daughter of the Bishop of Chester and became a registrar of the diocese, a magistrate and in 1757 High Sheriff of Lancashire. Daniel kept his distance from the textile trade, preferring the avocations of the county squire on his Hope Hall estate - yet he regularly attended Cross Street Chapel, was buried there in 1764 and bequeathed £100 for the purpose of apprenticing the sons of poor dissenting ministers. Samuel too remained loyal to Presbyterian dissent, was a chapel trustee and continued the family's lucrative involvement in the textile trade. His sons Thomas and James were both Manchester merchants and Cross Street Chapel trustees in the late 18th and early 19th century and the former was for a number of years Chapel treasurer.²²

It was Daniel's son Thomas Butterworth Bayley (1744-1802) who exemplifies most interestingly the complexity of social affiliations underpinning

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21. Baker op. cit. passim. For Norris see Leo Grindon Manchester Banks & Bankers (Manchester 1877) pp. 48-9. See also Scholes Manchester and Salford Directory; or, Alphabetical List of the Merchants, Manufacturers and Principal Inhabitants (2nd ed. Manchester 1797), passim.
22. For the Bayley family see E. Axon 'The Bayley Family of Manchester and Hope' Transactions of the Lancashire & Cheshire Antiquarian Society Vol. VII (1889) pp. 194-9

rational dissent in the late 18th century. Educated at Edinburgh University (rather than the corrupted Anglican universities in England) he settled down to the life of an energetic country gentleman. At the early age of 24 he was appointed High Sheriff of Lancashire and for many years served as Collector of the King's Revenue under the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.²³ An efficient agricultural capitalist, he was a founder of the Manchester Agricultural Society which, according to John Aikin in 1795, "by its annual premiums has done much to diffuse a spirit of improvement in that essential branch of political economy through the neighbourhood".²⁴ He was an honorary member of the Board of Agriculture, author of a number of papers on scientific techniques in agricultural production. Bayley was also keen on making the farms on his estate more profitable and invested capital in draining, marling, liming and so on - "by which steps", a report of 1795 noted, "Mr. Bayley has advanced the rental of his estate, since the year 1768 very considerably - his tenants are thriving and getting money".²⁵ Bayley was also a leading magistrate, for many years Chairman of the Quarter Sessions, though a trustee and member of a heterodox dissenting congregation.

If merchants and manufacturers in the textile trade made up the bulk of the Chapel trustees an individual like Thomas Percival, a doctor, was a figure of immense local influence. Born in 1740, he was the son of a Warrington businessman, though both his uncle and grandfather were physicians. He abandoned the Church and became a dissenter at Warrington Academy, where he came under the influence of the Arian Presbyterians like John Seddon in the late 1750s. Proceeding to the Universities of Edinburgh

23. Ibid. p.199; Thomas Percival 'Biographical Memoirs of the late Thomas Butterworth Bayley' in Works: Literary, Moral and Medical of Thomas Percival... (1807) Vol. II pp. 291-302

24. John Aikin op. cit. p. 200

25. Quoted in William Marshall The Review and Abstract of the County Reports to the Board of Agriculture Vol. I 'The Northern Department' (York 1818) p. 271

and then Leyden, he qualified as a doctor in 1765. Lord Willoughby of Parham - the Presbyterian Lord - was an important patron of Percival, introduced him to influential figures in London intellectual society and used his influence to get him elected to the Royal Society. At the same time Percival found a wife in London, the only daughter of a wealthy London merchant Nathaniel Basnett. In 1767 he moved to Manchester and quickly established a successful medical practice. By 1775 he had bought himself an estate at Hart Hill and three years later he was made a trustee of Cross Street Chapel - for a newcomer to the town and the Presbyterian community a remarkable ascent.²⁶ Two other physicians - Thomas Henry and John Ferriar - were also important members of the congregation.²⁷

Socially, then, Cross Street Chapel hardly conforms to the model of a ghettoised community of dour shopkeepers, small manufacturers or dealers. If it was unusually large and opulent, other Presbyterian congregations in this period reveal the same social and economic processes at work.

ii. HULL

In the mid-18th century the Presbyterian congregation in Bowl Alley Lane in Hull had included a number of influential figures in the town: Benjamin Blaydes, head of the town's largest shipbuilding business, a merchant, a shipowner, owner of a ropemaking business and three times Mayor of Hull; Ralph Peacock, wealthy merchant and member of Trinity House; Joseph Pease, who introduced linseed crushing into the town, set up Hull's first bank in 1754 and was wealthy enough to loan £1000 to Hull Corporation in 1770. From mid-century, however, the congregation entered a period of gradual numerical decline. Socially too there was change as

26. Baker op.cit. pp. 87-9; Edward Percival 'Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Thomas Percival' in Works op.cit. Vol. I pp ii-ccxviii

27. For Henry see W.V. and K.R. Farrah and E.L. Scott 'The Henrys of Manchester. Part I; Thomas Henry (1734-1816)' in Ambix: Journal of Alchemy and Early Chemistry Vol. XX (1973) pp 184-208; for Ferriar see DNB.

successful merchants were assimilated into the Anglican social elite. Thus, after the death of Blaydes in 1771, his sons moved into landed society and the Church of England.²⁸

Nevertheless in the 1770s and 80s Bowl Alley Lane Chapel was still a focus of social and economic influence. The most influential member - a trustee and chairman of the congregational committee which managed chapel business - was Joseph Robinson Pease. Born in 1752, he was the first and only child of Joseph Pease's daughter Mary. She had married Robert Robinson - a Manchester merchant and member of the network of families gathering at Cross Street Chapel. Orphaned at the age of five Joseph Robinson was brought up by his father's brother in Manchester and from 1764 educated at the Warrington Academy.²⁹ Taken under the patronage of his grandfather in Hull, he was sent in 1769 to Holland to undergo the rigours of a commercial apprenticeship.³⁰ Within a year Pease's unmarried son Robert died and Joseph Robinson, adding the name Pease, became heir to the Pease business. When his grandfather died, aged 90, in 1778 he became the head of one of Hull's most substantial merchant houses.

Over the next 30 years he developed the family's interests. As well as holding the major share of 'Pease's Old Bank' he had a concern in two seed-crushing businesses and in the whale industry. He invested heavily in inland transport. In the 1790s he was the second largest shareholder in the Calder-Hebble Navigation, with an investment of £6,000; he had £3,800 in the Driffield Navigation, as well as lesser sums in the Rochdale Canal and in local turnpike schemes.³¹ He played a part in the development

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28. William Whitaker One Line of the Puritan Tradition in Hull: Bowl Alley Lane Chapel (1910) p.95; Gordon Jackson Hull in the Eighteenth Century (Oxford 1972) pp. 180-3; K.J. Allinson (ed) The Victoria County History: York, East Riding Vol. 1 (1969) p.312
29. T. Tindall Wildridge Old and New Hull (Hull 1884) pp. 155-8; V.F. 'Historical Account of Students educated in the Warrington Academy' MR Vol. IX (1814) p. 265.
30. There are interesting letters from Pease in Holland throughout the years 1769 to 71 in Pease Mss 138 in Wilberforce House, Hull.
31. Jackson op.cit. pp. 111-12, 191-2

of the town with heavy investments in a number of housing projects; for instance a group of three large merchant houses in Charlotte Street. And he continued to buy further land in the town.³² He inherited his uncle Robert's country estate at Hessle and added to it. In 1790 he totally rebuilt the old house. Though there was a working farm on his Hesslewood estate - in his will he left to his wife a cart and draught horse, all his corn, hay and poultry, and the choice of any three of his milch cows - land-owning was largely peripheral in economic terms. A 1793 enclosure award shows that Pease owned a relatively modest 190 acres at Hessle.³³ It has been estimated that only 16% of his income in the mid-90s came from land and most of this not from Hesslewood but from his town properties.³⁴

With this kind of range of economic interest Pease was clearly part of Hull's social elite. In 1780 he served on the Grand Jury at York. In 1783 he was Deputy Lieutenant of the East Riding. Despite his affiliation to rational dissent, Joseph Robinson Pease appears to have been a conventional gentleman-merchant of his day. Politically inactive, unintellectual, he married the Anglican daughter of a Derbyshire squire. A catalogue of his books reveals a small library, slightly Whiggish in content - the familiar light reading of any liberal patrician - a History of the Reformation, Plutarch, Butler's Hudibras, the novels of Sterne, eight volumes of The Spectator, Ferguson's Lectures, some miscellaneous volumes of topography and light verse.³⁵

32. K.J. Allinson (ed) op. cit. pp 447-51

33. F.C. Heaven 'Notebooks: Vols 2 and 3' in Hull University Archives DX 37/26 and 27; Will of J.R. Pease in Borthwick Institute, York: Prerog April 1807

34. Jackson op. cit. pp. 111, 115

35. 'Memorandum Book 1780-88' pp. 53-4 in Pease Mss 136, loc. cit.

Pease was the most opulent rational dissenter in the late 18th century in Hull. Baptismal registers of the period suggest that the bulk of the congregation were made up of tradesmen, shopkeepers, craftsmen, mariners and various kinds of skilled labour.³⁶ At the same time there were three physicians (all MD) - John Alderson, William Chambers Darling and Alexander

OCCUPATIONS OF FATHERS OF CHILDREN BAPTISED AT BOWL ALLEY LANE CHAPEL: 1770-95

PROFESSIONAL	4	3 doctors, 1 attorney
MERCHANTS	4	4 merchants
FARMERS	3	
GENTLEMEN	1	
SMALL DEALERS, RETAILERS	13	1 haberdasher, 1 grocer, 1 goldsmith, 1 tobacconist, 1 confectioner, 1 butcher, 2 shopkeepers, 1 innkeeper, 1 linen-draper, 1 apothecary, 1 baker, 1 brewer
CLERICAL	1	1 excise officer
ARTISANS, SKILLED & SEMI-SKILLED LABOUR	44	8 tailors, 7 shoemakers, 5 ropemakers, 2 joiners, 1 cartman, 1 painter, 2 carvers, 1 brickmaker, 2 bricklayers, 1 cabinet-maker, 1 miller, 3 carpenters, 1 wheelwright, 1 skinner, 1 oil-miller, 1 chairmaker, 1 blockmaker, 1 sail-cloth maker, 1 gardener, 2 husbandmen, 1 weaver
MARINERS	30	29 mariners, 1 sailor
GENERAL LABOUR	13	13 labourers
TOTAL 125		plus 3 soldiers, 4 tide-waiters, 1 out-pensioner and 1 ale-draper (?), 3 invalids.

Wilson - a lawyer and a number of merchants, including members of the Briggs family involved in shipowning, trading and insurance. In 1788 George Hadley - a Tory Anglican with no sympathy for dissent of any kind - described the congregation as "the genteelest in town".³⁷

36. Baptismal Registers of Bowl Alley Lane Chapel 1744-1827 in PRO: Non-Parochial Registers RG4/3752

37. George Hadley A New and Complete History of the Town and County of the Town of Kingston-upon-Hull (Hull 1788) p. 801

ii. WAKEFIELD

The old Presbyterian congregation at Westgate Chapel in Wakefield numbered among its members in the late 18th century, some of the wealthiest woollen merchants in the town. The minister Turner told Belsham that it was composed "for a considerable part, of persons of fortune and genteel life".³⁸ Among the trustees in 1779 were five members of the Milnes family, merchant princes of the West Riding with opulent mansions and landed estates, purchased out of the profits of trade. The Lumb family, long-standing Yorkshire landowners and woollen merchants, also supplied five trustees. Other trustees were prosperous merchants, men like John Naylor, Joseph Holdsworth, Benjamin Heywood, Joseph Burrell.³⁹ The Naylors were in the process of building up what by the end of the century had become one of the most important trading houses in the area, buying around 12% of the total cloth production of the West Riding.⁴⁰ Benjamin Heywood, woollen merchant in partnership with a branch of the Milnes family, was wealthy enough by 1802 to buy the Stanley Hall Estate from Sir Thomas Pilkington for £23,500 and build himself an opulent new mansion.⁴¹ Another trustee was Dr. James Richardson, who was said to have the principal medical practice in the town and neighbourhood.⁴²

The Milnes family provide a spectacular instance of the late 18th century merchant gentry with one foot in the West Riding woollen industry and the other in the landed gentry. From a Chesterfield family of cloth merchants

38. Quoted in Priestley Memoirs 2 p. 85n

39. Minute Book of Westgate Chapel, Wakefield: in Wakefield Central Library, Archives Department - John Goodchild Loan Mss - hereafter cited as WCL: JG Mss; Bailey's British Directory (1784) Vol. 3 pp. 727-9

40. J.W. Walker Wakefield, Its History and People (3rd ed. 1966) Vol. II p. 465; Henry Clarkson Memoirs of Merrie Wakefield (Wakefield 1889) pp. 47-50

41. Walker op. cit. Vol. II p. 465; Wakefield District Heritage ed. Kate Taylor (Wakefield 1976) p. 32

42. Clarkson op. cit. p. 165

Robert and John Milnes set themselves up in Wakefield in the late 17th century. By the second half of the 18th century their sons and grandsons constituted a commercial dynasty of more than local importance. They bought more than half of the total production of white cloth of the clothiers in the Huddersfield area by the 1780s for instance and in the same period they held a contract to clothe the whole Russian army.⁴³ As early as 1744 the Milnes family were wealthy enough to run two privateers out of Liverpool and in the 1760s they were still the only Wakefield merchants with a direct link to the American market.⁴⁴

Their four great mansions dominated Wakefield's main thoroughfare, Westgate. John Milnes's house was particularly imposing with massive gardens and a suite of ballrooms with ceilings painted by fashionable Italian artists. Thornes House, belonging to James Milnes, with fifteen bedrooms, stables, its own laundry and brewhouse, was picked out by the 'Universal British Directory' in 1793 as "one of the completest town houses in the country".⁴⁵ Much of their profit was finding its way into the purchase of land. Pemberton Milnes, for instance, bought extensive estates in Bawtry from the Lister sisters in 1779. At a cost of £38,000 it included Bawtry Hall, the manor of Bawtry and a good deal of property in and around the town: several inns, a Nursery, shops, farms, houses and a windmill a few miles across the Nottinghamshire border. Over the next few years

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43. Walker op. cit. pp. 397, 410; John Milnes to Holmes April 1780 Yorkshire Association Papers M25/271 in York City Library Archives: this collection is hereafter abbreviated to YCA:YAP
44. B. Scott Leeds Past & Present (newspaper cuttings compiled in late 19th century: in Leeds Central Library, Local History Collection) Vol. I p. 23; John Milnes to Marquess of Rockingham 21 xi 1765 Wentworth Woodhouse Monuments R24-37, in Sheffield Central Library. This collection is hereafter abbreviated to SCL:WWMss. I should thank Earl Fitzwilliam and his trustees for permission to consult these papers.
45. The Universal British Directory of Trade, Commerce & Manufacture... (1793) p. 662; Kate Taylor op. cit. p. 140

Pemberton Milnes added piecemeal to his landholdings, buying the manor of nearby Austerfield as well as property at Harworth and Bawtry.⁴⁶

James Milnes too was involved in piecemeal purchase of land throughout Yorkshire. Much of it consisted merely of small parcels scattered around the East Riding; there were also six small pieces around Morley totalling 82 acres; 11 acres at Hunslet; just over 100 acres at Darfield and 35 acres not far away at Ardsley; as well as 95 acres and a corn mill at Gildersome. His will reveals that the other main field for soaking up profits was canal and road shares. He had £13,000 in the Aire and Calder Navigation alone, plus nearly a £1000 in other canal shares. Turnpike securities amounted to nearly £2,300 including £1000 in the Sheffield and Wakefield Turnpike Road Security.⁴⁷ Richard Slater Milnes invested in an estate in 1788 - he already had a house in Wakefield and another in Piccadilly in London - buying the Ferry Fryston Estate of 1266 acres. He proceeded to rebuild the rambling house - with new white stone facings, ionic pillars and pediment, and a balustrade and balcony - till it conformed more closely to the ideal image of the country residence of a cultured Horatian gentleman.⁴⁸ They liked to see themselves as county gentlemen and had their portraits painted by fashionable artists like Stubbs: on horseback, red-coated, riding to hounds.

This insertion within landed society went quite deep. Pemberton Milnes's only child, Bridget, married in 1775 Peter Auriol Drummond, son of the Archbishop of York, for instance - sign of a marked degree of social acceptance

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46. Catalogue of the Crewe Muniments 'Part II: Bawtry and Austerfield Estates' (National Register of Archives 1972) CM 1902 a & b pp. 208-9. Joseph Hunter South Yorkshire: the History and Topography of the Deanery of Doncaster (1828) Vol. I p. 72
47. Papers of James Milnes: WCL: JG Mss.
48. Ferry Fryston Survey Book: Roger Crowle 1775 p. 13 Crewe Muniments CM 1663 in Sheffield Central Library - hereafter cited as SCL:CM. (I should thank Mary, Duchess of Roxburghe for permission to consult these papers); James Pope-Hennessy Monkton Milnes: The Years of Promise 1809-51 (1949) pp. 85-6

by upper class churchmen.⁴⁹ Yet this did not involve a complete break with the social milieu of Wakefield. Pemberton Milnes remained involved in the woollen trade: he was a trustee and committee member of the Ossett Mill Company in the 1780s, he owned extensive brick kilns and his banking interests were tied up with the profitability of the woollen industry.⁵⁰ Despite the amount of time spent on their estates, in London or at fashionable resorts like Matlock and Scarborough the leading menfolk of the Milnes dynasty retained their affiliation to Westgate Chapel and were usually generous subscribers.⁵¹ Pemberton Milnes managed to combine the apparently incompatible positions of recognised leader of Yorkshire dissent and the man reputed to have consumed more port than any of his contemporaries in the county.⁵²

iv. LEEDS

Leeds was unusual in this period: not only was there in Mill Hill chapel a substantial Presbyterian congregation which by the 1780s was unmistakably Unitarian, but there was also in Call Lane Chapel an Independent congregation which was untouched by evangelical influence and remained Arian into the mid-19th century. As a town directory noted in 1808, the Call Lane congregation was "without any tincture of Calvinism".⁵³ Relations between the two chapels were very close - their ministers exchanged pulpits, there was overlap between the membership of each and there was a good deal

49. Clarkson op. cit. p. 45; Hunter op. cit. Vol. I p. 69,73

50. Kate Taylor op. cit. pp. 74-5

51. Minute Book of Westgate Chapel, Wakefield loc. cit.

52. A.M.W. Stirling Annals of a Yorkshire House: from the papers of a Macaroni and his Kindred (1911) Vol. II p. 195

53. The Leeds Guide: giving a concise history of that rich and populous town, the circumjacent villages and Kirkstall Abbey (Leeds 1808) p. 36

of association and inter-marriage between them. For instance: one of the daughters of the late Mill Hill minister Thomas Walker, married a chapel trustee William Tottie - their daughter in turn married Thomas Bischoff, son of a Call Lane trustee George Bischoff and grandson of Call Lane minister Thomas Whitaker.

Mill Hill Chapel was always the larger and more opulent. According to Priestley in 1790 it was "in a fine state, containing many young people".⁵⁴ Its trustees in the 1770s and 80s included representatives of a number of the town's leading merchant families - such as Thomas Lee and his sons, Josiah Oates, Hatton Wolrich, William Tottie, Joseph Hainsworth, Eli Musgrave, and Obadiah Dawson; other trustees included John Lee, brother of Thomas, barrister, a political confidante of the Marquis of Rockingham and from 1783 an M.P; James Fenton, wealthy owner of a Glass works and collieries; Jeremiah Marshall, linen-manufacturer; John Shute, a grocer and tobacconist; David Farrar, a dyer. The broader membership, of course, was primarily made up of small capitalists, shopkeepers, tradesmen: cloth-dressers and woolstaplers, a stuff manufacturer, a bookseller, a butcher, a maltster, a brazier and so on.⁵⁵

Call Lane Chapel had fewer substantial merchants and its trustees in the mid and late 18th century always numbered clothiers and tradesmen as well as merchants, though the former were often men of wealth. One late 18th century clothier David Rider - a member of both Call Lane and Mill Hill Chapels - was wealthy enough to supply his daughter with a dowry of £5,000 in 1773.⁵⁶ In Hans Busk and members of the Bischoff family Call Lane had trustees as wealthy and powerful as any Leeds merchant.⁵⁷

54. Joseph Priestley Memoirs 2 p. 85

55. Minute Book 1771-1858 in Vestry of Mill Hill Chapel, Leeds

56. C.A. Lupton The Lupton Family in Leeds (Ripon, no date) p.22

57. List of Call Lane trustees in Papers of William Lupton & Co. VII/131: in Special Collections, Brotherton Library, University of Leeds.

Over one million pounds worth of cloth passed through the hands of the Leeds merchants in 1781 and of this at least £250,000 was handled by merchants belonging either to Mill Hill or Call Lane congregations - including the second largest volume of foreign trade by a single merchant, Bischoff and Sons (£45,000); the Lees, in long-standing partnership with Jeremiah Dixon, handled £40,000 worth and both 'Wolrich and Stanfield' and 'S. Oates and Son', handling £35,000 worth of goods each, were numbered among the top eight merchant houses in the town.⁵⁸

The kind of wealth some of these merchants could casually disburse was exemplified in 1767 in a special subscription fund to build a new parsonage for Mill Hill Chapel. This raised nearly £450 and among the subscriptions were £63 from Thos Lee, 25 guineas each from Josiah, Samuel and George Oates; 30 guineas from Thomas and Hatton Wolrich; over £36 from Anthony Markham; 20 guineas each from John, Richard and Thomas Lee Jnr. plus many subscriptions of between four and ten guineas.⁵⁹ In Leeds, as elsewhere, wealthy Presbyterian merchants began to move into landed society. Thomas Lee served as deputy-receiver of the land taxes, which was both lucrative and brought him the patronage of the Marquis of Rockingham in the 1760s. His son Thomas got £10,000 through marriage to a Greenwich lady and inherited a landed estate from his father.⁶⁰ Others married into land. Hans Busk married the heiress of Richard Rodes and thus inherited Long Houghton Hall and Bull House Peniston, where he had a private Unitarian chaplain, Thomas Halliday.⁶¹ James Fenton married a daughter of Sir Henry Ibbetson, merchant prince, former Mayor of Leeds and landowner. Other wealthy merchants of Mill Hill Chapel in the late 18th century built

58. Appendix A: R.G. Wilson Gentlemen Merchants: The Merchant Community in Leeds 1700-1830 (Manchester 1971) pp 239-40

59. Minute Book 1771-1858 loc. cit.

60. Wilson op. cit. pp 150, 242, 245

61. Ibid. p. 243; C.J. Street 'The Old Nonconformity at Norton, Derbyshire II' in TUHS Vol. I No. 2 (1918) p. 130

themselves substantial houses. Thomas Wolrich bought Armley House in 1772. Geo William (Low Hall and Carr House), Josiah (at Chapel Allerton) and Joseph Oates (Weetwood Hall) each had houses in the town's rural hinterland.⁶² Richard Lee's house on Woodhouse Lane had stabling for eight horses, a coach house, a saddle house, a brew house and laundry, as well as five acres of garden and paddock.⁶³

v. SHEFFIELD

Upper Chapel was the oldest and largest dissenting congregation in 18th century Sheffield. Its trustees in the 1780s included a butcher, two linendrapers, a shoemaker, half a dozen cutlers and three members of the Shore family who were landowners and bankers.⁶⁴ Among the membership in the late 18th century were doctors and surgeons like William Staniforth, John Moorhouse and Dr. John Rutherford; also John Parker, an attorney from a local gentry family; Joseph Gales, the radical printer and publisher, from 1787, of the 'Sheffield Register'; and Edward Nanson, a brewer and maltster. The bulk of the congregation were tradesmen. Among the occupations in the baptismal registers of the 1790s⁶⁵ were - a gardener, a filesmith, a plumber and glazier, a sawmaker, a silversmith, a grinder, a scissorsmith, a forkmaker, several cutlers and an optician. In many cases these men were artisans. Others were, however, capitalists of some property. Samuel Staniforth, for instance, a trustee of the Chapel, owned a draper's shop but was also described as a "wholesale woollen draper and

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62. John Stansfeld History of the Family of Stansfeld of Stansfield in the Parish of Halifax and its Numerous Branches (Leeds 1885) p. 234; Leeds Public Libraries Lawrence Oates & Antartica 1912-62 (Leeds 1962) p.12
63. Wilson op.cit. p. 69
64. Trustees listed in J.E. Manning A History of Upper Chapel Sheffield (Sheffield 1900) p. 189; Bailey's Northern Directory (1781) pp. 290-2
65. Upper Chapel Baptismal Registers: SCL HC29

merchant".⁶⁶ Luke Palfreyman Snr., described as a "hosier", owned his own shop and was able to finance his son's education for the legal profession.⁶⁷ William Fisher ran a "horn-pressing works" in premises at the bottom of his garden: his residence was apparently "a well-built and respectable-looking house, with palisades in front, and with a fine old staircase".⁶⁸

Towering over the congregation in wealth and social influence were the Shore family whose rise had been as meteoric as any Manchester or West Riding textile merchant. Originating in rural Derbyshire the first Samuel Shore (1676-1751) had made a fortune in the early 18th century - starting as an ironmonger, developing his own iron works, making some shrewd purchases of land and taking the leading role in the commercial development of the river Don. His son's marriage to the heiress of a wealthy Liverpool merchant provided a welcome addition to the family's capital. And his son in turn, the third Samuel Shore (1738-1828), made a lucrative marriage in 1759 to Urith Offley which brought the family a substantial estate of several hundred acres at Norton - half a dozen miles from the centre of Sheffield. Already in the 1740s the Shores were part of the Sheffield elite and members of the socially exclusive Assembly. Samuel Shore the third was a magistrate and in 1761 High Sheriff of Derbyshire.⁶⁹ At Norton Hall the workmen, servants and other dependants were each Sunday ushered into the dining room where the family's Unitarian chaplain conducted rational worship: when Theophilus Lindsey was staying

66. R.E. Leader Sheffield in the Eighteenth Century (Sheffield 1905) pp. 182, 308, 309n; Bailey's Northern Directory (1781) p. 292

67. John Holland and James Everett Memoirs of the Life and Writings of James Montgomery (1854) Vol. I pp. 194n, 195n, 239.

68. Leader op.cit. pp. 214-15.

69. Lady Stephen 'The Shores of Sheffield & the Offleys of Norton Hall' Transactions of the Hunter Archaeological Society Vol. V (1943) pp. 1-3, 6-7. 'Obituary of Samuel Shore' Gents Mag. Vol. 98 part ii (1828) p. 639; Leader op.cit. pp. 71-3, 113-15

there in 1785 the assembly numbered between one and two hundred.⁷⁰ One of their Norton neighbours was also a Unitarian: Robert Newton (1713-89), a somewhat misanthropic local landowner and former Sheriff of Derbyshire (in 1746), was a lifelong dissenter, a devotee of Lindsey and bequeathed £200 to build in Norton a "neat, but plain place of worship for the use of Protestant Dissenters denominated Presbyterians".⁷¹

Samuel Shore's two brothers John and William - both also Upper Chapel trustees - bought themselves estates near Sheffield. They played a key role in the development of the town's first banks, in partnership first with Benjamin Roebuck and then with the Parkers. There were half a dozen Shore men in the select dining club the 'Monthly Club' whose members included the Earls of Effingham and Surrey, several of the gentry of the area, the vicar of Sheffield and a few of the leading commercial men in the town.⁷²

vi. NEWCASTLE-UPON-TYNE

In the late 17th century Presbyterianism had been immensely powerful in Newcastle-upon-Tyne and included an important section of the town's governing elite.⁷³ In 1727 they were wealthy enough to finance the building of a new and fashionable chapel, with seating for over 600 people, as the centre-piece of a square to be surrounded with new houses belonging to members of the congregation. The site was called Hanover Square: "in testimony of their attachment to the reigning family and the principles of the revolution".⁷⁴ By the second half of the 18th century Hanover Square

70. C.J. Street op. cit. II p. 130; More Letters of Theophilus Lindsey ed. H. McLachlan in TUHS Vol. III No. 4 (1926) p. 366. This will subsequently be cited as 'More Letters of Lindsey'.

71. Memoirs of Lindsey pp. 99n, 100n; Street op. cit. p. 135

72. Stephen op. cit. p. 9; Leader op. cit. pp 91, 117

73. Alfred Hall Church of the Divine Unity, Newcastle-upon-Tyne: A Short History (Newcastle 1922) pp 4-6

74. R.J. Charleton Newcastle Town: An Account of its Rise and Progress: Its Struggles & Triumphs: and its Ending (1885) p.84

Chapel was a settled and respectable part of the town's social life.

In 1755 the group of merchants who set up what came to be known as the Newcastle Old Bank - Ralph Carr, John Cookson, Joseph Airey and Mathew Bell - were, as the 'Newcastle Courant' remarked "a Company of Gentlemen of Character and Fortune" and were all, with the exception of Bell, linked to Hanover Square Chapel. Each was wealthy enough to raise a founding share of £500.⁷⁵ Airey was a corn-miller and glass-maker. Cookson was involved in a couple of glass manufactories and iron-foundries and had some investments in coal-mining.⁷⁶ The most substantial of the three - and the most influential figure in the Hanover Square congregation - was Ralph Carr. Born in 1711 the son of a Dissenting merchant who had extensive mining interests, acted as a land agent for Lord Thanet and other local gentry and had bought an estate at Dunston Hill in North Durham, Ralph Carr inherited a good deal of wealth and power. He was himself a shipowner, a shipbroker and underwriter, a commission agent and a merchant dealing in all kinds of commodities - and not, it was later rumoured, above dealing in contraband goods. He was a magistrate and a member of the county elite - and in 1745/6 had invested his resources in the Hanoverian cause to the tune of £30,000.⁷⁷

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75. Maberley Philips ' "The Old Bank" (Bell, Cookson, Carr and Airey) Newcastle' in Archaeologica Aeliana (2nd series) Vol. XVI (1894) p.455 & n; R.E. and C.E. Carr The History of the Family of Carr of Dunston Hill, Co. Durham & the Collateral Lines in England (1893) Vol. I pp. 70-1.
76. Eneas Mackenzie A Descriptive and Historical Account of the Town and County of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Including the Borough of Gateshead (1827) Vol. I p. 376n; Margaret Ellison 'The Tyne Glasshouses and "Bielby and Bewick" Workshop' Archaeologica Aeliana (5th series) Vol. III (1975) pp 146ff.
77. R.E. Carr and C.E. Carr op. cit. Vol. I pp 46-7, 60-4, 66-8; James Losh, Newcastle barrister and Unitarian in the early 19th century, was told about Carr's dealing on contraband goods, see The Diaries and Correspondence of James Losh ed by E. Hughes Vol. I (Surtees Society Vol. CLXXI 1956) p. 42

Members in the 1780s still included Ralph, Thomas and Matthew Carr, Henry, Jonathan and William Airey, John Cookson and another partner in the Old Bank John Widdrington, a lawyer and a nephew of Ralph Carr. Their servants too had to be accommodated in the chapel.⁷⁸ However these years marked a gradual weakening of the alliance of this group of wealthy merchants with rational dissent. John Cookson's sons Isaac and Joseph were educated at Warrington Academy but in the course of the 1770s they abandoned dissent, preferring (respectively) a place on Newcastle Corporation and the pleasures of the turf.⁷⁹ Ralph Carr in 1758 married the daughter of the Vicar of Ponteland and increasingly withdrew from Newcastle society. In 1787, for instance, he withdrew his capital from the Old Bank altogether, complaining irritably about the new pushing generation: "now that so many Banks are begun here and everywhere the business is spoiled, and must be attended with daily hazard, and their competitions disgracefull". Though he retained some links to Hanover Square Chapel he also attended the Church of England.⁸⁰

However the congregation in the 1780s and 90s still comprised a substantial number of men of property and education: Robert Rankin and sons - merchants, sugar-refiners, bankers; George Waldie a coalowner with an old family estate at Kelso; there were three surgeons and two physicians, one of them, a newcomer to the town, Dr. John Clark. He founded the Dispensary and by the 1780s had probably the most successful medical practice in the town. In 1788 he was elected to the Infirmary - sign of acceptance in the local elite. Though his attempts to reform and modernise the Infirmary and to improve public health through a Newcastle

78. Register of the Minister and People who regularly assemble in Hanover Square Chapel, Newcastle 1782 in Vestry of the Church of the Divine Unity, Newcastle-upon-Tyne: all references to Hanover Square Mss are located here.

79. V.F. op.cit. pp. 204, 530.

80. Carr and Carr op.cit. Vol. I pp 48-9, 71-4.

Board of Health came to little by the time of his death in 1805, a radical of the next generation called him "the greatest benefactor of the afflicted poor that ever appeared in Newcastle".⁸¹

The largest group, according to the Baptismal register of these years, consisted of tradesmen, shopkeepers, artisans: however amongst these were a number of what could be called "intellectual tradesmen" and there were

OCCUPATIONS OF FATHER OF CHILDREN BAPTISED AT HANOVER SQUARE CHAPEL
1780-1800

PROFESSIONAL	5	3 surgeons, 2 physicians
MERCHANTS & MANUFACTURERS	6	1 hat manufacturer, 2 merchants, 1 pottery owner, 1 shipbuilder, 1 nursery-owner
DEALERS & RETAILERS	11	1 bookseller, 1 printer and bookseller, 1 music and instrument dealer, 1 baker, 1 hatter and hosier, 1 hosier and draper, 2 linen-drapers, 1 dealer in earthenware & glass, 1 ironmonger, 1 brewer
ARTISAN CRAFTS & SKILLED LABOUR	11	2 shoemakers, 1 organ-builder, 1 tailor, 1 painter and glazier, 1 joiner, 1 cooper, 1 engraver, 1 upholsterer, 1 brushmaker, 1 housecarpenter
SCHOOLMASTER	1	
KEELMAN	2	

others too in the congregation: Edward Humble who was a bookseller and ran a circulating library; Archibald Purves, a bookseller and bookbinder; John Mitchell, a bookseller, printer, publisher and later newspaper editor; the Hodgson family, printers and publishers of the 'Newcastle Chronicle': the Charnleys, booksellers.⁸² This was a remarkable concentration of men involved in the printing, publishing and circulation of written materials and it was to characterise the Hanover Square Chapel in the early 19th century, as a later chapter will recount.

81. Mackenzie op. cit. I p 505n; J.R. Fenwick Sketch of the Professional Life and Character of John Clark MD... (Newcastle 1806)

82. Baptismal Registers of Hanover Square, Newcastle-upon-Tyne: PRO Non-parochial registers RG4/1777; Register etc...1782 in Hanover Sq. Mss The First Newcastle Directory 1778 (2nd edition, introduced by J.R. Boyle: Newcastle 1889); An Account of Newcastle-upon-Tyne or Epitomized History of that Town & County from Authentic Records, containing Newcastle and Gateshead Directory (T. Angus: Newcastle 1787); The Newcastle and Gateshead Directory for 1795 (Newcastle 1795)

These six liberal Presbyterian congregations in the North of England - to become of great importance in the early 19th century in the building of liberalism's influence - are not offered here as typical examples of the social base of late 18th century 'rational dissent'. Each and every congregation was, of course, unique. However certain of the guiding social characteristics described here were clearly shared by other Presbyterian congregations. The High Pavement Chapel in Nottingham, the Leicester Great Meeting, the Octagon Chapel in Norwich, the Old and New Meetings in Birmingham, Bristol's Lewins Mead Chapel, the St. George's Meeting in Exeter - all were opulent and influential congregations. Among their membership was a solid core of merchants and professional men - sometimes with estates and gentry connections. All had a substantial group of tradesmen and small capitalists - shopkeepers, small manufacturers, skilled craftsmen - who owned property and had a modicum of education.

Even in those smaller towns where there were fewer opportunities for merchants and professional men the old Presbyterian congregation - though perhaps small and declining - still had a scattering of wealth and influence. At Saviourgate Chapel in York - an environment hostile to dissent - the congregation was always small. Already in the 1690s Lady Hewley complained "those who uphold it are very old, weak and infirm".⁸³ In 1785 Theophilus Lindsey wrote to a friend: "At York I preached for Mr. Cappe, and was truly grieved that so eminent a Teacher and Scholar and excellent person should be destined to speak to so few, and those of such inferior note".⁸⁴ Nevertheless among the congregation's membership in the 1780s were several merchants, a barrister, a gentleman, a Colonel Sutherland and the substantial banker Joshua Crompton.⁸⁵ At Halifax, Northgate End Presbyterian Chapel

83. John Kenrick Memorials of the Presbyterian Chapel, St. Saviourgate, York (York 1869) p. 34

84. More Letters of Lindsey p. 367

85. See Register of Births and Burial of St. Saviourgate Chapel, York: PRO Non-parochial registers RG4/3780; signatories to 'Resolutions of the Congregation' 23 i 1784 in St. Saviourgate Mss, Borthwick Institute York: 1/12; list of trustees of Colton Trust for 1784 and 92, ibid 4/5/6 and 7.

was in serious decline. Dorothy Wordsworth wrote to a Halifax friend in April 1795: "I fear that the Chapel will go entirely to decay as there are so few young people to support it"⁸⁶ Yet it had among its members throughout the 18th and early 19th century, the town's only physicians in Doctors Nettleton, Hulme, Thompson, Cartledge and Moulson, as well as the town's bankers the Briggs.⁸⁷ The Bradford Presbyterian Chapel in Chapel Lane was similarly in steady decline in the late 18th century and yet included among its members a succession of surgeons and doctors - Abraham Swaine MD (d. 1761), John Hawkbridge, surgeon, (d. 1788) and George Mossman MD, practising in the Town from 1788 until his death in 1824 - as well as Joseph Dawson, dissenting minister turned iron master and dying in 1813 with wealth amounting to £45,000.⁸⁸ Priestley noted in 1790 that the congregations at Halifax and Bradford were "reduced almost to nothing".⁸⁹ Such cases could be duplicated. Even where the transition to Unitarianism coincided with numerical decline these congregations often included a few individuals - a doctor, a lawyer, a substantial merchant - who ranked with the town's elite in terms of wealth and social status.

It is important, of course, not to think of these late 18th century congregations as isolated cells. As Part One above made clear, English Presbyterianism was always congregationalist in organization so that there was no central social arena or headquarters where members gathered. Moreover in the late 18th century, internal communications were still difficult and expensive. However that wealthier rational dissenters did associate socially

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86. Dorothy Wordsworth to Jane Pollard April 1795 in E.D. Selincourt (ed) The Letters of William & Dorothy Wordsworth Vol. I 'The Early Years 1787-1805' (2nd ed. Oxford 1967) p. 143
87. F.E. Millson Two Hundred Years of Northgate End Chapel 1696-1896: pp 26, 38-9
88. J.B. Hewitt Epitaphs and Memorials (1719-1853) from the old Burial Ground of Chapel Lane Chapel, Bradford (Typescript dated 1938 in Bradford Central Library, Local Studies Department) no page numbers. For Dawson see, for instance, No Author A Record of the Origin and Progress of Lowmoor Iron Works 1791-1906 (Bradford 1906) passim. His will is in Borthwick Institute York: Prerog June 1814.
89. Priestley Memoirs 2 p. 85

on a regional basis is indicated by the numerous cases of intermarriage. Geo. William Oates of Mill Hill Chapel married a daughter of the Manchester Presbyterian merchant Robert Hibbert in the 1770s. Josua Rayner of Mill Hill Chapel married a daughter of the Chesterfield branch of the Milneses (also Presbyterians) and thus became related to the Wakefield branch of the Milnes family. The Wakefield and Chesterfield Milneses and the Shore family of Sheffield were interconnected by marriage at several points throughout the 18th century.⁹⁰ And there were a number of marriage connections between leading members of Manchester, Halifax, Leeds and Bradford congregations. Wealth and leisure enabled many of these wealthy dissenters to frequent such fashionable resorts as Bath, Matlock, Buxton and Scarborough, where they encountered their co-religionists from other areas. Throughout the late 18th century, and well into the 19th, there was a Unitarian Chapel in Buxton. Though there were no Unitarians actually resident in the town, during 'the season' there were enough visiting the resort to make opening the chapel worthwhile - ministers from the Manchester area preached on an occasional basis, taking advantage of the waters at the same time.⁹¹ A young Scottish radical and ardent Unitarian, Thomas Christie, was astonished in 1787 by the worldliness of the young people gathered around Rev. William Turner, Unitarian minister of Wakefield, biblical scholar, confidante of Priestley and Lindsey:

"I found him encompassed with gay young friends who had come there from different parts on a visit and amongst whom the old man was to me quite lost, for instead of philosophy and theology we talked off I can scarce tell thee what and we spake of Matlock and of Buxton and of what dashing youths were there and of the lords and dukes and of their equipages and of their horses and of their lacqueys and of their dogs".⁹²

90. See Stephen op.cit. p.2 & n; Copies of the Inscriptions on the Tombstones in the Burial Ground: Mill Hill Chapel Leeds 1889 in Mill Hill Mss;

91. Ernest Axon 'Buxton Chapel' in TUHS Vol. III No. 4 (1926) pp. 325-27

92. Quoted in John Nicholls Literary Anecdotes of the Eighteenth Century: comprizing Biographical Memoirs etc... Vol. IX (1815) p. 379

One important institutional nexus of this wealthy stratum of dissenters, and one which brought them into social contact with the Whig gentry, was Warrington Academy. This Dissenting Academy - though lasting only from the late 1750s until the year 1780 - has attracted a good deal of attention from historians because of its educational innovations and as a centre in which such luminaries of rational dissent as Joseph Priestley, William Enfield, George Walker and Gilbert Wakefield taught.⁹³ What has not received much attention is the social background of its students. Warrington's real constituency was precisely that stratum of wealthy merchants pinpointed above. Among the students were representatives of the Cookson family of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, the Milnes family of Wakefield, the Fentons of Leeds, the Cromptons of Derby and York, the Heywoods of Liverpool and Wakefield, the Pease family of Hull, the Rayners of Leeds, the Shores of Sheffield, the Hothams of York. However there were also a substantial number of sons from liberal gentry families. While a third of the Warrington students subsequently became merchants, bankers or manufacturers, nearly as many went on to become gentlemen - including Lord Ennismore, Sir William Strickland and Sir James Ibbetson. Four students went on to become Anglican vicars and three to become army officers.⁹⁴ The gentlemanly ethos of the academy is suggested by the fact that some of the "young gentlemen" kept their own horses and that fencing instruction was provided.⁹⁵ William Turner Jnr., a student at Warrington and from 1782 Unitarian minister at Newcastle-upon-Tyne recalled with disgust some of the students: "the dissipated and inflamed West Indian", "the profligate outcast of our great public schools" and "the pampered petting of large fortune, who, from the treatment he had seen given, and been himself allowed to give, to his private tutor at home,

93. See for instance Irene Parker Dissenting Academies in England (Cambridge 1914); H. McLachlan English Education under the Test Acts (1931); M.D. Stephens & G.W. Roderick 'Education & the Dissenting Academies' History Today (Jan. 1977) pp 47-54.

94. V.F. op.cit. passim.

95. H. McLachlan 'Sport and Recretation in Nonconformist Academies' in Essays and Addresses (Manchester 1950) pp 199-200

had learned to consider every tutor as a sort of upper servant".⁹⁶ Yet if Warrington was sometimes the last educational resort of young bucks some of these sons of the gentry socially had much in common with dissenters. Sir James Ibbetson, for instance, came from a Leeds family who had been important patrons of Call Lane Chapel in the late 17th century and Ralph Carr, of Hanover Square Chapel Newcastle, was his mother's father. His private tutor, who accompanied him to Warrington, was Benjamin Dawson: son of the minister of Halifax's Presbyterian congregation and brother of Leeds Presbyterian merchant Obadiah, he was trained for the dissenting ministry, conformed to the Church of England but remained both a theological rationalist and a reformer. Ibbetson's sister in turn married another Mill Hill Chapel trustee and former Warrington student, James Fenton.⁹⁷ Others sent their sons not because of religious affiliation or social contact but out of sympathy with the intellectual values of the Academy. Francis Blackburne, well-known clergyman and friend of Lindsey and Priestley, sent his son Francis because of his sympathy with the theological rationalism of the tutors.⁹⁸ Daniel Malthus - Oxford graduate, barrister, country gentleman - sent his son Thomas (the future economist) to Warrington because his devotion to the principles of the French Enlightenment gave him sympathy with the Academy's curriculum.⁹⁹ One of the more ungovernable students, the wealthy young Irishman Archibald Hamilton Rowan, expelled from Trinity College Cambridge for riotous behaviour (and thus, perhaps, one of the targets of Turner's disapproval) was serious enough in his sympathy with rational dissent to retain connections with the Presbyterian congregation in Dublin for the rest of his life, subscribe generously to

96. William Turner The Warrington Academy (1813-15) (new edition, Warrington 1957) p. 36

97. V.F. op. cit. p.264; Wilson op. cit. p. 244; for the Dawsons see John Nicholls op. cit. Vol. VIII (1814) pp.380-1

98. For brief account of Blackburne Senior see DNB, E.M. Wilbur A History of Unitarianism in Transylvania England and America (Cambridge, Massachusetts 1952) pp 275-7, 280-2.

99. V.F. op. cit. p.597; DNB

Unitarian associations and remain a political reformer.¹⁰⁰

Finally it is worth looking at the social characteristics of Theophilus Lindsey's new London chapel. In 1780 the American Samuel Curwen called Lindsey's Unitarian congregation "the most respectable for its number I ever saw".¹⁰¹ Eight years later Lindsey was mildly amused to find that his heterodox chapel had been recommended at Tunbridge Wells by one "gentleman of fortune" to another as "the only genteel place in London".¹⁰² At the opening service in 1774 there were around 200 people attending - including the Duke of Richmond, the Earl of Surrey, Lord Despensers, Benjamin Franklin, and several barristers and clergymen - all of them, according to John Lee, "persons of condition".¹⁰³ The Duke of Richmond and Earl of Surrey did not contribute funds: "to attend a place of worship supported by voluntary contributions, was to them a novelty; and delicacy, perhaps misplaced, prevented the friends of the new sanctuary from suggesting a hint to the illustrious visitors", Thomas Belsham later explained.¹⁰⁴ However the Earl of Surrey remained interested. In 1780 Lindsey reported: "the Earl of Surrey frequently attends our worship, but mixed with the crowd in the seats under the gallery".¹⁰⁵ Other Whig aristocrats patronised the congregation. Both Charles James Fox and Lord Shelburne had promised £100 on the chapel's foundation, though the latter's apparently never materialised.¹⁰⁶

Regular attenders and subscribers - annual subscription for a pew was a minimum of one guinea - included: Thomas Bernard, barrister, son of Sir Francis Bernard the Governor of Massachusetts, and active in the 1790s and after in scientific philanthropy, education and poor law reform;

100. The Autobiography of Archibald Hamilton Rowan (1840) ed. by W.H. Drummond (Shannon, Ireland 1972) pp v-vi, 45, 443, 448. J. Drummond and C.B. Upton Life and Letters of James Martineau (1902) Vol. I p.62

101. G.A. Ward (ed) op. cit. p. 278

102. Lindsey to William Tayleur 29 xi 1788 UC Mss: JRL

103. Memoirs of Lindsey p. 111n

104. Ibid. pp 112n-113n.

105. Letters of Lindsey p. 29

106. Lindsey to Tayleur 14 v 1776 UC Mss loc. cit.

Dr. William Heberden, Fellow of the Royal Society and holder of a lucrative medical practice; Richard Kirwin, another FRS, a chemist and geologist, later president of the Royal Society in Dublin; Michael Dodson, barrister; John Jebb, doctor and radical activist; Robert Martin Leake, barrister and later a Master of Chancery.¹⁰⁷ A number of MPs were regular attenders at some period in the 1770s and 80s. The young William Wilberforce, for instance, refused to subscribe to the 39 Articles prior to taking his degree at Cambridge in 1780 (though he relented in the following year) and frequented Essex Street Chapel throughout the early 1780s; Lindsey noted in 1784: "I was glad to see Mr. Wilberforce, the new member for the County of York in his pew two Sundays ago...I have a great opinion of him. The Sunday before last he brought Lord Bathurst's eldest son with him".¹⁰⁸ Among other MPs affiliated to the congregation were: James Adair, MP for Cockermouth 1775-80 and Recorder of London 1779-89; Thomas Whitmore, a wine merchant, MP for Bridgnorth; Joshua Grigby, MP for Suffolk; John Sargent, MP for Midhurst and West Looe; James Martin, MP for Tewkesbury.¹⁰⁹ A former Prime Minister, the Duke of Grafton, became a Unitarian in 1789 and, according to Belsham, "a regular and exemplary" worshipper at Essex Street Chapel until his death in 1811. He also gave material help to the Unitarian cause and subscribed to the maintenance of Lindsey's widow.¹¹⁰

107. Ward op. cit. pp.328, 524; Letters of Lindsey pp 99,129,28

108. R.I. and S.W. Wilberforce The Life of William Wilberforce (1838) Vol. I pp 75-6; More Letters of Lindsey p.364

109. Their affiliation is mentioned in Lindsey to Tayleur 13 i 1780, Lindsey to Rowe 13 ii 1791 UC Mss; JRL and discussed in more detail in G.M. Ditchfield Some Aspects of Unitarianism and Radicalism 1760-1810 (University of Cambridge Ph.D. thesis 1968) pp.111 ff.

110. Memoirs of Lindsey p. 322ff; Thomas Belsham Uncorrupted Christianity Unpatronized by the Great: A Discourse...on the Decease of Augustus Henry, Duke of Grafton (1811) p. 1 and passim; Grafton to Belsham 7 i 1807 MCO;

Essex Street's first group of thirteen trustees (in 1783) similarly included men of wealth and social and political influence: Sir George Saville bart., Nottinghamshire landowner, MP and influential figure in the Whig Opposition; John Lee, barrister, MP and briefly in 1783 Solicitor-General; Sir Barnard Turner, City Alderman knighted for his part in heading the London Association's suppression of the Gordon Riots in 1780; Samuel Shore, Sheffield banker and landowner; William Tayleur, barrister, Oxford Fellow and wealthy Shropshire landowner; Thomas Brand Hollis, noted radical who possessed a substantial estate in Essex; John Hett, barrister and Master in Chancery; John Browne, London druggist but wealthy enough to bequeath on his death in 1788 £500 to the Chapel, £2000 to Hackney College and additional legacies to Lindsey and Disney; Thomas Cadell, successful bookseller and publisher (of Gibbon's 'Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire' for example) who retired in 1793 a wealthy man and subsequently became a City Alderman and Sheriff of London; as well as a solicitor, a London merchant and a "gentleman".¹¹¹

II

The freedom which Presbyterian ministers gradually achieved in the years after the Salters Hall controversy dissolved the doctrinal unity of the congregation, making more complex and subtle the relationship between minister and individual laymen. It is clear, however, that an element of the growing freedom of opinion and intellectual tolerance within Presbyterian congregations - despite the positive gains which ministers underlined again and again - was a growing indifference to doctrine, a casual individualism in the whole approach to religion. Wm. Turner Jnr. asked whether in the late 18th century Presbyterian ministers "could indulge a greater freedom of enquiry, from the candour - sometimes,

111. 'A Lawyer' 'The Deeds of Essex Street Chapel' TUHS Vol. I No. 3 (1918) pp. 261-2

shall it be said, from the indifference? - of their hearers..."¹¹²

The situation of the Presbyterian in London was a particular warning. Priestley commented in 1782:

"Dissenters in London, having no connexion with one another, and having nothing to do with their minister, except in the character of a preacher, come at length to attend to nothing but his eloquence and delivery; and if these are not sufficient to keep them attached to any place, they go for their entertainment (for it deserves no other name) elsewhere".¹¹³

This already weak relationship between minister and hearers was still further weakened by the custom - unique to London Presbyterianism - of a minister being designated "lecturer" and being paid by different congregations to preach regularly at a stipulated time. A minister like Joseph Fawcett attracted to the Old Jewry in the late 1780s and early 1790s "the largest and most genteel audience that ever assembled in a dissenting place of worship" - including several eminent churchmen, noted actors like Mrs. Siddons and the Kembles and young radical intellectuals such as Godwin, Holcroft and Wordsworth.¹¹⁴ However this was a volatile and fickle audience not a solid and loyal congregation sharing a set of social and intellectual values.

A closer look at Lindsey's Essex Street Chapel reveals the extent to which even he had gathered an audience rather than a congregation. His notoriety as a heretical clergyman attracted various sightseers. Curwen reported in 1780 a well-dressed Scottish lady entering his pew in mid-service who asked him various questions at the end of the service: "she inquired of me if the preacher did not deny the divinity of Christ, or rather, she affirmed that he did; adding, she never heard it so plainly

112. William Turner A Sermon preached at the Chapel in Hanover Square, Newcastle for the support of New College Manchester (Newcastle 1800) p.9

113. Joseph Priestley The Proper Constitution of a Christian Church... to which is prefixed a Prefatory Discourse, relating to the present State of those who are called Rational Dissenters Works XV p.54

114. Quoted from Gents Mag (1804) in M.R. Adams Studies in the Literary Background of English Radicalism, with special reference to the French Revolution (Lancaster, Pennsylvania 1947) pp 193-4; H.D. Budden The Story of Marsh Street Congregational Church Walthamstow (Margate 1923) pp 29-30

declared in public before".¹¹⁵ Sarah Lamb, the unmarried sister of Charles Lamb's father, casually entered Lindsey's chapel one day and frequented it ever after. "She came not for doctrinal points, and never missed them", her nephew, who often accompanied her there, later noted - in fact her only reading was Thomas a Kempis and an old Roman Catholic prayer book.¹¹⁶ Though few could have been less self-conscious than Sarah Lamb, a substantial proportion of Lindsey's hearers were casual visitors or non-members. Many of those who gave substantial concrete support to the congregation were less than conscientious in their attendance. In March 1780 Lindsey complained: "Few of the better sort attend twice a day, which shows there is a want of zeal of our forefathers, and is a bad example, as I sometimes, but in vain, take the liberty to tell them".¹¹⁷ Sixteen months later he reported that, while attendance at the morning worship was always good, members generally neglected to attend in the afternoon: "what with the absence of the greater part, and the indifference of the others, and unwillingness to alter their dinner hour, though we begin not till four o'clock, we have often not more than a dozen persons belonging to us, though sometimes, yet not always, a tolerable congregation of other persons".¹¹⁸


Part of the problem was that many of the Essex Street members worked close to the chapel - at the Inns of Court or the Houses of Parliament - but had their homes and families elsewhere. Thus many members made the weekend an opportunity of escaping from London. Robert Smith MP, from a Presbyterian family of bankers in Nottingham, was a regular subscriber to the congregation and, Lindsey believed "a sincere believer and Unitarian":

115. Ward op. cit. pp 288-9

116. E.V. Lucas The Life of Charles Lamb (1905) Vol. I pp. 11ff.

117. More Letters of Lindsey p. 364

118. Letters of Lindsey p.30

"but for these last two years that he has been married he has not attended much, going to their country house on the Saturdays".¹¹⁹ The problem was exacerbated in the summer months when MPs and legal men, along with fashionable society in general, deserted London to escape the stench of the uncleansed Thames. Many of Lindsey's supporters departed to their rural seats. "Some of our members are removing this week to their country houses, but the great clearing will be when the lawyers vacation comes", he noted in June 1784.¹²⁰ This separation between the public life of London and the private life of country seat and family meant that Lindsey's influence was often restricted to the former sphere. When some of his members returned to their seats they resumed the conventional role of churchman. Lindsey expressed his continued disappointment at their compromises: "I think they do not heartily enter into our scheme, because at other times, and at home, where they might command, they can bear to hear the  (trinitarian) forms in all their solemnity tho' they disapprove them".¹²¹

The particular location of Lindsey's congregation in the centre of London and its very recent foundation had much to do with these particular difficulties. Yet old established Presbyterian congregations in London were numerically very weak. Lindsey himself noted with a hint of surprise in June 1774 "the comparative smallness that attend on the preaching of so excellent and eminent a person as Dr. Price". A London minister of a later generation said that Price had preached "his immortal discourses" to an audience of ten or so at Newington Green Chapel.¹²² Even old-established Presbyterian congregations in the dissenting heart-lands of the North were suffering from religious indifference.. Priestley in 1771

119. Lindsey to Tayleur 6 viii 1782 UC Mss.

120. More Letters of Lindsey p. 364

121. Lindsey to Tayleur 19 xii 1778 UC Mss

122. Letters of Lindsey p. 31; George Kenrick Divine and Human Aids in the Christian Ministry and the Studies preparatory to it, thankfully acknowledged: A Farewell Discourse (1845) Appendix. p.12

noted the widespread complaints of "the extreme ignorance of the generality of youth in the present age, with respect to religion!"¹²³ This was a result of the indifference of dissenting parents who paid little attention to the religious training of their children: family prayer, scripture-reading and religious discussion were increasingly given up in dissenting homes. The minister's role was confined to the sphere of the meeting house so that there was a widening gap between him and the intellectual life of his hearers:

"as the minister is seldom seen but in the pulpit, (I mean in a ministerial character), all the opportunity that the people have of being instructed in the theory of religion, is their hearing miscellaneous discourses, which are now almost every where confined to subjects which have an immediate relation to practice, while the theory of religion, and the evidences of it, are almost wholly neglected".¹²⁴

Dissenting congregations, Priestley argued, had in many cases become mere audiences and the minister simply a paid preacher without moral authority.

In the early years of the 18th century the Presbyterian congregation had exerted considerable disciplinary authority. Individual members were liable to "admonition" and "excommunication" for breaches of the moral code. In some cases the culprit was publicly rebuked before other members of the congregation. The Presbyterian minister was a powerful figure in a church which demanded obedience and submission to a particular set of rules, prevented members leaving the church or joining another without permission and demanded regular attendance at Sunday worship; "particular churches, their respective elders and members, ought to have a reverential regard to their judgement", it was said in 1691.¹²⁵ In many Independent and Baptist churches the disciplinary power of the congregation was preserved - censuring non-attendance on Sundays, intervening in family disputes

123. Joseph Priestley 'An Essay on the Best Method of Communicating Religious Knowledge to the Members of Christian Societies' in Institutes of Natural and Revealed Religion (1782) Works II p.xxii

124. Ibid p. xxiv

125. Alexander Gordon Cheshire Classis Minutes 1691-1745 (1919) pp. 109, 114, 119-120

and in a variety of ways preserving the members from too much association with the outside world. And this was reinforced in the late 18th century by evangelical influence. The ideology of the fallen nature of the material world and the puritanical antagonism to the pleasures of the flesh was directed against both the 'patrician' and the 'plebian' cultures of the period: the patrician culture of good wine, classical literature and art, the turf and other sports; and for the lower classes what Edward Thompson has described as "the older, half-pagan popular culture, with its fairs, its sports, its drink and its picaresque hedonism", were equally subject to the anathemas of evangelical dissent.¹²⁶

However among the Presbyterians there was a shift away from this disciplinary ethos in the course of the 18th century. Priestley in 1780 reaffirmed Christianity's opposition to the things of this world: while it was not wrong to participate in the secular affairs of the world, the individual Christian has to be prepared "to renounce all the advantages, honours and pleasures of the world, when they come in competition with our duty and our obedience to the commands of Christ". The purpose of the congregation was, he said, "to counteract the influence of the world around us, to keep up the idea of our being separate from the world, and of the importance of being on our guard against the infection of it".¹²⁷ But, as Priestley himself noted, rational dissenting congregations contrasted with other types of dissent in no longer existing as a 'moral community'. There was among Unitarians, according to Priestley, too great a fear of church discipline: "let a man behave ever so ill in some of our societies, and become ever so great a disgrace to us, there are many who would never disclaim, or even censure him".¹²⁸ And this was part of a general moral ethos of laxity - a conscious reaction against the strictures and severity

126. Edward Thompson The Making of the English Working Class
(revised edition, 1968) pp 43ff

127. Joseph Priestley A Sermon Preached December 31st 1780 at the New Meeting in Birmingham on undertaking the pastoral office in that place
(1781) Works XV pp 33-4

128. Joseph Priestley The Proper Constitution of a Christian Church...
loc. cit. p. 53

with which the generation before had treated their children. This took on a secularist tinge at times with a real hostility to 'priestcraft' or 'priestly interference' in the private concerns of laymen. In 1782 Philip Holland of Bolton complained that it was difficult even to broach the question of the laity's duty of respect to their minister among the rationalist Presbyterians: "We are fallen into an age, in which the jealousy of priestly domination runs so high, that an address to you on this head, especially from a Minister, will be suspected of some sinister design, and incur the imputation of ambition or low interest".¹²⁹ There was a consequent weakening of Sunday observance. Among early 18th century dissenting families, Sunday was always a day apart. There were strict rules of observance. The day was passed in lengthy religious services at Chapel and in solitary reading, silence, prayer and meditation at home. Neither work nor pleasure was permitted, not even reading or conversation - unless it was religious in content. Joseph Priestley recalled the "peculiar strictness" with which Sunday was observed in the 1740s and 50s among the Independents of the West Riding: even preparation of food (work) or a stroll in the open air (pleasure) were forbidden.¹³⁰ But among the rational dissenters such rigorous observation was in decline. At Mill Hill Chapel in Leeds it was reported one Sunday in May 1763 that the congregation was much depleted "as it was one of the great race days".¹³¹ In his influential 'Institutes' in the 1770s Priestley had been critical of gloomy and rigorous Sunday observance. He pointed to Christ's disapproval of the excessive rigours and superstitious manner in which the Pharisees had kept the Sabbath. He affirmed that as a day of rest it was "a most reasonable and merciful institution" - for the working class in particular. But it was absurd to forbid any kind of labour irrespective

129. Philip Holland A Sermon delivered at Pudsey...at the ordination of William Turner Jnr. (Wakefield 1782) p. 30

130. Priestley Memoirs 1 p.17; see also Duncan Coomer English Dissent under the Early Hanoverians (1946) p.53

131. H. McLachlan 'Diary of a Leeds Layman 1733-86' TUHS Vol. IV No. 3 (1920) p. 263

of the situation: "the rest of the Sabbath should give place to labour, when acts of justice, benevolence and mercy, must otherwise be neglected". But Priestley was also careful to lay down some restrictive order of Sunday observance. It was a Christian duty to rest on the Sabbath, to attend public worship, to engage in "serious and useful reflection". It was wrong, he said, "to give way to excessive levity, and especially to use noisy and riotous diversions on that day, though a cheerful rather than an austere manner of spending it, is favourable to its proper use".¹³²

"My youth", Lucy Aikin recalled, "was spent among the disciples or fellow-Labourers of Price or Priestley, the descendants of Dr. John Taylor, the Arian, or in the society of that most amiable of men, Dr. Enfield. Amongst these was no rigorism. Dancing, cards, the theatres, were all held lawful in moderation: in manners the Free Dissenters, as they were called, came much nearer to the Church than to their own stricter brethren, yet in doctrine no sect departed so far from the Establishment".¹³³ In breaking with theological Calvinism in the course of the 18th century liberal Presbyterian ministers had also broken with its austere ethic. Thus in 1764 Samuel Lowthion represented "rigid austerity" and "criminal licentiousness" as extremes to be equally avoided by rational Christians. God, he said, had implanted in man "no one appetite, passion, or affection, which we may not innocently and commendably gratify".¹³⁴ The things of the material world were good and to be enjoyed by men in moderation.

Leading figures in the late 18th century Unitarianism affirmed their distance from puritan asceticism. In 1778 William Enfield argued that puritanism was always irrational: "Their forbidding singularities were of no other use...than to subject them to unnecessary mortification and

132. Priestley Institutes...loc.cit. pp 323-4

133. Memoirs...of Lucy Aikin ed. P.H. Le Breton (1864) p. 197

134. Samuel Lowthion The Friendship and Piety of Visiting the Fatherless and Widows in their Affliction: A Sermon (Newcastle 1764) pp. 10-12

ridicule. Puritanical formality and gloominess of aspect, an affected preciseness of behaviour, and a rigorous abstinence from innocent pleasures, are distinctions no longer expected from us".¹³⁵ Newcome Cappe, minister at St. Saviourgate in York, was similarly critical of the extremes of puritanical austerity and licentiousness. True religion, he said, "requires of us no rigorous austerities, or superstitious mortifications" and provides for the "gratification" of all man's "natural principles".¹³⁶

Unitarianism opposed to the gloomy austerity of traditional Calvinism a benevolent and worldly optimism. "The general property of religion is to cheer and revive the human spirit", Holland argued in 1787. In this scheme of things the ideal Christian was not a man of great devoutness and other-worldliness but one "who keeps his judgement clear, his passions calm, and his affections justly balanced, who cultivates a humane disposition, and frequently performs acts of mercy".¹³⁷ For Enfield the essential virtues were similarly a matter of rational and honest social behaviour: "regulations of manners", "the most refined principles of honour in our transactions with our brethren", "active and disinterested benevolent".¹³⁸ For Priestley too Christianity was a code of ethical conduct both intellectual and worldly: "elevation of thought, comprehension of mind, virtuous affections and generous actions" were key virtues. And the best definition of virtue was: "that disposition of mind, and that course of conduct arising from it, which is best calculated to promote a man's own happiness and the happiness of others with whom he is connected".¹³⁹ Christianity, Priestley's successor at Leeds, William Wood, noted in 1775

135. William Enfield The Principles and Duty of Protestant Dissenters Considered, in a Sermon preached at the Ordination of Rev. John Prior Estlin... (1778) p. 23

136. Newcome Cappe On the Incompatibility of the Love of Pleasure with the Love of God in Discourses chiefly on Devotional Subjects by the late Rev. Newcome Cappe (York 1805) pp. 162-3

137. Holland op.cit. p.17

138. Enfield op.cit. pp. 24-5

139. Joseph Priestley Letters to a Philosophical Unbeliever (2nd ed. 1787) Works IV pp. 356,9

was an ethical code whose tenets were "designed to secure our present as well as our future happiness. Whatever hath a tendency to promote the true enjoyment of our bodies - whatever is likely to contribute to our social pleasure, and to render our discourse with our fellow men free, easy and comfortable, is pointed out, recommended, and enforced by Christ and his apostles....even the little elegancies of demeanour, which constitute the beauty of polished society are not forgotten."¹⁴⁰

As well as the mores of "polished society" and a taste for the genteel culture, rational dissent assumed a high degree of literacy. Taking its moral and intellectual bearings as much from classical literature as from the Bible, it counterposed to the Hebraism of the dissenting tradition a fervent Hellenism. In 1778 one Unitarian layman warned his nephew, preparing for the dissenting ministry at Daventry Academy, against neglecting classics: "It was they that brought us out of barbarism three centuries ago - and they will preserve us from those false refinements of wit and ingenuity, which the polished ages are too apt to run into".¹⁴¹ In fact there was a heavy stress on classical scholarship at Daventry and already in his first term there he was reading Plato in the Greek. At Warrington too classical learning always stood at the centre of the curriculum. For a Unitarian minister in the late 18th century like William Turner Snr. classical literature was a basis for any kind of intellectual judgement. For instance, in a letter to his son, training for the ministry at Warrington, he contrasted the flowery style of Seneca with Cicero's strength and clarity: "But Cicero's pen was formed under the commonwealth and in an age of bold and manly exertions; Seneca's was cut to the temper of despotism, and in an age of fear and servility".¹⁴² In an anonymous 'A Poetical Satire of the Times' Rev. Thomas Barnes of Cross Street Chapel,

140. William Wood 'On Courtesy' in Sermons on Social Life (1775) p. 76

141. Samuel Kenrick to Timothy Kenrick 8 i 78 'Kenrick Letters' in TUHS Vol. III No. 3 (1925) p. 270; see also Timothy to Samuel Kenrick 24 xii 1774 *ibid.* pp 255-6

142. Quoted in William Turner Lives of Eminent Unitarians (1843) Vol. I p.365

Manchester, was represented as preaching to his congregation in Greek and offering them Seneca and Socrates rather than the doctrine of Christianity.¹⁴³ At Norwich's Octagon Chapel the minister William Enfield even included a translation of one of Horace's Odes among the congregation's hymns.¹⁴⁴

Rational dissent was very much an affair of the cultivated intellect. Priestley claimed in 1782: "it is no vanity to say that the Unitarian Dissenters consist, for the most part, of men of reading and reflection".¹⁴⁵ And a hostile witness made the same point a decade later, claiming that Unitarianism made an impact only on "a speculating sort of people".¹⁴⁶ Its forthright intellectualism was an important force limiting popular influence. Rationalist dissent held no attraction, as Doddridge put it in the mid-18th century for "the plain people of low education and vulgar taste", those who were "strangers to the refinements of learning and politeness".¹⁴⁷ Of course Unitarianism aspired to be the religion of all rational men and disclaimed any narrow class bias. William Turner Snr. affirmed the minister's duty to communicate to all classes of society - "not only for the entertainment and pleasure of the knowing and the rich". Hence, he went on, preaching should always be lucid and "free from juvenile affectations and flaunting decorations of stile, which are fit only to perplex the ignorant and disgust the judicious".¹⁴⁸ Other ministers too

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143. Ernest Axon Thomas Barnes in TUHS Vol. V No. 1 (1931) p.89
144. J.W. Robberds A Memoir of the Life and Writings of the late William Taylor of Norwich... (1843) Vol. I pp 149, 151.
145. Priestley The Proper Constitution of a Christian Church... loc. cit. p.46
146. Andrew Fuller The Calvinistic and Socinian Systems examined and compared as to their Moral Tendency: in a Series of Letters, Addressed to the Friends of Vital and Practical Religion in The Principal Works and Remains of the Revd. Andrew Fuller ed. A.G. Fuller (1842) p. 334
147. Quoted in Alan D. Gilbert The Growth & Decline of Nonconformity in England & Wales with special reference to the period before 1850: An Historical Interpretation of Statistics of Religious Practice (University of Oxford D. Phil. thesis 1973) p. 154
148. William Turner Snr. Christ's Admonition to his Ministers, considered and apply'd in a Charge delivered at the Ordination of the Rev. William Turner Jnr. (Wakefield 1782) p. 100

stressed the importance of avoiding gratuitous intellectual sophistication in the pulpit. The minister was primarily a moralising influence. " I would much rather be the means of curing the disorders of the heart", Estlin said at his ordination in 1778, "than correcting the mistakes of the head, and am infinitely more desirous of inculcating a spirit of candour, benevolence and rational piety, than a zeal for any doctrines of speculation".¹⁴⁹

Though this was the aspiration, the practice was rather different. No matter how ministers such as Priestley, Turner and Estlin aimed for a classless universality in their preaching, years of rigorous education and scholarship had decisively shaped even their spontaneous language. While Unitarian ministers avoided the courtly style and the extensive Greek and Latin references sometimes found in Anglican sermons of the period, their sermons were still intellectually demanding. They assumed a knowledge not just of the Bible but also a range of cultural references - to classical and modern literature, to historical events in both the ancient and modern world and to polite culture in general.¹⁵⁰ They assumed also a basic grasp of a particular philosophical vocabulary. Hearers from the labouring poor would find in the abstract discourses of rational dissent, few points of reference to their own daily experience. Job Orton, a liberal Calvinist minister, noted in the 1770s the abstractness of the sermons of divinity students at Warrington Academy: "they are too dry and philosophical in their compositions, and do not come home to men's consciences, as every Minister should do".¹⁵¹ Paul Cardale, minister at the Presbyterian

149. Enfield op. cit. p. 47

150. Thus Philip Holland, for instance, recited eleven lines of Milton's Paradise Lost to his Bolton congregation; Richard Price in 1787 treated a congregation at the Old Jewry to a discourse which referred to enlightenment theories of science and of progress - to Greek philosophy, Galileo, Bacon, Boyle, Newton and Condorcet. Philip Holland 'On the Goodness of God to the Poor' in Sermons on Practical Subjects (Warrington 1792) Vol. I p. 161. Richard Price The Evidence for a Future Period of Improvement in the State of Mankind with Means and Duty of Promoting it, Represented in a Discourse...to the Supporters of a New Academical Institution amongst Protestant Dissenters (1787) passim.

151. 'Original letter from the Rev. Job Orton' reprinted in Protestant Dissenters Magazine Vol. VI (1799) p.53

congregation in Evesham, exerted considerable influence in the Midlands through his anonymous Unitarian tract 'The True Doctrine of the New Testament concerning Jesus Christ' in 1767: but, according to Orton, he "ruined a fine congregation by his very learned, dry and critical discourses, an extreme heaviness in the pulpit, and an almost total neglect of pastoral visits and private inspection", leaving a congregation of barely twenty people.¹⁵²

When in 1780 William Turner Jnr. - training for the ministry at Warrington Academy - expressed his wish that rational dissenters would try harder to reach "the common people" his father responded with caution: "I agree with you so far as to style and manner, provided vulgarisms and degrading familiarities be guarded against, which must be affectation and even hypocrisy in a man of real sense, and forfeit him the character of rational, with the rational". As far as the substance of truth was concerned he was even more uncompromising: "it is of too serious a nature and solemn importance to be tampered with by way of accommodation. Shame on all popularity obtained by such arts".¹⁵³

"Time was", a correspondent to the 'Protestant Dissenters Magazine' noted in 1794," when large and opulent congregations, especially in London, sought out for ministers of solid abilities and sound erudition; whereas now, when a vacancy happens, their great object is to find a man of popular talents, who will bring an increase of hearers to their meeting houses..." And what kind of preacher was most successful among the dissenters? "Why, such as can make the most noise, or tell the most entertaining stories or talk the most fluently without notes and without study".¹⁵⁴

Rational dissenters looked with some dismay at the growing anti-intellectualism of the Independents and the concomitant increase in popularity it

152. Samuel Palmer Letters to Dissenting Ministers and to Students for the Ministry from the Rev. Job Orton...to which are prefixed memoirs of his life (1806) Vol. I p.154. See also *ibid.* p.200

153. William Turner Lives of Eminent Unitarians pp. 371-2

154. No Enemy to Learning 'To J.H.' in Protestant Dissenters Magazine Vol. I (1794) p.504

seemed to bring. However even that most populist of Unitarians Joseph Priestley - while observing with some alarm the loss of lower-class adherents among the Presbyterians and seeing the real difficulties of supporting "a learned ministry" among some lower class groups sympathetic to Unitarianism - remained attached to an abstract and philosophical model of Christianity. His primary aim was always, he wrote: "to free it from those corruptions which prevent its reception with philosophical and thinking persons, whose influence with the vulgar, and the unthinking, is very great".¹⁵⁵ This kind of patrician elitism of the intellect remained ascendant within Unitarianism as did its corollary - a profound distrust of popular evangelical preaching.

III

The emergence of Unitarianism among Presbyterian congregations in the late 18th century was, then, not simply a matter of the changing intellectual predilections of its ministers but was very much tied up with shifts in the relation between minister and congregation, the weakening of the sectarian boundary against the secular world, the dissolution of doctrinal uniformity and the decline of religious authority. The break with the ascetic ideal of the protestant ethic and the affinities with polite society and abstract intellectual culture also had much to do with the change in wealth and status of many leading Presbyterians.

As Max Weber observed, the ascetic ideals of the protestant ethic were closely linked to the limited affluence of particular social strata: increasing wealth had a secularizing effect. "With great regularity we find the most genuine adherents of Puritanism among the classes which were rising from a lowly status, the small bourgeois and farmers, while the

155. Priestley An Appeal to the Serious and Candid Professors of Christianity... (1770) Works III pp 315-16; Memoirs 1 p. 200

beati possidentes, even among Quakers, are often found tending to repudiate the old Ideals".¹⁵⁶ In 17th century England the bedrock of Puritanism had been 'the middle sort of men': tradesmen of various kinds, independent enough economically to be outside the social control of Church and gentry, yet at the same time usually subject to a relatively austere material regime and daily labour. Similarly in the late 18th century evangelical dissent and Methodism was often predicated on a similar social position and tapped the social resentment of the small shopkeeper and the artisan against the gentry, the gentleman farmer and the prosperous clergyman - "dissipation", "luxury", "fashion" became key terms of accusation. The ascetic ideal was both a religious sanctification of their limited material possessions and a protest against it.¹⁵⁷

Among the Presbyterians in many of the thriving commercial centres of England in the 18th century material austerity no longer predominated, nor did its corollary - the ascetic ideal. The emergence of rational dissent had much to do with the changing social and economic position of Presbyterians. For successful merchants and doctors social life in towns like Leeds, Manchester and Newcastle-upon-Tyne was increasingly complex and differentiated. They were required to move in the world and thus could not hold themselves apart as 'the elect'. Simple opposition between 'saints' and 'sinners', separation into the closed and almost autonomous social world of the sect, was increasingly incompatible with the complexity of social interaction. Joseph Ryder, member of Call Lane Chapel in Leeds and a small clothier, testified to this when he noted in his diary in 1754: "This day I have very different company - at some part, professors, at another part, profane. To carry well among all requires the wisdom from above".¹⁵⁸ The boundary which marked off the dissenting community from

156. Max Weber The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism trans. Talcott Parsons (1930) p.174

157. See especially W.R. Ward Religion and Society in England 1790-1850 (1972) pp. 10-11

158. H. McLachlan 'Diary of a Leeds Layman' loc.cit. p.265

other social associations and which thus insulated it from the values of the secular world were dissolving.

At the same time the genteel culture with its balls, its card-playing and horse-racing, its wine and food, its profane art and philosophy were increasingly acceptable within its moral framework. Consider Titus Hibbert: Born in 1718, a lifelong member of Cross Street Chapel in Manchester, he founded a yarn business which made him a prosperous man. Yet his lifestyle does not conform to that represented in Weber's 'protestant ethic'. His account books revealed voluminous purchases of alcohol - cider, currant wine, rum, cognac, malt liquor and gallons of port. Hibbert played cards, and went to the races. The whole family were frequent visitors to the theatre and to concerts. His daughter Hannah had a private tutor for educating her in ladylike accomplishments - she had riding lessons, dancing tuition and her own spinet. Alongside the wordly attitude to consumption and entertainment there was in Hibbert an enthusiasm for intellectual 'improvement'. He subscribed to a circulating library, was a member of a debating society and assiduously attended courses of public lectures on astronomy and other scientific subjects. He kept a large folio volume in which he made notes from his reading in contemporary philosophy, literature and political debate.¹⁵⁹

Titus Hibbert exemplifies the broader shift in dissenting culture among the Presbyterians: the dissolution of both the rigorous asceticism and the cultural isolationism of the dissenting sect. While ministers sometimes complained about aspects of the changes taking place, rational dissent conformed very much to the kind of world-picture of these new urban wealthy. Owing their situation - unlike rich or poor, lord or beggar - neither to blind fate nor to divine will but, they believed, to their own hard work, calculation and planning they found rational dissent

159. Mrs. Hibbert Ware The Life and Correspondence of the Late Samuel Hibbert Ware (1882) pp 1-39

legitimizing both the accumulation of capital and the enjoyment of its fruits. Rational dissent, while preserving elements of the old protestant ethic, reflected a more relaxed and leisured regime. Accounts of the secular world as a tribulation - a wretched place of exile to be endured only with the expectation of a better life after death - hardly reflected the daily experience of the prosperous merchant, doctor or even urban shopkeeper. Similarly faith in miracles or mysteries, fear of divine intervention in daily affairs, superstitious belief in evil spirits or ghosts contradicted the values of men whose success required a faith in instrumental reason.¹⁶⁰ However, the political dimension of dissent was also crucial and this is the subject of the next chapter.

160. For an account of similar processes at work within French Roman Catholicism in the 18th century see Bernard Groethuysen The Bourgeois: Catholicism versus Capitalism in Eighteenth Century France trans. Mary Ilford (1968)

2. RATIONAL DISSENT AND THE SHAPING OF OPPOSITIONAL POLITICS IN THE
1770s AND 80s

"Religion does not ordinarily rule either in the hearts or cabinets
of princes".¹

Dissenters in the 18th century, by their very religious identity, confronted - sometimes daily - the repressive power of the state. In the 1670s and 80s an estimated 8,000 dissenters had died in English prisons and many times that number were imprisoned or lost their property.² The Toleration Act of 1689 marked the end of that brutal phase and in the course of the 18th century there were further legal concessions to dissent. From 1727 the indemnity acts were renewed annually (usually), enabling dissenters to hold state offices without religious conformity. Via the Dissenting Deputies - originating in 1732 to manage a campaign for relief from religious disabilities, but remaining in existence as a pressure group³ - there were successes in exciting pressure on parliament: for instance in 1757 they successfully campaigned for the banning of militia exercises on the Sabbath. However, anti-dissenting laws remained on the statute books - notably the Test and Corporation Acts. And there were even further inroads on their tenuous freedoms: Hardwicke's Marriage Act of 1753 - aimed ostensibly at clandestine marriages - in fact forced dissenters to go through the marriage ceremony in an Anglican church, conducted by a clergyman, conforming to the Anglican ritual.

For dissenters in this period, their legal status made them vulnerable to victimisation in every sphere of their daily life.⁴ Petty victimisation

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1. Newcome Cappe A Sermon preached on the 13th of December, the late Day of National Humiliation... (1777) p.3.
 2. For this period see especially Gerald R. Cragg Puritanism in the Period of the Great Persecution (1957)
 3. Bernard Lord Manning The Protestant Dissenting Deputies ed. O. Greenwood (Cambridge 1952). esp. Chapter 2.
 4. No Author An Abstract of Proceedings of the Deputies and Committee appointed for the support of Protestant Dissenters from the Commencement of the Institution (1796) pp. 8ff.

from figures of authority - a clergyman refusing to conduct a funeral, a magistrate refusing to license a chapel - in turn legitimated or even encouraged other kinds of persecution: riotous attacks on chapels, physical assaults on dissenting ministers, individual dissenters insulted in public. As a statement of the Dissenting Deputies noted in 1796, reviewing hundreds of cases of victimisation over the previous sixty years:

"The prejudices of the vulgar were confirmed by the insinuated opinion of the legislature in their disfavour; and all the ill temper of their enemies availed itself, in many instances, of the laws themselves, and in more, of the ignorance or misconstruction of them, to harrass those, whose mediocrity of fortune or situation in life did not allow them the means of contending against the power of their oppressors, however injuriously or even illegally exerted".⁵

If rational dissenters in the second half of the 18th century tended - because of their relative wealth and influence - to be untouched by individual harrassment they were nonetheless unavoidably conscious of being vulnerable to the enmity of a hostile state. Moreover their approach to Unitarianism left them unprotected by the Act of Toleration, which specifically excluded anti-trinitarianism and in 1698 the Blasphemy Act threatened those who denied the Trinity with loss of civil rights and imprisonment. Though by the late 18th century this was in abeyance the sentencing of Peter Annet in 1762 to the pillory and a year's hard labour for some mildly rationalist writings was a warning of the risks of liberal theology.⁶ Increasingly from the late 1760s there were fears of a revival

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5. Ibid. p.ii; John Wesley - a frequent victim of assaults - was convinced that "wherever a mob continues any time, all they do is to be imputed not so much to the rabble, as to the Justices". Quoted A.D. Gilbert Religion and Society in Industrial England: Church, Chapel and Social Change (1976) p.79
 6. See Priestley's comments a few years afterwards in An Essay on the First Principles of Government and the Nature of Political, Civil and Religious Liberty, including remarks on Mr. Brown's Code of Education, and on Dr. Balguy's Sermon on Church Authority (2nd ed: 1771) in Works XXII pp. 135-6.

of persecution.⁷

The very conditions of their existence as religious communities, then, led rational dissenters to a political consciousness and especially to an alertness to the threat which the state always posed. Laissez-faire - the belief that state involvement in social and economic life should be kept to an absolute minimum and that the free action of individuals should be left to regulate matters - thus tended to become the ideal in every sphere of life. Priestley, for instance, argued for complete intellectual freedom for men to think, debate, write and publish what they wish; for complete religious freedom for all groups and individuals - Christian, non-Christian and anti-Christian - to practice and publicise their faith; for freedom for all men to educate their children in whatever way they saw fit. Civil rights and freedom of opinion, it was said in 1796, Dissenters "more perhaps than any other class of the subjects of this realm, are led by their peculiar situation to study the nature and appreciate the value".⁸ And of no section of dissent was this more true than the Presbyterians who had approached to Unitarianism - their rationalism was a criminal offence, they were educated and often intellectually advanced, their relative prosperity and influence brought them into the political nation and their ministers were sometimes intellectuals of national standing.

Not surprisingly, therefore, they were of significance in the political life of England in the 1770s and 80s. "They dominated the first movement for radical reform", J.H. Plumb noted.⁹ They were involved in the campaign for reform in the Church and the Universities - Unitarian Anglicans

7. See for instance Priestley Remarks on Some Paragraphs in the Fourth Volume of Dr. Blackstone's Commentaries on the Laws of England, Relating to the Dissenters (1769) in WORKS XXII esp pp. 302-3. See also Ursula Henriques Religious Toleration in England 1787-1833 (1961) p.54.

8. An Abstract... (1796) p.iii

9. J.H. Plumb England in the Eighteenth Century (1714-1815) (Pelican History of England Vol. 7, new ed: 1963) p.133; The same point is made in W.R. Ward Religion and Society in England 1790-1850 (1972) p.21.

such as Jebb, Lindsey and Frennd are key names here. Rational dissent led the campaign to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts and were effective opponents of the war with the Americans. They were sometimes key figures in the Association Movement in the early 1780s; and they played a major role in providing an intellectual rationale for political change, significantly shaping at least a section of public opinion. Probably no period of British political history has been documented with such thoroughness as these years and it would be pointless here to reiterate what is already well documented simply to prove the political importance of rational dissent in this period. Instead I have focused more narrowly on a number of specific issues which have not been previously studied: the way in which rational dissent exerted pressure on Whig policy-making, illustrated in detail by a study of the West Riding; the role of Unitarian ministers in criticising government policy and formulating alternatives; the patrician character of rational dissent's radicalism.

I

The dissenters always possessed a measure of political influence by virtue of being voters. In the 18th century the county voter had to possess freehold property valued for the land tax at forty shillings per annum. In theory the county electorate were the independent gentlemen of England; in practice they included many small farmers, shopkeepers, craftsmen. Nevertheless the county electorate were a social elite, a propertied minority of only about 4% of the total population. Many Presbyterian congregations, as the Evans List showed, included a significant number of county voters - there were 75 at Sheffield's Upper Chapel, 74 at Cross Street Chapel Manchester, 120 at Bristol, 114 at Leicester, 335 at Nottingham and so on.¹⁰ As concentrations of voting power such congregations

10. The John Evans List of Dissenting Congregations and Ministers 1715-29
DWL Mss 34.4. passim.

had a measure of political leverage in county politics. More than this, where their numbers included merchants or men or property they exerted a wider pressure on those voters who depended upon their good will for economic survival. At Whitehaven there were a number of wealthy dissenting merchants and it was noted in the Evans list: "Dissenters here by Trade have such an Influence on Elections at Cockermouth...ye y turn y as yey please".¹¹ Similarly it was reported from Exeter in 1716: "The Influence of Trading Dissenters very extensive over their Dependents in Business".¹² As a result prospective MPs had in many places to pay some attention to the susceptibilities of the dissenting interest and their support was often worth courting. In Cheshire for instance there were 869 Presbyterian county voters in 1715 - nearly a quarter of the county electorate.¹³ Sir Robert Dukinfield and then his son Sir Charles used their patronage of dissent - the last was, for instance, a trustee of the congregation at Knutsford - to marshal support for the Whig cause. In 1721 Charles Dukinfield recommended to a meeting of all the Presbyterian ministers of the county that they used their "interest" with their congregations in support of the Whig candidates in the approaching election - which they agreed to do. The same support was provided for Dukinfield again in 1733.¹⁴

Until the 1770s Presbyterian dissent was by and large politically quiescent, getting little or nothing for its support of the Whig cause. Partly this was an effect of internal weakness, loss of influential members, numerical decline. Partly, too, after the threat of repression in the latter years of Queen Anne's reign, de facto tolerance, which enabled the Corporation Acts to be evaded, made cooperation with the regime worthwhile. However, politically decisive in the cooling of religious

11. Ibid. p.19

12. Ibid. p.31

13. Ibid. pp. 13-14

14. Alexander Gordon Cheshire Classis Minutes 1691-1745 (1919) pp. 61,81

antagonisms was the strength of Walpole's state: an elaborate system of patronage penetrated every area of the political nation, assimilated potential opposition and set up a powerful single-party regime. The number of electoral contests, for instance, fell drastically. In 1705 about 65% of Counties were involved in contested elections but by 1747 this had dropped to a mere 7½%.¹⁵

However during these years of political quiescence, as the previous chapter detailed, many Presbyterian trading families were steadily building up wealth. This in turn brought social influence and even a measure of incorporation within local ruling elites by the late 18th century. At Birmingham, for instance, the Low Bailiff was customarily chosen from among the membership of the Old Meeting or the New Meeting (both in process of transition to Unitarianism). And Thomas Lee, a member of the Old Meeting, was Steward of the Manor of Birmingham from 1778 until his death in 1791. Two dissenters - John Taylor (d.1775) and William Russell - were magistrates. In addition members of these congregations in Birmingham served on the jury which annually elected town officers, served as Overseers of the Poor and made up a substantial minority of the town's street commissioners.¹⁶

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15. J.H. Plumb The Growth of Parliamentary Stability in England 1675-1725 (1967) Chapter 6. Even dissenting ministers were subject to Walpole's attentions - from 1722 the Crown disbursed sums of money to a committee of leading London ministers who in turn disbursed small sums to needy ministers or their widows. Thus there was, as Short noted, a "Walpolean skeleton hanging in the dissenting closet". K.R.M. Short 'The English Regium Donum' English Historical Review Vol. LXXXIV (1969) esp. pp.59-65, 71. See also for something of the social context Geoffrey Holmes 'The achievement of stability: the social context of politics from the 1680s to the age of Walpole' in The Whig Ascendancy: Colloquies on Hanoverian England ed. John Cannon (1981)
16. Emily Bushrod The History of Unitarianism in Birmingham from the middle of the Eighteenth Century to 1893 (University of Birmingham M.A. Thesis 1954) pp 11, 211-12, 222; R.K. Dent Old and New Birmingham: a History of the Town and its People (1878-80)(new ed. Wakefield 1972) Vol. I pp 217-18.

Elsewhere too, congregations of rational dissenters were, by the second half of the 18th century, no longer regarded as dark conventicles of outsiders. They had become a settled and respectable element of social life, capable even of sharing in the local administration of power. Prominent and wealthy Presbyterians were appointed as magistrates - Samuel Shore (Sheffield), Pemberton Milnes (Wakefield), Ralph Carr (Newcastle-upon-Tyne), Henry Norris and Thomas Butterworth Bayley (Manchester) are examples. They also held local honorary positions. At Ipswich, for instance, in 1779 two members of the Old Meeting were the town bailiffs and the whole Corporation attended divine service 'in state' at the chapel.¹⁷ Though in most cases town corporations were controlled by a close-knit oligarchy of churchmen, there were even cases where the local Presbyterian congregation had become the dominant grouping. This was the case at Bridgwater, Bridport, Portsmouth, Bristol and Nottingham by the second half of the 18th century. At Bridgwater, for instance, the Presbyterians "gradually became highly respectable for fortune and numbers and at length included the whole of the civic magistracy" so that in 1788 a special pew for the Mayor and Corporation was constructed.¹⁸ At Portsmouth the Carter family of the High Street Presbyterian Chapel was predominant in local politics - throughout the second half of the 18th century the Mayor and the aldermen usually belonged to this congregation. The Mayoral mace was ostentatiously placed in a special socket in front of the gallery and members of the Corporation attended public worship in their full official dress.¹⁹

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17. G.R. Clark History of Ipswich (1830) p. 242
 18. C.E. Pike Our Ancient Meeting House: Some Account of the Fabric of Christ Church, Dampier St., Bridgwater (no place, no date) p.4; Jerom Murch History of the Presbyterian and General Baptist Churches in the West of England (1835) p. 178 f.
 19. Lewis Namier and John Brooke The House of Commons 1754-90 Vol. I (1964) pp. 297-9; Portsmouth Record Series: Book of Original Entries 1731-51 ed. by N.W. Surry and J.H. Thomas (Portsmouth 1976) Appendix; V. Bonham-Carter In a Liberal Tradition: A Social Biography 1700-1950 (1960) pp 17-19.

In the years 1754-94 the Lewins Mead congregation at Bristol provided the town's mayor on fifteen occasions.²⁰

Such local dissenting elites could exert considerable influence on the broader political process. At Nottingham the ruling Presbyterians were disaffected over the American war: an Admiralty agent complained in 1777:

"This town is without exception the most disloyal in the Kingdom, owing in a great measure to the whole Corporation (the present Mayor excepted) being Dissenters, and of so bitter a sort that they have done and continue to do all in their power to hinder the service by preventing as much as possible the enlistment of soldiers".²¹

Throughout the late 18th century Nottingham Corporation kept to a Whig-radical political stance. At Portsmouth too rational dissenters used their local dominance to challenge government policy over the American War. From 1783 the leading Presbyterian family the Carters controlled also the town's parliamentary representation. In the same year the Mayor, John Carter, told Christopher Wyvill that the Corporation had passed unanimously a motion calling for shorter parliaments and "a more Equal Representation of the People".²² At Bridport, where the local Presbyterians had controlled the Corporation since the early 18th century, they also exerted considerable pressure on their parliamentary representatives. In 1804 C.J. Fox reported to Lord Holland that one of the town's M.P.s "maintained his parliamentary interest...by professing to be a DISSENTER".²³

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20. Olive Griffiths 'The Records of Lewins Mead Chapel, Bristol'. TUHS Vol. VI No. 2 (1936) p. 122
 21. Quoted in Namier and Brooke op.cit. p.355. See also Malcolm I. Thomis Politics and Society in Nottingham 1785-1835 (Oxford 1969), esp. Chapter 7.
 22. Parliamentary Papers of John Robinson 1774-84 ed W.T. Laprade Camden Society, third series Vol. XXXIII (1922) p.88; Wyvill Political Papers IV pp. 255-6.
 23. Basil Short A Respectable Society: Bridport 1593-1835 (Bradford-on-Avon 1976); Lord John Russell Memorials and Correspondence of Charles James Fox (1853) Vol. IV p.57

John Brooke identified nineteen MPs in the period 1754-90 who were dissenters, plus another eight who had a dissenting background but had become churchmen.²⁴ Affiliation to dissenting congregations is always difficult to trace, as Brooke notes, and it is possible to identify some MPs with affiliation to specific Unitarian or liberal Presbyterian congregations whom he omits. He lists the following dissenting MPs who I can positively identify with specific chapels: James Adair (Essex St.), Thomas Brand Hollis (Essex St.), James Martin (Essex St. and Princes St., Westminster), William Smith (Essex St.), John Lee (Essex St. and Mill Hill Chapel, Leeds), Samuel Touchet (Cross Street Chapel, Manchester), Richard Slater Milnes (Essex St. and Westgate Chapel, Wakefield). In addition not specified by Brooke: Sir George Savile (Essex St.), Joshua Grigby (Essex St.), Thomas Whitmore (Essex St.), Robert Smith (Essex St.), Benjamin Hobhouse (Lewins Mead, Bristol). The following MPs were founder-members of Lindsey's Unitarian Society in 1791: Hollis, Milnes, William Smith, Martin and Hobhouse.

Lindsey's Essex Street congregation predominates here and, as noted above, this had a quite different social status and a much lighter hold upon its members than the traditional Presbyterian congregation. However, in terms of real political influence what counted was not just the number of MPs from rational dissenting congregations. There were also MPs who depended upon dissenting votes for re-election as well as those who shared the political values and intellectual perspective of rational dissent. Henry Beaufoy, for instance, MP for Yarmouth, was by upbringing a Quaker and nominally a churchman - yet he was educated at Warrington Academy, a disciple of Richard Price, moved in Unitarian circles in London in the 1780s, served on the committee of Hackney Academy and was a leading

24. John Brooke The House of Commons 1754-90: an Introductory Survey (paperback edition, 1968) pp. 169-70

parliamentary spokesman of the dissenting interest.²⁵

The overall parliamentary strength of the dissenting interest in the late 18th century is indicated by the panic with which North and his cabinet greeted the bill to relieve dissenting ministers in 1772: "The minister", commented Horace Walpole, "afraid of disobliging the dissenters before the general election, suffered the bill to pass the House of Commons, hoping the loss would be imputed to the Lords only, and not to Members of Parliament".²⁶ The Duke of Richmond had urged the Marquis of Rockingham - a Whig leader - to support this Bill: "your giving it a warm support will greatly recommend you to that weighty body of men, the Dissenters, who all over England are very powerful and who stick pretty much together..."²⁷ In 1787, when repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts was first raised, a Somerset MP noted that many MPs "will not dare oppose it".²⁸ Upwards of 100 MPs consistently voted for repeal over the next few years. And in 1792 a petition for the relief of Unitarians - at a particular moment when Unitarianism was not just an unpopular but even a dangerous avocation - received the support of 63 MPs.²⁹

In the next section I want to focus on rational dissent in the West Riding, pinpointing some of the ways in which local Presbyterians were part of the Whig party capable of exerting considerable pressure on Whig grandees.

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25. VF 'Historical Account of Students educated in the Warrington Academy' MR Vol. IX (1814) p.268; Peter Brown The Chathamites: A Study in the Relationship between Personalities and Ideas in the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century (1967) p.157; Appendix to Richard Price The Evidence for a Future Period of Improvement in the State of Mankind...to the Supporters of a New Academical Institution among Protestant Dissenters (1787) p.8
26. Quoted in E. Porritt The Unreformed House of Commons (Cambridge 1909) Vol. I p.277. See also Letters of Lindsey p.53 and Richard Pares King George III and the Politicians (new ed. Oxford 1967) p.40
27. Quoted in Lord Albemarle Memoirs of the Marquis of Rockingham (1852) Vol. II p.224
28. Brooke op.cit. p.167
29. The whole question of dissenting influence on MPs in the 1780s is usefully discussed in G.M. Ditchfield 'The parliamentary struggle on the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, 1787-90' English Historical Review Vol. LXXXIX (1974) pp. 551-77

II

A complex structure of landed, commercial and manufacturing interests the county of Yorkshire was a field in which forces of national significance, illuminating the whole political formation were brought to a focus. Dominating County politics from the 1750s was the second Marquess of Rockingham who constructed a political dynasty recently called "probably the most successful interest in county politics".³⁰ As well as dominating the political life of Yorkshire he was also a national leader of an important Whig grouping in parliament and was briefly Prime Minister in 1765 and 82. He was also immensely wealthy, his estates in Yorkshire, Northamptonshire and Ireland brought in annual rents of over £20,000. However in a constituency of the size and complexity of Yorkshire Rockingham's dominance had to be based on more than wealth and the traditional loyalties.³¹ He had to register the growing power of the West Riding woollen merchants and he shrewdly built up a reputation with the woollen interest on first entering the Lords. The short-lived Rockingham Administration of 1765-6 confirmed this. And over the years Rockingham flattered the merchants by his personal letters and circulars and by his consultations with them.³²

In return Rockingham procured support from the woollen interest and particularly from the liberal Presbyterians in such towns as Wakefield, Leeds and Sheffield who were traditionally loyal to the Whigs. Richard Milnes of Westgate Chapel in Wakefield was an advisor to the first Marquess of Rockingham. In 1745 he led the organization of a County subscription to raise funds for military resistance to the Jacobite incursions and he was responsible for distributing the funds to Whig supporters.³³ His son

30. Brooke op.cit. p.8

31. For the emergence of Rockingham's dominance see C. Collyer 'The Rockinghams and Yorkshire Politics 1742-61' Thoresby Miscellany Vol. XII (1954) pp. 362ff.

32. Ibid. pp. 368-9; C.H. Guttridge The Early Career of Lord Rockingham (University of California 1962) p.11

33. Richard Milnes to Rockingham 15 i 1745 and Rockingham to Milnes 13 x 1746 in SCL: CM-M2/362 and 409-10.

Pemberton added considerably to the political capital invested in the Rockingham dynasty. As the head of an important woollen firm, one of the leaders of Yorkshire dissent and a county landowner Pemberton Milnes had a good deal of influence. He had votes at his command: "My Nottinghamshire Interest and Vote", he told Fitzwilliam to assure the Duke of Portland in 1784, "are at his command whenever they are wanted". He also advised the county elite on who in the Wakefield area should be excluded from the magistracy on political grounds.³⁴ He kept Rockingham informed of local feeling and became one of his political advisors in a relationship which went beyond that of master and servant. Pemberton Milnes became privy to the tactical manoeuvres of the Whig leadership and was entrusted with dangerous confidences. In February 1780, for instance, Rockingham wrote of all his fears and doubts about the political situation and concluded:

"I could say much more to you if I had the opportunity of seeing you, I may perhaps have already wrote more to you or stated opinions to you, which your mind might not concur in. I write nevertheless with the fullest confidence that if your Sentiments differ with mine, you as an old and esteemed friend. will point out to me wherein you differ from me, or whereon you doubt".³⁵

Most important of all was the capacity of the Milnes family to mobilise their relations, contacts and dependents in support of the Whig cause. This was particularly significant in the early 1780s when the Yorkshire Association was campaigning for a radical shift in the state policy. Pemberton Milnes played a decisive role in the emergence of the new Association. Wyvill's first circular of 1779 - calling for economical reform - had the support of some North Riding gentry but had received a number of discouraging replies from elsewhere. Pemberton Milnes however turned the tide. He replied to Wyvill that he was "happy to find this County is going to do what I have long wished for in my own mind" and provided names of a number

34. Pemberton Milnes to Earl Fitzwilliam 24 ii 1784 and 17 ii 1784 in SCL: WW Mss F34/38 and 43

35. Rockingham to Pemberton Milnes 28 ii 1780 SCL: WW Mss R1-1881

of local associates (James and John Milnes among them) who were sympathetic.³⁶ Pemberton, John, James Snr. and James Milnes Jnr. were all present at the founding meeting of the Association on December 30th 1779 and Pemberton and James Snr. were both nominated to the Committee. In the course of 1780 Richard Slater Milnes, James Jnr. and John Milnes were nominated to the Committee as were two other members of Westgate Chapel in Wakefield - Robert and Thomas Lumb.³⁷

The Milnes family were subsequently extremely important in generating support for Yorkshire Association initiatives such as petitions to Parliament. In January 1780 it was largely owing to the commitment of Pemberton that any signatures were being collected for the Yorkshire petition in the Wakefield area; as he told Holmes, who was coordinating activities from York: "I am oblig'd to send a Person with it from House to House, not the least regard was paid to the Printed advertisement, of its laying at such and such Places for signing, I have also sent Persons with it into the villages many miles around this Neighbourhood".³⁸ In April John Milnes returned from a lengthy visit to Lord Effingham to find the political situation in Wakefield - in the absence of Pemberton - utterly stagnant. He went on to give Holmes a detailed account of the current situation of the Association's campaign in the West Riding, pointed to those areas which had not been canvassed and detailed several individuals who should be formally approached. He undertook himself to canvass the Huddersfield area where the commercial influence of the Milnes would be decisive in getting the support of the clothiers: "As we purchase at least one half of the White Cloths don't doubt getting all them to a man".³⁹ Three weeks later John Milnes was telling Holmes of the success that he and his partner Benjamin

37. See 'An Alphabetical List of the Members of the Committee of Association for the County of York...' in *ibid.* II pp. 322-4.

38. Pemberton Milnes to Holmes 26 i 1780 YAP/YCA: M25/204

39. John Milnes to Holmes April 1780 YAP/YCA: M25/271

Heywood (another Westgate Chapel trustee) had achieved: "though we had the Insinuations of a Powerful Adverse Party, and the Prejudice of the People to surmount, yet our Success was beyond our expectations". Taking advantage of the crowds of people attending the weekly market in Huddersfield they had obtained signatures from many of the surrounding villages - three quarters of those approached had agreed to sign the petition.⁴⁰

Pemberton Milnes continued to be active also - writing many letters to his friends to rally support for the Association and canvassing in the Halifax area.⁴¹

The Milnes were of strategic influence because of their status in areas where clothiers were predominant and there was no influential resident gentry. The freeholders around Morley and Askrigg, for example, John Milnes noted, were largely clothiers "so that none but Merchants have much interest in that country".⁴² Moreover the Milnes's energy contrasted with the apathy of other sympathisers in the area. A petition on a county-wide basis at the end of 1782 and the beginning of 1783 had the signatures of just over 10,000 freeholders - of these the Milnes circle had procured 1500.⁴³ In January 1783 Pemberton Milnes reported to Holmes: "both Messrs. R.S. Milnes and Mr. John Milnes have taken immense and indefatigable Pains and Labour in getting the Petition signed and are still going on with the circulation thereof, yet I am fully convinced that not one half of the Freeholders in this part of the County West of this Place will have the opportunity of putting their Names to it for want of being invited when in Person, by some Person of consequence".⁴⁴

40. Same to same 11 v 1780 YAP/YCA: M25/285

41. See for instance Pemberton Milnes to Rockingham 12 ix 1780
SCL: WW Mss R139-19

42. John Milnes to Holmes 13 vii 1780 YAP/YCA: M25/291

43. Wyvill Political Papers II pp.249-51

44. Pemberton Milnes to Holmes 26 i 1783 YAP/YCA: M25/469

If the Milnes family were especially active in political organization and in the cementing of links between local groups of supporters and Whig leadership in Yorkshire, other liberal Presbyterians played an active political role. Samuel Shore of Sheffield's Upper Chapel, was an active supporter of the Cavendish interest in Derbyshire and the Rockingham interest and as landowner, merchant and dissenting leader was influentially placed. In the 1760s he was nominated as Whig parliamentary candidate for Derbyshire but refused the offer. Both he and his brother John were members of the Yorkshire Association and the former served on the Committee. Like the Milnes family, he was active in the collection of signatures for Association petitions. In February 1781 he was, along with Wyvill and Sir James Norcliffe, a deputy of the Yorkshire Association at a lengthy meeting of the various County Associations in London.⁴⁵

At Leeds the Mill Hill trustee Thomas Lee was a staunch supporter of Rockingham and was rewarded with the position first of deputy-receiver, then receiver, of the East Riding land taxes which, as he said himself, "is of some little convenience to the merchant".⁴⁶ In the emergence of the Yorkshire Association 1779 a number of Mill Hill merchants were active. Several of them were recipients of Wyvill's initial circular. Milnes Rayner immediately expressed his support, advised that the Leeds Corporation be invited to participate and provided a list of 23 potential supporters who should be contacted: they included the ministers of both Mill Hill and Call Lane Chapels, William Wood and Joseph Bowden, as well as leading Mill Hill merchants James Fenton, William Tottie, David Stansfeld, Samuel Hamer Oates and Joseph Hainsworth.⁴⁷ Others - Obadiah

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45. Lady Stephen 'The Shores of Sheffield and the Offleys of Norton Hall' Transactions of the Hunter Archaeological Society Vol. V (1943) pp.7-8; 'Obituary of Samuel Shore' in Gents Mag Vol. 98 part ii (1828) pp. 640-1; Wyvill Political Papers Vol. I pp 300-1, 305 and Vol II p. 323.
46. R.G. Wilson Gentlemen Merchants: The merchant community in Leeds 1700-1830 (Manchester 1971) pp.150, 245.
47. Milnes Rayner to Holmes 20 xii 1779 YAP/YCA: M25/124

Dawson, Richard Lee, Samuel and Josiah Oates and Thomas Wolrich - had already been directly contacted.⁴⁸ Obadiah Dawson, Stansfeld, Wolrich and Samuel Oates attended the founding meeting at the end of December 1779. Although they agreed as a group to keep their names out of printed circulars - "it is but too notorious that names may be procured to countenance anything", Milnes Rayner commented⁴⁹ - they were active enough in Leeds to be identified as the ringleaders of anti-government organization. Thus William Denison, of the Corporation elite, though agreeing in 1780 with the Association campaign "so far as they recommend economy" was suspicious of its local Unitarian leadership: "the chief promoters of it in this County are the Oates who were Promoters and Supporters of the American rebellion and consequently the cause of our present distress".⁵⁰

One Mill Hill Chapel trustee played a particularly significant political role. Thomas Lee's younger brother John (b. 1733) became a barrister and was soon drawn into Rockingham's orbit, becoming one of his advisors in the late 1760s. Lee first came into public prominence when in May 1769 he led the legal case of the Wilkesite radicals against the return of Luttrell as their MP. Soon after Coulhurst wrote to Lee's future wife: "Lord Lyttleton, Lord Temple and a vast many of the first personages in this kingdom are striving to pay him honour, and courting his friendship; and it is universally allowed, no man ever conducted a weighty cause half so ably, or spoke so well".⁵¹ On Rockingham's recommendation he was appointed Recorder of Doncaster and throughout the 1770s was an important member of his inner group as a personal advisor, a speech writer and a general "man of business". Lee called himself a "Vehicle of Communication" between Rockingham and his supporters.⁵² And his long-

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48. Letters to Holmes in Yorkshire Association Papers - William Tottie 16 xii 1779 M25/124; Josiah Oates 19 xii 1779 M25/109; Obadiah Dawson 19 xii 1779 M25/114; Richard Lee 22 xi 1779 M25/141.
49. Wyvill Political Papers II pp. 322-4; Milnes Rayner letter already cited.
50. Wilson op.cit. p. 168
51. Albermarle op.cit. Vol. II p.111
52. John Lee to Rockingham 18 ix 1769 SCL: WW Mss R1-1229

standing links with Leeds were called upon by Rockingham; in December 1779 for instance: "My Lord forgot to ask you this morning whether it had occur'd to you to write to your Nephew in Leeds; some of your excellent Hints convey'd to him might have a good effect in stirring up others at that place to exert a proper spirit".⁵³ As a lifelong Unitarian Lee was extremely useful to his co-religionists: he was instrumental in getting Priestly^e_k an invitation to accompany Cook as ship's astronomer on his second voyage at the end of 1771 and was particularly helpful to him after 1782. He was also a trustee of Lindsey's congregation and gave useful legal advice on the foundation of the chapel when local magistrates were creating obstructions.⁵⁴ More importantly, he was a channel of communication and influence for his Yorkshire friends and relations and fellow-dissenters.

Rational dissent was therefore not politically impotent. Men like Pemberton Milnes, Samuel Shore, John and Thomas Lee in Yorkshire had penetrated into positions which gave them some influence with the national leadership of the Whigs. Their social influence was ratified in public office - seats on the bench, honorary positions such as Deputy Lieutenant of the County - or in private patronage. In such ways local individuals and groups with a measure of power were integrated into the political structure which the Whig elite controlled. However there was always an element of tension between Whig oligarchy and local supporters. The former condescended to represent the interests of the latter in some cases but not in others. In 1772 for instance the Rockingham Whigs refused to support the bill to abolish certain dissenting subscriptions, much to the disappointment of John Lee who told William Turner, minister

53. Rockingham to John Lee 19 xii 1779 - this letter and one hundred others to and from Lee are in the John Clements Library of the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor but some of the contents are detailed in an Appendix to Handlist of Correspondence of Charles, the Second Marquis of Rockingham in SCL: WW Mss.

54. Priestley Memoirs 1 pp.86, 157, 209, 216; Memoirs of Lindsey pp. 109-10.

at Westgate Chapel Wakefield: "I am sorry for it, because I think the cause would have done them honour, and the desertion of it will lose them many friends".⁵⁵

However it was the deepening crisis of 1779 - military defeats in America, high taxation and economic depression, chaos within the government with resignations and disagreements and the prime minister incapacitated - which exposed the limitations of the political structure. Lee in December 1779 wrote of the widespread unemployment, the decline of trade and the resulting heavy losses for merchants and landowners which was bringing about a loss of confidence in the existing political order among a substantial section of Yorkshire's Whig base.⁵⁶ The Yorkshire Association emerged out of this crisis and led to the breakdown of cooperation between the Whig centre and local supporters.⁵⁷

At first Rockingham had seen the Yorkshire Association as a source of strength for his party, but as very much a subsidiary support of his own parliamentary strategy. Representing Rockingham's interests in Association matters, Pemberton Milnes had from the beginning noted the danger of its incipient radicalism: "there are some things which Mr. Wyvill mentions in his letter", he reported to Rockingham, "which I think had better be never mentioned, that of more County members and Short Parliaments".⁵⁸

In the course of 1780 the extent to which the Yorkshire Association's demand for parliamentary reform challenged the hereditary interest of Rockingham became clear.⁵⁹ By September 1780 Pemberton was assuring

55. Quoted in Priestly Memoirs 1 p.159n.

56. Wyvill Political Papers III p.166; James Milnes wrote to Rockingham in similar terms: "The situation of this country is so truly deplorable, that in a sober, serious hour of reflection, it is painful and alarming to think what is to become of it". 12 ix 1780 WW. Mss R139-20. See also Letters of Lindsey pp 83-4.

57. See H. Butterfield 'The Yorkshire Association and the Crisis of 1779-80' Transactions of Royal Historical Society 4th series Vol. XXIX (1947) esp. p.69.

58. Pemberton Milnes to Rockingham 8 xii 1779 SCL: WW Mss R1-1867

59. See for instance Rockingham to Pemberton Milnes 28 ii 1780 SCL: WW Mss R1-1881.

Rockingham: "I will do all I can to prevent our Committee doing hasty and wrongheaded things".⁶⁰ From 1782 the Association moved closer to the young William Pitt but it was only after the events of 1783 that the internal tensions of the Yorkshire Whig alliance exploded.

The deaths first of Rockingham and then the long-standing county member Sir George Savile - an important figure in the holding together of divergent groups and interests in Yorkshire - threw the political situation into flux. Rockingham's successor, his nephew Earl Fitzwilliam, inherited a political interest which was already dangerously polarised.⁶¹ The Fox-North Coalition in 1783 profoundly shocked many Whig reformers as an unprincipled piece of opportunism on the part of the leaders - including Fitzwilliam. Specific measures of the short-lived coalition - especially the East India Bill and a receipt tax - further alienated Whig supporters. One of Fitzwilliam's aides, visiting Wakefield in February 1784, found the merchants there furious with this latter measure and deeply grieved at Fitzwilliam's support of it: "they were all to a man very clear that Ld. Rockingham, had so great a respect for the trade of this country, that he would never have persevered in so obnoxious a tax..."⁶²

Pemberton Milnes reported to his new patron the growing political alienation of his own family from their traditional loyalties. John Milnes had joined with the local vicar, Dr. Bacon, in drawing up an Address to the Throne thanking the King for dismissing the Fox-North Coalition Ministry and throwing out Fox's India Bill: "I am sorry to say that all of the name of Milnes in this Town have signed the address except myself". John Milnes and Bacon were going to London to present the Address, where

60. Pemberton Milnes to Rockingham 12 ix 1780 SCL: WW Mss R139-19

61. For background to Fitzwilliam see E.A. Smith Whig principles and party politics: Earl Fitzwilliam and the Whig party 1748-1833 (Manchester 1975)

62. Quoted in N.C. Phillips Yorkshire and English National Politics 1783-4 (Christchurch, New Zealand 1961) p.40

they would probably be joined by Richard Slater Milnes.⁶³ A fortnight later Pemberton Milnes told Fitzwilliam that politically he was now "in opposition to all the rest of my near relations".⁶⁴

On March 25th 1784 in a seven hour meeting a gathering of four thousand Yorkshire freeholders fought out a political battle which split apart the Yorkshire Association and the county's Whig alliance. Richard Slate Milnes was a leading speaker and expressed his regret at speaking against men 'whose principles I have been accustomed to revere'. But, he went on, Fox's India Bill and the Coalition provided "a lesson that the most amiable men, in private life, could not resist temptation when public advantage was set in opposition to interest".⁶⁵ A motion supporting the King's dismissal of the Coalition was passed by a narrow majority and as a result there was a secession of members of the Yorkshire Association who remained loyal to the Fox-Fitzwilliam wing of the party - including Pemberton Milnes and the Lumbs. As a result there was dual power in the county - two substantial bodies of men claimed to represent the Whig interest in Yorkshire. The Fitzwilliam group and the Yorkshire Association soon clashed in the general election. Fitzwilliam's candidates in both the City of York and the County were defeated. While Pemberton Milnes remained loyal to the old Whig leadership, subscribing £200 in support of Fitzwilliam's electoral campaign in Yorkshire, his nephew and fellow trustee of Westgate Chapel Richard Slater Milnes was elected for the City of York. Throwing down the gauntlet before Fitzwilliam, he told the electors: "I have this day the unspeakable Happiness of being at once the Instrument of your Emancipation from the Influence of an Aristocratical Fraction, combined to annihilate your importance in the national scale..."⁶⁶

63. Pemberton Milnes to Fitzwilliam 8 ii 1784 SCL: WW Mss F34/31

64. Same to same 24 ii 1784 SCL: WW Mss F34/43

65. Wyvill Political Papers II pp 337-8

66. Quoted Phillips op.cit. p.49

The events of 1783-4 certainly marked an important rupture in the 'party' structure of the 18th century Whigs. Five years later Wilberforce noted in his journal the anniversary of the election of Dick Milnes and the defeat of Fitzwilliam's candidates as "an aera".⁶⁷ Throughout the country the Foxites were crushed as the dissenters and the commercial interest switched their allegiance to Pitt.⁶⁸ Joseph Priestley, influenced by the Pittite enthusiasms of the Birmingham Dissenters, signed an anti-Fox address - though in discussion with Theophilus Lindsey soon after he expressed his discomfort over his new allegiance and his continuing regard for Fox.⁶⁹ Lindsey himself remained loyal to the Foxite Whigs but noted with alarm the aggressively pro-Pitt line taken by London Dissenters. The crisis also affected his own congregation, as he commented in April 1784: "Three members of the House of Commons have never entered our walls since the commencement of the present political contest. I told one of them I was sorry that such were the effects of their squabbles".⁷⁰

Interesting though the broader political effects of these events are, my aim in this section has been primarily to focus in detail on the nature of the local structure of party politics in the late 18th century showing how rational dissenters of wealth and influence could put pressure on the policy-making of their aristocratic political leaders and even challenge their ascendancy. A later chapter will return to some of these questions and examine the continuing influence of Unitarians on Yorkshire politics, particularly after 1815. I want now to look at another aspect of the political influence of rational dissent in the 1770s and 80s - the way in which Unitarians were influential in formulating political ideology, via the activities of their ministers in particular.

67. R.I. and S. Wilberforce Life of William Wilberforce (1838) Vol. I p.189

68. See John Cannon The Fox-North Coalition: Crisis of the Constitution 1782-4 (Cambridge 1969) Chapter 11.

69. Letters of Lindsey p.114

70. More Letters of Lindsey p.364

III

It is important not to see the relationship between Rockingham Whigs and West Riding Unitarians as simply manipulative, a random coincidence of material interests. Throughout the late 18th century there was a common language, a shared moral and intellectual vocabulary. As the Duke of Richmond suggested in 1772, urging Rockingham to support a petition put forward especially by rational dissenters such as Kippis: "their religious principles and our political ones are so very similar, and most probably will make us generally act together".⁷¹ In an important sense religious dissent provided an intellectual and moral anchorage for the opposition Whigs of the 1770s and 80s, filling the space left by the Anglican church which in the whole period was firmly aligned with Government forces. Burke wrote to Fox in 1777:

"The Tories do universally think their power and consequence involved in the Success of this American Business. The Clergy are astonishingly warm in it - and what the Tories are when embodied, united in their natural head the Crown, and animated by their Clergy, no man knows better than yourself..."⁷²

He went on to call the Dissenters "the main effective part of the Whig strength". Of course there were clergymen who sympathized with rationalist theologies, parliamentary reform, freedom of thought and the Whig opposition. But the church hierarchy always maintained strict control over the activities of clergymen. In the early 1770s Lindsey found many clergymen sympathetic to the Father's Tavern petition but who were afraid to sign it. In 1781 the Archbishop of York censured those clergymen who had supported the Yorkshire Association.⁷³

The rational dissenting minister had no such constraints: he could participate in political activity in support of the Whigs and could voice,

71. Quoted in Albermarle op.cit. Vol. II p. 224

72. Edmund Burke to Charles James Fox 8 x 1777 in George Guttridge (ed) The Correspondence of Edmund Burke Vol. III (Cambridge 1961) p. 383

73. Memoirs of Lindsey pp 49-50; Wyvill Political Papers Vol. I p. 354 and Vol. V pp 18-19, 19n.

in the traditional language of religious dissent, criticisms of government policy. At Bolton the minister Philip Holland was politically active in organizing petitions against the American war.⁷⁴ Newcome Cappe, minister at St. Savourgate Chapel in York, was an enthusiastic supporter of the Yorkshire Association and had been invited to its founding meeting. "Had he been a Freeholder in this County" he wrote to Holmes, "he could not have lost a moment to have done himself honor, by annexing his to so respectable a list of names, associated, on so urgent an occasion, for so laudable a purpose".⁷⁵ The ministers of both Mill Hill and Call Lane Chapels in Leeds were similarly approached for their support. At Westgate Chapel in Wakefield the minister William Turner wrote a paper in 1780 explaining and justifying the principles and political strategy of the Yorkshire Association.⁷⁶ At Nottingham Rev. George Walker - a former tutor at Warrington Academy and from 1774 minister at High Pavement Chapel - even became a political leader of note. He drafted petitions against the American war. He was a prominent and effective speaker on the platform of a number of Nottinghamshire county meetings in the early 1780s in the cause of parliamentary reform - on one occasion earning public praise from Sir George Savile and the Earl of Surrey. He was chairman of the associated dissenters of Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire and South Yorkshire in the late 1780s and his pamphlet 'The Dissenters Plea' was nationally circulated. Both C.J. Fox and Gilbert Wakefield thought it the best contribution to the whole campaign against the Test and Corporation Acts. In the early 1790s he drafted a number of important radical petitions to parliament from Nottingham.⁷⁷ In 1811 - four years after

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74. Franklin Baker The Rise and Progress of Nonconformity in Bolton: An Historical Sketch...in Four Lectures (1854) pp. 59-60
75. Newcome Cappe to Holmes 16 xii 1779 YAP/YCA: M25/89
76. 'Memoirs of Mr. Turner's Life and Writings' appended to William Wood A Sermon preached Sept. 7th 1794 on occasion of the death of the Rev. William Turner... (Newcastle-upon-Tyne 1794) pp 44n
77. George Walker Essays on Various Subjects...to which is prefixed a Life of the Author (1809) Vol. I pp. lxxvi - vii, cxxv, cxxxix, cxi, clviii - ix.

Walker's death and thirteen years after his departure from the town - his old friend and business partner Major John Cartwright told Lord Holland: "I lament to observe, that since the loss of that excellent man, George Walker, Nottingham seems with him to have lost somewhat of its decision of character, and that a leader, authoritative from wisdom, virtue and energy, is wanting".⁷⁸

If Walker was unusual in the extent of his political activism, many other ministers were deeply interested. Theophilus Lindsey was remarkably well-informed on political affairs. He regularly attended debates in the House of Commons. He often dined or breakfasted with MPs or men of influence. In December 1775 he was at Shelburne's house along with Price, Priestley, Kippis and others, for instance.⁷⁹ For a number of years he spent each Sunday evening with Lee and Priestley - the former an intimate of Rockingham, the latter of Shelburne. Lindsey also knew many prominent Americans, including Benjamin Franklin and John Adams.⁸⁰ His correspondence makes it clear that, through these frequent contacts, he was privy to important political information which in turn he disseminated to Turner in Wakefield and Tayleur in Shrewsbury. For instance in July 1779 he told Tayleur that a friend "who had just been with one in high place" had confided that peace terms with the Americans had been offered to the British government through the mediation of Spain.⁸¹ "Some pretty high in the administration are of my old Cambridge Acquaintance", he noted of the new Rockingham government in 1782.⁸² He was also able to forward to Tayleur and Turner detailed information about the disposition of the Americans in the lead up to the war and about the military successes of the rebel forces.⁸³ Lindsey was even a source of political information

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78. Francis Dorothy Cartwright The Life and Correspondence of Major Cartwright (1826) Vol. II p.19
79. Lindsey to Turner Snr. 12 xii 1775 in 'William Turner's Letters' in Library of Newcastle Literary and Philosophical Society
80. Letters of Lindsey pp 86-7, 73, 76; Priestley Memoirs 1 p.209
81. Letters of Lindsey p.84
82. Ibid. p.85
83. See for instance Lindsey to Turner 30 i 1777 in 'Turner Letters' loc.cit.

for a political leader like Shelburne: Priestley wrote to the latter in September 1776: "Mr. Lindsey, whose intelligence is generally pretty accurate, says he is informed from the very best authority, that there is an irreconcilable difference between Ld. Gower and Mr. Rigby".⁸⁴

William Hazlitt (father of the writer) provides a remarkable example of the channels of information and influence among rational dissenting ministers. Born 1737 the son of an Irish merchant, Hazlitt had become a Unitarian at Glasgow University. He mixed in rational dissenting circles in London, knew Price and Priestley and Kippis, and ministered to congregations at Marshfield in Gloucestershire (1766-70) and at Maidstone (1770-80). He then became minister to a congregation at Bandon in County Cork, where he confronted the English army and won. A regiment of English soldiers were stationed nearby and some American prisoners were interned at Kinsale close by. Soldiers sometimes mistreated local people - amusing themselves by throwing turf at passers-by or by forcing Catholics to eat meat on Fridays. The American prisoners were also maltreated. Hazlitt visited the prison and wrote letters to the Cork newspaper to publicise the brutality of the English soldiers. He also, apparently, helped three Americans escape. One Sunday three soldiers confronted him in the street and physically threatened him. Hazlitt promptly wrote to his London friends. Price transmitted Hazlitt's account to his friend Shelburne who happened to be Prime Minister. There was an enquiry at Kinsale prison, the guilty officers were reprimanded and the regiment moved to another posting.⁸⁵ The ministers of rational dissent in 1770s and 80s provided, then, a network of social communication through which politically significant information was transmitted between governing circles and distant

84. Quoted in Anne Holt A Life of Joseph Priestley (Oxford 1931) pp 75-6

85. P.P. Howe. The Life of William Hazlitt (1928) p.3; R.M. Wardle Hazlitt (University of Nebraska 1971) pp. 5-7.

groups of dissenting merchants: from Rockingham's cabinet through Lindsey to Turner and onto Wakefield merchants; from Hazlitt in an Irish village through Price to Shelburne, the Prime Minister.

Unitarian ministers also used their position as preachers to exert political influence. Adapting the moral rigour of the dissenting tradition to the immediate political context a number of Unitarian ministers preached effective denunciations of the American war. Thus in 1776 on a government proclaimed fast-day William Turner took the opportunity to expose his Wakefield congregation to a vehement denunciation of the immorality of rulers. Ostentatious self-mortification on such a political fast-day fitted well, he said with "pride, vanity, self-confidence and even the basest sensualities and most odious debaucheries in secret, as well as of moroseness, haughtiness, censoriousness, hardness of heart, oppression, fraud, falsehood, and cruelty towards others".⁸⁶ It was necessary that some individuals should - "by common consent" - be invested with the power to govern but this was for the common good not for the particular interests of a narrow group. However, Turner went on, in all countries at all periods there have been men - "blinded by avarice and ambition, hardened against the feelings of humanity, and having perverted or lost all principles of fear of God, and righteousness to man" - who have confused power and right. Finding themselves possessed of the power they have decided they possess the right "to invade, and make a property of their fellow-creatures, and use them for their own advantage, pleasure or caprice, though it were to their bitter suffering and cruel oppression, both in body, mind and outward estate".⁸⁷ Though the whole sermon remains at this pitch of generality, the immediate context of Britain's attempt to repress the American rebels haunted everything Turner said. And he concluded with biblical fury:

86. William Turner The Whole Service as Performed in the Congregation of Protestant Dissenters at Wakefield on Friday Dec. 13th 1776, Being the Day appointed for a General Fast(Wakefield 1777) p.23

87. Ibid. p.26

"whoever shall persist in the commission of unrighteousness, oppression, and cruelty to their brethren, and, at the same time, attempt, by fastings, however solemn, to bribe the righteous ruler of the world to connive at the wickedness, will only bring down on themselves his heavier vengeance for the aggravated insult".⁸⁸

This sermon was not simply a confirmation of the already-formed viewpoint of Turner's hearers. At Wakefield many of the members of the Westgate Chapel were initially hostile to the American cause (doubtless seeing a speedy and effective defeat of the rebels as the best way of protecting their trading links with the colonies).⁸⁹ Turner's fast-day sermon was thus an open challenge. Theophilus Lindsey was most impressed, noting that its vindication of "the just rights of men...might be of service to those that attended however averse to the Americans..."⁹⁰ He was in receipt of a number of copies and undertook to distribute them at "our club" - presumably the fortnightly dining club of 'Honest Whigs' whose numbers included Lindsey, Price, Priestley, Kippis, John Lee, Abraham Rees, Benjamin Franklin, Jonathan Shipley (Bishop of St. Asaph), William Rose (co-editor of the 'Monthly Review').⁹¹

At St. Saviourgate Chapel in York on the same fast-day Newcome Cappe delivered a sermon which denounced the whole moral ethos of Britain. He noted widespread electoral corruption, a legal system "unrighteous and oppressive", everywhere "public virtue" was "trampled underfoot by interested ambition, consumed by party zeal, or suffered to die away through a cold and careless insensibility". Every aspect of social life was shown to be decadent - religion, education, family life, business; and all classes, rich and poor shared equally in the profligacy.⁹² The political implication was obvious: the existing order sanctioned every vice,

88. Ibid. p.34

89. Letters of Lindsey p.79

90. Lindsey to Turner 30 i 1777 'Turner Letters' loc.cit.

91. Members listed in D.O. Thomas The Honest Mind: the Thought and Work of Richard Price (Oxford 1977) pp. 142-3; and see also Priestley, letter to the editor of the Monthly Magazine 10 xi 1802 reprinted as Appendix XXIV to Works XXV p.393.

92. Cappe op.cit. pp. 5-6

it could provide no legitimacy for any of its actions, particularly not the suppression of the Americans. Patriotism could be nothing but an empty fraud.

Newcome Cappe had made an impact in London political circles in 1757 with a sermon praising the victory of Frederick of Prussia at Rosbach: this had gone rapidly through thirteen editions and brought him praise and attention from leading political figures.⁹³ His 1776 sermon attacking the American war similarly brought him into the political spotlight. It quickly went through two editions and via John Lee brought to the attention of various members of the Whig Opposition. Lee wrote to Cappe early in 1777:

"Sir George Savile, happening to call on me a fortnight since... I showed him your sermon, and read him several parts of it. He was delighted beyond measure with it, insisted on taking it away with him...I have seen him frequently since, and he was never failed repeating his admiration, in terms that do him and you equal honour. He sent to Johnson for 7 or 8 copies, but none are to be had; and he was strongly disposed to take a liberty with you, by giving orders to print a new edition of it, without your knowledge".

Savile and Lee had canvassed it around. Burke had read it and spread its fame around the Commons benches. Lee told Cappe: "last night the duke of Portland sent me a card, to desire I would give him an opportunity of reading it".⁹⁴

Sermons from the pulpits of rational dissent were not only moral assaults on the legitimacy of the established social and political order. They also, on occasion, articulated an explicit political philosophy. In 1781, in a sermon before the Associated Dissenting ministers of the West Riding, William Wood - Priestley's successor at Mill Hill Chapel in Leeds - generalised the opposition to the American war into a coherent account of the moral and political dimensions of international trade. Against any kind of

93. Catherine Cappe 'Life of the Rev. Newcome Cappe' in Discourses, Chiefly on Devotional Subjects by the late Rev. Newcome Cappe (2nd ed. York 1816) p. xxxiv.

94. *Ibid* pp. 1, 1i

narrow patriotism, he affirmed the equality of all nations and all peoples in the divine order:

"The inhabitants of the frigid, the temperate, and the torrid zones differ exceedingly from each other in the beauty of their external persons, in the endowments of their minds and in their opportunities of obtaining the productions of nature and the conveniences of life. But, notwithstanding the difference of their situations and manners, they are all men, the possessors of a common nature, and are supplied, in all their necessities, by the one God and father of all".⁹⁵

This led first to a condemnation of slavery: "Is a whole race of men to be made slaves at pleasure because they have a black complexion and woolly hair?"⁹⁶ But Wood's major argument was about how the existing mercantilist order contravened the natural order. God created a planet "expressly designed to promote a commercial intercourse" which in turn required cooperation between peoples: "While the inhabitants of different climes are labouring for you, you ought likewise to be labouring for them; and thus, by a fair exchange equally profitable to all parties, you will mutually increase each others happiness".⁹⁷ War was a contravention of this order, both economically harmful and immoral: war-like patriotism, Wood stated, was fundamentally unchristian and was exploited by "the wicked ambition of Princes". He looked forward to a world of peace and international free-trade:

"the human mind is gradually preparing to submit itself to the government of the universal creator, to acknowledge its connection with the general body of mankind, and to perceive that, it can never, even in this world, secure its real interest, till it peaceably pursue an extensive and equitable commerce".⁹⁸

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95. William Wood The Christian Duty of Cultivating a Spirit of Universal Benevolence amidst the present unhappy National Hostilities: A Sermon... (Leeds 1781) p.14
96. Ibid. p. 16
97. Ibid. p.29
98. Ibid. p. 31. For the mercantilist order see Charles Wilson Mercantilism (Historical Association 1958)

In this way Wood succeeded in articulating from the pulpit a coherent moral, political and economic rationale for opposition to the American war and, more broadly, to the whole mercantilist order of things.⁹⁹

Ministers used other forms of public discourse, and with great success. Priestley's pamphlet 'The Present State of Great Britain and her Colonies' in 1769 gained him the friendship of Sir George Savile and the good opinion of Rockingham.¹⁰⁰ It was published in several cheap and widely distributed editions. In 1774 'An Address to Protestant Dissenters', defending the cause of the American colonists, written and published in consultation with Benjamin Franklin was again widely distributed and influential.¹⁰¹ Franklin even wondered whether it contributed to the dissolution of parliament a year early: in the House a member of the Government, Lord Suffolk, had stated that the early dissolution was to prevent public opinion "being poisoned by artful and dangerous publications".¹⁰² Two years later Richard Price's 'Observations on the Nature of Civil Liberty', upholding the American cause and calling for parliamentary reform, rapidly went through 14 editions - more than 60,000 copies - in London alone.¹⁰³ Other rational dissenting ministers, especially in London, also contributed to the emergence of a critical

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99. For other radical critiques of the American war from the pulpits of rational dissent see Newcome Cappe A Sermon preached on Friday 4th of February, 1780, the late Day of National Humiliation... (York 1780) and A Sermon preached on Wednesday, 21st February, 1781, the late day of National Humiliation... (York 1781); George Walker A Sermon preached to a Congregation of Protestant Dissenters at Nottingham, December 13, 1776; Being the Day Appointed for a General Fast (1777); Joshua Toulmin The American War Lamented: A Sermon preached at Taunton on February 18th and 25th 1776 (1776)
100. (Priestley) The Present State of Liberty in Great Britain and her Colonies by an Englishman (1769) in Works XXII pp. 380-98
101. (Priestley) An Address to Protestant Dissenters of all Denominations, on the approaching Election of Members of Parliament, with respect to the State of Public Liberty in General, and of American Affairs in particular (1774) Works XXII pp.483-98.
102. Priestley to editor of Monthly Magazine 1 ii 1804, Appendix XXIV to Works XXV p. 396.
103. Priestley Memoirs 1 p. 289n; Peter Brown op.cit. p. 148

political philosophy. Joseph Towers (1737-99), Price's co-minister at Newington Green from 1778, was a voluminous author, especially on political issues, and an activist in London politics.¹⁰⁴ Andrew Kippis (1725-95), from 1753 minister at Princes Street Presbyterian Chapel in Westminster and tutor first at Hoxton then at Hackney Academies, was similarly a fluent and energetic writer of political tracts and articles.¹⁰⁵

In scholarship the equal of any church divine, articulate and politically informed, with a facility for drafting a persuasive argument, such men made useful associates, as Earl Shelburne was quick to notice. His brilliant coterie in the 1770s and 80s - a "shadow administration" of ideologues, advisors and policy experts - included a number of rational dissenters.¹⁰⁶ Richard Price was drawn into Shelburne's circle in the early 1770s and soon became his intimate friend: the latter taking the, for him, unusual step of signing his letters to the former 'Yours affectionately'. Until Shelburne's political retirement in 1783 Price was an influential figure in the Chathamite party, both as a moral critic of the American war and as a careful advisor on fiscal policy.¹⁰⁷ On his advice other young rational dissenting ministers were drawn into the Bowood circle. In 1771 Shelburne applied to Price for "a gentleman of character and extensive knowledge and learning" as a tutor for his sons. Price wrote to George Walker - still ministering to a congregation in Yarmouth: "You were the first I thought of, and I have mentioned you to him, and represented you as possessed of all the qualifications he wants..."

104. James Lindsay A Sermon occasioned by the death of the Rev. Joseph Towers LL.D (1799) passim; DNB.

105. Abraham Rees A Sermon preached at the Meeting House in Prince's Street, Westminster, on 18th October 1795, upon Occasion of the much lamented death of Rev. Andrew Kippis DD, FRS and FSA... (1795) esp. pp 45ff; DNB

106. J.H. Plumb England in the 18th Century pp 138, 187; D. Jarrett The Begetters of Revolution: England's involvement with France 1759-89 (1973) Chapter 10.

107. Brown op.cit. p.142; Thomas op.cit. pp.145-8 and passim.

You would find yourself under no disagreeable restraints, and he would consider you as his companion and friend..." Walker in fact declined the offer, ostensibly for "domestic" reasons though in fact within a matter of months he was entertaining moves to Birmingham as minister of the Old Meeting and to Warrington Academy.¹⁰⁸ Eventually in October 1772 Shelburne found a tutor and companion in Thomas Jervis. Born 1748 the son of a dissenting minister in Ipswich, Jervis had been educated at Hoxton under Andrew Kippis before becoming in 1770 a tutor at the Dissenting Academy in Exeter and minister at the small Presbyterian congregations at Topsham and Lympstone. Jervis - a Unitarian - was evidently satisfactory, remaining in Shelburne's service until 1783.¹⁰⁹ In 1781 Jeremy Bentham reported that Shelburne's son Lord Fitzmaurice - who had been under the sole charge of Jervis since the age of six - was an "ingenious youth": "He is not sixteen, and already he writes better than his father".¹¹⁰

Meanwhile, on Price's recommendation, Shelburne sought to add Joseph Priestly to his circle in 1772 - first as a tutor to his sons then as librarian and literary companion. Priestley delayed - even after Shelburne had paid him a personal visit at Leeds in August 1772. Finally he accepted the offer and in May 1773 preached his farewell sermon at Mill Hill Chapel.¹¹¹ Over the next few years Priestley, with a town house in London and his own house on Shelburne's estate at Calne in Wiltshire, as well as a substantial salary of £250, was at one of the centres of political life at that date. He was an intimate member of the Bowood House group and was taken on a lengthy European tour where he was

108. Walker op.cit. Vol. I pp lxxi-ii

109. G.E. Evans Vestiges of Protestant Dissent (1897) p.114; H. McLachlan English Education under the Test Acts (Manchester 1931) p.121

110. The Correspondence of Jeremy Bentham Vol. III (1971) ed. Ian R. Christie pp 50, 67-8. (Here, on p. 50n, Jervis is mistakenly identified as William Jervis (d.1792), a relation of Captain John Jervis, later Earl St. Vincent)

111. Priestley Memoirs 1 pp. 175, 177-9, 180-1, 183, 185, 188 for Priestley's agonising over what to do.

introduced to intellectuals and politicians of note, especially in Paris. At the same time he had plenty of free time for study and writing. "My office", he recalled, "was nominally that of Librarian, but I had little employment as such, besides arranging his books, taking a catalogue of them, and of his manuscripts, which were numerous, and making an index to his collection of private papers. In fact I was with him as a friend..."¹¹²

Priestley's precise relationship with Shelburne and politics is a matter of some confusion however. Shelburne had originally envisaged that among Priestley's duties would be the collection of materials of political relevance. And Revd. Richard Warner later said that Priestley had engaged in political research for Shelburne and presented the latter with materials for speeches and policy decisions.¹¹³ Certainly Priestley was of some political service. In 1775 he tried to get Sir George Savile's support for Shelburne, stating at some length his patron's honesty and political importance.¹¹⁴ However Priestley himself later said that politics had been specifically excluded from their contract.¹¹⁵ It is clear that this was a source of tension. From 1778 Shelburne lost his enthusiasm for Priestley and began, tactfully, to disengage himself from their contract. Finally in 1780 Priestley resigned. Theophilus Lindsey wrote to a friend soon after: "I may say that Lord Shelburne, being so much immersed in Politics, did not find Dr. Priestley of that use to him as he might wish, as the Dr. from the first declared against being in the least engaged in such matters and kept his independence".¹¹⁶ Another potential source of friction, again a result of Priestley's "independence", was religious controversy. While in Shelburne's service Priestley had been careful to

112. Priestley Memoirs 1 p.197

113. Ibid. pp 180-1; Richard Warner Literary Recollections (1830) Vol. II p.116n.

114. Priestley to Savile 28 x 1775 in The Fifteenth Report of the Historical Manuscripts Commission (1897) Appendix, Part V: 'Foljambe Manuscripts' p.149

115. Priestley to editor of Monthly Magazine 1 ii 1804 loc.cit. p.396

116. More Letters of Lindsey p.375

avoid publishing political assertions of any kind so as to avoid compromising his patron's public position. However theology was a different matter and in the summer of 1777 he published his 'Disquisitions relating to matter and spirit'. This was extremely controversial, at least as embarrassing as a radical political tract to Shelburne. Several of the latter's friends attempted to prevent its publication, though Shelburne himself preserved a studious silence. Priestley went ahead with the publication, he later recalled, "without any regard to consequences, assuring them that this publication should not be injurious to his lordship".¹¹⁷

Whatever the precise source of difficulty it is clear that the main problem was Priestley's independence vis a vis his patron. Aristocratic patronage was seen by Priestley as a contract between equals which did not compromise his own independence and individual freedom of action. The same challenging use of aristocratic patronage is clear in the late 1780s in his dedication of his three volumes of 'Experiments and Observations on Different Kinds of Air' to the Prince of Wales. Rational dissenters were becoming increasingly unhappy with Pitt's political leadership and were drifting back towards a rapprochement with the Foxite Whigs. Priestley's request to Fox to apply for permission to dedicate his scientific studies to the Prince of Wales was seen as a significant public gesture in this direction. Burke was keen to see the Dedication granted and urged Fox on:

"...I cannot conceive what objection the Prince can have to be considered as an encourager of science. Besides this consideration, Dr. Priestley is a very considerable leader among a set of men powerful enough in many things, but most of all in elections; and I am quite sure that the good or ill humour of these men will be sensibly felt at the general election".¹¹⁸

117. Priestley Memoirs 1 pp. 203-4. Earl Stanhope later ascribed the "breach" to "the increasing license of his published speculations" in The Life of William Pitt (1861) Vol. II p. 136

118. Lord Russell op.cit. Vol. II pp. 359-60. See also Priestley Memoirs 2 p.36

Permission was eventually granted and Priestley dedicated the three volumes to the Prince of Wales. There was a passing reference to the "excellent qualities" of the Prince but far from offering a short, formal and obsequious dedication Priestley took the opportunity to firmly tell his future King what was what: "you should not be dazzled by the flattering, but often fatal, idea of extending what is called the royal prerogative; but rather study to give your subjects every power which they can exercise for their own advantage. And whatever flatterers may suggest, the people...will always be able to do more for themselves than the most enlightened and best disposed princes can do for them". Priestley went on to imply that the Prince of Wales should help the dissenters, be more just in dispensing rewards than the present King and should concern himself with a reformation of the Church of England and the ending of "establishments" civil and religious. "A sovereign conducting himself by these liberal means", he suggested (with a hint of insubordination), "will rank among the few truly great and good princes whose object has not been themselves, and their personal glory and power, but the real good of their country..."¹¹⁹

Edmund Burke made much of the impropriety of dissenting ministers dabbling in politics. He described Price as "a man much connected with literary caballers, and intriguing philosophers; with political theologians, and theological politicians, both at home and abroad". And he went on to argue that "politics and the pulpit are terms that have little agreement".¹²⁰

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119. Priestley 'Dedication and Preface' to Experiments and Observations on Different Kinds of Air and other Branches of Natural Philosophy Connected with the Subject (1790) Works XXV p.368
120. Edmund Burke Reflections on the Revolution in France and on the Proceedings in Certain Societies in London relative to that event. In a Letter intended to be sent to a Gentleman in France (11th ed. 1791) in Burke: Select Works ed. by E.J. Payne Vol. II (Oxford 1898) pp. 12-13

Many orthodox dissenting ministers, too, were sharply critical of Unitarian ministers who neglected religious duties for secular and political causes: "who are zealous for liberty, but the souls of their flocks are neglected", as Job Orton put it.¹²¹ "The political divine is seldom found to be the most holy, zealous, successful minister", another dissenting minister argued in 1794 - the tone of political polemic and dispute was, he said, incompatible with the dignity of the ministerial office.¹²² However the intellectual culture of rational dissent did not separate off the religious from the secular with such rigour and stressed the application of christian ethics to public life. For George Walker political activity was simply an extension of his religious and moral principles. Politics, he wrote, "is a branch of morals, it involves the character and happiness of a people, and to think and to act aright in it must forever be a serious duty of man".¹²³ Priestley's successor at Birmingham contended in 1793: "I know how ready some are to exclaim against politics in the pulpit. I might as well exclaim against a volume of sermons being introduced into a manufactory...if politics are upon no occasion to be introduced into the pulpit, the bible certainly has no business there".¹²⁴

However such political preaching was something quite different from narrow factional struggle of parliamentary groups, from which rational dissenting ministers distanced themselves. Priestley, as we have seen, kept his distance from Shelburne's political interest and in his 'Observations on Education', written partly at Bowood, had made some very jaundiced remarks on the corruption and dishonesty of parliamentary

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121. Samuel Palmer Letters to Dissenting Ministers and to Students for the Ministry from the Rev. Mr. Job Orton...to which are prefixed memoirs of his life (1806) Vol. II p.4
122. A Dissenter 'A Serious and Seasonable Address to Protestant Dissenters in the Present State of Public Affairs' in Protestant Dissenters Magazine Vol. I (1794) p.281
123. George Walker 'The Duty and Character of a National Soldier' in Sermons (1770) Vol. II p.437
124. John Edwards A Discourse on Friday, April 19th 1793, at the Union Meeting, in Livery Street, Birmingham; Being the Day Appointed by the King for a General Fast (Birmingham 1793) pp. iv-v

politics.¹²⁵ Price too kept his distance: when Shelburne asked him to take up the position of his private secretary he remarked that he was as fitted to become Master of the Horse.¹²⁶ Such Unitarian ministers as Priestley, Price, Towers, Cappe, Turner etc. refused - as Burke, for one, did not - to become merely propagandists for established interest groups in their competition for the spoils of political intrigue. Rather they saw themselves as the conscience of society, ready to counterpose reason and virtue to the mechanisms of power, ambition and interest. As such they conform closely to the 'Critics of Power', in Lewis Coser's typology of political intellectuals, who - exemplified in the American Abolitionists and the Dreyfusards - politicised morality: "They upset habitual adjustments by injecting profound moral questions into routine discussions of public affairs. They forced men to rethink the very bases of their political allegiances, to re-evaluate the political order before the tribunals of their consciences. By challenging precedent and tradition they shocked men out of their customary passivity and helped to shape their political and moral consciousness".¹²⁷

IV

For rational dissent, no less than the Roman Catholic or Anglican Churches, one of the functions of religion was to provide a legitimation for social and material inequalities. Appearances, Philip Holland told his Bolton congregation, seem to show that the rich and poor were treated unequally by God: "But, whatever men may think it will be found, upon an impartial enquiry, that a wise providence bestows his favours upon his creatures in a more equal manner than is often supposed".¹²⁸ All men

125. Priestley Miscellaneous Observations Relating to Education (1778) in Works XXV p.17

126. Brown op.cit. p.156

127. Lewis Coser Men of Ideas: A Sociologist's View (2nd ed. New York 1970) p.225

128. Philip Holland 'On the Goodness of God to the Poor' in Sermons on Pratical Subjects (Warrington 1792) Vol. I p.170

possessed the same natural faculties and the same fundamental rights to life, liberty and the fruits of their labour.¹²⁹ Holland criticised the pretensions of the rich to be better than the poor. However this led not to a questioning of material inequalities but rather to pronouncements upon the mutual duties of rich and poor, master and servant. The former must be open-handed with their charity. The latter must learn to accept their lot: "the lowest and meanest may testify their dutiful regard to the supreme governing mind, by a patient, contented, cheerful frame of spirit...to be resigned, easy and thankful".¹³⁰

Something of the social ethos of the larger urban Presbyterian congregations in this period emerges in the frequent concern of ministers with this relation of master and servant. At Cross Street Chapel in Manchester the minister Ralph Harrison took up the same position as Holland: the essential equality of men was not incompatible with "diversity of outward rank and condition":

"in this apparent inequality the justice and wisdom of the supreme ruler stand unimpeached. Without order and subjection, endless confusion and anarchy would take place. This various distribution of things sets in motion the various qualities and powers of our nature. This diversity of rank and office contributes to the general prosperity and welfare. Nor does the happiness of life depend upon external circumstances".¹³¹

Relations of authority and obedience, wealth and poverty stemmed "from accidental circumstances". One result was that "persons of superior affluence" - "who have higher concerns to occupy their minds" - will hire others to perform mundane tasks for them. This servitude, he noted, in contrast to the slavery of the ancient world, is entered into voluntarily by the servant and for his own benefit:

129. Ibid. p.172

130. Ibid. p.177

131. Ralph Harrison 'Duties of Masters and Servants' in Sermons on Various Important Subjects by the late Rev. Ralph Harrison... (Manchester 1813) p.88

"The rights of liberty and independence equally belong to the high and to the low, to the rich and to the poor. Servitude is a voluntary contract, founded upon reasonable and equitable terms, and the duties of masters and servants are reciprocal"¹³²

Duties of the servants included diligence, frugality, honesty, obedience to the rules of the household, loyalty to the interests and reputation of his master. The master, on the other hand, had to avoid insensitivity:

"It is cruel and inhuman to regard servants without sympathy or sensibility; to have an eye to their labour but not to their satisfaction".¹³³

The duties of the master included an attention to the health, comfort and education of his servants. He had to care for their moral welfare, acting as "guardian of their morals", restricting their access to sources of "temptation".¹³⁴

This latter aspect is clearly of importance, particularly in the legitimation it provided for the man of wealth to exert pressure on his dependents to conform socially or politically. At Call Lane Chapel in Leeds Joseph Bowden made this explicit. He stressed the duty of heads of families to "command their households"¹³⁵ and this stretched beyond immediate family and servants: "Not only over the inhabitants of our house but over those, whom we stately employ, and with whom we and our nearer charge must have frequent intercourse, the Providence of God has constituted us watchmen". The master should exert "a prudent and salutary restraint" over his dependents, preventing them from misusing the sabbath for instance.¹³⁶

Often the vices of the wealthy were briefly alluded to. The master, Harrison said, should avoid "asperity of language" and an overbearing or tyrannical manner.¹³⁷ On occasion the duties of masters were reinforced

132. Ibid. pp.90-1

133. Ibid. p.98

134. Ibid. p.99

135. Joseph Bowden 'Discourse I: The Conduct of Abraham in his Family' in Prayers and Discourses for the Use of Families: in Two Parts (1816) pp. 4-5

136. Bowden 'Discourse II: Eli's Negligence of his Children' *ibid.* pp.24,26

137. Harrison *op.cit.* p.98

with considerable vigour. At Wakefield in 1776 for instance, Turner probed the consciences of some of his wealthy hearers. Providence had made some wealthier than others - "but he hath not made one part of them to be a property, and as it were, beasts of burden unto others".¹³⁸

Every individual had the same natural faculties of body and mind and the same natural (and "inalienable") rights and privileges "which none of their brethren can invade or deprive them of, without injustice and cruelty to them, and impiety against their common Father Protector and Lord".¹³⁹

The main thrust of Turner's condemnation was the despotic policy of the British government against the Americans. However he pointedly called upon his hearers to consider whether they were guilty of any abuse of power over their servants, their dependents or their inferiors and stressed the duty of "shewing compassion, kindness and bounty to the poor and distressed".¹⁴⁰ But even here the masters were simply being reminded of the duties and responsibilities of their social position. Neither the legitimacy of that position, nor its particular paternalist form were ever in question.

The picture of the 'lower orders' which predominated among rational dissenters in this period was somewhat lurid and partook of the employer's distrust of his servant and the man of property's fear of the destructive mob. "But what is the promiscuous throng, which generally fills up the lower orders of life?" Hugh Worthington asked a London congregation in 1778: "Look into the streets, and let their words and actions decide their prevailing character. Will not breaking the sabbath, despising the ordinances of religion, using the name of God in sport or blasphemy, together with horrid imprecations, drunkenness and obscenity - will not these justify the application of that Scripture phrase, 'They live without God

138. William Turner The Whole Service...p.25

139. Ibid.

140. Ibid. p.29

in the world?"¹⁴¹ The popular culture of that period with its unchristian rituals, festivals and symbolic universe was identified by Unitarian ministers as simply disorderly and ignorant. Theophilus Lindsey's resignation from the Church of England in 1773 involved no populist appeal to his parishioners who were firmly instructed in the duty of obedience they owed their superiors. In his 'Farewell Address' an unusually large audience at Catterick were exposed to a criticism of their customary misuse of the sabbath in labour or in "all those noisy and riotous games, always accompanied with profane oaths, and generally ending in the ale-house or worse".¹⁴²

This hostility to the popular culture was, of course, closely linked to the fears of the propertied classes of social disorder, economic indiscipline, riotous behaviour and crime. This emerges most clearly in 1786 in an address by William Turner to an assembly of northern dissenting ministers in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. He painted a grim picture of the "deplorable ignorance and stupidity", the "profligacy" which prevailed among the labouring poor. "They are not taught the importance of industry and frugality", Turner stated, and went on to show how this led to disaffection and crime:

"They learn, too frequently, from the example of their parents and others with whom they converse, to repine at their lot, to murmur at their difficulties, to grudge at and envy their superiors, and to consider every mean artifice of fraud and deceit, by which they may hope to obtain anything, as perfectly fair and allowable, provided they can only avoid detection and escape punishment".¹⁴³

"Can we wonder", he went on to ask, "that our persons and properties are

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141. Hugh Worthington The Progress of Moral Corruption: A Sermon preached... for the Benefit of the Charity School in Gravel Lane, Southwark (1778) p.24
142. Theophilus Lindsey A Farewell Address to the Parishioners of Catterick (1774) p.17
143. William Turner Sunday Schools Recommended in a Sermon Preached before the Associated Dissenting Ministers in the Northern Counties... (Newcastle 1786) pp. 12-14

growing daily less secure from the violent attacks of the idle and debauched".¹⁴⁴ Turner was focusing on some of the major problems of social control in this period, especially linked with pre-industrial handicrafts: Saint Monday, extensive pilfering, low productivity, an absence of labour discipline. A year later Joseph Priestley made similar points about the weakness of the work ethic among workmen. Lacking industry or foresight, the labouring poor married without making provision for their future families, refused to work more than was necessary for their immediate needs and had no perspective for the future: if they made any "extraordinary gain", rather than being put to profitable use, it was "spent in the alehouse, where they contract the worst habits, and often encourage one another in every kind of vice and licentiousness".¹⁴⁵

As dissenters, as well as members of the propertied classes, liberal Presbyterians had particular cause to fear and resent the riotous propensities of the lower orders. Dissenters had always been a target of Jacobite violence. But even after the demise of Jacobitism in the 1740s dissent continued to attract popular aggression. The Walsall chapel was destroyed in a riot in 1751. At Clapham in 1760 the minister was insulted during public worship and part of the chapel seriously damaged. In 1772 chapels at Midhurst and Dartmouth were attacked by rioters and in the latter case the Mayor refused to issue warrants against the offenders until he himself was threatened with legal action. At Lewes in 1775 there were several disturbances at St. Thomas's Meeting House.¹⁴⁶ The Gordon Riots in London in 1780 were a warning of the potential scale of popular violence. The kind of isolation and vulnerability felt by rational dissenters is indicated by the subsequent panic which swept through the

144. Ibid. p.15

145. Priestley Some Considerations on the State of the Poor in general, prefixed to an Account of a Society for Encouraging the Industrious Poor Appendix XII to Works XXV p.315

146. These and other cases of intimidation are detailed in An Abstract of the Proceedings of the Deputies and Committee appointed for the support of Protestant Dissenters from the Commencement of the Institution (1796) pp. 23-5.

membership of Lindsey's Essex Street Chapel when it was rumoured that the chapel was marked down as a target by the Protestant Association, Lindsey wrote: "...I received several applications from the members of our Society, and anonymous letters others, to blot their names out of their prayer-books in the chapel, lest they should be made use of to their prejudice..."¹⁴⁷ In addition to the riotous mob, there were numerous cases of dissenting ministers being assaulted, public worship disrupted, chapels vandalised and individual dissenters insulted in the street. These experiences clearly confirmed dissenting hostilities to the lower orders who were seen as not only idle, irreligious and profligate but also the dupes of corrupt politicians.

Hence rational dissenters tended to see the working classes as a barrier to social and moral reformation as substantial as corrupt churchmen and despotic politicians. Priestley, for instance, in his 'Essay on the First Principles of Government' suggested that in Britain Roman Catholicism was no longer of great danger: "All the address and assiduity of man, cannot, certainly, recommend so absurd a system of faith and practice to any but the lowest and most illiterate of our common people, who can never have any degree of influence in the state".¹⁴⁸ And elsewhere he noted on several occasions that popular religion tended to be superstitious, irrational and outdated. Education was of limited value for the "lowest classes of life" he argued in 1778 - the inculcation of "habits of industry, sobriety, honesty and other virtues" plus the capacity to read and write were all that was required:

147. More Letters of Lindsey pp. 365-6

148. Priestley Essay on the First Principles of Government (2nd ed. 1771) Works XXII p.65. See also Priestley's rejection of universal suffrage on grounds of the vulnerability of the poor to electoral corruption in The Present State of Liberty in Great Britain and her Colonies (1769) in Works XXII p.385

"If, however, those who have the poorest prospects in life can be taught contentment in their station, and a firm belief in the wisdom and goodness of Providence that has so disposed of them, and consequently apply themselves with assiduity and cheerfulness to the discharge of their proper duties, they may be almost as happy, even in this world, as the most virtuous of their superiors..."¹⁴⁹

Priestley, and rational dissenters generally, looked to an enlightened class of propertied men and scientists to lead the moral and political reformation which would bring with it human improvement.

Of course 'the people' were not absolutely irredeemable. Education, of all kinds, offered a longer-term hope of their moral redemption. This was true even in the political sphere. The Society for Constitutional Information, founded in 1780, aimed precisely at the enlightenment of the minds of the ordinary people. As John Jebb put it: "We can never expect to behold a proper exertion of the natural good sense and spirit of the Nation, until the understandings, and affections, of all orders of men, are emancipated from the influence of false ideas, which ignorance, or the art of designing politicians have annexed to those expressions"¹⁵⁰

Joseph Towers, Unitarian minister and another founder of the Society of Constitutional Information, saw political education and religious enlightenment as crucial for reform: "he had a full conviction", according to his obituarist, "that the ignorance of the people ever has been, and ever must be, the mother both of superstition and of despotism".¹⁵¹

Among the S.C.I.'s membership in the early 1780s - alongside a number of Whig grandees, professional politicians, City aldermen and London radicals - were a significant number of rational dissenters: the ministers Towers, Price, Kentish and George Walker; MPs James Martin, William Smith and Richard Slater Milnes; members of Lindsey's congregation such as

149. Priestley Miscellaneous Observations Relating to Education (1778) in Works XXV pp. 59-60

150. Quoted in D. Drinkwater-Lunn John Cartwright: Political Education and English Radicalism 1774-94 (University of Oxford D.Phil. Thesis 1970) pp. 73-4.

151. James Lindsay op.cit. p.36

Thomas Brand Hollis and Sir Barnard Turner; members of Price's Newington Green congregation Thomas Rogers and James Burgh. In 1791 Priestley commented: "though so many, even of the common people, are directly or indirectly influenced by the court, that very little is to be expected from this quarter in the present state of things, it is highly proper that their minds should be enlightened, and that they should have a full sense of their natural rights, in order that they may be prepared to act with intelligence and effect in any new state of things that may occur".¹⁵² So that to fulfill properly their role within the constitution 'the people' must necessarily be transformed by education, abandoning their way of life and their values, to become more like the propertied commercial and professional men of rational dissent - rational, self-disciplined and orderly, industrious and acquisitive, educated and cultured, conscious of their rights and independent from the influence of the court and the church.

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To sum up then, rational dissent meant by its very nature a measure of vulnerability to persecution and an acute consciousness of political status. Despite wealth and influence even, the individual who remained attached to a liberal Presbyterian congregation in the 18th century was something of an outsider, unlikely to have entry to the extended cousinage of churchmen who in many places dominated local administration. However in some places rational dissenters were becoming influential in local political organization for the Whig Opposition and a number of their religious ministers were intellectuals of influence, especially in the voicing of opposition to the American war. Energetic and often principled and idealistic, rational dissenters were important in a range of reforming initiatives in the 1770s and 80s and implacably opposed to the church.

152. Priestley Political Dialogue on the First Principles of Government (1791) Works XXV p.103

At the same time, despite the democratic rhetoric it is important to observe the social elitism underlying their reformism. Richard Price affirmed in April 1787 that the dissenters were neither republicans nor democrats: "I know not one individual among them who would not tremble at the thought of changing into a Democracy our mixed form of government..."¹⁵³

Part III will take up some of the developments described in this and the previous chapter as they continued in the early years of the 19th century, focusing especially on the social, intellectual and political influence of Unitarians in their local context. It is necessary however to sketch in something of the effects of the disturbances of the 1790s on rational dissent.

153. Richard Price The Evidence for a Future Period of Improvement etc... (1787) p.31n. Burke was quick to pinpoint the inconsistency of Price and other reformers - "who, when they are not on their guard, treat the humbler part of the community with the greatest contempt, whilst, at the same time, they pretend to make them the depositories of all power". Burke op.cit. p.66

3. THE ADVERSITIES OF RATIONAL DISSENT: 1791-1800

"Why are the mass of people, the poorer class, the swinish multitude, as Mr. Burke contumeliously calls them, so generally adverse to their friends, and so blindly the dupes of their oppressors?"¹

Confidence and optimism was very much the keynote of rational dissent in the 1780s. No matter how gradual and uneven - and optimism did not blind the likes of Priestley, Price, Lindsey and Enfield to the power of the forces of 'despotism' and 'superstition' - there was steady progress and improvement in all spheres of society. The events of the early 1790s - Church and King riots against rational dissenters and the disintegration of the political alliance for reform - was a brutal challenge to that confidence. By the end of the 1790s the landscape had been transformed. Whole families of Unitarians had emigrated to America or abandoned dissent. Individuals had suffered physical intimidation, their property had been destroyed and socially they had become outcasts from their own class. Others had suffered imprisonment. In this chapter I want to outline some of the effects of these events on rational dissent.

I

As the previous chapter detailed, dissenters were always vulnerable to the occasional bigotted clergyman or magistrate, even to local rioting. However in the early 1790s this was of such intensity and persistence, sustained with government support, as to be qualitatively different. The anti-dissenting aggression of the early 1790s was not only a result of the tensions in British society arising out of the French Revolution and ensuing European war. The charge which exploded beneath rational dissent in these years had long been laid. From at least the end of the 1770s the Unitarians - and Joseph Priestley in particular - had been the object of

1. Thomas Walker A Review of Some of the Political Events which have occurred in Manchester during the past Five Years (1794) p.127

ferocious verbal abuse from some Anglican pulpits. William Hunter, Oxford Fellow and vicar of St. Paul's in Liverpool, thundered in several sermons against Priestley: "whose name it is to be wished, were closed up with the rest of the infidel group in the black book of oblivion".² The Feather's Tavern petition for Church reform, dissenting claims for relief from discriminatory legislation and opposition to the American War all, Hunter thought, originated in a conspiracy of Socinian republicans. He fumed in 1780 against "the seditious demagogue and envious Presbyter...the hydra-headed monster, which now assumed every shape and explores various regions to rob us of our civil and religious rights".³ Other Anglican ideologues - often men of substantial influence like Dr. Horne the President of Magdalen College in Oxford or Dr. Drummond, the Archbishop of York - publicised the same analysis of the national crisis of 1780-81: military defeat and economic depression were divine punishments for the evil influence of anti-trinitarian republicans in English life.⁴

The development of the Dissenting campaign against the Test and Corporation Acts between 1787 and 90 was crucial in exacerbating this paranoia and in mobilising resistance among Churchmen. At first characterised by restraint under the auspices of the Dissenting Deputies, the campaign changed, after the defeat of the first motion for repeal in 1787, into a broader and more contentious national campaign. There was co-ordination of provincial dissent, the use of overt political pressure on MPs and a rapport established with the Foxite Whigs. A second attempt in

2. Quoted in Monthly Review LVIII (1778) pp. 324-5

3. Quoted *ibid* LXIII (1780)

4. See for instance George Horne Sermon on the late General Fast, Feb. 4th 1780, Preached before the Honourable House of Commons, at the Church of St. Margaret's Westminster (1780). For some interesting suggestions on the political factors stimulating the emergence of particular kinds of evangelical religion in these years see John Money Identity and Experience: Birmingham and the West Midland 1760-1800 (Manchester 1977) p.195

May 1789 - for an enquiry into religious tests rather than outright repeal - was only narrowly defeated by 20 votes. In preparation for a third attempt there was further development of dissenting organizations - public meetings and pamphlets proliferated.⁵ Increasingly, too, the campaign was identified as inextricably linked with other radical movements. Priestley in particular had become a notorious publicist and his open letter to Pitt on the latter's opposition to the dissenting motion in 1787 disturbed even sympathisers. George Wilson described it to Bentham as "full of rage...clever enough and very bold, but very indiscreet, and certainly prejudicial to the cause".⁶ Leading voices of rational dissent - men like Price, Towers, Kippis - contributed to the linking of repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts to complete disestablishment of the church, to a republican constitution, to radical parliamentary reform and to sympathy with the French revolution in many minds by 1790.

And the Church, at the same time, defended the status quo by branding any kind of change in the legal status of dissent as a threat to the whole constitution and social order. Bishops and clergymen thundered against Priestley and rational dissent. From 1787 he was the target of a vitriolic campaign by the clergy of Birmingham.⁷ Physical intimidation

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5. For a recent account of the whole campaign see Albert Goodwin The Friends of Liberty: The English Democratic Movement in the age of the French revolution (1979) Chapter 3, pp 65-98.
 6. Wilson to Bentham 24 iv 1787 in The Correspondence of Jeremy Bentham Vol. III ed. I.R. Christie (1971) p. 533. The offending piece was A Letter to the Right Hon. William Pitt, on the Subject of Toleration and Church Establishments, occasioned by his Speech against the Repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts (2nd ed. 1787) in Works XIX pp. 111 ff. This was singled out as a major political error by 'A Dissenter' in 'A Serious and Seasonable Address in the Present State of Public Affairs' in Protestant Dissenters Magazine Vol. I (1794) p.276
 7. See Priestley Familiar Letters addressed to the Inhabitants of Birmingham, in Refutation of several Charges advanced against the Dissenters and Unitarians by the Rev. Mr. Madan; also, Letters to the Rev. Edward Burn, in answer to his on the Infallibility of the Apostolic Testimony concerning the person of Christ (2nd ed. 1790) in Works XIX pp. 135 ff.

was also brought into play. In Hull, for instance, George Hadley - a Tory churchman - represented the Dissenting campaign as a treasonous attempt to subvert the constitution. He spoke darkly of repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts as provoking a violent popular outburst: "until every conventicle and prison, would have smoked in ashes for the vindication of the Established Church".⁸ In Lancashire the Unitarian minister at Chowbent, Harry Toulmin, was being physically threatened in the summer of 1789. Theophilus Lindsey blithely told him: "I am glad to hear of the threats against you, as they are all 'bruta fulmina', and show that the country is not in a state of indifference to the truth, the worst of all others".⁹ In January and February of 1790 there were numerous Church and King meetings throughout the country. From Birmingham Priestley wrote to Lindsey about the zeal and bigotry of church supporters and was certain they would do "something violent". A month later he was reporting continuing tension in the town: "notwithstanding that we talk, and I believe, of the increasing light of the age, great numbers who will not read are no better than the partizans of Sacheverel, and would think it a glorious thing to extirpate the Dissenters". Within a fortnight Priestley described how the "spirit of party" in the town was "astonishing". It was planned to ring all the church bells and illuminate the town on the expected defeat of the third motion for repeal in parliament: "we apprehend the mob will do mischief".¹⁰

Finally in July 1791 the violence that had simmered under the surface for a number of years exploded in Birmingham. A Church and King mob went on a carefully engineered rampage. Firstly they attacked Priestley's chapel, the New Meeting - broke down the doors, demolished the pews,.

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8. George Hadley A New and Complete History of the Town and County of the Town of Kingston-upon-Hull (Hull 1788) p.431
 9. Lindsey to Toulmin 5 ix 1789, printed in 'Record Section' of TUHS Vol. XV No. 4 (1974) p. 142
 10. Priestley Memoirs 2 pp 51, 53, 54.

destroyed the vestry library and then set the whole building ablaze. At the same time the Old Meeting was broken into - the pews, the pulpit and the galleries were torn down and all dragged out into the burial yard and burnt and then the whole building set alight. Action of the Vicar of St. Martin's delayed the arrival of the water engines though when they finally reached the burning Chapels the crowd prevented their use. Priestley's house was broken into and plundered, his library and laboratory wrecked. Over the subsequent 48 hours the houses of 27 individuals - some of them rational dissenters - were attacked, some of them looted and burned to the ground. A small chapel and minister's house at Kingswood were also destroyed.¹¹

The immediate reaction of the establishment was pleasure at seeing their radical bogey-man get the punishment he deserved, mitigated by a degree of anxiety at the controllability of the mob. At Margate Burke could hardly restrain his joy when details reached him.¹² Priestley himself was convinced that the riots were fomented by the court to intimidate all reformers - and other shared this conviction.¹³ Certainly Birmingham churchmen, some of them in positions of authority, had actively encouraged and even directed the rioters. However they were not responsible for the depth of popular resentment against the liberal elite in the town.

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11. The best single account is R.B. Rose 'The Priestley Riots of 1791' in Past and Present 18 (1960) esp. pp. 71-6. See also Priestley's own account in An Appeal to the Public Part I. To which are added Strictures on a Pamphlet entitled 'Thoughts on the late Riots at Birmingham' (2nd ed. 1792) in Works XIX pp. 347 ff.
 12. Priestley to the editor of the Monthly Magazine 1 ii 1804 in Works XXV p. 398. Christopher Wyvill told Lindsey that a group of North Yorkshire gentry treated the riots with "great levity" and as no more than Priestley deserved. And the Unitarian Society in London remarked on widespread expressions of delight from Churchmen. Letters of Linsey p.119; Unitarian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge: Rules etc. (1791) p.25
 13. George Dyer for instance thought that if the government was not directly responsible, the rioters believed themselves "to be complying with the wishes of the government". M. Ray Adams Studies in the Literary Backgrounds of English Radicalism (Lancaster, Pennsylvania 1947) pp 263-4

The riots, as R.B. Rose has demonstrated, were a fortuitous convergence of working class resentment against a local elite of employers and magistrates with traditional religious animosities.¹⁴

Whatever the specific combination of factors which caused the Birmingham explosion in July 1791 the effect of the dissenting challenge to the Church of England hegemony in the late 1780s was a national campaign of Church and King aggression against dissenters in general and Unitarians in particular. "The same bad spirit pervades the whole kingdom", Priestley wrote a couple of weeks after the riots in Birmingham: "Had Dr. Price been living, it is taken for granted that Hackney would have suffered as much as Birmingham, and that the College would not have been spared".¹⁵ From Stourbridge Rev. Benjamin Carpenter wrote that the Birmingham riots had produced "frenzy" in the town and an atmosphere of "hatred and animosity".¹⁶ In November 1791 Priestley reported that dissenters at Great Yarmouth and elsewhere were procuring arms to protect their property.¹⁷

Manchester was particularly tense. Here the old Presbyterian Chapel on Cross Street had been destroyed by Church and King mobs in 1715 and members of the congregation had particularly suffered from the Jacobite occupation of the town in 1745. A vestigial Jacobitism lingered among the Anglican clergymen of the Collegiate Church.¹⁸ Political animosities between Tory churchmen and Dissenting reformers had exploded into violence in 1788 when a public meeting on the Regency crisis had ended in a brawl.

14. Rose op.cit. pp 83-4

15. Priestley Memoirs 2 p. 125

16. Benjamin Carpenter A Letter to the Rev. R. Foley MA, Rector of Old Swinford, In Answer to the Charges brought against the Dissenters in Stourbridge with a Concise View of the Principles of Dissenters (Stourbridge no date - circa 1792) p.4

17. Priestley Memoirs 2 p.173

18. L.S. Marshall The Development of Public Opinion in Manchester 1780-1820 (Syracuse 1944) p.108. In 1777 Samuel Curwen described the overt Jacobite sympathies of a number of Manchester churchmen: Journals and Letters of the late Samuel Curwen.. ed. G.A. Ward (New York 1842) p.137

The campaign against the Test and Corporation Acts stimulated particularly virulent opposition from Tory churchmen. The high-church party were reported to be "uncommonly abusive and insolent" in March 1790.¹⁹ The new Unitarian Chapel on Mosley Street - founded in 1789 as a self-consciously radical congregation and ministered to by a Birmingham disciple of Priestley, William Hawkes - provided a target for intimidation.²⁰ Both Priestley and Gilbert Wakefield had preached there, and several activists in the Manchester Constitutional Society were members. In March 1792, during a campaign to petition for relief for Unitarians from 17th century legal restrictions, Hawkes was unwilling to get involved while his Arian colleague at Cross Street Chapel was enthusiastic: "I was sorry to hear Dr. Priestley say", Lindsey wrote, "that whilst Dr. Barnes of Manchester was very hearty for the thing, Mr. Hawkes declined to sign it, so much has he been intimidated since the outrages at Birmingham".²¹ Three months later the King's birthday was celebrated in Manchester by a 'Church and King' mob who rampaged through the centre of the town, tore up trees in St. Anne's Square and then, with the connivance of both clergy and magistrates, attacked both Cross Street and Mosley Street Chapels. Both withstood the assault but prudently remained closed for several weeks afterwards.²² Further riots in December 1792 wrecked the premises of the town's radical newspaper. The house of Thomas Walker - leading radical and founder member of Lindsey's 'Unitarian Society' in 1791 - was surrounded and the mob

19. For the acute tensions of these years see Frida Knight The Strange Case of Thomas Walker (1957); Marshall op.cit. pp 108-10; Pauline Handforth 'Manchester Radical Politics 1789-94' Transactions of the Lancs and Cheshire Antiquarian Society Vol. LXVI (1956); Goodwin op.cit. pp. 139-47.

20. There is no history of this important congregation. However see Alexander Gordon Historical Account of Dob Lane Chapel Failsworth (Manchester 1904) pp.41-2

21. Letters of Lindsey p.371

22. Archibald Prentice Historical Sketches and Personal Recollections of Manchester, intended to illustrate the Progress of Public Opinion from 1792 to 1832 (Manchester 1851) p.7

attempted repeatedly to break down the door. Inside Walker and a group of friends were armed - this was the pretext for the subsequent arrest and trial, on a charge of treason, of seven reformers of whom at least three - Walker himself, Samuel Jackson and Benjamin Booth - were linked to Mosley Street Chapel.²³ Throughout 1793 private squads of vigilantes under the auspices of the 'Association for the Preservation of Constitutional Order and Law against the Destructive Attacks of Republicans and Levellers' dominated Manchester's political life. In January 1793 - at the instigation of the 'Loyalist Association' - the magistrates forced 34 men to swear an oath of allegiance.²⁴ More than half of these can be positively identified as members of either Mosley Street or Cross Street Chapel including William Hawkes, minister of the former.

If Birmingham and Manchester were unusual in the extent of aggression against the reforming elite in 1792 and 93, there were few parts of the country which were unaffected by Church and King terror. "Is there any considerable town in the kingdom, in which Dissenters consider themselves in a state of security?" asked one correspondent to the Protestant Dissenters Magazine in 1794.²⁵ The ritual burning of effigies of Paine, sometimes Priestley, occasionally a local Unitarian minister, were commonplace. Chapels were damaged. Individual ministers were physically intimidated by armed mobs knocking on their door at night, burning effigies of Paine before their houses. At Taunton, for instance, the veteran Unitarian Baptist

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23. Knight op.cit. Chapter 9. For membership of Mosley Street Chapel in these years the only evidence is the Baptismal Register which lists fathers of children baptised there: among these names are Ottiwell Wood, Samuel Greg, John Ferriar MD, William Hibbert, Samuel Jackson, Joseph Aston, George Duckworth, William Ogden, Benjamin Booth, Scholes Birch. Two boys were baptised Benjamin Franklin - in 1796 and 97. See Baptismal Register of Mosley Street Chapel in MPL Archives M30/3/1/1.
24. Prentice op.cit. pp. 43-4 lists the 34 men.
25. A. Robinson 'To the Editor' Protestant Dissenters Magazine I (1794) p. 368

Joshua Toulmin was regularly subject to insults and jeers in the street. An effigy of Paine was burnt before his door and his windows were regularly broken.²⁶ In Lancashire Church and King aggression seems to have been particularly intense and in a number of districts there was sustained pressure on groups of rational dissenters who were identified as reformers.²⁷ Even at Nottingham, where the membership of the High Pavement Chapel occupied a position of considerable political influence, they were subjected to rioting and serious damage to property.²⁸ In some cases these violent outbursts were an expression of deeper social tension. More often though it was a matter of small groups of loyalist bully boys hired to cause trouble with the encouragement of local Tories, sometimes clergy and magistrates. At Chowbent it was an army recruiting party which interrupted religious worship at the Presbyterian chapel, jostled and insulted the members of the congregation and threatened their property.²⁹

The other, and complementary, prong of repression in these years came from the government of Pitt. A succession of repressive measures and legal proceedings narrowed the freedom of action of reformers and reinforced the atmosphere of hysteria and intimidation.³⁰ In May 1792 a proclamation against seditious libels, aimed at the cheap edition of Paine's 'Right of Man', and the arrest of the radical Thomas Spence and

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26. Israel Worsley Observations on the State and Changes in the Presbyterian Societies of England during the last half century...preceded by a Sermon on the Rev. Dr. Joshua Toulmin... (1816) p.22
 27. For Liverpool see Ian Sellers 'William Roscoe, the Roscoe Circle and Radical Politics in Liverpool 1789-1807' in Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancs and Cheshire 120 (1968) pp 51-2; for Bolton see Franklin Baker op.cit. pp 67-8; for Failsworth see Alexander Gordon op.cit. p.48; for Chorley see Mrs. H. Ridyard A Selection from the Early Letters of the late Rev. William Shepherd LL.D (Liverpool 1855) pp 46-7
 28. Malcolm I. Thomis Politics and Society in Nottingham 1785-1835 (Oxford 1969) pp 175-9
 29. See Lindsey's account in a letter to Russell Scott 26 iii 1793, printed in 'Record Section' of TUHS Vol. IX No. 1 (1947) pp. 36-7
 30. Part One of E.P. Thompson The Making of the English Working Class (revised ed. 1968) provides an overall account of the state repression of the 1790s.

the deist William Hodgson, announced the beginning of the onslaught. In November 1792 a Baptist minister in Exeter, William Winterbotham, was indicted for allegedly preaching a seditious sermon. In July 1793, despite little evidence and a liberal judge, he was found guilty and sentenced to four years imprisonment. In the summer of 1793 there were the trials of the 'Scottish martyrs' - one of them Thomas Fyshe Palmer, a Unitarian minister and friend of Priestley, Frennd and others - leading to sentences of transportation to Botany Bay. Also in the course of 1793 Thomas Walker of Manchester faced prosecution, the Birmingham Unitarian bookseller James Belcher was imprisoned and there were numerous successful prosecutions of other radicals in the provinces. At Liverpool Rathbone was threatened with prosecution. Abraham Crompton, a Unitarian of some wealth and a Lancashire magistrate, was also under pressure - an indictment was only dropped after influential political friends negotiated with the Attorney General and Crompton agreed to resign from the bench. In the course of 1794 a number of respectable London Unitarians - Samuel Rogers, John Towgood, William Stone - were interrogated, along with Whig politicians like Sheridan, about links with France. Then in May 1794 Habeas Corpus was suspended and a dozen radical activists were arrested, including another Unitarian minister - Jeremiah Joyce. These prosecutions showed rational dissenters that they were vulnerable to imprisonment, irrespective of their wealth, their friends and social status. And in 1795 the Treasonable Practices and Seditious Meeting Acts made any kind of political organization, public meeting or political writing perilous. From Nottingham Rev. George Walker vehemently denounced these acts as undoing the Revolution of 1688, ending a century or religious toleration. Simply by following the dictates of his own conscience the religious dissenter was infringing the law: "as a dissenter he cannot think, he cannot speak, he cannot act, without

tending to excite a dislike against the doctrine, oeconomy, establishment and being of the Church. By this law his unavoidable duty is adjudged to be a crime of the most awful magnitude".³¹

II

Increasing dread of imprisonment swept through the circles of rational dissent in England as they lost faith in the impartiality of the law and alarming historical parallels came to mind. Already in September 1791 Theophilus Lindsey was expressing fears about his correspondence being opened at the post office and about the future use that could be made of it: "It was a very good plan to commit to the flames the letter I sent, and I daresay I need not desire that the same way may be taken with respect to any confidential letter I may have formerly sent. One cannot be too careful".³² In January 1792 Priestley was urging William Russell - a Unitarian who had lost a great deal in the Birmingham riots - not to be despondent or to be "intimidated from doing yourselves that justice which the laws of your country hold out to you". By June, however, he himself had lost confidence, writing to Russell: "I see that the country is against us, and that no justice is to be had for us in it". He went on to express his approval of "retiring from the scene for a time", and sympathised with Russell's idea of emigrating to America.³³ Since leaving Birmingham Priestley had lived in an almost constant climate of intimidation. In November 1791 the possibility of his succeeding Price as minister at Hackney was looking doubtful: as he told Josiah Wedgewood: "Many apprehend public disturbance in consequence of my coming". In June 1792 he wrote to the French

31. In a letter to an MP in George Walker Essays on Various Subjects... to which is prefixed a Life of the Author (1809) Vol. I pp. cxc-cxcviii

32. More Letters of Lindsey p.362

33. Priestley Memoirs 2 pp 178, 183

scientist Lavoisier: "In case of more riots, of which we are not without apprehension, I shall be glad to take refuge in your country..."³⁴

The depth of the gloom and anxiety among rational dissenters is evidenced in the desperate resort to emigration. At the beginning of 1793 Dr. James Currie, of the liberal Presbyterian congregation at Kaye Street in Liverpool, noted: "The poor persecuted and abused Presbyterians are universally broken-hearted, and are preparing for emigration to America in vast numbers".³⁵ In Exeter the Unitarian minister Timothy Kenrick wrote in February 1793: "The present temper of the people of this Country in regard to Unitarian Dissenters, joined to the Association for prosecuting seditious writings and seditious conversation, makes me sometimes wish myself the other side of the Atlantic, many of the friends of liberty in this kingdom I find are preparing to remove thither, and I believe I should be much inclined to follow them, if the aspect of affairs do not soon change".³⁶ In the course of 1793 and 94 several members of Kenrick's family in Birmingham and Liverpool sailed for America. Priestley's sons and a group of young Manchester radicals and Unitarians - including the notorious Thomas Cooper - left Manchester in August 1793. Priestley himself sailed for America in April 1794 and the Russell family followed him soon after. Several Unitarian ministers left for America - Porter from Devonport, Christie from Glasgow, Harry Toulmin of Chowbent among them. Joseph Gales fled from Sheffield under threat of imprisonment in June 1794. And the diaspora continued. In March 1795 Lindsey wrote:

34. Scientific Correspondence of Joseph Priestley: 97 Letters ed.

H.C. Bolton (New York 1892) pp. 117, 130.

35. Memoir of the Life, Writings and Correspondence of James Currie MD, FRS, of Liverpool ed. by William Wallace Currie (1831) Vol. I p.178

36. Timothy Kenrick to Samuel Kenrick 26 ii 1793 'Kenrick Letters' in TUHS Vol. IV No. 2 (1928) p.177

"Five American vessels, to my knowledge, have been filled with different parties of our countrymen - two of them setting out this week, one carrying a minister of Kent with his family and friends, amounting to upwards of twenty persons...These all flee the country as in the Laudean times".³⁷

Many others made careful preparations and were poised for flight. At Liverpool, for instance, several members of the circle of rational Dissenters carefully prepared an escape plan in 1793. The Unitarian minister William Shepherd had bought some land in Kentucky, while Dr. Currie planned to make Virginia his refuge.³⁸ A group of Norwich and London rational dissenters, including Dr. Alderson and Price's nephew George Morgan, awaited anxiously the results of the treason trials of 1794 and had made preparations to emigrate to America if, as they expected, the victims were found guilty.³⁹

Persecution had repercussions on every aspect of the daily life of rational dissenters and their families. Not only were they liable to insult in public places but, one minister reported from Stourbridge, churchmen were refusing to deal with shopkeepers or tradesmen who belonged to the Presbyterian chapel: their situation was, he said, "very precarious with respect to property and outward comfort".⁴⁰ Individual ministers suffered economically. At Taunton Joshua Toulmin was forced to close down first his school and then the bookshop which his wife managed.⁴¹ Similarly at Ditchling Rev. Charles Lloyd had to close his school when most of the pupils were withdrawn by alarmed parents.⁴² Socially too rational dissenters often became isolated as social institutions were either barred to them or were closed down to avoid prosecution.

37. More Letters of Lindsey p.374

38. Currie op. cit. Vol. II pp. 37-42; Sellers p.53

39. Cecilia Lucy Brightwell Memorials of the Life of Amelia Opie (Norwich 1854) p.46

40. Carpenter op.cit pp 11, 32

41. Worsley op.cit. p.22 and n. Samuel Kenrick to Timothy Kenrick 10 xii 1794 in Chronicles of a Nonconformist Family: The Kenricks of Wynne Hall, Exeter and Birmingham ed. W.B. Kenrick (Birmingham 1932) p. 82

42. Timothy Kenrick to his father 6 iii 1793 in Chronicles etc. p.68

At Hanover Square Chapel in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, for instance, a 'Friendly Society for Religious Conversation' meeting regularly in the chapel vestry and a 'Pamphlet Society' for young people were both discontinued in the 1790s because of rumours of sedition and the fear of prosecution.⁴³ At Taunton support for the Dispensary was withdrawn, forcing it to close in August 1793, because of the Unitarianism of its founder Dr. John Cox. In many places small informal discussion groups, 'conversation clubs', literary societies, which brought together Unitarians and liberal churchmen were discontinued out of fear of prosecution. Archibald Prentice later described the isolation of the Manchester reformer in these years:

"Even in the assemblies for music and dancing the 'Jacobin' and his wife and daughters were liable to insult and vulgar abuse. The reformers were excluded from all society but that around their own firesides, and even there they had carefully to guard against the introduction of the insidious spy; and in business transactions, none who could help it would deal with them".⁴⁵

Politically too precisely the same processes were at work as the reform alliance disintegrated and individuals were deprived of any public space in which to operate. After the crushing parliamentary defeat of the third bill for repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts in 1790 the dissenting campaign faded. As Timothy Kenrick noted in June 1792: "For the Protestant Dissenting to renew their claims at this time would only furnish their adversaries with a pretence for setting the Mob upon them."⁴⁶

The combination of physical intimidation and threat of legal proceedings similarly enforced the withdrawal from involvement in other kinds of reforming politics. At Liverpool for instance a small group, most of them Unitarians - Dr. James Currie, William Roscoe, William Rathbone

43. No Author Friendly Association etc. (Newcastle 1803) p.2

44. Worsley op.cit. pp. 34-5

45. Prentice op.cit. p.19

46. Timothy Kenrick to Samuel Kenrick 1 vi 1792 TUHS Vol. IV No. 1 (1927) p.74

(a Quaker who subsequently was expelled from the body for his Unitarianism), Rev. William Shepherd and Rev. John Yates - campaigned in the late 1780s and early 90s on a variety of local platforms, few of them popular. They opposed slavery, campaigned for reform of the Corporation, for religious liberty and for parliamentary reform. They criticised the war with France and the policies of the Pitt government in general. They were, in fact, in opposition to every power group in the town and by their incessant energy and fluency with the pen succeeded in keeping up a constant protest. However a combination of physical intimidation and legal threats broke down their resistance and by the end of 1793 the so-called 'Liverpool Jacobins' had withdrawn from political life: "having regard", as Rathbone succinctly put it, "to the lunacy of the town".⁴⁷

At Manchester division occurred within the ranks of rational dissent itself. Barnes the minister at Cross Street Chapel - though educated under Priestley at Warrington Academy and an Arian - was suspicious of the Priestleyan radicalism of Hawkes and the new Mosley Street Chapel.⁴⁸ Some of the leading hearers of Barnes were similarly averse to the uncompromising position of some of their coreligionists. Percival, for instance, had no qualms about his son becoming a clergyman and he told Bishop Watson that he thought Priestley was "too fond of the 'petty artillery of controversy' ". He also told Paley of his respect for the Church of England and his willingness to return to its fold if certain concessions to conscience were granted.⁴⁹ Butterworth Bayley was sympathetic to the Church and a supporter of it, as well as of Cross Street Chapel.⁵⁰

47. Sellers op.cit. passim.

48. Priestley Memoirs 2 p.35

49. Edward Percival 'Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Thomas Percival' in Works: Literary, Moral and Medical of Thomas Percival... (1807) Vol. I pp cxlvii-viii, clxvii.

50. Ernest Axon 'The Bayley Family of Manchester and Hope' Transactions of the Lancs and Cheshire Antiquarian Society Vol. VII (1889) pp 203-4

The early 1790s proved a test of such divided loyalties. Samuel Jackson (of Mosley Street Chapel) moved in the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society a vote of sympathy for Priestley - "that this Society do write to Dr. Priestley, expressing their concern at the losses he has sustained by the late disgraceful riot at Birmingham". Priestley was an honorary member of the society - elected in 1782. And the Literary and Philosophical Society was dominated by rational dissenters like Barnes, Percival, Bayley, Henry, Ferriar and others - it even met in the rooms of Cross Street Chapel (until 1799). Yet the Society prevaricated, fearing identification with 'Jacobinism', and the resolution was postponed. A small group of radicals resigned in protest, including Cooper, Thomas Walker and Priestley's son.⁵¹

As the ground of reform was brutally cut away beneath their feet the solidarity of rational dissent weakened. On the one hand some of the radicals emigrated (Cooper, Priestley Jnr. among them) or withdrew into internal exile: after his acquittal in 1794 Walker had little to do with rational dissent or Manchester. Another Unitarian subjected to intimidation, Ottiwell Wood, left Manchester for political reasons. On the other hand some of the more opulent distanced themselves from dissent and radicalism. Butterworth Bayley was increasingly keen to identify himself with the Church and, as a magistrate, to remain loyal to Pitt. In 1795 for instance he complained that the mere suspension of Habeas Corpus did not go far enough in suppressing political clubs and by the end of the 1790s - as Walker bitterly commented - he saw sedition everywhere.⁵²

Percival too increasingly became a 'Churchman'. Others who had gone further

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51. Frances Nicholson 'The Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society 1781-1851' Manchester Memoirs 68 (1924) ix, p.105
52. Thomas Percival 'Biographical Memoirs of the late Thomas Butterworth Bayley' in Works etc. (1807) Vol. II p.302; Wyvill Political Papers VI pp 69-70

towards radical reform pulled back. George Philips, for instance, a founder of Mosley Street Chapel and author in 1792 of a pamphlet advocating radical parliamentary reform (including universal suffrage, secret ballot, shorter parliaments) became, according to Prentice, "frightened at the atrocities of the Revolution" and as a result "retreated into the ranks of the whigs".⁵³ Walker tended to pin part of the responsibility for the collapse of reform in Manchester on the timidity of the dissenters. Though they initiated almost every project of liberal reform they had finally achieved nothing, he wrote in 1794:

"...however consistently and disinterestedly many of them have acted, they have, as a body, constantly fallen short of their own principles; they have excited opposition, which they have never completely supported; and through fear, or some other motive, they have been so strongly the advocates of an overstrained moderation, that they have been rather the enemies than the friends of those who have ventured the most for the rights of the people..."⁵⁴

Undoubtedly the kinds of intimidation described above - legal and illegal - were effective in producing among rational dissenters everywhere a mood of timidity and even defeatism. Walker's own example - his acquittal in 1794 cost him several thousands pounds and led to his bankruptcy - was a grim warning of the price of commitment to reform.⁵⁵ The course of events in France, the emergence of a popular Painite radicalism of wage-earners, a further spate of prosecutions in the late 1790s which imprisoned rational dissenters such as the Cambridge editor Benjamin Flower, Gilbert Wakefield and the publisher Joseph Johnson - reinforced the withdrawal from public opposition to the state. "Such is the dread of being branded with disaffection and Jacobinism", Rev. William Wood of Leeds told Wyvill in 1799, "that the most enlightened and honest Friends to their King and Country dare not venture to propose

53. Prentice op.cit. p.73

54. Walker op.cit. quoted Prentice pp. 20-1

55. Knight op.cit. p.181; Prentice op.cit. p.15

even a respectful Petition to the Throne..."⁵⁶ Richard Slater Milnes wrote in similar terms from Wakefield in 1800, noting the futility of attempting to renew the campaign for political reform: "The real friends to Liberty in this Country are very few; from repeated trials we know them well; and from the experience we have had, it does not appear to me a judicious proceeding to persist in objects that rather revolt than conciliate the Public Mind".⁵⁷

Aside from the disastrous effects on individual rational dissenters, these years marked a nadir in the denominational life of rational dissent - again through identification with 'Jacobinism'. Lindsey's Unitarian Society was founded in 1791 with much enthusiasm and plans for branches in every part of the country. At its first annual dinner in April, attended by a number of Whig politicians, there were a number of political toasts including one to Burke thanking him for his 'Reflections' which had done so much to generate interest in Unitarianism; "this toast", Timothy Kenrick reported, "one of the Company sent to him the next morning which threw him into a violent paroxysm of anger".⁵⁸ These radical toasts were duly reported in the press, reprinted in some French papers and raised by Burke in parliament. One of the participants later admitted that this was a "faux pas" and offended a number of members.⁵⁹ Subsequent annual meetings were held more privately and avoided political gestures. However, with the single exception of the Western Unitarian Society - whose meetings in 1792, Joshua Toulmin recalled, were "held not only under discouraging circumstances, but, not wholly exempt from apprehensions of molestation" - there were no further Unitarian societies formed until after 1800.⁶⁰

56. Wyvill Political Papers VI p.66. See also, for continuing political inactivity of Unitarian merchants in Leeds, *ibid.* pp. 147-50, 186-7.

57. *Ibid.* p. 168

58. Timothy to Samuel Kenrick 15 v 1791 'Kenrick Letters' in TUHS Vol. III No. 4 (1926) p.402

59. Belsham Memoirs of Lindsey pp. 302-3

60. Joshua Toulmin A Sermon preached before the Devon and Cornwall Association and...the Western Unitarian Society (Birmingham 1814) p.39

Hackney Academy, attempting to follow on from Warrington, similarly gave substance to claims that Unitarianism led to atheism and sedition. Price was anxious about indiscipline among the students in 1789.⁶¹ In the early 1790s the Academy became notorious. There were republican dinners and Paine was a guest at least once. Some of the students nearly caused a riot in a theatre when they called for the French revolutionary hymn 'Ca ira' in place of 'God Save the King'.⁶² The presence of Gilbert Wakefield and Joseph Priestley among its tutors added to its radical image. Already by the summer of 1793 its future was in doubt.⁶³ Finally in 1796 it closed down - which, Priestley wrote to its Principal Thomas Belsham, was "very mortifying to the friends of liberty, and I doubt not the occasion of much triumph to its enemies; but we must give way to the times which are unfortunately against the good cause, in England".⁶⁴ Warrington's other successor as a seminary of rational dissent, Manchester Academy fared little better. Opened in 1786 with grandiose pronouncements and an impressive list of subscribers⁶⁵ it remained small - in 1789, for instance, it had only two tutors and 18 students (five of them preparing for the ministry).⁶⁶ By 1797 William Shepherd was reporting to Belsham that it was "conducted upon a very contracted plan".⁶⁷

61. Priestley Memoirs 2 pp 20-1

62. Letters of Lindsey p.41; H.W. Stephenson 'Hackney College and William Hazlitt' TUHS Vol. IV No. 3 (1929) pp. 226-8

63. Priestley Memoirs 2 p.200

64. Ibid. pp. 360-1

65. See Appendices - including lists of subscribers and benefactors - to Ralph Harrison A Sermon preached at the Dissenting Chapel in Cross Street Manchester, March xxvi, MDCCLXXXVI, On Occasion of the Establishment of an Academy in that Town Together with a Discourse... by Thomas Barnes (Warrington 1786)

66. Priestley Memoirs 2 p.35

67. William Shepherd to Thomas Belsham 21 ii 1797 in DWL Mss 12.58 (13)

There were stories of student indiscipline and when a despairing Thomas Barnes resigned as Principal in the following year confidence in its future was so meagre that a succession of ministers - among them William Shepherd, Thomas Belsham, Timothy Kenrick and Charles Wellbeloved - refused invitations to succeed him.⁶⁸ Manchester Academy struggled on until 1803 when it was transferred to York and reorganised. Thus, as Shepherd noted in 1797, the serious shortage of young ministers was not being remedied: "It grieves me to think of the decadence (if I may be permitted to use a French word) of our places of education...What with shrewd scepticism on the one hand and ignorant orthodoxy on the other Religion is likely for a season to be under a cloud".⁶⁹

Individual congregations suffered badly in these years and a number were without ministers, especially in Lancashire and Cheshire: Ormskirk 1794-6, Nantwich 1799-1801, Rusholme 1794-7, Dukinfield 1797-1804, Dob Lane at various times between 1795 and 1803, Chorley 1797-99, Stand 1793-7.⁷⁰ The chapel at Devonport, founded in 1790, was a victim of official pressure. Commissioner Fanshawe of the dock-yards had announced that members of this Unitarian congregation were by definition disloyal subjects. He insisted that all apprentices had to provide a certificate of baptism from the local Anglican vicar. Most of those who worked in the naval dockyard withdrew from the congregation and before long shopkeepers and professional men who depended on the dockyard followed their example. In 1794 the minister emigrated to America and the chapel was left without a settled minister until 1798. In 1806 it was finally closed down and sold off.⁷¹

Elsewhere some of the tensions of the period were played out within congregational life. Timothy Kenrick at Exeter, for instance, was under a

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68. On student indiscipline and Barnes resignation see his obituary in Gents Mag. 80 part ii (1810) p.106. See also G.M. Ditchfield 'The Early History of Manchester College' in Transactions of the Historical Society of Lancs & Cheshire 123 (1972) esp. pp. 89, 98.
69. Shepherd to Belsham, letter already cited.
70. G.E. Evans Vestiges of Protestant Dissent (1897) passim.
71. Worsley op.cit. pp. 20n, 21n; Jerome Murch History of the Presbyterian and General Baptist Churches in the West of England (1835) pp. 526-7.

good deal of pressure in the 1790s. A strong loyal Association and the imprisonment of the local Baptist minister Winterbotham intimidated some dissenters in the town. Moreover, Kenrick's senior co-minister at St. George's Meeting was a somewhat conservative Arian. An uncompromising Unitarian and radical Kenrick denounced the Priestley riots from the pulpit⁷² and in April 1793 made some of the congregation uncomfortable by his criticism of the government on a Fast Day. On the following Sunday when Kenrick entered the pulpit two families got up from their pews and noisily and ostentatiously left the Chapel. "Such behaviour besides being a public affront, exposed me in the present temper of the time to the greatest danger", Kenrick commented and resigned in protest. A petition from two-thirds of the membership and then a general meeting asked him to stay. However over the next few years three or four families absented themselves whenever he preached and there were regular conflicts between Kenrick and Manning, the latter threatening to resign more than once.⁷³

At St. Saviourgate Chapel in York in 1792 Charles Wellbeloved, fresh from Hackney College, found both his theological rationalism and his political radicalism disturbed some of his more opulent hearers and several members withdrew from the congregation. Wellbeloved himself found the situation uncomfortable and sought a move.⁷⁴ There were countervailing cases. In 1796 Rev. James Pilkington of Derby's Friar Gate Chapel published a radical political tract called 'The Doctrine of Equality'. This caused a local furore and Pilkington resigned. However a meeting of the congregation resolved unanimously "That persecution or punishment for speculative opinions would be inconsistent with the principles of the

72. John Kentish 'Memoirs of Timothy Kenrick' in An Exposition of the Historical Writings of the New Testament...by the late Rev. Timothy Kenrick (Birmingham 1807) Vol. I p.xi

73. Timothy to Samuel Kenrick 1 vii 1793 'Kenrick Letters' TUHS Vol. IV No. 3 (1929) pp 295-7: See also *ibid.* pp. 298, 301-3, 309

74. John Kenrick A Biographical Memoir of the late Rev. Charles Wellbeloved (1806) pp. 44-6

friends of truth and free inquiry" - Pilkington was reinstated.⁷⁵

However the fate of Jeremiah Joyce reveals the widespread defeatism among rational dissenters. Acquitted without trial at the end of 1794 after six months in the Tower of London and Newgate jail with Horne Tooke, Hardy, Holcroft and other metropolitan radicals, he had been welcomed by his friends as "an injured and persecuted man" and the "legal disgrace" he had undergone had not, he thought, lowered him in the estimation of those he knew.⁷⁶ However, despite the support of important ministers like Theophilus Lindsey and Thomas Belsham, more than one attempt to become Unitarian minister at an established congregation was frustrated. When he was put forward for the vacant pulpit at Shrewsbury in 1798 the congregation expressed their "fear of the unfortunate Newgate business".⁷⁷ Joyce remained active in Unitarian circles - he preached at Essex Street Chapel throughout 1802, deputising for the ailing Disney; he was secretary of the 'Unitarian Society' for many years;⁷⁸ and he was an important figure in the circle around Robert Aspland and the 'Monthly Repository'.

Yet, as Aspland commented:

"he did not experience that cordial reception in Unitarian congregations which he had anticipated and to which he was justly entitled. His habits as well as his inclinations fitted him for a Nonconformist pastor, and yet he never received an invitation to settle in the ministry that was at all worthy of his acceptance".⁷⁹

75. John Birks Memorials of Friar Gate Chapel, Derby (Derby 1895) p.10

76. See 'Appendix' to Jeremiah Joyce A Sermon preached on Sunday, February 23rd 1794... (2nd ed. 1795) p.24. See also John Seed 'Jeremiah Joyce, Unitarianism and the Vicissitudes of the Radical Intelligentsia in the 1790s' in TUHS Vol. XVII No. 3 (1981) pp 97-108.

77. Theophilus Lindsey to John Rowe 13 ii 1798 UC Mss: JRL

78. Hannah Lindsey (?) to William Turner Jan. 1803 'Turner Letters' in Newcastle Literary & Philosophical Society.

79. Robert Aspland 'Obituary of Jeremiah Joyce' in MR Vol. XII (1817) pp 702-3

In the 1790s a significant number of young ministers abandoned the ministry altogether, alienated by the compromises and evasions of Presbyterian congregations. One of them, Israel Worsley, estimated that at least ten of his fellow students at Daventry Academy abandoned the ministry in frustration.⁸⁰ Certainly among them were William Stephenson and George Wiche both students at Daventry at the same time as Worsley. Stephenson - father of the novelist Elizabeth Gaskell - combining the ministry at the radical Dob Lane Chapel at Failsworth with the role of classics tutor at Manchester Academy from 1793, abandoned both: the former because of his rejection of the value of classical learning, the latter because of scruples over the paid ministry.⁸¹ George Wiche had abandoned the ministry at Monton, near Manchester, during the previous year.⁸² He argued that the economic status of the minister, as a hired servant, militated against his duty to express the truth. The whole ministerial profession was thus compromised: "Of them I see but few, in comparison with their number, whose chief cause is not to advance the worldly prosperity of themselves and their families; who fear not poverty as a disgrace; and who do not, with assiduity, strive to obtain the applause, and countenance of the rich". The minister's duty was to break free of all such worldly constraints - to abandon the institutional role of the ministry.⁸³

Other ministers, too, pushed Unitarianism beyond the bounds of religious dissent. Gilbert Wakefield's rejection of the value of public

80. Worsley op. cit. pp. 41-5

81. Winifred Gerin Elizabeth Gaskell: A Biography (Oxford 1976) pp. 2-3

82. For biographical details see John Kentish Biographical Notice of the late Rev. George Wiche of Monton, a supplement in T. Broadhurst Memoir of the late Rev. Robert Smethurst, nearly Fifty Years minister of the Presbyterian Chapel at Monton... (Bath 1847) pp. 3-11

83. The Declaration of George Wiche, on resigning the office of an hired preacher (Manchester 1796) pp. 8, 15 -16.

worship in 1791, which struck at the very core of institutional religion, "made a great impression", according to Priestley, on many of the students at Hackney.⁸⁴ At the end of 1794 Samuel Kenrick was anxiously asking Rev. Timothy Kenrick if there was truth in the report that Porter, minister at Devonport, and "several other young unitarians of promising talents" had become Godwinites.⁸⁵ In the following year another Hackney product Arthur Aikin began to preach infidelity from the Shrewsbury pulpit and soon gave up the ministry.⁸⁶ In 1797 Thomas Martins, minister at the Old Meeting in Yarmouth, stated his objections to public worship, resigned as minister and subsequently renounced Christianity burning his Bible and theology books.⁸⁷

By the end of the 1790s, then, the Unitarian cause was in an apparently desperate condition. The mark of Jacobinism was indelibly imprinted on it. Price was dead and Priestley along with many other stalwarts of Unitarianism, in exile in distant America. Hackney Academy was closed down and Manchester Academy on the verge of collapse. A number of Unitarian Chapels were without ministers. While the rest of dissent was increasingly falling under the sway of an evangelical irrationalism which turned away from political practice as such, a number of young Unitarians had moved into outright Deism, infidelity or Godwinism. As Priestley's old enemy Samuel Horsley, Bishop of Rochester, pronounced in 1800: "The advocates of that blasphemy have preached themselves out of all credit with the people. The patriarch of the sect is fled, and the orators and

84. Priestley Memoirs 2 p. 122. Wakefield's critique was entitled A Short Inquiry into the Expediency and Propriety of Public or Social Worship. A number of rational dissenters responded, including Priestley, Anna Barbauld and John Simpson.

85. Samuel Kenrick to Timothy Kenrick 10 xii 1794 in Chronicles etc... p.83

86. See Lindsey's angry letter to William Tayleur about Aikin 27 xii 1795 UC Mss: JRL. See also Aikin in DNB.

87. C.J. Palmer The Perlustration of Great Yarmouth, with Gorleston and Southtown (Yarmouth 1875) p. 135

oracles of Birmingham and Essex Street are dumb; or if they speak, speak only to be disregarded".⁸⁸ Yet announcements of the death of Unitarianism were premature.

88. Quoted in Priestley Memoirs 2 p. 491n.

PART III

UNITARIANISM AND THE EMERGENCE OF LIBERAL

CULTURE 1800 - 35

PROLOGUE

The adversities of the 1790s only exacerbated the relative isolation of the Unitarians which, as noted above, long predated the French Revolution and long outlasted its impact on English political debate. Unitarians were regarded as beyond the pale of religious respectability by dissenters and churchmen alike. They bore stigmata of successive bigotries - they were papists in disguise, then they were infidels, Jacobins, French spies and subsequently, in some quarters, Jews. From the pulpits, in the press and in books, even in casual conversation in an inn or a coach Unitarians were the casual currency of abuse or the embodiment of all evil.¹ In 1805 Richard Wright came across a small group of working class Methodists in Thorne - though poor, isolated, barely literate, they had heard of Joseph Priestley as "a very bad man" who maintained "dangerous doctrines".² Printers at times refused to print Unitarian sermons, booksellers to stock their books.³ Wilberforce was reprimanded by an evangelical cleric for leaving Theophilus Lindsey's books lying around the house where a servant might open their pages and read.⁴ "Certainly no Romish hierarchy can so successfully exclude heretical books, as social enactment excludes those of Unitarians from our orthodox circles. The bookseller dares not to exhibit their books on his counter: all presume them to be pestilential: no one knows their contents or dares to inform himself", Francis Newman wrote, recalling his own guilt and anxiety when he first touched a Unitarian book.⁵ When in 1838 two liberal Bishops - Maltby of Durham, Stanley of Norwich - casually subscribed to a volume of sermons by Newcastle's Unitarian minister William Turner there was uproar: the press thundered against Socinian Bishops, the pulpits of the Church rang with dire

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1. See for instance The Correspondence of Leigh Hunt, edited by his eldest son (1826) Vol. I p.33
 2. A Review of the Missionary Life & Labors of Richard Wright, written by himself (1824) pp. 74-5.
 3. See for instance Mr. Bensley to J.H. Bransby 10 ix 1805 Bransby Mss in UC Mss: JRL; the former, a London printer, refused to print 450 copies of a Unitarian sermon by the latter on grounds of religious scruple.
 4. See The Correspondence of William Wilberforce ed R.I. & S. Wilberforce (1840) Vol. I p.13
 5. F.W. Newman Phases of Faith: or, Passages from the History of my Creed (6th edition, 1860) p.49.

warnings, an effigy of the Bishop of Durham was burned.⁶ In 1846 Joseph Barker on a preaching tour of the West of England after his abandonment of Methodism, noted: "It is astonishing how frightened people are of entering a Unitarian Chapel".⁷

Being theological lepers had social effects. Rev. John Kentish warned his fellow-Unitarians in 1808 that while they had no longer to fear loss of life or property, or imprisonment, for their beliefs: "yet the loss of connections, of friends, of reputation, of patronage and countenance we must prepare ourselves for experiencing".⁸ The young Henry Solly was shocked to discover a few years later the invisible barrier between his family and others when his sister's marriage was broken off. His father Isaac Solly was wealthy, their house large and in a fashionable area of London and the family were well connected; yet they were unacceptable to the head of a Cheshire county family who refused to permit his son to marry a Unitarian. "Yes", his sister told him, "they are less willing to talk with us, to visit us, to be intimate with us, to marry us".⁹ As late as the 1890s Mary Hughes encountered two old ladies, governors of Bedford College, who were bitter because as Unitarians they were looked upon as atheists and treated "by many people as inferior socially".¹⁰

This undercurrent of prejudice and isolation meant that Unitarians were, to a considerable extent, confined to their own select circles centred around the chapel to which they belonged. The Unitarian congregation provided a supportive community in a hostile world. Members cooperated in

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6. See the account of the controversy by James Clephan in his obituary of Turner in The Gateshead Observer 30 vi 1859. See also CR Vol. V (1838) pp. 732-3, 797-8, 849-55.
 7. Quoted in W.H. Burgess 'Joseph Barker at Colyton ii' in TUHS Vol. II No. 4 (1922) p.175
 8. John Kentish The Simplicity of the Christian Doctrine: A Sermon preached at Dudley, July 19th, 1808 (Birmingham 1808) pp. 24-5
 9. Henry Solly These Eighty Years (1893) Vol. I pp. 136-7
 10. See Hugh McLeod Class and Religion in the late Victorian City (1974) p. 260, note 22.

business and mixed socially - which in turn led to a good deal of inter-marrying. The chapel also offered cultural facilities - discussion groups, vestry libraries, book clubs and so on. And Unitarians constituted a wider community. Thus in 1820 a Birmingham layman asked a local minister for a letter of introduction to the Unitarian minister in Shrewsbury where he and his family were planning to buy a house: "A letter of this description would be particularly useful in procuring us a knowledge of the place in a shorter time than could be attained by desultory enquiries of people who are not altogether to be depended upon".¹¹ Similarly in 1838 when the Unitarian James Clephan moved from Leicester to take up the post of editor of the 'Gateshead Observer' two letters of introduction to Rev. William Turner from fellow ministers smoothed his path into the Unitarian community.¹²

Of course in this period all dissenting groups suffered a degree of harrassment in their daily lives - and the poor rural dissenter probably suffered the greatest. Then too, all sects responded to the hostility of their environment by offering their members a supportive community - with a measure of access to social security in times of difficulty, types of educational and leisure facility, entry into a marriage market. However early 19th century Unitarianism possessed a number of unique attributes which made it a potent force in the emergence of a liberal culture. Firstly, at the social level, it continued to include among its members in many towns a significant number of individuals of wealth, economic power and social influence. Secondly, it was always emphatically rationalist and secular and its intellectual affinities were with such emergent liberal discourses as political economy and utilitarianism. Thirdly, as a moral code it stressed the christian duty of activity to improve society - the good man was not he who invested energy in prayer and religious ritual, or even in

11. James Pershouse to J.H. Bransby 29 v 1820 Bransby Mss loc.cit.

12. T.C. Holland to Turner 1 iv 1838 and W. Duffield to same 10 iv 1838 both in Turner Mss in the library of Newcastle Literary and philosophical Society

traditional charity, but the man who strived to reform the world. And fourthly it was the only section of dissent which always had a measure of political purchase - there were, for instance, always a handful of Unitarian MPs (after 1832 there were around a dozen). At the same time many Unitarians were political activists of influence in their own locality. In the following chapters these interlinked facets of Unitarianism will be examined in detail, beginning in the next chapter with the social features of Unitarian congregations in the first third of the 19th century.

4. THE SOCIAL CONSTITUENCY OF EARLY 19TH CENTURY UNITARIANISM

In social terms, there was no particular class or group to which early 19th century Unitarianism corresponded. Each congregation was a unique combination of elements. Some had a substantial number of the social elite of the period - wealthy merchants, physicians, barristers, large-scale industrialists. Most were made up largely of shopkeepers, artisans, small capitalists, clerks, schoolteachers - men with a modicum of property and education, clearly demarcated from the mass of labouring poor. Most also had a number of working class adherents - though usually few and often attending solely for the regular dole which they received. Such indigent members were regarded as a propriety. As a minister remarked of the Ancient Chapel at Toxteth in Liverpool, it was a prosperous congregation with "a few of the picturesque and Walter-Scottish adornments and supplements to a well-to-do Christian congregations - the 'poor' ".¹ However, there were attempts in the early 19th century to go beyond this kind of chill paternalism - to gain a serious hearing for Unitarianism among the working class, to emulate the successes of Methodist and Calvinist evangelicalism. The first part of this chapter looks closely at this project to make Unitarianism the "religion of the people". The second part then shifts attention to the main concern of subsequent chapters - the membership of a number of influential Unitarian congregations in the towns of Northern England.

I

In the early years of the 19th century there was a new consciousness of the need to reach the uneducated lower orders among many Unitarians. There was also - especially among a new generation of keen young Unitarian ministers, some of them rebelling against an evangelical training - a new

1. Memoirs of Charles Wicksteed ed. P.H. Wicksteed (1886) p.25

enthusiasm for controversy and theological polemics. And there were signs of a breakthrough, especially through the efforts of the Unitarian Fund.

"The success of Unitarianism during the last twenty years", Richard Wright wrote in 1824, "has been chiefly among the common people".²

Wright himself, a founder of the Fund, had much to do with this.

Born in 1764 into a poor family in an isolated Norfolk village, he moved through the whole gamut of sectarian dissent in his youth - from Calvinism through Methodism to various types of unorthodox Baptist groups and by the 1790s, ministering to a Baptist congregation at Wisbech, was in all essentials a Unitarian.³ In touch with such leaders of radical dissent in London as William Vidler and Robert Aspland, he was already doing much freelance missionary preaching in the Eastern Counties before, in 1810, the Unitarian Fund made him a full-time missionary. Wright was a new kind of Unitarian minister. Self-taught and competent in Greek, Latin and Hebrew he had no aspirations to cultivated intellectual sermonising: "A missionary's style of preaching should be plain and solemn, and in some places familiar and colloquial; always suited to the mass of his hearers...What is called fine composition I never attempted, I was always sensible that I was not capable of it, and I was far from thinking it either necessary or suited to the preaching of the gospel, in particular to the preaching of it to the poor and unlearned".⁴ He was always, he said, sensitive to the capacities of his audience and ready to adapt himself quickly to their interests. However his emphasis on simplicity and practical matters did not lead him into dogmatic or emotional styles of preaching. His aim was not to excite, frighten or move men and women but to gain their intellectual assent: "It will not do for an Unitarian missionary to declaim and dogmatize, he must address the understandings of men, by a clear statement of truth, and present to

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2. A Review of the Missionary Life and and Labors of Richard Wright, written by himself (1824) p.440. Hereafter cited as Wright op.cit.
 3. For the early life of Wright see Ursula K. Wright 'Richard Wright, Unitarian Missionary (1764-1836) (With Extracts from an Unpublished Fragment of Autobiography)' The Hibbert Journal Vol. XXVI (1927-8) pp. 85-101
 4. R. Wright op.cit. pp. 138-9

their minds, those arguments and proofs which will produce conviction".⁵ As well as preaching Wright always held an informal meeting for debate immediately afterwards and then made himself available for individuals to find him, treating seriously and considerately Christian or Jew, Churchmen or Dissenter, Deist or Atheist. He also distributed tracts by the thousand and tried to help sympathisers in whatever way he could. Politics he always avoided - though this did not protect him from being accused as a Deist and "an enemy to the government".⁶

Walking 30 or 40 miles a day often, Wright lived simply - carrying a dinner of bread and cheese or a pickled herring in his pocket, stopping at roadside inns for a glass of ale and a pipe, taking what accommodation was offered: "I have after preaching supped on barley bread and sour milk, and slept in a bed on a clay floor, the room open to the thatch...the following night I have slept at the house of a merchant in Hull, in a room which was carpeted and had every genteel accommodation. But I rested as comfortably in the former as in the latter".⁷ In this way, between 1810 and his retirement in 1822, he walked around 3000 miles each year preaching wherever he could get a hearing - in opulent Unitarian chapels, in little Methodist chapels, in houses, in the open-air - making Unitarianism known in places where even the name was previously unheard. Wright - and a number of other short-term missionaries such as Thomas Cooper, James Lyons, Robert Gisburne, Samuel Martin - did much to make Unitarian ideas familiar. They also fostered little groups of sympathisers, gave them access to a broader body of like-minded people, provided them with a measure of financial support. In this way the apparently spontaneous emergence of Unitarianism among groups of working class adherents to the Methodists and Baptists was consolidated, encouraging the confidence that it was simply a matter of time and effort before Unitarianism triumphed over superstition and irrationality

5. Ibid. p.129

6. Ibid. pp. 147,50

7. Ibid. p.158

to become the religion of the people. In the following pages I will briefly renew the emergence of working class Unitarian groups in three main areas.

i) CORNWALL. In 1811 Wright received a letter from a Methodist at Flushing who had become a Unitarian. Before the end of the year Wright preached at various places in Cornwall and found sympathetic hearers among some Methodists in Falmouth and Flushing.⁸ In 1812 another Unitarian missionary, Gisburne, preached in the area. But the Wesleyan authorities were alerted to the stirrings of heresy and there were a series of expulsions in both towns, including a popular lay preacher called Philp.⁹ The expelled, numbering around thirty altogether - and subject to charges of Jacobinism, a barrage of abuse from local Methodism and, Wright reported, "loss in their trade" - established two Unitarian groups holding public worship in rented rooms.¹⁰ Too poor to pay for a full-time minister they were especially dependent on the efforts of Philp. In the 1820s further Unitarian groups emerged: regular Unitarian meetings were held in the market-house at Redruth where a number of members were miners, at Penryn and at Penzance.¹¹ One wealthy supporter was Sir Rose Price, living on an estate of nearly 800 acres at Trengwainton - sold on his death in 1835 for £28,500.¹² But success was short-lived. In 1827 the departure of Philp to become full-time Unitarian minister at Lincoln was a serious loss. George Brown, one of the leading members at Falmouth, appealed for help

8. Ibid. pp. 383-4

9. Jerone Murch History of the Presbyterian and General Baptist Churches in the West of England (1835) pp. 536-8

10. Richard Wright 'Missionary Tour in Cornwall' MR Vol. X (1815) p.770

11. See for details the account of the Unitarian missionary Samuel Martin in the Unitarian Fund Register Vol. IV (1824) pp. 30-5.

12. Richard Edmonds Jnr. "A Statistical Account of the Parish of Madron and the Borough of Penzance" Journal of the Statistical Society of London Vol. II (1839) p.208

from the British and Foreign Unitarian Association fearing the imminent collapse of Cornish Unitarianism altogether: "being chiefly poor persons", he said, the maximum they could hope to raise for a new minister was £40 per annum.¹³ From 1829 there was a full-time Unitarian missionary in the county, Matthew Harding, supported partly by the BFUA and partly by local contributions. However decline continued. In May 1830 Brown was sending Aspland depressing news of the loss of members and the dearth of funds.¹⁴ By 1831 Harding was in an increasingly desperate situation and poured out his grievances to Aspland: when he had come to Cornwall in 1829, he said:

"I found the cause very feeble, the friends few in number, and situated amidst bitter and strenuous opposition. This aspect though sufficiently gloomy, did not however discourage me, for I was led to hope, that although few in number they would prove themselves staunch friends to the cause...I have been painfully disappointed. For, with but few exceptions they have proved themselves indifferent and worldly-minded".¹⁵

Harding complained that, though promised £70 per annum, he had in the previous year received only £32 and was unsure whether he would ever receive the balance. An attempt at establishing a school had been wrecked by the predominant anti-Unitarianism in Falmouth and his son could find no work in the area. His few sticks of furniture and all the family's possessions would not even pay his bills in the town. "Thus are my prospects of my usefulness and even of subsistence completely blighted".¹⁶ He planned in desperation to emigrate to America. In 1835 the groups at Falmouth and Flushing still survived - Murch noted that Philp's son was preaching regularly: "The congregation is very small, and Mr. Philp perseveres amidst many discouraging circumstances".¹⁷ However the Flushing group disappeared. By 1851 Unitarianism was barely hanging on by its finger nails in Cornwall:

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13. George Brown to Robert Aspland 7 xi 1827 DWL Mss 24, 141 (24)
 14. Brown to Aspland May 1830 DWL Mss 24, 141 (23)
 15. Mathew Harding to Aspland 30 ix 1831 DWL Mss 24, 141 (15)
 16. Ibid.
 17. Murch op.cit. p.540

on Census Sunday the morning and evening services at Falmouth attracted only eight people and fifteen attended an evening service at Penzance.¹⁸

ii) LANCASHIRE. In and around Rochdale there was a substantial accession of working class Methodists to the Unitarians following the expulsion of Joseph Cooke from the Connexion in 1806.¹⁹ With around 700 followers in Rochdale and the Rossendale Valley, Cooke gradually abandoned such orthodox tenets as original sin, the atonement and the trinity. After the death of Cooke in 1811, aged only 36, there were a series of disputes among his followers and the Cookite rump who remained loyal to his rationalism found themselves dispossessed of their Rochdale chapel and subjected to public abuse from all sides. "Our pains were much increased by considering ourselves as the only people in the country, if not the world, who believed these things", one of their number recalled.²⁰ At this point the old Presbyterian congregation of Unitarians in Rochdale intervened, allowing the Cookites to use their Blackwater Street Chapel. The social gulf between the two groups prevented them from uniting together, though their religious principles coincided. Led by three young lay-preachers - John Ashworth a woollen weaver, James Wilkinson a cobbler, James Taylor a hat-maker - the Rochdale and Newchurch groups combined Methodist forms of organization with a Unitarian theology and, with financial assistance from both local and national Unitarian bodies, had by 1817 three substantial congregations - at Rochdale, Newchurch and Padiham. There were also half a dozen other stations where they preached regularly and had followers - Burnley, Bury, Oldham, Whitworth, Lanehead and Lowerplace.

Other new Unitarian groups emerged in Lancashire in these years.

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18. Religious Census 1851: Detailed Tables V pp. 58-9. For a more detailed account see John Seed 'Unitarians in early 19th century Cornwall' in Devon and Cornwall Notes and Queries Vol. XXIV Part 5. (Spring 1980) pp. 177-80.
 19. For accounts of Methodist Unitarianism in early 19th century Lancashire see John Ashworth An Account of the Rise and Progress of the Unitarian Doctrine, in the Societies at Rochdale etc... (Rochdale 1817); Herbert McLachlan The Methodist Unitarian Movement (Manchester 1919)
 20. MR Vol. X (1815) p.313

Richard Wright went on extensive missionary tours in the county in 1812, 18, 21 and 22.²¹ At Oldham in 1812 he found a small Methodist group moving through Universalism to Unitarianism. By 1816 they had opened a new Chapel on Lord Street.²² Wright helped form small working class groups at Houghton Tower near Preston and at Mellor near Blackburn.²³ At Todmorden his preaching converted the radical manufacturer John Fielden to Unitarianism and he subsequently led the founding of a Unitarian congregation in the town.²⁴ At Rawtenstall the minister, John Ingham, and a number of members of an old Calvinist Baptist Chapel had moved through antinomianism to the Unitarian position and welcomed Wright into their pulpit.²⁵ By the mid-1820s there were new Unitarian congregations and groups at Rochdale, Newchurch, Padiham, Oldham, Rawtenstall, Middleton, Swinton, Todmorden, Hollinwood, Astley, Blackburn, Leigh and elsewhere.

These consisted almost wholly of working people. According to Dr. John Thompson in 1815, a Halifax physician and Unitarian, the Rochdale congregation were all working class: "Every member of it, man and woman, is obliged to work at some handicraft trade for daily bread, with the exception of one female who keeps a retail shop".²⁶ The Newchurch congregation were almost all poor weavers. At Padiham they were weavers and colliers and, it was said in 1820, "two poor men talk as they can on the Lord's Day to from fifty or sixty persons as poor as themselves".²⁷ At Todmorden almost all the members were working people and nine of the thirty-seven founders were illiterate, signing their names with a cross.²⁸ According to an Oldham

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21. R. Wright op.cit. p. 317
 22. A. Marcroft Historical Account of the Unitarian Chapel, Oldham (Oldham 1913) pp. 13, 18ff.
 23. Wright op.cit. pp. 324-6
 24. Arthur W. Fox Annals of the Todmorden Unitarian Congregation (Todmorden 1924) p. 2ff.
 25. No Author Two Hundred Years: the Story of a Congregation 1757-1957 (Rossendale no date) p.7
 26. MR Vol. X (1815) p. 313
 27. Quoted in No Author The Rise and Progress of Unitarianism in Padiham (Belfast 1881) p.6
 28. A.W. Fox op.cit. pp. 6, 7, 19.

member in 1813: "Most of those who join us are poor people but we have one or two families of property".²⁹ Among the most active members, and trustees, were several local radical leaders: William Browe a machine-maker, Joseph Newton a cotton-spinner, John Taylor a weaver. According to their lay-preacher, a young weaver called Benjamin Goodier, most of the Lord Street Chapel adherents had belonged to the large number of Deists and irreligious people in the town: "They have been disgusted with popular Theology and popular preachers, and have therefore laid aside all religious character. This I find to be the case with most of our converts...."³⁰ At Middleton too the congregation appealed to a freethinking constituency, sharply distinguishing themselves from religious orthodoxy with its dictatorial superstition.³¹

The Methodist Unitarians always disclaimed political intent. The preacher at Padiham, John Robinson, resisted attempts by his hearers to open his pulpit to political lecturers - though a few years after, in 1832, Cobbett lectured from the pulpit of the Methodist Unitarian Chapel in Rochdale. Robinson also prevented a group of Padiham Unitarians from launching a balloon in honour of Orator Hunt from the chapel-yard.³² Yet however much he might disclaim political purpose, when a Unitarian preacher told audiences of Lancashire working men and women that beings such as devils and witches were purely mythical, that man was an inherently virtuous and rational being, that religious orthodoxy was an oppressive and irrational construct manipulated by cynical rulers to keep the people in darkness, that complete freedom of opinion in speech and writing was an inalienable right, and so on, then he was necessarily challenging the status quo and aligning himself with Painite radicalism and the infidel tradition. And this

29. Marcroft op.cit. p.33

30. Ibid. p.33

31. The Fundamental Rules and Regulations, of the Society of Unitarian Christians; Assembling for Religious Worship, in a Room, in Union Street Middleton (Manchester no date - circa 1823) p.3

32. H. McLachlan 'Methodist Unitarianism and the Beginning of Cooperation in Rochdale 1844' in Essays & Addresses (Manchester 1950) p.223

was a continuing convergence. In 1832 Methodist Unitarians James Taylor (the Rochdale preacher), Edmund Grundy and John Fielden stood on the radical ticket against Whig reformers, though only Fielden was elected. And in the 1840s these Unitarian workmen provided substantial support for Owenism: half of the original Rochdale Pioneers in 1844 belonged to their chapel. This important and unexplored reciprocity between Methodist Unitarianism in Lancashire and the radical tradition cannot be pursued further here.³³

The social constituency of Methodist Unitarianism was a source of continuous difficulties. At Todmorden John Fielden was a generous supporter of the congregation and paid for a full-time Unitarian minister to combine the ministry with teaching in his factory-school.³⁴ None of the other congregations, however, could afford a full-time minister. From the early 1820s the Lancashire and Cheshire Unitarian Missionary Society provided some small financial help and for varying spells supported a travelling missionary in the area.³⁵ But poverty was a continuing threat to their survival. Their vulnerability to intimidation also helped retard development. At Newchurch, Ashworth noted in 1817, "we suffered much verbal persecution - were heavily burthened with a debt upon the chapel - were poor and could raise but little money amongst us".³⁶ In the same year subscribers from the Rossendale Valley to the Yorkshire Religious Tract Society (Unitarian) fell away as a result of "the very low wages that are now given and the high price of provisions, which disable many from subscribing even the small sum of one penny per week".³⁷ At Padiham they were subject to constant harrassment, including measures to prevent them building a chapel.

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33. Ibid. p.213ff; G.J. Holyoake Self-Help by the People: The History of the Rochdale Pioneers (10th ed. 1893) p.12f, p.86
34. A.W. Fox op.cit. p.29, 31
35. See for instance The Annual Report of the Committee of the Lancashire and Cheshire Unitarian Society for the year ending April 1827 (Manchester 1827) passim.
36. John Ashworth op.cit. p.52
37. See The Second Report of A Religious Tract Society, In the West Riding of the County of York (1817) p.6

"We have had to fight our way with our lives in our hands" one of their preachers said in 1822 and a year later Rev. John Grundy stated: "I can attest that they have suffered much, and persevered in their profession of the truth through much evil report".³⁸ The Middleton group had made a point of appealing to their fellow working-men stressing that contributions were voluntary and as small as an individual could afford: "they are wishful that no one shall be excluded from their community, on account of his poverty".³⁹ But economic difficulties, low wages and unemployment, caused a drastic decline in numbers at Middleton and elsewhere in 1826-7. Radical political affiliations also caused difficulties. Oldham's Lord Street congregation was reported by a Home Office informant in October 1816 to be "extremely disaffected" and was serving as a distribution centre for radical literature. In the following year warrants were issued for the arrest of two of its trustees, Browe and Newton, who escaped to America.⁴⁰ Other members followed and in 1818 Wright noted the congregation's decline: "Many unfavourable circumstances have occurred to retard the progress of the cause, in particular the removal of several families, who were its first supporters, to America, and the general pressure which has been felt owing to the state of trade, by the working manufacturers".⁴¹ Decline continued: by 1826 the chapel was said to be "nearly deserted" and in 1829 it was leased to the Roman Catholics and not reopened by the Unitarians until 1840.⁴² These particular pressures on congregations were compounded by the unsteady financial resources of the Lancashire and Cheshire Unitarian Missionary Society - declining funds in 1828, for instance, forced them to discontinue employing a full-time missionary.⁴³ Richard Wright had told the

38. The Rise and Progress of Unitarianism in Padiham (1881) pp. 7-8

39. The Fundamental Rules & Regulations etc... p.3

40. John Foster Class Struggle & the Industrial Revolution: Early Industrial Capitalism in three English Towns (1974) pp. 279-80

41. Marcroft op.cit. p.40

42. Ibid. p. 43f.

43. The Annual Report of the Committee of the Lancashire & Cheshire Unitarian Missionary Society (Manchester 1828) p.6

Society in 1822: "Nothing is necessary but for all the friends of the cause to unite heart and hand, in the adoption of popular measures, in steady, zealous and persevering exertions, and Unitarianism in a few years will be the pre-ponderating system in Lancashire".⁴⁴ In fact most of the groups survived into the second half of the 19th century but as tiny embattled islands of Unitarianism, struggling for survival in a hostile environment.

iii) EAST YORKSHIRE. If in Lancashire working class Unitarianism in the early years of the 19th century emerged with a Methodist form, in rural East Yorkshire it was linked closely to Baptist conventions. In the late 1770s, a group of York artisans, practising Anglicans, formed themselves into an autonomous religious society which was over the next half century to undergo a remarkable evolution and to spawn a number of smaller groups in various parts of East Yorkshire.⁴⁵ At first they had attended various churches and chapels in York, being most impressed with the Wesleyans. However the affiliation of Wesleyans to the Church of England was a problem as they began to criticise the worldliness of the clergy, the Church's vestigial Roman Catholicism and its general lack of a coherent and active morality. They became Calvinists and for some time were served by young visiting preachers from Lady Huntingdon's Connexion. However they had begun to read and study theology - questions and doubts multiplied. They accepted the Baptist doctrine of adult baptism and found some like-minded people among the Baptists. Still they questioned, broke with Calvinism and found affinities with the followers of John Johnson, an heretical Baptist writer in Liverpool. Finally the York group decided to abandon the whole field of

44. See the Unitarian Fund Register No. II (no date, probably 1822) p.13

45. The following paragraph is based on David Eaton Scripture the only Guide to Religious Truth: A Narrative of the Proceedings of the Society of Baptists in York in Relinquishing the Popular Systems of Religion, from the Study of the Scriptures etc... (York 1800)

doctrinal dispute - "to lay aside all men and their books, of whatever sort they might be, and to study and follow the scriptures only..." Hence they broke with doctrinal authority and, like rational dissenters, tested the Bible against empirical evidence and common sense: "thus we became rational creatures" David Eaton, one of their number, recalled.⁴⁶ They soon came to reject the doctrines of original sin and the depravity of man, affirming the inherent worth of all men and the power of the human mind to achieve both virtue and wisdom. They also abandoned orthodox forms of discipline - wrote their own hymns, conducted their own services and allowed each of their number to freely follow his own reason in any direction the text of the Bible seemed to warrant. By the 1790s they were both in theology and in practice Unitarians. Yet they had - like the Rochdale followers of Cooke - reached this position quite independently. Eaton wrote: "so wholly ignorant were they of Unitarians and their writings, that it was not till some years after their receiving their more rational views, that they knew any person held sentiments similar to their own".⁴⁷ From the late 1790s they were in touch with Charles Wellbeloved, Unitarian minister at the old St. Saviourgate Chapel in York, who wrote to another minister in October 1800: "Our society here is very small and not very zealous, but Unitarianism is not without its advocates in this city, and, you will be glad to hear, is making no inconsiderable progress. A Society of Baptists are very ardent in the support of Scripture truth, and very assiduous in extending it".⁴⁸ Their leading preacher - a York cordwainer called Francis Mason - preached far and wide in East Yorkshire and initiated a number of groups. Similarly David Eaton, a shoemaker, preached regularly in and around York. The Baptismal Registers of the society,

46. Ibid. pp. 21-2

47. 'Mr. Eaton's Account of the Rise and Progress of the Unitarian Fund' in MR Vol. XX (1825) p. 479

48. Wellbeloved to Richard Fry 14 xi 1800 in Fry Mss printed in E.D. Priestley Evans A History of the New Meeting House, Kidderminster 1782-1900 (Kidderminster 1900) p.114

from their commencement in 1780 until the 1820s, reveal that the group had adherents at Selby, Cawood, Kirk Hammerton, Hull, Bilton, Sutton, Acaster and Malton.⁴⁹

Their social constituency was primarily working class. Eaton described them in 1800 as: "a number of plain illiterate persons without learning, or any of the advantages of an improved education; most of them in the lowest stations of life, journeymen, mechanics, with one or two exceptions, thus situated in the mass of society..."⁵⁰ John Walker was probably one of the exceptions: a watch-case maker in London he inherited a sum of money which enabled him to retire to York where he became one of the founding core of the society.⁵¹ The Baptismal Registers reveal that artisans made up the bulk of the membership.⁵² There were a couple of schoolmasters, a master-mariner, half a dozen shopkeepers but here there

OCCUPATIONS OF FATHERS OF CHILDREN BAPTISED AMONG YORK UNITARIAN BAPTISTS 1780-1827

labourer	21	plasterer	1	out-servant	1
shoemaker	10	weaver	1	bookbinder	1
comb-maker	8	skinner	1	tallow chandler	1
cordwainer	6	servant	1	printer	1
grocer	4	currier	1	file-maker	1
tailor	3	watch-case maker	1	husbandman	1
schoolmaster	2	baker	1	woodturner	1
joiner	2	farmer/fishmonger	1	master-mariner	1
bricklayer	2	hairdresser	1	whitesmith	1
plain-maker	2	ship's carpenter	1		
Total: 79					

were none of the merchants with country houses, the doctors, the lawyers who constituted a substantial elite in the old Presbyterian congregations in transition to Unitarianism.

49. Register Book of York General Baptists in PRO Non-parochial registers RG4/3518

50. Eaton op.cit. p.1

51. Obituary in The Christian Reflector Vol. II new series (1827) p.70

52. Loc.cit.

There were new groups spontaneously emerging elsewhere in East and South Yorkshire - and again largely among artisans and labourers. From 1805 Wright was in touch with a small group of New Connexion Methodists in Thorne who had adopted Universalism. They were, Wright recalled, "few in number, in very humble circumstances, and all of them quite unlearned".⁵³ Though barely able to afford to hire a room, they continued to meet regularly, became Unitarians and established contacts with other individuals in the district, especially at Stainforth. In the latter village a man described by Wright as "of respectable character, and more information than his neighbours" became a convert and hired a room for Unitarian meetings. Another important convert was a Thorne lawyer called Benson: "he did us considerable service, by giving us his countenance, and saying in different places, that there was something of a religious kind now introduced at Thorne to which a man of sense might attend with pleasure". His son, preparing for the legal profession in his father's firm Benson and Beckett, went further - preaching for the local Unitarians and writing two pamphlets defending them from the attacks of Calvinists.⁵⁴ Another influential figure intervened on their behalf. John Pemberton Heywood, barrister and Wakefield Unitarian, came regularly to nearby Hatfield to hold the manorial court. He offered Wright the court house to preach in: "Now the poor despised Unitarians in Thorne and its vicinity began to be viewed in rather a different light".⁵⁵ In 1816 a chapel was built at Thorne and a year later at Stainforth, Benson preaching regularly until in 1818 John Gaskell - a young graduate of Glasgow University - was appointed a joint-minister to both congregations.

Socially the congregation's constitutency was largely lower class.

There was a gentleman, William Marsden, and the lawyers, Benson father and son,

53. R. Wright op.cit. p.80

54. Ibid. pp. 186, 190-1, 193. See obituary of younger Benson in MR Vol. XX (1825) pp. 240-1

55. Ibid. p.194

among the membership but the registers of the two congregations show a lack of individuals belonging to the social elite - no medical men, merchants or landowners.

OCCUPATIONS OF MEN IN THE BAPTISMAL & BURIAL REGISTERS AT THORNE & STAINFORTH 1817-37

labourer	5	shoemaker	1	sailmaker	1
farmer	3	sailor	1	waterside-man	1
blacksmith	2	coal-merchant	1	farmer and iron- merchant	1
tailor	2	baker	1	servant	1
gentleman	1	ropemaker	1	inn-keeper	1
Total: 23					

The bulk of the two congregations - Stainforth was very small, largely an adjunct to the Thorne chapel - consisted of the shopkeepers and artisans who predominated in the social structure of the small but thriving market-town of Thorne.⁵⁶

Other groups emerged in the same period. At Selby a young school-teacher called Briggs opened a room for Unitarian meetings and preached regularly in the surrounding countryside. A Unitarian Fund missionary spent over a month in the area in 1823 and remarked on the multiplication of groups since his previous visit in 1818: "Then there was an interest in two places only; now our cause has a footing in twelve, all within eight miles of Selby. The improvement made both to increase of numbers and religious feeling, is at once surprising and delightful".⁵⁷ Around York too the proseletysing of Mason and other Unitarian Baptists led to the surfacing of a number of groups and from the early 1820s divinity students at the Unitarian College in York preached regularly in the area.⁵⁸ There were groups at Cawood, Barton, Bulmar, Welburn, Thornton and Howden. At

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56. Register of Stainforth Unitarian Church PRO Non-parochial registers RG4/4051; Register of Thorne Unitarian Church PRO Non-parochial register RG4/3080.
57. See the report of F. Horsfield in Unitarian Fund Register No. III (1923) p.18. Wright op.cit. pp. 201-2.
58. Much of the following is based upon a volume of 'Missionary Transactions' in which students kept a detailed record of their preaching trips in the York area between 1824 and 30: this is hereafter cited as there are no page numbers.

Welburn, one of the York students recalled, "the society to which we preached so increased that no room was large enough to hold it".⁵⁹ Money was raised, by the students largely, and in 1825 a chapel built. By 1830 regular congregations sometimes approaching two hundred were being reported and there was a substantial Sunday School. At nearby Malton an old Presbyterian congregation apparently safe within the Independent fold was disturbed when its Calvinist minister was converted to Unitarianism. Tension resulted in a secession of the orthodox and in 1815 they opened their own Independent Chapel, leaving a declining group of Unitarians. The students reported in 1824: "though the attendance may not much increase at Malton for the present yet there are evident marks of a growing spirit of solid practical religion amongst the few Unitarians there".⁶⁰ Despite difficulties the congregation survived with regular congregations of between fifty and one hundred. Further away at Hull there were three small Unitarian Baptist groups in these years.

Yet the long-term effect of this Unitarian activity in Yorkshire was not visible in solid and stable religious organizations with numerical weight in denominational terms. At York, Selby and Hull the new groups eventually joined Unitarian congregations with a long Presbyterian ancestry. Elsewhere a number of the groups proved transient, fading without trace. At Howden, for instance, the York students quickly gave up their preaching visits in 1824: "the gradual decrease of attention in the place and the discovery that most of those who professed to attend as members were in reality Deists and characters with whom it was disgraceful to be connected - led to their discontinuance".⁶¹ At Thorne and Stainforth, Malton and Welburn the new groups survived as autonomous congregations but remained small. A movement which in East Yorkshire in the 1820s could be calculated

59. James Drummond and C.B. Upton The Life and Letters of James Martineau (1902) Vol. I p.35

60. J.G. Miall Congregationalism in Yorkshire (1868) p.313; Missionary Transactions MCO. See also the Records of the Malton Unitarian Chapel in the North Riding Record Office, Northallerton: R/1/ML/3.

61. Missionary Transactions MCO

in terms of hundreds had sunk by the 1840s to a matter of dozens.

The kind of constraints on the Welburn congregation suggest some of the broader pressures militating against Unitarian success. From the late 1820s there was also a Methodist chapel in the village so that the Unitarians lost their monopoly. Moreover the Methodists were not slow to attack the Unitarians - for instance, they circulated a satirical piece of doggerel called 'The Unitarian's Creed' called by one of the York students "this stupid piece of bigotry and misrepresentation".⁶² Clearly some adherents drifted away. In 1837 a student reported: "at Welburn rather thin, the flock having gone after a Methodist shepherd". While in the late 1820s congregations of up to two hundred were reported by December 1835 a student noted that he had preached to ninety people, adding: "a larger congregation than had been known for some time". Competition with Methodist preachers was not the only problem. Many of the adherents at Welburn congregation lived on scattered farms or settlements far from the village so that bad weather prevented attendance. Then too, as farm servants they were kept from attendance for several weeks at a time by the annual harvest. Direct social pressure damaged the Unitarian cause more seriously. In the 1820s the incumbent of the parish was the famous wit and Whig writer Sydney Smith. A rationalist himself and a friend of York's Unitarian minister Wellbeloved he tolerated the Unitarians - indeed he told the student missionaries: "so long as you only gather and tame my refractory parishioners, I shall look upon you as my curates, to get the people ready for me".⁶³ However from 1838 the Earl of Carlisle at Castle Howard began moves to regain his tenants for the Church of England. He opened a new Day School in the village and those linked to the Unitarian Chapel and Sunday School were pressured to end their affiliation. "Many

62. Ibid.

63. Drummond & Upton op.cit. Vol. I p.36

have been induced through fear of giving offence to their Landlord, to forsake us. But many still remain firm", it was reported within a matter of weeks. Soon after the screw was tightened still further when the new schoolmaster announced that any child sent to the Unitarian Sunday School was banned from his school. In a short time the Unitarians lost twenty scholars. By June 1839 Sunday School numbers were down to thirty and the congregation was losing members.⁶⁴ In 1851 the Welburn Sunday School was surviving, still with 30 pupils, and the religious census records the joint attendance at Malton and Welburn Unitarian Chapels as 28 at morning service, 52 in the afternoon and 62 at evening service.⁶⁵

These three districts were not of course the only parts of England where lower class Unitarian congregations emerged in the early 19th century. At Willington in the Delamere Forest a small group of poor antinomians became Unitarians: their leader Edward Astbury gave a patch of his small farm and the members levelled the ground, cut the stone and wood and built themselves a chapel.⁶⁶ In the Eastern counties - Lincolnshire, Cambridgeshire, East Anglia - there were a succession of conversions among Calvinist Baptist ministers giving rise to new Unitarian groups at Boston, Soham, King's Lynn, Braxfield and Lutton.⁶⁷ In the Potteries an old Presbyterian chapel was revived at Newcastle-under-Lyne and a new congregation emerged at Hanley.⁶⁸ In the North-East of England a Methodist New Connexion chapel at Alnwick had become Unitarian by 1817 and livened up religious controversy in the town throughout the 1820s.⁶⁹ At Sunderland a small Unitarian group was in existence from around 1814 and built a chapel in 1830.⁷⁰ However the

64. Missionary Transactions MCO

65. Religious Census 1851

66. See note by Richard Wright in MR Vol. XIX (1824) p.186

67. Wright op.cit. pp. 61-3, 175-82

68. See Lilian Beard 'Unitarianism in the Potteries from 1812' TUHS Vol. VI No. 1 (1935) p. 14ff; Wright op.cit. pp. 358-62.

69. George Tate The History of the Borough, Castle and Barony of Alnwick (Alnwick 1868-9) Vol. II pp. 201-2, 205-6; Register of Ebenezer Chapel Alnwick in PRO Non-parochial Registers RG4/1571; James Crozer The Alnwick Unitarian Debate (2nd ed. Alnwick 1826); John Wright Two Letters to the Rev. David Paterson...occasioned by his Attack on the Professors of Christian Unitarianism on Sunday Dec. 31st 1826 (Alnwick 1827)

70. Robert Weir Davidson The Origins & History of the Unitarian Free Church Sunderland 1830-1930 (Sunderland 1930)

gains were few and far between and many of these groups faded away after a few decades. The trajectory of the groups in the three districts depicted above was shared elsewhere: a period of expansion and enthusiasm followed by decline under the pressure of public hostility and lack of resources. The minor constellations around Rochdale and in rural East and South Yorkshire were the main addition to organized Unitarianism in the early 19th century. Compared to the remarkable spread of other denominations, then, Unitarian missionary effort was a dismal failure.

Recent research into the social constituency of evangelical dissent and Methodism in these years indicates that it took root primarily among artisans, craftsmen, tradesmen, shopkeepers, outworkers - groups outside the social control of the Anglican squirearchy.⁷¹ As Everitt details, in primarily farming districts attempts to initiate dissenting congregations were often effectively resisted by local landowners and clergymen.⁷² Welburn was the single Unitarian foundation successfully established in such a social context and subsequently proved extremely vulnerable to the power of the landowner. Yet why the failure to penetrate those groups which had a measure of social independence and a moral culture that was individualist? The particular unpopularity which Unitarians provoked was clearly a factor but the social character of Unitarians was also decisive. The lack of proselytism, the social clannishness and the uncompromising intellectualism of existing Unitarian groups made them particularly alien to working men and their families.

The Unitarian Fund only won half-hearted approval from many ministers (see above pp. 42-3) and few were actively involved in missionary preaching. As Priestley explained in 1783: "the rational Dissenters do not think that the future state of any man will depend upon his opinions, but only on his disposition of mind and his conduct in life."

71. A.D. Gilbert Religion and Society in Industrial England: Church, Chapel and Social Change 1740-1914 (1976) esp. p. 60f.

72. Alan Everitt The Pattern of Rural Dissent: the 19th Century (Leicester 1972) pp. 42, 48-9, 55.

They have, therefore, naturally less zeal for all matters of opinion than the Calvinists have, and for the same reason they are less solicitous about making converts".⁷³ Not only was there a lack of enthusiasm for making converts but, in many congregations, there was a positively unwelcoming disposition. An old member of the High Pavement Chapel in Nottingham recalled how newcomers were alienated by the cold distant attitude of members of the congregation and were made to feel like intruders.⁷⁴ At Manchester's Mosley Street Chapel a young Unitarian noted in his diary in 1832: "in our soi-disant pure-Christianity-chapels no one ever thinks of opening the door of his pew to a stranger (especially if he happens not to have a good coat on his back) as they universally do in the churches of the establishment and other dissenting chapels..."⁷⁵ Conversely there were cases where wealthy Unitarians refused to patronise a local Unitarian group if the latter was lacking in social status. An angry Richard Wright recorded that at Colchester a number of wealthy local Unitarians refused to attend a small Unitarian Chapel in the town because of the poverty of the members:

"I have found instances of this dastardly and unchristian conduct in different parts of the kingdom of people who would attend Unitarian worship where the congregation are genteel and opulent, but would shun the place where it is conducted when attended chiefly by the poor, and where Unitarianism is unpopular".⁷⁶

Unitarian intellectualism confirmed their social exclusiveness. It was claimed in 1809 that there were many instances of servants begging their masters to be excused from attending Unitarian Chapels with them - and not because they disapproved of the doctrines but because they found the whole proceeding incomprehensible. The "untaught and ignorant" needed sermons appropriate to their situation in plain language: "I think it will be generally allowed, that the sermons usually given in Unitarian Chapels, are

73. Joseph Priestley 'Forms of Prayer and Other Offices, for the Use of Unitarian Societies' (1783) Works XXI p.480

74. Benjamin Carpenter Early Presbyterianism in Nottingham (1862) p.178

75. The Diary of Edward Herford MPL Mss 9.23.4.H32 Vol.I

76. Wright op.cit. p.251

in language far too refined for the comprehension of this part of the congregation: nor are the vices to which their condition in life renders them most liable, such as drunkenness, dishonesty and lying, often even touched upon; or if they are, it can be but slightly in these elegant discourses".⁷⁷ This was a point of acute tension among Unitarians who valued intellectual cogency as a sine qua non, distrusted emotional preaching and regarded with undisguised distaste the uneducated populace. Even an enthusiastic populariser of Unitarianism like William Severn, a former Wesleyan and minister at Hull from 1806 until his death in 1813, was deeply distrustful of the anti-intellectualism of evangelical strategies to gain popular attention. "The Methodists must have the influx of that class of society who are devoutly ignorant", he told a young Kidderminster Unitarian in 1809, criticising attempts there to attract a popular following to the New Meeting. The proper strategy was to preach straightforward Unitarianism and concentrate on "the thinking part of the young people amongst you", even though this would lead to no marked rise in numbers for ten or twenty years.⁷⁸ A few years earlier he had written that Unitarians were not "Philosophers by Fire" and refused on principle to compromise their intellectual rigour and rationalism by pandering to the uneducated and the superstitious:

"They do not attempt to induce the multitude to adopt their opinions, by the effervescence of an heated imagination, displayed by vociferous pronounciation, violent action, and the denunciations of the everlasting flames of hell, to torture those who withhold their assent. In contrast therefore with such kind of WARM RELIGIONISTS they are undoubtedly COLD CHRISTIANS, or if you will, COLD PHILOSOPHIZING CHRISTIANS".⁷⁹

Even the new generation of militant Unitarians who rejected the complacency of old rational dissent, men like William Severn, did not cross the barrier between the polite and the plebian cultures, between the educated and uneducated.

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77. M.H. 'Popular Preaching Recommended to Unitarians' MR Vol. IV (1809) p.321
78. William Severn to Joseph Hopkins 7 vi 1809 in Severn Mss in E.D. Priestley Evans op.cit. p.76
79. William Severn A Vindication of the Unitarians, or Remarks upon a late Publication, entitled 'A Vindication of the Methodists'... (Hull 1806) p.9

In the 1880s a "sexagenarian layman" claimed: "I am old enough to remember when the Unitarian body included comparatively few of the artisan class or of any section of society below what are usually called the middle classes. We were commonly regarded as a very intellectual and for the most part a very well-to-do people and this was about the fact".⁸⁰

II

If there were boundaries which made the Unitarian congregation alien to the working class, there was, equally, an incompatibility between Unitarianism and the dominant landed culture. "A wealthy dissenting family is but rarely known to continue steadfast in the principles of Nonconformity for more than two generations", it was noted in 1823.⁸¹ Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries there was a continuous leakage of Unitarian families into the Church of England as new wealth loosened their insertion within the social circles of urban dissent. Priestley in 1782 remarked on the social factors which often changed religious liberalism into unprincipled conformity or indifference: "a marriage into a family in which other principles are professed with more zeal, or such an increase of fortune as shall raise a man above the level of his fellow-worshippers and thereby lead him into other connexions, will be sufficient to carry him, Unitarian as he may be, into the Established Church, or make him neglect public worship entirely".⁸² Israel Worsley similarly observed in 1816 "the gradual pairing off of the younger branches of our more wealthy families to the church" - putting it down to worldly ambition for "connexions and

80. Christian Life 27 vii 1889

81. MR Vol. XVIII (1823) p. 394

82. Priestley The Proper Constitution of a Christian Church considered in a sermon...to which is prefixed a Prefatory Discourse, relating to the present state of those who are called Rational Dissenters (1782) Works XV pp. 49-50

offices" from which dissenters were excluded.⁸³ The very geographical shift of a wealthy Unitarian family from the town to a country estate often made access to a chapel difficult or impossible. Then too the next generation were raised with little experience of urban dissent, were brought up among churchmen and often educated at public school where vestigial dissenting loyalties could be cruelly tested. John Cam Hobhouse, son of Bristol's Unitarian MP, recalled how at Westminster School after 1800: "I was insulted and laughed at - and questioned as to what God was worshipped at my chapel".⁸⁴ Forming their identity among the gentry, marrying into Anglican families and aspiring to lucrative careers in the professions, the church, the army or politics the rigours of rational dissent were left far behind. Such was even the case with the sons of a Unitarian minister such as John Disney. Meeting them in the late 1790s when both were students at Cambridge, Coleridge remarked: "Dr. Disney's sons, at all events, the younger, with his Shirt collar half way up his cheek, gave no high idea of the propriety of Unitarian Dissenters sending their sons to Established and Idolatrous Universities".⁸⁵ In fact both subsequently moved far from the world of Unitarianism: John (b. 1779) becoming a Dorsetshire gentleman and eventually Sheriff of the County; Algernon (b. 1780) becoming an army officer and eventually a Colonel.⁸⁶

However in some urban centres - as detailed in the following case-studies - defections of wealthy families were often more than offset by a new Unitarian generation of wealthy merchants, manufacturers, professional men so that, although personnel changed, the particular social influence which rational dissent had possessed in the late 18th century was reproduced in the years after 1800.

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83. Israel Worsley Observations on the State and Changes in the Presbyterian Societies of England during the last half century... (1816) p.47
84. Robert E. Zegger John Cam Hobhouse: A Political Life: 1819-52 (University of Missouri, Columbia 1973) p.38
85. Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge ed. E.L. Griggs (Oxford 1956) Vol. I p. 577
86. Venn Alumni

i) MANCHESTER. The two most influential Cross Street Chapel trustees in the late 18th century - Dr. Thomas Percival and Thomas Butterworth Bayley - drifted away from the congregation in the 1790s and died soon after: the latter in 1802, the former two years later. None of their offspring became members of the congregation. Bayley's sons all left Manchester behind making careers variously in the East India Company, in the Church of England, in St. Petersburg. One of Percival's sons became a clergyman.⁸⁷ The death of Barnes and Harrison in 1810 marked another shift in the chapel's history. One of their replacements, John Grundy, was in contrast to the somewhat cool ecumenical rationalism of his predecessors, a young and militant Unitarian keen on polemical theology. In 1811 and 12 he delivered courses of controversial public lectures, reportedly to "most crowded audiences", and attracting young rational dissenters from miles around the town.⁸⁸ He also provoked other religious ministers to respond in kind.⁸⁹ Some rational dissenters were alarmed. Hawkes, of Mosley Street Unitarian chapel, begged Grundy to discontinue the controversy for fear of provoking a Church and King mob.⁹⁰ Others too were evidently anxious. At the beginning of 1813 Rev. John Kenrick wrote from York to a Manchester Unitarian: "I had heard a little of the combustion into which Manchester has been thrown by the Theological lectures of Mr. Grundy but I was not aware of the dissatisfaction which you mentioned as existing among some members of his congregation..."⁹¹ When in November 1814 Grundy proposed

87. Ernest Axon 'The Bayley Family of Manchester and Hope' in Transactions of the Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society Vol. VII (1889) pp. 204-7; Venn Alumni.

88. James Mason Bass 'A Farmer's Chapel-Going' TUHS Vol. IX No. 4 (1950) p.210

89. See for instance Samuel Bradley Lectures on some of the most important Doctrines of revelation, in which the leading opinions of modern Unitarianism and especially those advanced by Rev. John Grundy are examined (Manchester 1813)

90. A. Gordon Historical Account of Dob Lane Chapel, Failsworth (Manchester 1904) p.42

91. John Kenrick to G.W. Wood 7 i 1813 MCO

another course of public lectures in the chapel the trustees refused permission: "Resolved unanimously that it appears to the Trustees present that the delivery of Evening lectures in the chapel in the ensuing winter is inexpedient".⁹²

Apparently a few individuals drifted away from the congregation in the early years of Grundy's ministry.⁹³ However there was no upheaval or significant withdrawal. At the end of 1813 a visitor reported: "The congregation in Cross Street, where Dr. Barnes preached with so much acceptance, is quite as large as it was when the walls rang with anathemas against Unitarianism".⁹⁴ The old patrician elite of liberal Presbyterianism continued to give their support and the chapel constituted the aristocracy of dissent in pre-reform Manchester. A town directory noted in 1816 that it was "composed of persons of the first respectability".⁹⁵ And, as the trustees themselves noted in 1824 with a degree of hauteur: "Its extent and importance may be judged of from the fact that the amount of the annual rents of the pews and sittings is six hundred pounds or thereabouts..."⁹⁶

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92. Minute Book of the Trustees of Cross Street Chapel Manchester in the Chapel Vestry p.20
93. A. Gordon What Manchester Owes to Cross Street Chapel: an Address (Manchester 1922) p.10
94. J.H. Bransby to Thomas Howe 3 xi 1813 Bransby Mss in UC Mss: JRL
95. Joseph Aston A Picture of Manchester (Manchester 1816) pp. 95-6
96. Minute Book loc.cit. p.47

OCCUPATIONS OF CROSS STREET CHAPEL TRUSTEES IN EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY

	1809	1821	1828
MERCHANT	33	26	24
BANKER	4	4	2
MANUFACTURER	1	4	3
GENTLEMAN	3	3	2
SOLICITOR	1	2	2
DOCTOR	-	-	1
CHEMIST	1	-	-
WINE MERCHANT	-	1	1
WAREHOUSEMAN	-	-	1
ACTUARY	-	-	1
CHANDLER	-	-	1
SADDLER	1	-	-

In the early 19th century the trustees included a number of substantial merchants - some with large houses in Manchester's rural hinterland or old gentry seats purchased out of the profits of trade: men like Jonathan Hatfield who lived in a "spacious mansion" at Travis Isle where he owned a large corn mill; Benjamin Potter, who lived at Darley Hall, formerly Sir Richard Arkwright's home; William Rigby Esquire of Oldfield Hall near Altrincham, whose nomination as High Sheriff of Cheshire was revoked because of his liberal notoriety; John Touchet, of Broom House, Pendleton, who was chairman of the Manchester Exchange for a number of years and Constable of the town in 1810.⁹⁸ Bankers - "the nobility of the bourgeois class", as Stendhal called them⁹⁹ - figured among the trustees. Two substantial banks - Jones, Loyd & Co. and Heywood's bank - originated among the Cross Street Chapel trustees. John Jones, a tea-dealer, began to move into banking before his death in 1775. His sons Samuel and William, both trustees,

97. As detailed in Thomas Baker Memorials of a Dissenting Chapel (1884)p.89ff
 98. Baker op.cit. pp. 104, 105, 97-8, 102.
 99. Quoted in Theodore Zeldin France 1848-1945: Ambition and Love (2nd ed. Oxford 1979) p.77

abandoned tea-dealing and then in partnership with their brother-in-law Lewis Loyd, a former Unitarian minister, built up a substantial banking firm.¹⁰⁰ Samuel Jones was wealthy enough to bequeath £5000 to Manchester College to help augment the income of Unitarian ministers on his death in 1819.¹⁰¹ Loyd's son subsequently became Lord Overstone and one of the richest men in Victorian England.¹⁰² Heywood's Bank, founded in 1788 by an offshoot of a leading Liverpool family of merchants and Presbyterians, was similarly developed by a Cross Street trustee Nathaniel Heywood. By the end of the 1820s his sons Benjamin, Thomas and James were wealthy young men with landed estates and a gentlemanly lifestyle.¹⁰³ Other trustees¹⁰⁴ in these years included Samuel Kay, solicitor and steward of the Lord of the Manor Sir Oswald Mosl y; Dr. Edward Holme, with the richest medical practice in the town;¹⁰⁵ Thomas Henry, apothecary, surgeon, owner of a magnesia factory and industrial chemist;¹⁰⁶ Samuel Dukinfield Darbishire, a solicitor - according to Froude, who lived in his household as a private tutor for a year or so, "a gentleman of wealth and influence"¹⁰⁷ - with a

100. Baker op.cit. pp. 95-6, 98, 109; L.S. Pressnell Country Banking in the Industrial Revolution (Oxford 1956) p.51.

101. Baker op.cit. p.95

102. See W.D. Rubinstein 'British Millionaires 1809-1949' in Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research Vol. XLVI (1973) p.209 and note

103. See especially J. Hughes Liverpool Banks and Bankers 1760-1837 (1906) pp. 91-107 and J.S. Leatherbarrow Victorian Period Piece (1954) pp. 176-7. For biographical sketch of Thomas see DNB and J.F. Smith (ed) 'Admission Register of Manchester School Vol. 3 Part 1' in Chetham Society I No. 93 (1874) pp 74-6; for Benjamin see Thomas Heywood A Memoir of Sir Benjamin Heywood... (Manchester no date); for James see Venn Alumni, DNB

104. The following are to be found in Baker op.cit. - other sources are cited where necessary.

105. DNB

106. W.V. and K.R. Farrah and E.L. Scott 'The Henry's of Manchester, Part I; Thomas Henry (1734-1816)' in Ambix: Journal of Alchemy and Early Chemistry Vol. XX (1973) pp. 184-208.

107. Waldo Hilary Dunn James Anthony Froude: A Biography: Vol I 1818-56 (Oxford 1961) p.151

country house in Carnarvonshire to which he retired, serving as High Sheriff of the County in 1855; James Aspinall Turner, merchant and manufacturer; Alexander Henry, head of one of the major merchant houses in the town. These, and others, played a significant role in the making of liberal culture in Manchester, as later chapters will detail.

Of course the trustees were the elite of the congregation and not representative of the whole membership. The baptismal registers¹⁰⁸ suggest a more complex social make-up. The central body of the membership was made up of the politically strategic strata of small property-owners: small dealers, shopkeepers, clerical workers, small manufacturers, artisan craftsmen. Large capitalists still figure as a significant proportion: around a third of the total were bankers, merchants, industrial employers, professional men. However the working class who made up the bulk of the town's population were singularly absent, with only a handful of weavers. An interesting point revealed by the baptismal registers is the presence of at least eight German merchants several of whom, if not all, were Jewish - for instance Edward Augustus Lomnitz, Martin Schunk, the Schwabes, the Steinthals, Julius Leppoc.¹⁰⁹ These German merchants were to play a significant role in mid-century Unitarianism in Manchester becoming important financial supporters and trustees and in one case a Unitarian minister.

108. Baptismal Registers of Cross Street Chapel Manchester in Chapel Vestry

109. For details of some of these men and the wider context see Bill Williams The Making of Manchester Jewry (Manchester 1976) passim.

OCCUPATIONS OF MANCHESTER FATHERS OF CHILDREN BAPTISED AT CROSS
STREET CHAPEL 1811-32*

PROFESSIONAL	8	4 solicitors, 2 manufacturing chemists, 1 physician, 1 newspaper editor
BANKING & FINANCIAL	4	1 banker, 1 broker, 1 accountant, 1 actuary
MERCHANTS	23	16 merchants; 1 cotton dealer; 2 merchants & commission agents; 1 cotton twist, canvas & paper dealer; 1 wine merchant; 1 corn merchant; 1 oil & corn merchant & miller.
MANUFACTURERS	15	6 manufacturers; 1 cotton spinner & twist dealer; 1 fustian & hat-lining manufacturer & insurance agent; 1 millwright & engineer; 1 silk manufacturer; 1 merchant & cotton spinner; 1 gingham silk & muslin manufacturer; 1 cotton merchant & cambric manufacturer; 1 woollen cord manufacturer; 1 small ware manufacturer and dealer
SMALL DEALERS & RETAILERS	18	2 grocers; 1 grocer, soap boiler & tallow chandler; 1 grocer & innkeeper; 1 grocer & commission agent; 2 pawnbrokers; 1 hairdresser; 1 silversmith, jeweller, hairdresser & perfumer; 1 shopkeeper; 1 tea-dealer; 1 inn-keeper; 1 linen-draper; 1 coal merchant; 1 chandler; 1 brewer; 1 miller; 1 tobacconist
CLERICAL STAFF, SALESMEN	12	3 salesmen; 1 traveller; 1 insurance agent; 4 book-keepers; 3 bankers clerks
WAREHOUSEMEN	6	
ARTISAN CRAFTS, SKILLED & SEMI-SKILLED LABOUR	31	1 cabinet-maker; 3 calenderers; 1 reed-maker; 3 dyers; 3 spinners; 2 tanners; 1 blacksmith; 1 carpenter; 1 boat-builder; 1 carpenter; 1 gardener; 1 mechanic; 1 fustian cutter; 1 warper; 1 reed-maker; 1 shuttle-maker; 1 wharfinger; 1 lettropress printer; 1 joiner; 1 lathe & toolmaker; 1 brushmaker; 1 wharfinger & carrier; 1 coachman; 1 millwright
WEAVERS	8	
		*there were also a Leicestershire farmer, a Scottish soldier, a painter living abroad, a Norfolk farmer, a sergeant in the 13th Foot, a Liverpool iron-merchant, a London physician, a Norfolk brewer, a Chester tobacconist
TOTAL:	134	

Despite its traditionalism and elitism, Cross Street Chapel was capable of attracting and assimilating ambitious and successful newcomers to the town. Thomas and Richard Potter, for instance, set themselves up in 1802 with little capital and few friends.¹¹⁰ They steadily built up a successful merchant business. Acceptance within the Cross Street Chapel fraternity was signalled first by the marriage of Thomas Potter to a daughter of Thomas Bayley of Booth Hall, one of the oldest Presbyterian families, then by his being made a trustee in 1828. He became the first Mayor of Manchester and was knighted in 1838 and his sons in turn became stalwarts of Unitarianism and mid-century Manchester liberalism. There were other examples, less spectacular, of this kind of social ascent and absorption within the Unitarian community: for instance, John Edward Taylor, spotted as a young man of ability and set up by his fellow Unitarians as the first editor of the 'Manchester Guardian' which he successfully developed into an organ of the town's liberal patriciate;¹¹¹ or William Fairburn, son of a Northumberland farm servant, who successfully developed at Ancoats the largest engineering works in the town by the 1840s.¹¹² Cross Street was not however the only Unitarian congregation in the centre of Manchester.

Mosley Street Chapel was always overshadowed by nearby Cross Street Chapel. The former was very small with only 68 pews and no gallery.¹¹³ Yet in the 1820s and 30s it counted among its members the elite of Manchester's middle class - some of the largest cotton manufacturers in

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110. Georgina Meinertshagen From Ploughshare to Parliament: A Short Memoir of the Potters of Tadcaster (1908); Baker op.cit. p. 117-18; T. Swindells Manchester Streets and Manchester Men Vol. I (1906) pp. 149-51.
111. H. McLachlan 'The Taylors and Scotts of the Manchester Guardian' in Essays and Addresses (Manchester 1950) pp. 70-93.
112. Robert Spears Memorable Unitarians (1906) pp. 272-3; DNB; Life of Sir William Fairburn ed. W. Pole (1877)
113. Aston op.cit. p.96

the country, successful merchants, and several professional men of influence. There were a few of the lower middle class occupations - some clerks and tradesmen - but the wealthiest stratum of the middle class predominated and the working class were absent.

OCCUPATIONS OF PEW-RENTERS OF MOSLEY STREET CHAPEL 1832 ¹¹⁴

PROFESSIONAL	11	2 surgeons; 2 physicians; 3 attorneys; 2 solicitors; 1 manufacturing chemist; 1 artist
MERCHANTS	17	10 merchants; 2 silk merchants; 2 flour dealers; 1 corn merchant; 1 corn factor; 1 broker; 2 wine merchants
MANUFACTURERS	18	8 manufacturers; 8 cotton spinners; 2 umbrella manufacturers
GENTLEMEN	2	
SMALL DEALERS, RETAILERS	9	1 bookseller; 1 retail dealer; 1 upholsterer; 1 iron-monger; 1 baker; 2 apothecaries; 1 warehouseman; 1 saddler
CLERICAL STAFF	12	5 clerks; 2 agents; 1 book-keeper; 2 librarians; 2 schoolmasters

In 1816 a detailed list of 43 Manchester cotton mills revealed that nearly 80% employed fewer than 400 hands and that the average number of hands per mill was around 300.¹¹⁵ The three largest employers in the town - George and Adam Murray with 1215 workers, McConnell and Kennedy with 1020 workers and Philips and Lee with 937 workers - were all linked with the Mosley Street Unitarian congregation. Remarkably, the Murrays, John Kennedy and James McConnell all came from the same area of Kircudbrightshire and were all apprenticed to William Cannan a Scottish machine-maker, a

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114. List of pew-renters in two notebooks of the minister J.J. Tayler in MPL M30/4/1 and 2. See also 'Register of Baptisms 1789-1836' in PRO: Non-parochial Registers RG4/2856.
115. J.H. Clapham 'Some Factory Statistics of 1815-16' Economic Journal Vol. XXV (1915) pp. 476-7; Select Committee on Children's Employment, 1816 (397) iii pp. 374-5.

Chowbent in the 1780s.¹¹⁶ Cannan was a Unitarian and apparently had an immense intellectual influence on all his apprentices; the Murrays, Kennedy and McConnell all abandoned their hereditary Calvinist Presbyterianism for rational dissent under his influence and McConnell had a portrait of Cannan on his wall in later years.¹¹⁷ In Manchester from the early 1790s all moved from machine-making into factory production of cotton. Starting with little capital they made massive profits: McConnell's capital, for instance, increased from £168 in 1791 to nearly £11,000 a decade later.¹¹⁸ By the end of the Napoleonic Wars these four Scottish mechanics dominated the Manchester spinning trade. The third firm Philips and Lee also originated in the early 1790s when George Philips, from an old family of Presbyterians and merchants in Manchester, established a mill at Salford and lured away Peter Drinkwater's manager George Augustus Lee to become the managing partner.¹¹⁹ Other industrialists affiliated to the congregation in the early years of the 19th century included: Samuel Greg, Senior, whose Quarry Bank mill employed 252 hands in 1816 and who was in the process of developing other mills in the area so that by 1832 the Gregs were responsible for around 1.5% of the total

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116. For John Kennedy see: Brief Notice of my Early Recollections in a Letter to my Children (no place or date, privately printed); DNB; 'Memoir' by William Fairburn in Memoirs of the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society 3rd series Vol. I (1862) p.147ff. For James McConnell see David C. McConnell Facts and Traditions Collected for a Family Record (Edinburgh 1861). C.H. Lee A Cotton Enterprise 1795-1840: a history of McConnell and Kennedy, fine cotton spinners (Manchester) esp. pp. 12-13, 27 contains information on the Murrays, as does Kennedy's recollections pp. 8-9.
117. J. Kennedy op.cit. p.14; D.C. McConnell op.cit. p.149 and n.
118. D.C. McConnell op.cit. pp. 139,144
119. G.W. Daniels The Early English Cotton Industry (Manchester 1920) p.150n; The Life of Robert Owen, written by himself (new ed. introduced by John Butt 1971) p.26

yarn and cotton-goods output of the country;¹²⁰ Peter Ewart, a former partner of Samuel Oldknow and then Samuel Greg, whose Manchester mill in 1816 employed 192 hands;¹²¹ and a number of younger industrialists - Robert Nicholson, Benjamin Nicholls, Edward Shawcross, Samuel Robinson, Edmund Potter.

Before going on to look at other members of Mosley Street congregation, it is worth focusing in more detail on the social characteristics of some of these Unitarian industrialists. Their social origin varied. John Kennedy's grandfather had been a shopkeeper who accumulated the money to buy a small estate; Kennedy's father was educated at Edinburgh University and farmed the estate, though his early death straitened the family's circumstances.¹²² The grandfather of the Murrays was a farmer turned shopkeeper which their father continued.¹²³ James McConnell came from a family of small farmers, his father farming 600 acres in the parish of Kells.¹²⁴ Samuel Greg, from Belfast, was brought up by an unmarried uncle who was a merchant in Manchester - he was educated at Harrow and then at Parr's rival school at Stanmore and was intended for the Anglican clergy. Greg finally refused to proceed to Holy Orders, travelled extensively in Europe and in 1783 inherited his uncle's business, moving soon after into factory production at Wilmslow.¹²⁵ Peter Ewart was the son of a Scottish clergyman and elder brothers included the British minister at the Berlin Court, William Ewart a wealthy merchant in Liverpool, and John Ewart, a Bath physician.¹²⁶ George Augustus Lee was the son of an improvident actor and his four sisters figured in the literary circles of Bath where they ran a

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120. Seymour Shapiro Capital and the Cotton Industry in the Industrial Revolution (New York 1967) p.79; No Author The Story of Greg... A Study in Yarn (Stockport 1957) pp. 3-4; Select Committee 1816 iii pp. 374-5
121. Select Committee 1816 iii pp. 374-5
122. Kennedy op.cit. pp.2-3
123. Ibid. pp. 8-9
124. D.C. McConnell op.cit. p.120
125. John Morley 'W.R. Greg: A Sketch' Macmillans Magazine Vol.XLVII(1883)p.110
126. William Charles Henry 'A Biographical Notice of the late Peter Ewart' Memoirs of the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society 2nd series Vol. VII (1846)

fashionable and very profitable girl's school and wrote novels - hardly the family connections one expects for a genuinely innovative industrial engineer.¹²⁷ Samuel Robinson was the son of Thomas Henry Robinson, a Manchester merchant and founder of Mosley Street congregation.¹²⁸ Robert Nicholson was the son of the cashier in Heywood's Bank and had been employed in the management of the factory of fellow-Unitarian Samuel Alcock before setting up his own firm.¹²⁹ To summarise - there is a good deal of variety in the social background of these early 19th century Unitarian industrialists but all were from families of at least a modicum of education and property and some clearly brought some family capital to their business. Even McConnell whose father was sometimes in financial difficulties inherited nearly £50 from his grandfather in 1790.¹³⁰

The substantial profits of the early phase of factory production were not wholly absorbed back into business. Capital was diverted into fine new houses, carriages and horses, good wine, paintings, the education of the next generation. John Kennedy, for instance, bought Ardwick House - later described as "a model country residence surrounded by verdure" - and purchased land in Scotland. He sent his son to Shrewsbury School in 1829 and then onto Trinity College Cambridge and the bar.¹³¹ James McConnell bought a plot of land in Ardwick in 1804 and had a substantial house built with stables and extensive gardens at a cost of more than £7000.¹³² He also bought land in Kircudbrightshire in 1817 and four years later in Wigtonshire. To go with his new status as landed gentleman he

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127. 'Obituary' in The Annual Biography and Obituary Vol. XI (1827) pp. 246-9. Additional information on the Lee family in W.A. Munford William Ewart MP 1798-1869: Portrait of a Radical (1960) Appendix 3, esp. pp. 190-3
128. Obituary (1884) in MPL: Local biographical collection
129. Obituary in Manchester Guardian 1 xi 1886
130. D.C. McConnell op.cit. p.137
131. Kennedy op.cit. p.8; L.M. Hayes Reminiscences of Manchester (Manchester 1905) p.182; Venn Alumni
132. McConnell op.cit. p. 145

caused a search to be made in 1818 in the Lord Lyon Office at Edinburgh and the Dublin Herald Office and afterwards assumed the coat of arms of the O'Connell family.¹³³ Though apparently an abstemious man and spending most of the day at the mill one of James McConnell's sons recalled the frequent dinner parties where the wine was plentiful and the large ball held at the house in 1811 at which many members of the town's elite were guests.¹³⁴ The Greg household at Quarry Bank, was to the surprise of the wife of a local clergyman: "such a picture of rational happy life". She went on: "Mr. Greg is quite a gentleman...He is rich, and he spends just as people do not generally spend their money, keeping a sort of open house, without pretension..."¹³⁵ Greg's sons were educated in various Unitarian schools and at Edinburgh University and were sent on lengthy 'Grand Tours' of Europe combining the traditional humanist itinerary of classical ruins and art galleries with a sharp attention to the details of international trade.¹³⁶ They subsequently combined the role of industrial entrepreneur with that of cultured gentleman.

Other members of the congregation on Mosley Street in the early 19th century included: the Scotsman, Edward Baxter, a gingham and shirting manufacturer and merchant - according to his friend Archibald Prentice "a man of much energy, whose prosperity in business had not abated his earnestness for reform";¹³⁷ Thomas Robinson, a merchant living at Woodlands in Crumpsall;¹³⁸ George William Wood, son of the Unitarian minister at Leeds,

133. Ibid. pp. 1-3, 147

134. Ibid. p.146

135. Quoted in Morley op.cit. p.111. See also Autobiography of Mrs. Fletcher, with letters and other family memorials (3rd ed. Edinburgh 1876) pp. 97, 148-9

136. Morley op.cit. pp. 112,116; DNB for Robert Hyde, Samuel and William Rathbone Greg; A Layman's Legacy in Prose and Verse: Selections from the Papers of Samuel Greg, with a Prefatory Letter by Arthur Stanley, Dean of Westminster and a Brief Memoir (1877) pp 6-7, 17.

137. Archibald Prentice Historical Sketches and Personal Recollections of Manchester, intended to illustrate the Progress of Public Opinion from 1792 to 1832 (Manchester) p.72

138. Baker opcit. p.94

a partner in a family clothing firm at Leeds and a partner of George Philips in Manchester, wealthy enough to retire from business from the age of 50 to devote himself to politics;¹³⁹ William Henry, a doctor, owner of a chemical firm, scientific consultant to local industrialists and author of a standard textbook 'Elements of Experimental Chemistry' (by 1829 in its 11th edition), he was a scientist with a national reputation and at one point put forward for the Chair of Chemistry at Glasgow University;¹⁴⁰ plus, as the previous table indicated, a number of solicitors, doctors, merchants - even an artist called Lindsey Aspland.

To a large extent the two congregations in the centre of Manchester were simply two aspects of a single complex Unitarian community. Some men were trustees of both congregations and many attended services at both chapels. Indeed, it is important not to see congregations as isolated and water-tight compartments. The diary between 1812 and 19 of James Mason, a farmer at Stand a few miles to the North of Manchester, shows the amount of contact between different congregations in the district: there were 15 different visiting Unitarian ministers preaching in the chapel at Stand in those years, some of them on 2 or 3 occasions and Rev. John Gooch Robberds of Cross Street on a dozen separate occasions; conversely Mason himself attended services at Unitarian chapels at Bolton, at Blackley three times, at Cross Street Manchester three times and at Bury six times.¹⁴¹ Robert Philips, merchant of The Park - an opulent

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139. Obituary in Manchester Guardian 7 x 1843; J.J. Tayler A Discourse delivered in Upper Brook Street Chapel, Manchester October 15th 1843: on Occasion of the Death of George William Wood, Esq. MP (1843) pp. 33-44.
140. John Davies Sketch of the Character of the late William Henry (Manchester 1836); W.V. and K. Farrah and E.L. Scott 'The Henry's of Manchester' in Ambix: Journal of Alchemy & Early Chemistry Vol. XII (1974) Nos. 2 and 3 passim.
141. J.M. Bass op.cit. pp. 211-12

mansion on an estate of 126 acres - was a trustee of both the chapels at Stand and on Mosley Street.¹⁴² Often barred from socialising with their equals belonging to other sects, Unitarians in and around Manchester found friendships among their co-religionists. One of James McConnell's sons recalled how his family mixed a great deal with the Kennedys, the Murrays and the Ewarts - all Unitarian, all Scotsmen, all industrialists, all with children of similar ages.¹⁴³ Through the schools of Manchester Unitarian ministers like William Johns and John Relly Beard and the Unitarian College at York - where Marslands, Darbishires, Robinsons, Nicholsons, McConnells, Philippses and Woods were sent despite the annual fees of 100 guineas - the children and young men of Manchester's Unitarian elite came to know each other.¹⁴⁴ And in voluntary teaching in the Lower Mosley Street Schools, in discussion groups in the Chapels, in formal and informal parties and gatherings at their homes, a whole network of social contacts was built up and maintained.

The pattern of intermarrying reinforced these networks, binding together individuals and groups from both chapels almost into a single extended family. Of Cross Street Chapel trustees in the early 19th century, a significant proportion married into Unitarian families.¹⁴⁵ Subtracting the four trustees who were bachelors in each trust deed, the following are the percentages of all trustees who married Unitarians: in the 1809 trust deed 29%, in the 1821 trust deed 27%, and in 1828 30%. Now, details of nearly half the trustees' marriages are not known so that the real figure would be a good deal higher. Just focusing on the leading group in Mosley Street Chapel: James McConnell's father's sister had married

142. R. Travers Herford Memorial of Stand Chapel (Prestwich 1893) pp. 55, 80-5; J.S. Leatherbarrow op.cit. pp. 24-6.

143. D.C. McConnell op.cit. p.146

144. The next chapter gives a detailed account of this College.

145. Baker op.cit. passim

William Cannan and then George Murray married Cannan's daughter so that McConnell and the Murrays were connected on first setting up in Manchester. John Kennedy married the daughter of John Stuart, another Scottish Unitarian newcomer to the town, and her young orphaned brother Robert became a lifelong member of the household. The next generation strengthened the links. McConnell's eldest son married the eldest daughter of John Kennedy and then after her early death married a daughter of George Murray. Thomas Houldsworth McConnell also married a daughter of Murray, as did Kennedy's son. Two of Kennedy's daughters married Manchester Unitarians - James Heywood and Samuel Robinson, while the latter's sister married the former's brother Benjamin. McConnell's eldest daughter married the only son of George William Wood. George Augustus Lee married the sister of Peter Ewart in 1803 and in 1829 his daughter married her cousin and the nephew of Peter Ewart, William Ewart Jnr. of Liverpool. Both William Henry and Thomas Potter married daughters of Thomas Bayley of Booth Hall. W.R. Greg married a daughter of William Henry and his brother R.H. Greg married a daughter of Robert Philips. Samuel Dukinfield Darbshire and James Aspinall Turner both married daughters of the Cross Street Chapel trustee Robert Grierson Blackmore. And so on: from any of the Unitarian elite in the early 19th century a whole complex web of connections, cousins and uncles and in-laws radiates outwards through the Manchester middle class. In this way the family served as an agency for the preservation of the cohesion and stability of the Unitarian community across several generations, enabling it to perpetuate an intellectual and moral tradition. More specifically, the family served as the basis for developing businesses by providing a network of social trust and mutual commitment: the legal requirement of unlimited liability for the whole debt of a business meant that capital was only raised through those closely linked to an individual firm in the early 19th century. In this context the

interwoven networks of family and Unitarian community provided a system of mutual cooperation which Samuel Smiles noted was so crucial to the economic success of the middle class.¹⁴⁶

Note, however, the marked internal boundaries within Manchester's Unitarian community which preserved the social exclusiveness of the elite detailed in previous pages. In 1842 Rev. J.J. Tayler noted how impossible it was to get Manchester Unitarians of differing social status to associate together informally: "the most educated and influential class often keep away".¹⁴⁷ Association in voluntary work, for instance, teaching in the Sunday School, was carefully supervised. This is graphically displayed in the diary of a young member of Mosley Street congregation, Edward Herford, in 1834. Son of a wine merchant and insurance agent, he was himself training to be a solicitor and was something of a radical. However his social prejudices were exposed when James Clarke, an apprentice hat-maker, actually dared to broach marriage to Herford's Aunt Sophia: all three were teachers at the Sunday School. Clarke was briskly reprimanded by the Herford family for attempting to communicate with Sophia and promised to keep his intentions secret. Herford sputtered in his diary about this "specimen of impertinence and presumption" and the social tension between Unitarians of different social status is revealed in the way he described Clarke as "one of the inferior grade of teachers in our Sunday School, a young man somewhat distinguished...by a certain 'coxiness' of look and demeanour, and by his forwardness in giving his opinion at our meetings".¹⁴⁸

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146. Samuel Smiles Thrift (Popular edition, 1901) p.98. See also Asa Briggs Victorian Cities (2nd ed. 1968) p. 110. The sources of the foregoing account of intermarrying - too numerous to usefully cite - are the obituaries, memoirs and so on, many of which have been cited above.
147. Letters, embracing his Life, of John James Tayler B.A. ed. J.H. Thom (1872) Vol. I pp. 202-3
148. Diary of Edward Herford loc.cit. Vol. I

ii. HULL. The leading figure in Bowl Alley Lane congregation in the late 18th century, the banker Joseph Robinson Pease, remained an active member until his death in 1807. However his wife was an evangelical churchwoman and, though all the children were baptised in the chapel, her influence predominated in the family after Pease's death. The eldest son, also called Joseph Robinson Pease (b. 1789), matriculated a Fellow Commoner of Trinity Hall, Cambridge, in 1807 and conformed to the Church of England under pressure from his mother: "The ceremony of confirmation is over, and I am initiated into the Church of England. It is according to your wishes, and I am sure I may affirm the same on my part", he wrote to her from Cambridge.¹⁴⁹ Pease subsequently became an important figure in early 19th century Hull - a churchman, a Tory, hostile to Catholic Emancipation, parliamentary reform, free trade. That his father was a rational dissenter and he himself baptised in a Unitarian Chapel were, a later generation learned, "facts your grandmother used to repeat when she particularly wished to aggravate your grandfather".¹⁵⁰ Other children of J.R. Pease the elder were similarly absorbed into the elite of Tory churchmen who dominated Hull - one of his sons, George, even became an Anglican clergyman.

As in the late 18th century, artisans, tradesmen and skilled workmen of various kinds constituted the largest category in the congregation. However the substantial numbers of mariners and general labourers had faded significantly by the early 19th century. The Bowl Alley Lane congregation had become smaller but the propertied elite were proportionately more strongly represented. The managing elite of the congregational committee

149. J.R. Pease to Anne Pease 9 vi 1807 Pease Mss 35 in Wilberforce House Museum, Hull.

150. Letter of B.C. Pease Feb. 1887. Pease Mss 98; on Pease's later career see his obituary in Hull Advertiser 27 v 1866; T. Tindall Wildridge Old and New Hull (Hull 1884) pp. 155-8

OCCUPATIONS OF FATHERS OF CHILDREN AT BOWL ALLEY LANE CHAPEL
1801-35

PROFESSIONAL	3	1 attorney; 1 physician; 1 newspaper editor
MERCHANTS	7	7 merchants
SMALL DEALERS, RETAILERS	7	1 bookseller; 1 grocer; 2 butchers; 2 tailors; 1 auctioneer
CLERICAL STAFF	2	2 banker's clerks
ARTISANS, SKILLED & SEMI-SKILLED LABOUR	13	3 shoemakers; 3 joiners; 1 ship's carpenter; 1 paper-stainer; 1 cordwainer; 1 builder; 1 hatter; 1 mast & block-maker; 1 bricklayer
MARINERS	5	4 mariners; 1 ship's master
LABOURERS	2	2 general labourers

included: three physicians, among them Dr. John Alderson;¹⁵² four solicitors; the merchant, newspaper editor and writer on political economy William Spence;¹⁵³ George Lee, a Unitarian pastor to the Strutts at Belper who became a schoolmaster in Hull and then succeeded Spence as editor of the 'Hull Rockingham' newspaper;¹⁵⁴ Christopher Briggs, an insurance broker, a merchant, and a shipowner;¹⁵⁵ ten or so substantial merchants, among them Richard Tottie, involved in oil-milling, American Vice-Consul in Hull, agent to the Hamburg Steam Packet Company and in the 1830s a director of the Hull & Selby Railway Company.¹⁵⁶ Henry Blundell was a leading member

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151. Bowl Alley Lane Baptismal Registers PRO: Non-parochial registers RG4/3752 and 143
152. DNB; J. Horsfall Turner Yorkshire Bibliographer (Bingley 1888) Vol. I pp. 36-7. For background of Alderson family see C.L. Brightwell Memorials of the Life of Amelia Opie (Norwich 1854) pp. 1-2. Details of the congregational committee are contained in the Minute Book of Bowl Alley Lane Chapel 1802-50 in Hull Local History Library.
153. For Spence: obituaries in The Inquirer (1860) p.35 and Gent's Mag. Vol. CCVIII part i (1860) pp. 631-2; R.W. Corlass Sketches of Hull Authors (Hull 1879) pp. 105-9.
154. Obituary in CR new series Vol. IX (1842) pp. 532-3. See also Corlass op.cit. p. 108 and J. Horsfall Turner Halifax Books and Authors (Brighouse 1906) p.218
155. The First Hull Directory 1791 (reprinted Hull 1885) p.14; Battle's Hull and Beverley Directory 1814-15 (Hull 1813) p.22; The Trade and Commerce of Hull and its Ships and Shipowners, Past and Present (reprinted from The Eastern Morning News: Hull 1878) p.96
156. Battle's Directory 1813, p.91 Battle's Hull Directory (1803)

of the congregation from 1810 when he set up a brush-manufacturing business in the town - in the following year, in partnership with Spence he moved into paint-manufacturing and by 1851 he was one of the largest employers in Hull with 350 men.¹⁵⁷ Another member, Francis Stamp, was an auctioneer, appraiser, commission agent and wine and spirit merchant, as well as a bailiff for the unreformed Corporation.¹⁵⁸ Nothing like so large and opulent as Manchester Unitarianism, nevertheless the Bowl Alley Lane congregation in Hull was still a strategic grouping in the town's cultural and political life.

ii) WAKEFIELD. Westgate Chapel's wealthiest supporters in the late 18th century - the various branches of the Milnes family - tended to drift from the congregation as they moved into the circles of landed society and in some cases descended into a libertinage and insolvency as spectacular as their previous social ascent. Of the children of John Milnes Senior, for instance: Robert made a successful career in government service, married into the influential Bentincks, became in 1795 Governor of Martinique and was knighted;¹⁵⁹ Hannah, a great beauty, cut a striking figure in fashionable society in the 1760s and 70s - according to Mrs. Cappe "she was not denied a place in the first ranks of fashion, even in the metropolis", was pursued by the Duke of York and was expected to marry into the nobility but ended up estranged from her family, an ageing spinster in the household of the Earl of Rosslyn;¹⁶⁰ and John, inheriting an annual income of £7000 in the 1770s, lived spectacularly beyond his means in Paris, fathered several illegitimate children and died in 1810 with little of his fortune left but

157. No author Blundell: of Liverpool, Lincoln and Hull (1906); John Leng Reminiscences of Hull Thirty Years Ago (Hull 1882) p.6; No author The Blundell Book 1811-1951: A Short History (Hull 1951) esp. pp. 8-10

158. William White Hull and District Directory (Sheffield 1831); Bowl Alley Lane Register loc.cit.

159. Wakefield District Heritage ed. Kate Taylor (Wakefield 1976) p.78

160. Memoirs of the Life of the late Mrs. Catherine Cappe, written by herself (3rd ed. 1826) pp. 325-7; Joseph Hunter Notices of Contemporaries British Library Add. Mss 36527 f 67/8

with a fine collection of paintings and a "magnificent library".¹⁶¹

Heads of other branches of the family who remained politically active and involved in business - Pemberton, James Snr. and Jnr. and Richard Slater Milnes - remained loyal to Westgate. A special subscription for the chapel in 1804 was supported by James Milnes with £200 and R.S. Milnes with £50.¹⁶² However these senior figures died in short succession: James Snr. in 1792, Pemberton in 1795, Richard Slater in 1804 and James Jnr. in 1805. Only Richard Slater Milnes had male heirs to carry on the family name and these again drifted away from the interlocking worlds of business, rational dissent and reforming politics. The eldest, Robert Pemberton Milnes was educated under the Unitarian ministers William Shepherd and Thomas Belsham and then sent to Trinity College, Cambridge. He abandoned the family's hereditary Whiggism and then turned his back on a promising parliamentary career - refusing in 1809 a place in Perceval's cabinet. He remained M.P. for Pontefract until 1818 but increasingly withdrew to his Yorkshire estates at Fryston and Thorne indulging his misanthropy and his passion for scientific agriculture, fox-hunting and port.¹⁶³ As a young man he had been something of a rake: he once admonished a friend "if you ever hear anyone say I am a gambler, contradict it, I never lost a thousand a night but twice".¹⁶⁴ But in this respect he was far outdone by his brother Richard Rodes Milnes who became a typical Regency libertine - a gambler, a companion of Beau Brummel and the Prince Regent, a "patron of the turf" whose horses won the St. Leger five times in the 1820s. He squandered such sums in the pursuit of pleasure that the family were brought to the brink of total ruin.¹⁶⁵

161. Taylor op.cit. pp. 78-9; Hunter op.cit.

162. Pew Rent Register of Westgate Chapel 1769-1803. WCL: JG Mss.

163. T. Wemyss Reid The Life, Letters and Friendships of Richard Monckton Milnes, First Lord Houghton (1890) Vol. I pp. 8-30

164. Quoted *ibid.* p.30

165. *Ibid.* pp. 37-8. See also R.G. Wilson 'The Denisons and Milneses: 18th century Merchant Landowners' in J.T. Ward and R.G. Wilson Land and Industry: the Landed Estate and the Industrial Revolution (Newton Abbott 1971) pp. 164-5.

The break from affiliation to Westgate Chapel and rational dissent was gradual. In December 1811 the minister of Call Lane Chapel in Leeds, Joseph Howden, wrote to Belsham:

"I have very little intercourse with our friends at Fryston. Since you and I have met there, the young people have made great progress in their acquaintance with gradiose and gay folk. I must question whether they are happier for it, I am persuaded that they are not more amiable".¹⁶⁶

Yet, though neither brother seems to have been a member of Westgate in the early 19th century and though both had clearly moved far outside the moral and intellectual coordinates of Unitarianism, they retained Unitarian chaplains at their country houses for varying periods. At Fryston Rev. Samuel Lucas was private chaplain to Robert Pemberton Milnes from 1806 until his death in 1821 when he was succeeded by a young Unitarian minister John Philip Malleson. The baptism of his son Richard Monckton Milnes at Fryston Hall by Samuel Lucas in August 1809 was entered in the baptismal register at Westgate Chapel in Wakefield.¹⁶⁷ Even Rodes Milnes at Great Houghton kept the old private Presbyterian chapel open and from 1816 it was an adjunct to the Doncaster Unitarian Chapel.¹⁶⁸ However all this came to an end in 1828 when Robert Pemberton Milnes, having accepted liability for the debts of his brother (totalling £100,000), was forced to the desperate recourse of voluntary exile, taking the whole family for a seven year sojourn in Italy where they could economise without social embarrassment.¹⁶⁸

The expiring of the relationship between the Milnes family and Westgate Chapel was not the only change in the membership of the congregation around 1800. The establishment of a new Independent congregation,

166. Joseph Bowden to Thomas Belsham 6 xii 1811 DWL Mss 24, 107 (16 a & b)

167. For Lucas see Copies of the Inscriptions on the Tombstone in the Burial Ground; Mill Hill Chapel Leeds 1889 in Mill Hill Chapel Mss. for Malleson see H. McLachlan The Unitarian Movement in the Religious Life of England (1934) p. 130; for baptism of Monckton Milnes see Baptismal Register of Westgate Chapel in PRO Non-parochial registers RG4/3704; for the chapel at Houghton Hall see Miall op.cit. pp. 164-5

168. Reid op.cit. p.36

Zion Chapel, in 1783 caused the loss of some families. Relations however remained good - Zion's first minister, Bruce, even preached at Westgate on a few occasions.¹⁶⁹ Some members of the Burrell family conformed to the Church of England, one of their number later becoming the vicar of nearby Stanley. The Naylor's too moved away from Westgate: both John and Jeremiah subscribed to a special chapel fund in 1804 but in these years they increasingly identified themselves with Toryism and the Church of England, becoming stalwarts of the local Pitt club.¹⁷⁰

These changes did not fundamentally affect the property and status of the congregation. Total annual income from subscriptions was not reduced¹⁷¹ and supporters continued to include substantial merchants, professional men, landowners. "The congregation at Wakefield", the Unitarian missionary Richard Wright wrote in 1824, "is deemed one of the most opulent and genteel in Yorkshire".¹⁷² Recalling the 1820s a Wakefield Unitarian wrote: "The congregation at that time was a very numerous and important one, most of the leading families in the town and neighbourhood used to attend at least once on Sundays".¹⁷³

Wakefield was in steady decline as a centre of the woollen industry, especially after the crash of the town's largest firm, the Naylor's, in 1826.¹⁷⁴ However Westgate Chapel continued to include a number of substantial woollen merchants and owners of businesses involved in the cropping,

169. Thomas Chalmers Manuscript History of Westgate Chapel Wakefield in WCL: JG Mss.

170. Obituary of John Naylor in The Wakefield and Halifax Journal 29 i 1830; Henry Clarkson Memories of Merry Wakefield (Wakefield 1889) pp. 47-50.

171. Pew Rent Registers loc.cit.

172. Richard Wright op.cit. p.216

173. H. Clarkson op.cit. p.177

174. Clarkson said that the failure of the local bank, which caused the failure of the Naylor's, "shook the town from end to end, and was a severe blow to its prosperity for many years afterwards". Ibid. p.162. See also R.G. Wilson Gentlemen Merchants: The Merchant Community in Leeds 1700-1830 (Manchester 1971) p.133.

finishing and dying of woollen cloth - Benjamin Heywood, the Holdsworths, Joseph Scott, the Lumbs, William Kendall. Another member John Clarkson owned a scribbling and carding mill, the only factory in the town until the 1820s when other Westgate members Thomas and William Marriott established a worsted spinning factory.¹⁷⁵ Other members in the early 19th century included Henry Briggs, a coalowner;¹⁷⁶ Rowland Hurst, father and son, printers who owned the local newspaper;¹⁷⁷ Thomas Todd, a prosperous Dewsbury wine-merchant;¹⁷⁸ Samuel Marshall, a surgeon;¹⁷⁹ Dr. Disney Alexander, physician to both the Dispensary and the Lunatic Asylum;¹⁸⁰ Benjamin Clarkson, a solicitor with "a small practice of the best class" and clerk to the West Riding Deputy-Lieutenants.¹⁸¹ Some of these businessmen bought or rented substantial houses in the rural hinterland of Wakefield, enabling them to affect some of the styles of the gentry; Benjamin Heywood at Stanley Hall, the Holdsworths at Portobello, Henry Briggs at Overton Lodge, Benjamin Clarkson at Alverthorpe Hall, the Lumbs at Silcoates.

The most influential professional man in the congregation throughout the late 18th and early 19th centuries was John Pemberton Heywood (1755-1835), brother of Benjamin. Educated at Cambridge he was called to the bar, ultimately becoming Senior Barrister on the Northern Circuit. In 1811 he

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175. Ibid. pp. 205-6.
176. D.H. Curren Briggs A Merchant, a Banker and the Coal Trade 1693-1971 (privately printed Dover 1971) pp. 4-5; James W. Davies 'History of the Yorkshire Geological and Polytechnic Society 1837-87...' Proceedings of the Yorkshire Geological and Polytechnic Society new series Vol. X (1889) pp. 60-3.
177. Clarkson op.cit. p. 210; J.W. Walker Wakefield, Its History and People (3rd ed. 1966) Vol. II p. 564 The Wakefield and Halifax Journal 24 x 1823.
178. William Blazeby Dewsbury Memorial: The After Story of the Founding of a Unitarian Mission and the History of Unity Church and its Ministers (1908) pp. 15-16; obituary in The Inquirer 9 i 1864.
179. Clarkson op.cit. p.177.
180. Wakefield and Halifax Journal 27 i 1820; Edward Baines Directory of the County of York (1822) Vol. II p.432.
181. Clarkson op.cit. pp. 8, 65; Walker op.cit. Vol. II p.659.

became a West Riding magistrate, filling the chair at quarter sessions in both Wakefield and Leeds in later years.¹⁸² At the same time he was a man of considerable wealth. His marriage to the daughter of the Manchester industrialist Peter Drinkwater in 1797 brought him a dowry of £10,000 and the same sum four years later on Drinkwater's death. He had substantial landholdings - including a Westmoreland estate, a farm in County Durham, urban land in Liverpool and other land in Lancashire, Cheshire, the East Riding, Nottingham, Huntingdonshire and in Ireland. He was also an extensive shareholder in the Aire and Calder Navigation, had investments in half a dozen other canals and in the Manchester and Sheffield waterworks.¹⁸³

However, overshadowing the congregation were two newcomers to the town, Benjamin and Daniel Gaskell. Born near Manchester in 1781 and 82 respectively, the sons of a merchant and trustee of Cross Street Chapel who died in 1788,¹⁸⁴ they were established in Wakefield as the heirs of their childless uncle James Milnes. In 1805, they inherited his substantial wealth.¹⁸⁵ Benjamin at Thornes House and Daniel at nearby Lupset Hall became wealthy landed gentlemen, rentiers with considerable landholdings in various parts of the country: Benjamin owned the Clifton Estate near Manchester of 178 acres, an estate of several hundred acres near Wigan and various small parcels of land in Yorkshire. In 1808 he bought an estate of over 100 acres at Entwistle.¹⁸⁶ Daniel too, was keen to add to his property. In 1808 he bought an estate of 524 acres at Pennington, near Leigh and in 1813 was urging his solicitor to have overdue rent collected: "we wish much to have it invested in land".¹⁸⁷ However this dependence upon rents sometimes caused problems. Benjamin was making £130 per annum by renting a mill and

182. See obituaries in Wakefield and West Riding Herald 4 xii 1835 and Gents Mag new series Vol. V (1836) p.102; Kate Taylor op.cit. p.64-5. See also portrait of him in the anonymous poem The Bar: with Sketches of Eminent Judges, Barrister etc... (2nd ed. 1826) pp. 149-50.

183. Marriage settlement and will of J.P. Heywood in WCL: JGL.

184. Thomas Baker op.cit. p.89.

185. Will of James Milnes in WCL: JGL

186. Ibid.

187. Ibid. and letter of Daniel Gaskell 20 iv 1813 in same collection.

surrounding premises on Beverley Road in Hull to the Unitarian manufacturer Henry Blundell. However some small tenements nearby on Spring Row were less profitable. The local agent of the Gaskells complained in 1815: "I have had to go or send ten times every half year and having always such a clamor from the Tenants for Repairs etc. that I assure you I was extremely glad to be quit of the job". Two and a half years later the situation was the same: "I go slowly forward in collecting the Rents the Tenants run away and leave me in the Lurch. I go time after time and am no better".¹⁸⁸

Such little local difficulties notwithstanding, the Gaskells were prosperous rentiers - a later Unitarian minister in Wakefield estimated that Daniel Gaskell's annual income was £4,000.¹⁸⁹ This enabled them to play the part of open-handed benefactors. Benjamin was the major financial contributor to the erection of the Anglican Church of St. James at Thornes in 1829. The birth of his son in 1810 led him to regale the whole village with roast beef, mutton and strong ale.¹⁹⁰ Daniel Gaskell too gave financial support to the Church of England and was a prodigiously liberal supporter of local charities - he was said to have spent £5000 on education alone in Horbury.¹⁹¹ Both were also members of parliament, as a later chapter will detail.

The final touch of gentility was added to Westgate Chapel by the membership of Lady Galway: the only child of Pemberton Milnes, after the death of her second husband Lord Galway in 1810, she divided her time between her father's old house on Westgate and an estate at Bawtry until her death in 1835. She bequeathed a small fund for "decayed adherents"

188. Rodmell to John Carr (solicitor to the Gaskells) 16 vi 1815 and 11 x 1817, loc.cit.

189. See The Inquirer 1 i 1876 p.94

190. Walker op.cit. Vol. I p.305

191. See The Inquirer 1 i 1876 p.13. See also Taylor op.cit. pp. 18-19

of Westgate and £300 as the nucleus of an endowment fund - and dying childless rescued her nephew and heir Robert Pemberton Milnes from his exile in Italy.¹⁹²

Conversely the working class were hardly represented in Westgate Chapel. As the minister Johnstone wrote to the Yorkshire Tract Society in 1820: "so few comparatively of that humble class of Christians, who are readers of the Tracts, and to whom they would be most useful, belong to the congregation there, that little hope can be entertained of any able support of the Tract Society".¹⁹³

iv) LEEDS. As in the late 18th century, so in the early 19th century, the relationship between Mill Hill and Call Lane Chapels was close - indeed in 1797 the latter was described by a local directory as "a Chapel belonging to the Presbyterians".¹⁹⁴ Increasingly, however, as the latter gradually declined it became an adjunct of Mill Hill Chapel. A local directory of 1808 observed that Call Lane Chapel was "very disadvantageously situated in a very narrow street", though it went on to note that the congregation was "composed of persons of the first respectability".¹⁹⁵ Annual subscriptions in that year amounted to £120 but in subsequent years this was never overtaken and by the 1820s had fallen to little over £80 a year.¹⁹⁶ Increasingly old Call Lane families like the Luptons, the Darntons, the Bischoffs had a dual allegiance or drifted to Mill Hill. By the end of the 1840s the old Arians were said to be "as good as extinct" and the congregation became Baptist.¹⁹⁷

192. Clarkson op.cit. p.45; Chalmers op.cit.; Gents. Mag. new series Vol. IV (1835) p.666; Wemyss Reid op.cit. p.38.

193. The Fifth Report of A Religious Tract Society, In the West Riding of the County of York (1820) p.3

194. J. Ryley A History of the Town and Parish of Leeds... (Leeds 1797) p.6.

195. The Leeds Guide: giving a concise history of that rich and populous town, the circumjacent villages and Kirkstall Abbey (Leeds 1808) p.36

196. For details of annual subscriptions to Call Lane Chapel see Papers of William Lupton and Co. VII/131 in Special Collections, Brotherton Library, University of Leeds.

197. R.J. Owen 'General Baptist Beginnings in Leeds 1840-50' Baptist Quarterly Vol. XXIII No. 7 (1970) pp. 307,9.

Mill Hill Chapel, by contrast, was thriving. A local Unitarian reported in 1817: "The congregation is still in a flourishing state, the chapel large and commodious, two Sunday Schools one for each sex are attached. The richer members are very respectable and ready to come forward on all occasions, and amongst the middle and town classes a considerable spirit of religious enquiry and desire for information exists".¹⁹⁸ Four years later a visiting minister noted: "I see new faces at Mill Hill Chapel every time I preach there and everything bears testimony to the efficacy of our friend's ministrations".¹⁹⁹ Success continued and by the mid-1830s it was paying its minister £400 per annum, among the half dozen highest paid Unitarian ministers in Britain.

Among the trustees in the early 19th century²⁰⁰ were: William Walker of Killingbeck, merchant and partner in Beckett's Bank, and his son Thomas; several members of the Oates family, including Josiah Oates and Son, cloth merchants, George Oates merchant and Frederick Oates, solicitor and insurance agent; James Fenton, glass manufacturer and coalowner; John Marshall, flax spinner and one of the largest industrialists in the West Riding; several members of the Stansfeld family, cloth merchants; Charles Coupland, solicitor; Maurice Logan MD, physician; Thomas William Tottie, solicitor, professional agent of County landowners, advisor to the Trustees of both the Coloured and White Cloth Halls in Leeds and political confidante

198. John Thompson to Lant Carpenter 1 xii 1817 printed in 'Record Section' of TUHS Vol. X No. 1 (Oct. 1951) pp. 27,8

199. John Kenrick to George William Wood 29 x 1821 MCO.

200. Listed in Mill Hill Chapel Minute Book 1771-1858 in Vestry of Mill Hill Chapel Leeds. Additional information culled from local directories and R.G. Wilson 'Gentlemen Merchants'. For the Marshalls see W.G. Rimmer Marshalls of Leeds, Flax-spinners 1788-1886 (Cambridge 1960) For the Stansfelds see John Stansfeld History of the Family of Stansfeld of Stansfeld in the Parish of Halifax & its Numerous Branches (Leeds 1885). For Tottie see R.V. Taylor The Biographia Leodiensis; or Biographical Sketches of the Worthies of Leeds and its Neighbourhood... (1865) pp. 486-8.

of Earl Fitzwilliam; Thomas Benyon, merchant, partner of John Marshall and landowner; John Williams, Hunslet woollen manufacturer; William Fretwell, grocer, tea-dealer and hop-merchant; Edward Grace, merchant and oil-dealer; Thomas Read, gentleman; John Metcalf, excise man; David Farrar, dyer. Also among the members were Francis Carbutt merchant; James Buckton, flax manufacturer; John Hebblewaite, a clothier who became a merchant and made a fortune in partnership with the Rhodes family; John Luccock, woollen merchant; John Talbot, assistant editor of the 'Leeds Mercury'; Benjamin Hird M.D., physician to the Leeds Infirmary and the surgeons Josiah Stansfield and Benjamin Musgrave.²⁰¹

"Enjoying education, commonly occupying the more opulent ranks of life",²⁰² as a Leeds Independent minister said of them in 1831, the Mill Hill congregation was a significant focus of wealth and influence in early 19th century Leeds. A visitor in 1853 "found a respectable looking congregation, scarce one of the lower order".²⁰³ Many of these men were the sons and grandsons of Mill Hill members and trustees and were - as in the case of Manchester Unitarians - bound together by a complex network of interlocking family relationships and business partnerships - Oates, Luptons, Bucktons, Luccocks, Darntons, Bischoffs, Walkers, Totties, Stansfelds and others were interwoven into a cohesive community by marriages across several generations. Yet these were often also men with a much broader knowledge of the world than the norm in this period. John Luccock, for instance, was the agent for his firm (in partnership with the Luptons) in Brazil between 1808 and 18 and wrote a book about the experience.²⁰⁴ Arthur Lupton had lived in both France and the United States.²⁰⁵ Francis Carbutt - a partner

201. Details of other members in Minute Book and inscriptions on tombs (see note 167 above)

202. R.W. Hamilton The Religionists, Designating themselves Unitarians not entitled to the Christian Name... (1831) p.69

203. Anonymous diary MPL: M70/6/2

204. R.V. Taylor op.cit. pp. 305-6.

205. C.A. Lupton The Lupton Family in Leeds (Ripon, no date) p.39

of Hamer Stansfeld - was from 1812 to 39 an agent for Leeds firms in Europe.²⁰⁶ This gave them a breadth of culture which contrasted with the narrow philistinism of provincial nonconformity or the uneducated and untravelled small capitalist. A Unitarian minister spoke of George Oates on his death in 1824 as a representative of this "dying breed": "the well trained systematic merchant, accomplished in the knowledge of foreign countries and foreign languages".²⁰⁷

Wealth too brought other trappings of refinement such as fine mansions in their own grounds on the edge of town or set in parkland in the surrounding countryside. Different members of the Oates family had small estates in the early 19th century - Joseph Henry at Oatlands, George at Carr House, Edward at Meanwoodside. Nicholas Bischoff had a mansion at Headingley. Close by another Unitarian merchant, Thomas Benyon, had a substantial estate of nearly 450 acres. As well as two farms bringing in rents of nearly £600 per annum this had a fine wooded park of 180 acres and an early 17th century Palladian mansion with nine bed chambers, a library, ornamented ceilings, extensive cellars and accommodation for ten horses and four carriages; there was also a terrace walk from which "a panorama is presented which must be seen to be duly appreciated; there is so much of hill and dale, such a delightful irregularity in the Park, such variety and beauty in the distant Prospect, while the intermediate space is occupied by quiet rural Villages in the Valley, appearing in all their unpretending simplicity and character".²⁰⁸

Benyon's neighbour at Headingley was John Marshall, the most powerful individual in the Mill Hill congregation. Born in 1765 the son of Jeremiah Marshall, linen manufacturer and Mill Hill trustee, his meteoric rise to

206. Derek Fraser Politics in Leeds 1830-52 (University of Leeds Ph.D. thesis 1969) p.531.

207. John Kenrick to G.W. Wood 9 i 1825 MCO.

208. Particulars of the Sale of New Grange Estate: October 1829 - copy in Local History Collection of Leeds Reference Library.

wealth provided a rare exemplar for the Smilesian myth of the new entrepreneur; as his obituary put it, he "began life with very small means, but by his ingenuity and industry, exercised continuously for upwards of half a century, he succeeded in amassing landed and personal property, amounting it is believed, to at least a million and a half sterling".²⁰⁹ This enormous wealth came from his pioneering the mechanisation of flax spinning and the development of a massive factory in Holbeck which by the 1850s was employing 2500 people.²¹⁰ Marshall invested extensively in land in the Lake District and from the early 1820s spent a good part of each year on his Hallsteads estate, at the head of Ullswater.²¹¹ He also had a fashionable town house in London's West End where he entertained lavishly. "The house", Carlyle recalled, "was resplendent, not gaudy or offensive, with wealth and its fruits and furnishings; the dinners large and splendidly served; guests of distinction (especially on the Whig or Radical side) were to be met with there, and a good sprinkling of promising younger people of the same, or a superior type".²¹² As well as being able to patronise writers and young politicians - he bought Carlyle's first horse, gave Wordsworth the use of his carriage during the poet's regular London sojourns, he helped the young Thomas Babington Macaulay - Marshall's wealth, his social position as both major industrialist and substantial landed gentleman and his dissenting loyalties enabled him to become a figure of political influence, as a later chapter will specify.

209. Obituary in Gents Mag. new series Vol. XXIV (1845) pp. 201-2.

See also R.V. Taylor op.cit. p.412

210. Rimmer op.cit. passim. See detailed description of the Marshall Mills in T. Fenteman An Historical Guide to Leeds and its Environs... (Leeds 1858) pp. 29-30.

211. Arthur Booth 'A Lakeland Jekyll and Hyde' Cumbria Vol. 16 No. 2 (May 1966) p.71. Dorothy Wordsworth and Marshall's wife were friends since childhood, and Wordsworth's letters contain a number of references to Marshall's Cumberland estates. See The Letters of William & Dorothy Wordsworth: the Middle Years (Oxford 1937) Vol. 1 p. 144,147,351-2, 367-9; Vol. II p. 791; also ibid: The Later Years (Oxford 1939) Vol. II pp. 636,666.

212. Thomas Carlyle Reminiscences ed. C.E. Norton (new ed.1972) p.121. See also G.O. Trevelyan The Life and Letters of Lord Macaulay (Popular ed. 1889) pp.149,157.

v) NEWCASTLE-UPON-TYNE

Hanover Square Chapel may have lost its wealthiest adherents in the 1780s as Ralph Carr, the Aireys, John Widdington, the Cooksons, drifted away from rational dissent and the urban middle class into the county squirearchy. And against several other names in the 1782 Register of members - the Yellowley family, Matthew Carr, the Rogerson family - Turner has later scribbled "left the Meeting".²¹³ Yet new men of influence took their place in the early 19th century. James Losh for instance, coming to the town in 1799, became a figure of importance. From a landed Cumberland family, educated at Trinity College Cambridge and then called to the bar, he was a habitue of radical circles in the London of the 1790s becoming a friend of both Whig political leaders like Lord Grey and Tierney and of writers such as Coleridge, Wordsworth and Southey.²¹⁴ His Newcastle practice as a barrister made him one of the wealthiest Unitarians in Newcastle - he also had a substantial investment in several coal mines, and in a Hexham Brewery. His income in 1812 was, for instance, £2,600: £1400 from legal fees, £1000 from his mining investments and £200 from interest on capital.²¹⁵ From 1814 - through the good offices of such political friends as Samuel Romilly and Henry Brougham - he acted as Receiver of the extensive Tempest estates in County Durham which brought in a further £500 per annum.²¹⁶ With good family connections among the Whig gentry and a gentleman's cultivation and with friends among the

213. Register of the Minister and People who regularly assemble in Hanover Square Chapel, Newcastle 1782 in Hanover Square Mss.

214. The most detailed memoir of Losh and his family is in Henry Lonsdale The Worthies of Cumberland (1873) Vol. IV p.141ff. and esp. pp. 186-96. See also 'A Memoir of the late James Losh' appended to William Turner A Sermon preached on October 6th 1833 in Hanover Square Chapel, Newcastle, on occasion of the late lamented death of James Losh, Esq. (Newcastle 1833) pp. 21-30.

215. The Diaries and Correspondence of James Losh Vol. I
The Surtees Society Vol. CLXXI (1956) pp. 18-19

216. Ibid. pp. 33-4.

dissenters and radicals in Newcastle, Losh was strategically placed as a political man of business for the Whigs - a service which at length brought him the position of Recorder of Newcastle. Losh's uncle, Joseph Liddell was until his death in 1820 also linked to the congregation. Like Losh born into the Cumberland gentry and educated at Trinity College, he became a coalowner and a Unitarian in late 18th century Newcastle, retiring to the family estate at Moorhouse.²¹⁷ "Several of this assembly", Turner told his congregation, "have in their admiring recollection an aged and much revered friend, who, though from the distance of his general abode, incapable of being a regular member with us, was yet in former years...a devout fellow-worshipper in this house of prayer, and an attentive hearer of the word here preached".²¹⁸ Liddell was a generous supporter of Unitarianism: in 1820, for instance, he gave £100 to the Unitarian Fund.²¹⁹

The death of Dr. John Clark in 1805 removed the town's most influential doctor but there were always medical men in the congregation. In the early years of the 19th century Dr. John Ramsey and Dr. Stephenson were pew-renters.²²⁰ From the 1820s a young rising medical man Dr. Thomas Greenhow was a member of the chapel. He built up a large practice, was successful enough to buy one of the fashionable new mansions in Eldon Square and was elected a surgeon to the Infirmary in 1832. He played an important role in development of medical education and higher education in the North East, eventually becoming professor of Medical Ethics at Durham

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217. See brief biography in A.R. Laws Schola Novocastriensis: A Biographical History of the Royal Free Grammar School of Newcastle-upon-Tyne (Newcastle 1932) Vol. I p.64. See also Venn Alumni.
218. W. Turner A Sermon preached at the Chapel in Hanover Square Newcastle on 30th March 1820 on Occasion of the Death of Joseph Liddell Esq., of Moorpark, Cumberland... (Newcastle 1820) p.11.
219. See Rules of the Unitarian Fund, Established 1806: To which are added a Statement of the Society's Accounts and a List of Subscribers for 1820 and 21 (Hackney, no date) p.11.
220. Hanover Square Chapel Book, Containing the Account of Pew Rents as Collected Quarterly (1807-20) in Hanover Square Mss.

University.²²¹ As the following table shows professional men made up a substantial grouping in Hanover Square chapel.

OCCUPATIONS OF MEMBERS OF HANOVER SQUARE CHAPEL, NEWCASTLE 1805-35 222

PROFESSIONAL	13	barrister; 2 solicitors; 3 physicians; 2 surgeons; 4 newspaper editors & publishers; mining engineer
MERCHANTS & MANUFACTURERS	18	lead & chemical manufacturer; sugar refiner & banker; sugar-refiner & merchant; chemical manufacturer; 2 coal-fitters; 2 shipbuilders; ship & insurance broker; 3 corn factors; shipowner; 2 coal-owners; insurance agent; timber merchant & insurance agent; manufacturing chemist & druggist
GENTLEMEN	1	
SCHOOLMASTERS	4	
SMALL DEALERS RETAILERS	9	bookseller; stationer & tea-dealer; brewer; music & instrument dealer; bookseller & printer; druggist; 3 booksellers; printer & engraver

221. R. Welford Men of Mark 'Twixt Tyne & Tweed (1895) Vol. II pp. 330-6; C.A. Lupton op.cit. pp. 71-8; Robert Spence Watson The History of the Literary and Philosophical Society of Newcastle-upon-Tyne; 1793-1896 (1897) pp. 261-71.
222. Unfortunately the baptismal registers - in PRO Non-parochial registers RG4/1777 - do not give occupations. The listing here is compiled by cross-referencing names and addresses in Chapel registers with other sources. A substantial number of smaller subscribers cannot in this way be positively identified though, without doubt, they were largely small dealers, craftsmen, shopkeepers. The wealthiest and most influential figures in the congregation can be easily identified however. Welford, for instance - op.cit. Vol. II pp.454-5 - lists twenty or so leading members and their occupations of the early 19th century and these can be traced in chapel registers on the one hand and in secondary sources, trade directories, and so on, on the other. See also R. Welford The Church and Congregation of the Divine Unity, Newcastle: Their Origin and Development: a Lecture (Newcastle 1904) pp. 53-6 and Joan Knott 'The Vestry Library of the Hanover Square Unitarian Chapel, Newcastle-upon-Tyne' in Library History Vol. I No. 5 (Spring 1969) pp. 161-2. The following directories were used: The Newcastle and Gateshead Directory for 1795 (William Hilton, Newcastle 1795); Mitchell's Directory, for the year 1801, of the Town and County of Newcastle-upon-Tyne and Places Adjacent (Newcastle 1801); A General Directory for Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Gateshead and Places Adjacent, 1824 (Newcastle 1824); Pigot's Northumberland Directory (Newcastle 1834); Directory of the Towns of Newcastle-upon-Tyne & Gateshead for 1838 (M.A. Richardson, Newcastle 1838). Also useful was Register of the Names of Persons entitled to Vote for the Borough of Newcastle-upon-Tyne (1832) - this is afterwards cited as Voters Register 1832.

Commercial men and manufacturers, involved in Newcastle's considerable trade as a port and a market centre for the whole region, also figured prominently among the larger pew-renters in Hanover Square Chapel. There were several coal-fitters, ship-brokers, corn-factors, merchants and shipbuilders. The firm Losh, Wilson and Bell - incorporating two of Losh's brothers and two Newcastle Unitarians Thomas Bell and Thomas Wilson²²³ - were involved in coal-fitting, in a lead works and in an alkali works, the two latter at Walker. Several other members were involved in these developing industries. George Burnett, for instance, owned a patent lead-shot manufacturing firm in Newcastle and then in the 1830s, in partnership with another member Hugh Lee Pattinson, set up a chemical works at Felling.²²⁴ The Allhusens - cornfactors and general merchants - also diversified into chemical production.²²⁵ They induced the future captain of the Teeside iron and steel industry, Henry Bolckow, to come to Newcastle from their native Mecklenburg and join them as a general commission merchant in 1827 and a Mr. Bolckow figures as a subscriber to Hanover Square Chapel in the late 1820s and early 1830s.²²⁶ John Buddle the famous mining engineer and agent for Lord Londonderry had links with the congregation: though beginning without capital he built up a considerable involvement in coal-mining, shipping and railway stock and was worth £150,000 on his death.²²⁷

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223. Bell, brought up on one of the Losh farms in Cumberland, was brought to Newcastle as a clerk at the Walker Works and in 1809 became a junior partner - he was father of Isaac Lowthian Bell; see Lonsdale op.cit. Vol. IV pp. 173-4 and n. Wilson, a coal-miner turned schoolmaster entered the Losh counting-house in 1803 and became a working partner two years later - he also wrote interesting dialect poetry: see the volume Obituary Notices of Thomas Wilson (Gateshead 1858) and DNB.
224. See for Burnett and Pattinson DNB of latter; Extra-Mural Studies Dept., University of Newcastle The Old Tyneside Chemical Trade (Newcastle 1965) p.21; For Pattinson Lonsdale op.cit. Vol. IV pp. 273-320; For Burnett Obituaries of some of the more distinguished members of the Literary and Philosophical Society of Newcastle noticed in the reports of the committee of the society between the years 1844-51 ed. J. Fenwick (Newcastle 1857) p.8 and Voters Register 1832 pp. 46 and 71.
225. R. Welford Church and Congregation of Divine Unity etc. (1904) pp. 55-6; Hanover Sq. Mss; Voters Register pp. 53 and 69.
226. Ron Gott Henry Bolckow, Founder of Teesside (Middlesborough 1968) pp. 19-20; Hanover Square Mss.

The most remarkable presence in Hanover Square Chapel was the number of men involved in printing, publishing and bookselling. The town's liberal-radical newspapers in the early 19th century - the 'Newcastle Chronicle' and the 'Tyne Mercury' were both owned, edited and printed by members of the chapel - the Hodgsons²²⁸ and the Mitchells respectively.²²⁹ Both also - along with a third member John Marshall²³⁰ - were involved in printing books and tracts, including much Unitarian material. Throughout the 1820s the Mitchells produced the 'Newcastle Magazine' and Marshall set up a short-lived competitor the 'Northern Reformer's Monthly Magazine' in 1823. In addition there were several other Unitarian printers and booksellers, including Emerson Charnley - "the veteran emperor of Northumbrian booksellers" as he was called in 1834.²³¹

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227. DNB; Henry Barrass Jnr. 'Local Portrait Gallery IV: John Buddle' in The Northern Tribune Vol. I (Newcastle 1854) pp. 321-6; R. Welford and J.C. Hodgson 'Biographies of Contributors to the Society's Literature' in Archaeological Aeliana 3rd series Vol. X (1913) pp. 119-21.
228. Welford Men of Mark etc. Vol. II pp. 543-55; C.J. Hunt The Book Trade in Northumberland and Durham to 1860: a Biographical Dictionary (Newcastle 1975) p.50.
229. Welford Men of Mark etc. Vol. III p.191ff; M. Milne 'The Tyne Mercury and Parliamentary Reform 1802-46' in Northern History XIV (1978) esp. pp. 288-9; C.J. Hunt op.cit. pp. 67-8.
230. Hunt op.cit. p.65; R.W. Hetherington Newcastle Fifty Years Ago (c. 1883: bound volume of cuttings in the Library of Newcastle Literary and Philosophical Society) p.87. From 1800 Marshall was also librarian to the Literary and Philosophical Society but his uncompromising radicalism led to his dismissal in 1817 and revealed the unwillingness of his fellow-Unitarians to have any truck with popular radical movements see The Reports, Paper, Catalogues etc. of Newcastle Literary and Philosophical Society collected by Anthony Hedley, in Library of the Society; Vol. 6 (1814-16) and 7 (1817-19) no page numbers.
231. Hunt op.cit. pp. 21-2; Welford Men of Mark etc. Vol. I pp. 541-3; Hetherington op.cit. p. 82,3; Voters Register 1832 p.82.

A considerable part of the congregation in these years consisted of shopkeepers, small dealers, artisans, clerks and so on - the strata between capitalists and unpropertied labourers. However it was these interlocking circles of professional men/merchants and manufacturers/publishers and printers which gave the Unitarian chapel its influence in local affairs and made it, since many of them were enthusiastic pedagogues, "a conspicuous constellation in the literary firmament of Tyneside".²³²

III

Manchester, Hull, Wakefield, Leeds and Newcastle-upon-Tyne - five very different types of social and economic structure and in each case the Unitarian congregation reflected something of the urban context in which it was set. At Manchester, where by the 1830s mechanisation of cotton production was far advanced, there were a number of the largest industrialists within the Unitarian congregation, newcomers to the town, alongside the older merchants and professional men. At Leeds factory production in the woollen industry was slower to emerge and Mill Hill Chapel shows the continued predominance of old merchant families - though giants of industrialisation such as John Marshall and, in mid-century, James Kitson were drawn into the congregation. Wakefield was in decline as a centre of woollen production and becoming more of a county town and Westgate Chapel in the early 19th century - while it included old woollen merchants, new worsted manufacturers like the Marriotts and coalowners - also partook of this character with the predominance of the Gaskells,

232. Welford Men of Mark etc. Vol. II p.455

rentiers and gentlemen. Hull, isolated in rural East Yorkshire, profitted as a port by national economic development but socially remained more traditional and conservative - here Bowl Alley Lane included a number of professional men and merchants, one of the town's few substantial manufacturers Henry Blundell, but there were no new liberal industrialists to invigorate declining rational dissent. Finally Newcastle-upon-Tyne's Hanover Square Chapel included the usual proportion of doctors, solicitors, the merchants and manufacturers of any thriving port and market-centre but also a remarkable number of people involved in the production and distribution of newspapers, books and tracts - reflecting perhaps the degree to which Newcastle-upon-Tyne was the intellectual capital of a whole region stretching from the North Riding to the Cumberland coast and the Scottish borders. While each congregation included a number of different social groups it is clear that their central core came from the middle classes- social strata clearly demarcated from both the gentry and aristocracy on the one hand and the working class, the illiterate labouring poor on the other.

In the larger context, Unitarianism was most successful in the commercial centres of industrial areas such as Manchester, Birmingham, Leeds, Sheffield and Nottingham. In rural England it was markedly absent. In some of the older declining centres Unitarian congregations were in decline. In 1832 Crabb Robinson noted the decline of the old Octagon Chapel in Norwich: "Congregation very small - splendour of the old Octagon is gone - many families are dead or have left N. is the explanation given, but why no new ones?"²³³ At Exeter too the Unitarian congregation suffered from the economic stagnation of the town and in the 1830s was struggling to

233. Quoted in R.K. Webb Harriet Martineau: A Radical Victorian (1960) p.56.

pay the minister's salary. When Kenrick applied there for financial support for the Unitarian College at York he was briskly informed: "the North of England has taken away the trade from the West and therefore to the North we must look for the support of Dissenting Institutions".²³⁴

In London Unitarianism was weak and fragmented. There were a few strong congregations in the early 19th century - notably Aspland's at Hackney and Belsham's on Essex Street. In 1824 a new chapel was launched by a wealthy barrister called Agar. He rented an old chapel in St. James's Square and hired many of the most noted Unitarian preachers of the day to give lectures.²³⁵ In 1827 Dr. Henry Holland reported its future as "doubtful": "It has not been so much a congregation, as a gathering together of people by advertisement, papers on the Chapel door, and the promise of doctrinal sermons". Numbers attending had gradually declined.²³⁶

Holland's prognosis proved wrong. In 1833 the congregation moved into a new chapel on Little Portland Street and under the ministry of Edward Tagart attracted a number of substantial adherents - including in 1843 and 44 Charles Dickens.²³⁷ Under Martineau's ministry from 1858 members included successive American ambassadors, the geologist Sir Charles Lyell, various Wedgewoods, the poet Sir Lewis Morris and France Power Cobbe; Gladstone, Lord John Russell, Darwin and George Eliot were also occasional hearers.²³⁸

Yet this kind of audience of luminaries - like that of Lindsey three generations earlier - was transient and accidental. Elsewhere in London rational dissenting congregations with an impressive past struggled to survive.

234. See Kenrick to G.W. Wood 1 ix 1833 and 31 xi 1833 MCO where he cites his correspondence with the Exeter Unitarian, Kennaway.

235. No Author 'A Brief History of the Unitarian Congregation, York Street Chapel' in CR Vol. XIX (1933) pp. 530, 536

236. Henry Holland to William Turner 20 ix 1827 Turner Mss in Newcastle Literary & Philosophical Society.

237. See A.L. Drummond The Churches in English Fiction (Leicester 1950) p.245

238. H.S. Perris A Sketch of the History of Little Portland Street Chapel London (1900) pp. 24-5.

After preaching in Prince's Street Chapel in Westminster in 1809 Aspland noted in his diary: "Congregation very thin. It must spoil a preacher to have to do with such a handful of hearers".²³⁹ In 1817 Belsham observed of the Walthamstow Old Meeting: "it is cold and comfortless preaching to bare walls: and I fear that there is little hope of enlarging the congregation".²⁴⁰ Once patronised by wealthy city merchants and local gentry, so that its court-yard was crowded with carriages each Sunday, it faded to nothing and by the end of the 1820s was closed up.²⁴¹ James Lindsay's Monkwell Street Chapel, always small, did not long survive his death in 1820. Chapels at Carter Lane, Newington Green and Hampstead in the 1830s and 40s were regularly gathering congregations of only between a dozen and thirty.²⁴² London Unitarianism contrasted unfavourably with that of the North, as Unitarians were quick to point out. Martineau observed in 1839:

"Is it altogether a local prejudice which leads them to imagine, that in these manufacturing and commercial parts, the true Non-con spirit maintains itself in greater vigour than in London, and connects itself naturally with the qualities which raise men to influence in such towns as Manchester and Liverpool? It has always appeared to me, that our body in London exists in a somewhat disorganised state, and is composed largely of accidental elements, contributed mainly by the country...and that the sacrifice of money and time, requisite for the energetic maintenance of voluntary institutions, are necessarily more foreign to London than to provincial habits".²⁴³

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239. Quoted in R.B. Aspland Memoir...of Robert Aspland (1850) p.228
240. Thomas Belsham to John Kenrick Jan. 1817 in DWL Mss 24, 107 (6)
241. Henry Solly These Eighty Years, or, the story of an unfinished life (1893) Vol. I. p.54
242. Ibid. p.324; George Kenrick Divine and Human Aids in the Christian Ministry, and the Studies preparatory to it, thankfully acknowledged: A Farewell Discourse (1845), Appendix p.6.
243. Quoted in Drummond and Upton op.cit. Vol. I pp. 108-9.

However it would be wrong to postulate too simple a relationship between Unitarian congregations and the early 19th century industrial middle classes. Clearly a vast proportion of the latter were inimical to Unitarianism. In rapidly developing industrial towns in the West Riding like Bradford, Huddersfield and Halifax, Unitarian congregations were marginal. At Huddersfield there was no Unitarian congregation in the town until the 1840s though there was a small chapel at Lydgate nearby.²⁴⁴ At Bradford the old Presbyterian chapel struggled to survive as a Unitarian centre in the early 19th century and was almost wholly sustained by the Dawson family, ironmasters and landowners around Low Moor and Idle. A visitor in 1837 noted in her diary: "The congregation consists of only about four families, with the exception of a few poor people".²⁴⁵ The Northgate End Chapel at Halifax was stronger. Its members in the early 19th century included the physician Richard Moulson, James Stansfield a solicitor and subsequently a County Judge, the town's bankers the Briggs family as well as a handful of stuff merchants (the Kershaws, the Swaines). Yet it was still small; subscriptions raised only £75 in 1820 and gradually declined to around £55 by the 1840s.²⁴⁶

The social and economic environment can only go some way in explaining the specific character of Unitarian congregations in this period. There were always more complex and unique processes at work. At Newcastle-upon-Tyne, for instance, it was the individual attributes of the minister William Turner - in his quiet manner probably the most exemplary Unitarian minister of the period - which had much to do with making his chapel a

245. Quoted in A.K. Jacques Merrie Wakefield: (based on the diaries of Clara Clarkson (1811-89) of Alverthorpe Hall, Wakefield) (Wakefield 1971) p.89

246. Pew-rent Register of Northgate End Chapel Halifax NEC/51 in Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Libraries, Archives Department. See also F.E. Millson Two Hundred Years of Northgate End Chapel 1696-1896: A Sketch (Halifax 1896) pp 38-9 for list of chapel trustees.

magnet for young tradesmen - printers, booksellers, schoolmasters - with intellectual aspirations. In the following two chapters I want to take a detour into some of the more specific internal processes within Unitarian denominational life before coming back to the active role of Unitarians in the cultural and political life of the towns of Northern England.

5. MANCHESTER COLLEGE, YORK 1803-40: AN EARLY 19TH CENTURY UNITARIAN ACADEMY.

Joshua Toulmin observed in 1815: "Formerly, a school terminated the education of all, but those intended for professions, or of young men of great expectations; it still does of a large number amongst ourselves, and still more generally among the orthodox Dissenters".¹ However there were a significant number of Unitarians who wanted their sons educated for the professions or given some kind of higher education. This was an awkward problem for Unitarian fathers: how to educate their sons in the norms of their social standing without at the same time having them educated away from Unitarianism.

This was the danger with Oxford and Cambridge Universities. These were not closed to Unitarians, or dissenters in general. Oxford was the stricter, demanding subscription to particular doctrines on matriculation. At Cambridge, however, subscription was only called for on taking a degree. There were tensions in some cases but usually a Unitarian student could go through his course with minimal compromise. The less than liberal Isaac Milner told Wilberforce in 1805 that he had known a number of dissenters at Cambridge: "I never heard of the smallest inconvenience or difficulty they were put to, nor of any rudeness they met with".² With rare exceptions Unitarians were sent to Cambridge. Sometimes they were assiduous students but at the end of their three years refused to subscribe to the 39 Articles and thus were given no degree. This was the case with the Manchester Unitarian James Heywood, at Trinity College Cambridge from 1829. A subsequent Fellow of both the Royal Society and the Geographical Society,

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1. Joshua Toulmin in a letter to the MR in 1815, reprinted in William Turner Warrington Academy (new edition 1957) p.86. An earlier version of this chapter will appear in The Journal of Educational Administration & History in the course of 1982.
 2. The Correspondence of William Wilberforce ed. R.I. & S. Wilberforce (1840) Vol. II pp. 46-7.

active in the Manchester Statistical Society, a President of the London Statistical Society, on the senate of London University - he afterwards got his revenge by moving in the Commons in 1856 the successful repeal of religious tests at Cambridge for law, medicine and music degrees.³ Another Unitarian Cambridge student who scrupled to conform for his degree was Thomas Solly, at Caius College between 1836 and 38: he subsequently became a lecturer at Berlin University and the author of a number of philosophical works.⁴ Many others were less scrupulous. John Carter, for instance, entered Trinity College in 1806 - the first of his family of Portsmouth Unitarians to do so. His refusal to attend chapel caused a brief conflict but the college authorities allowed him this freedom: Carter even, by virtue of a few nominal conformities, became a Fellow of the College before moving into a parliamentary career.⁵ Others too found no difficulty in making a few nominal doctrinal compromises while remaining Unitarians - among them David Jones, former tutor at Hackney Academy and Unitarian minister at Birmingham New Meeting 1792-5, who graduated from Caius College in 1800, becoming a barrister.⁶

Yet it was precisely the easy-going religious tolerance of Cambridge which others warned against since it covertly drew the young Unitarian into deeper compromises. In 1812 Frennd noted that the effect of Cambridge's liberalism was to assimilate the individual dissenter into a different cultural order: "Cambridge is open to all sects; and the sons of dissenters of wealth frequently go thither, to the no small advantage of the established sect; as very few frequent the meeting-house, after they have gone through the DISCIPLINE of the University".⁷ Coleridge,

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3. For biographical data on Heywood see Venn Alumni, and obituary in The Journal of the Royal Statistical Society (1898) pp. 118-19.
 4. DNB; obituary in The Times 16 vi 1875
 5. Victor Bonham Carter In a Liberal Tradition: A Social Biography 1700-1950 (1960) p. 23ff.
 6. Venn Alumni
 7. MR VII (1812) p.717

during his Unitarian phase, also saw the effect of the whole Cambridge ethos in dissolving some of the pivotal supports of radical dissent: "one thing they will learn -- Indifference to all Religions but the Religion of the Gentleman ... with the young men at Oxford and Cambridge "the Gentleman" is the all-implying Word of Honor -- a thing more blasting to real Virtue, real Utility, real Standing forth for the Truth in Christ, than all the Whoredoms and Impurities which this Gentlemanliness does most generally bring with it". Coleridge went on to argue that it was quite improper for dissenters to send their sons to be educated by Anglicans: "The education which Dissenters receive among Dissenters, generates Conscientiousness and a scrupulous Turn / will this be gained at the Wine Parties at Cambridge?" ⁸

The Scottish Universities offered an alternative. However, though many Unitarians spent some time in a Scottish University, especially Glasgow, this was only a partial solution. Unlike the English Universities, the Scottish had no college discipline: the students lived in lodgings and simply attended crowded lectures as they chose. Moreover the Scottish University year was very short, no more than six months, and the students came from all social strata. ⁹ Toulmin warned parents in 1815 of the dangers of sending their sons to a "land of strangers" where they were free: "to associate with the promiscuous crowd ... far from the sight of all whose authority might have influence over him". ¹⁰

In its years at York between 1803 and 40, Manchester College tried to fill precisely this gap. It attempted to construct an education which fulfilled the needs of the wealthy elite of Unitarianism - both socially selective and yet intellectually liberal, preparing young men for their

8. Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge ed. E.L. Griggs (Oxford 1956) Vol. I pp. 577-8.

9. See E. Ashby and M. Anderson The Rise of the Student Estate in Britain (1970) pp 2-3, 5.

10. Toulmin op.cit. p.68

future roles as businessmen and cultured gentleman, reinforcing their hereditary religious dissent. The College also served another purpose - the training of Unitarian ministers. This was a problem. "Where are we to find young men, whose parents are at the same time able to incur the needful expence, and willing that their sons should be educated to the profession of a Christian teacher?" William Turner asked in 1800.¹¹ The particular character of the Unitarian ministry will be examined in the next chapter - enough to say here that the Unitarian ministry was not an attractive career for wealthy Unitarians while those for whom it was an attractive option were unable to afford the expense of a full-time education up to the age of 21 or so. Manchester College, York thus served two functions - to subsidise the training of ministers through offering an expensive higher education to prosperous laymen. In this it was unique among early 19th century dissenting academies. There were several Independent Academies (Hoxton, Homerton, Rotherham, Idle, Blackburn, Axminster and Newport-Pagnell) and four Baptist Academies (Bristol, Bradford, Stepney, Abergavenny) but all were wholly concerned with the training of ministers.¹²

I

Manchester College was moved to York in 1803 in an atmosphere of deep pessimism. As well as the surrounding anti-Unitarian hostility of these years, the Unitarian body was deeply divided over the College's future. There were financial worries and many potential supporters held back; as Mrs. Cappe recalled: "a sort of melancholy foreboding having seized the minds of some who might otherwise probably have come forward, that because Warrington and Hackney had failed, no institution on similar

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11. William Turner A Sermon preached at the Chapel in Hanover Square, Newcastle, for the Support of New College Manchester (Newcastle 1800) p.17
 12. James Yates Thoughts on the Advancement of Academical Education in England (1826) pp. 55-7

principles and with similar views, ever could succeed".¹³ The new principal and sole tutor Charles Wellbeloved - 33 years old, a former tutor at the ill-fated Hackney College and since 1792 minister at the old presbyterian chapel in York - was himself very doubtful of the institution's survival. In September 1803 it opened for its first session at York with eight students, with an unsteady financial base, inadequate accommodation, far from any substantial Unitarian chapel and without any qualified assistants to help. It was to take a further eight years before most of these problems were resolved.

The problem of staffing the college was serious as the number of students grew. In February 1804 Hugh Kerr, a young Scotsman and a graduate of Glasgow University, was appointed as an assistant tutor. He was succeeded in 1807 by Theophilus Browne, a former clergyman and fellow of Peterhouse who had publicly renounced all his preferments in the church on becoming a Unitarian in 1800. But Wellbeloved was heavily overburdened with work. He taught for five hours each day and for five days each week. He and his wife were responsible for feeding and superintending the domestic life of all the students, as well as looking after their own growing family. In addition he had to perform the duties of a dissenting minister - though at the small York congregation these were fairly light. "Some work is always pressing to be done", he complained, "and that work so various as greatly to distract my attention, and yet so urgent, that it cannot be postponed". The range of his teaching commitments forced him to constantly switch his attention from Virgil and Tacitus, to Theology, to Ancient and Modern History, to Hebrew, to ethics, to Greek Grammar: "and after five days fagging in this distracted manner, to sit down to sermon-writing".¹⁴ By 1806 the gloomy forebodings

13. Memoirs of the Life of the late Mrs. Catherine Cappe, written by herself (3rd ed. 1826) pp. 315-17.

14. Quoted in John Kenrick A Biographical Memoir of the late Rev. Charles Wellbeloved (1860) p.90

seemed to be realised when Wellbeloved collapsed under the strain and needed several months convalescence. But the College survived. When Browne departed in 1809 to become Unitarian minister at Norwich, Wellbeloved presented the college authorities with an ultimatum; his commitments were such that either he was provided with two assistant tutors or the range of studies would have to be narrowed.¹⁵ Funds were quickly raised and in 1810 two young tutors were appointed - John Kenrick and William Turner Jnr. - who were to remain at York for many years and took a good deal of the weight off Wellbeloved's shoulders.

The lack of proper accommodation was another serious problem in these early years. When the college first opened in 1803 a few of the students lodged with the Wellbeloved family, while the rest lodged in the vicinity. The major priority was to provide adequate accommodation in College for all students. A number of influential supporters stated their determination not to send their sons to the college until they were all accommodated under the direct supervision of the tutors. As luck would have it a group of houses, immediately across the street from Wellbeloved's house on Monkgate, came onto the market in 1810 and were quickly snapped up by the college trustees. The new buildings consisted of a large house, which became the home of one of the tutors, flanked on either side by a row of small houses in which the students had their rooms. At the back of the central house a lecture hall and some classrooms were built. A further lecture hall was also added onto Wellbeloved's house and the existing classroom there was transformed into the college library.¹⁶

In September 1811 the two new tutors moved into the new buildings with twenty two students. For the next twenty-five years or so Manchester college was a relatively stable and self-contained institution.

15. Wellbeloved to G.W. Wood 25 ii 1809 MCO

16. Kenrick op.cit. pp. 94, 97-8; V.D. Davis A History of Manchester College (1932) pp. 74-5

II

A printed notice of 1817 advertised the college's aim: "to afford to young men of fortune an education suited to the station they will hold in society; to lead those who are destined for the other learned professions through a proper course of preparatory studies; or to qualify such as are destined for commercial life to support with greater respectability the character of the British merchant".¹⁷ Both divinity and lay students followed the same basic three year course, though the former had to do extra courses on theology and Hebrew languages. There was a broad curriculum. Firstly there was the customary emphasis on classical languages. It is easy to forget that Greek and Latin were basic elements of the courses at both Warrington and Hackney: even the anti-traditionalist Joseph Priestley had declared in 1790 that the aim of dissenting education was "to make a good classical scholar as the necessary foundation of everything else".¹⁸ At York Greek and Latin were central elements of the course of study through all three years. One new student in 1814 reported that in his first term he was attending each week three hours of Greek lectures, three hours of Latin lectures and two hours of Latin translation classes.¹⁹

On the other hand there was a particularly strong - and characteristically Unitarian - stress on science. Thus all students had to follow the whole of the Cambridge University course in natural philosophy from

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17. Printed notice of 1817 in Manchester College Letterbook p.17 in MCO
18. Quoted in H. McLachlan English Education under the Test Acts (Manchester 1931) p.34. See also E. Cogan An Address to the Dissenters on Classical Literature (Cirencester 1789). A Unitarian minister and schoolmaster, Cogan argued that dissenters had to pay attention to classics education if they wanted their sons to "make a respectable figure in the Senate, in the Pulpit, and at the bar". (p.14)
19. Letter of J.J. Tayler Nov. 1814 in DWL Mss 24. 102(1)

Euclid and algebra, through mechanics, hydrostatics, pneumatics, optics, astronomy and ending with Newton's 'Principia'. In addition modern science was taught under the rubric of experimental philosophy and the college possessed a good deal of scientific apparatus. A special botany course was introduced in 1824: "It is important for our day students who may have the medical profession in view, to have the means afforded them of cultivating a science which forms so essential a part of their qualifications; and desirable for the reputation of the College that so popular and elegant a pursuit should not be excluded from its course".²⁰

Grammar, oratory, criticism and other branches of belles lettres were studied. Following Priestley's pioneering of history and geography at Warrington in the 1760s there were at York a number of courses covering moral philosophy, jurisprudence, history ("in pursuing which their attention is particularly directed to the History and Principles of the English Constitution") and political economy. For this generation of radical liberals basic text-books included such utilitarian classics as Thomas Belsham's 'Elements of the philosophy of the Human Mind' and Thomas Southwood Smith's 'Illustrations of Divine Government'.²¹ Looking back to the 1820s, when he was a student at York, James Martineau recalled the influence of this utilitarian culture on his own thinking: "Steeped in the "empirical" and "necessarian" mode of thought, I served out successive terms of willing captivity to Locke and Hartley, to Collins, to Edwards and Priestley, to Bentham and James Mill".²²

Gilbert Wakefield - who had taught at both Warrington and Hackney - was critical of late 18th century dissenting academies for trying to make their students "digest the whole Encyclopaedia in three years". He said of their exposure to metaphysics, ethics, history, philosophy,

20. J. Kenrick to G.W. Wood 22 x 1824 MCO

21. J.E. Carpenter James Martineau (1905) p.35

22. James Martineau Types of Ethical Theory (1885) Vol. I p.ix

politics, science and so on: "the young men were dosed with such infusions to a degree that made even the strongest stomach regurgitate under the operation".²³ And certainly the students at York found the work-load very heavy. John James Tayler - a model student and many years later in London the Principal of the College - wrote to his cousin in 1814: "The great fault here, as in most other Dissenting Colleges, seems to be, that they break the strength of the faculties, by distributing it amidst too great a variety of objects". Students were loaded down with so much work that they were forced to do it rapidly and superficially: "so that when they come to their journey's end, most of them are as light as when they set out".²⁴ The tutors, however, defended the breadth of the curriculum against the complaints of overworked students and the criticism of less "interested" observers. John Kenrick suggested that however the curriculum was organised there would be dissatisfaction in some quarter: "Hard is the fate of tutors in Dissenting Academies, too dependent on the public opinion to be able to pursue their own plans of education, and that same public prescribing things diametrically opposite - one says you may teach too many things to teach any well, shorten your list of lectures - another, you teach too few, add chemistry - a third, strike out some of your reading and give the time to elocution..."²⁵

Yet, whatever the particular difficulties and tensions, the college at York followed the example of Warrington and Hackney in providing an education that was emphatically secular in content and which, while retaining a traditionalist stress on classical learning, was open to newer fields of study such as the developing sciences, history and political economy.

23. Quoted in McLachlan op.cit. pp. 33-4

24. Tayler letter 1814 loc.cit.

25. Kenrick to G.W. Wood 8 viii 1814 MCO

It similarly followed their example in striving to remain non-sectarian. Manchester College at York always strenuously asserted that it was non-denominational and intended for: "the liberal education of youth in general, without distinction of party or religious denomination, and exempt from every political test and doctrinal subscription".²⁶ Wellbeloved's first assistant tutor, Kerr, was a practising member of the Church of Scotland. Wellbeloved assured Professor Young at Glasgow University, who had recommended Kerr, that there would be no problems over his religious affiliations: "Respecting his religious opinion neither the Trustees nor myself make any enquiry...all that I expect from a colleague who is engaged as a classical tutor is what his own good sense would point out as proper; that if he should have occasion to illustrate philologically any passage in the Scriptures, he would carefully avoid dogmatic theology".²⁷ Wellbeloved himself, even in educating Unitarian ministers, rigorously avoided even the hint of inculcating doctrines. On controversial issues such as the Trinity, the Atonement or the Deity of Christ he provided the students with various conflicting interpretations refusing ever to declare his own position. However, whenever he cited an opinion as "little known and even less regarded" the students listened with extra concentration and speculated on whether this Byzantine disclosure represented his own view. Wellbeloved's devotion to the words 'probably' and 'perhaps' irritated some of his students but he uncompromisingly stuck to his role of educating students how to read the actual biblical text.²⁸ In 1809 he took pride in the fact that some Unitarians were dissatisfied with him: "I was highly gratified to learn from a gentleman in London that some persons would not subscribe to us - because they thought the Academy not strictly Unitarian - they feared I would not

26. Printed notice 1817 loc.cit.

27. Quoted in V.D. Davis op.cit. p. 76n

28. J.E. Carpenter op.cit. p.32; Russell Lant Carpenter Memoirs of the Life and Work of P.P. Carpenter (2nd ed. 1880) pp. 15,17.

teach Unitarianism. I told him I considered their censure as the highest praise - I do not and will not teach Unitarianism - or any ism - but Christianism".²⁹ Hence Wellbeloved could quite honestly and straightforwardly claim that the college was open to students of any religious background, that no particular doctrines or tenets were taught and that the students were completely free to come to their own opinion on any religious question.

In actual practice however the aspiration and the reality did not match. There were occasional students sent from Anglican families but the bulk of the students and financial support came from Unitarian circles. As John Kenrick sharply remarked on one occasion: "With three Unitarian tutors, supported only by Unitarians, receiving none but Unitarian students and sending out none but Unitarian preachers, we may disclaim as we please Unitarianism or Dissent".³⁰

III

Yet if all the tutors at the college were Unitarians they were never merely propagandists for a particular sect nor isolated from the wider intelligentsia of early 19th century England. Wellbeloved had been educated among the elite of metropolitan dissent: at Homerton and Hackney. He was editor of the theology and metaphysical department of the 'Annual Review' until its demise in 1807. His scholarship was considerable. He read Greek, Latin, Hebrew, Arabic, Syriac and Chaldee; he was fluent in French and Italian and could read German.³¹ For many years he was engaged in the epic task of a new translation of the Old Testament and he completed two substantial volumes. His reputation for biblical scholarship

29. Wellbeloved to Wood 6 iv 1809 MCO

30. Kenrick to Wood 8 viii 1814 MCO

31. Kenrick op.cit. p.236 See Portraits of Yorkshire Worthies: selected from the National Exhibition of works of Art at Leeds 1868 ed. E. Hailstone (1869) Vol. II No. CXCIX for a portrait of Wellbeloved.

was great: when preparing a new edition of his 'Illustrations of Divine Government' in 1845 the well-known disciple of Bentham (and former Unitarian minister) Dr. Thomas Southwood Smith asked for Wellbeloved's help in revising the lengthy section on biblical exegesis, which, Smith acknowledged: "I was never as competent to handle as you..."³² Wellbeloved was a noted combatant in theological polemics too. In the 1820s he delighted such liberal Anglican intellectuals as Sydney Smith, Sir James Mackintosh, Professor Smyth of Cambridge by his skilful destruction of the position of the eminent York churchman Archdeacon Wrangham in a prolonged controversy. Brougham publicly praised Wellbeloved's abilities: "he has in controversy conflicted with some of the most learned members of the church and overthrown them, as far as mere learning goes. I speak not of doctrine, but as far as learning goes he has signally and triumphantly defeated them, by mere force of superior endowments".³³ He was a founder of the Yorkshire Philosophical Society: from 1823 until his death in 1858 he was curator of the Society's Antiquities and at different times a vice-president and member of its governing council.³⁴ He was a founder and vice-president of York Mechanics Institute and actively involved in a range of local pressure groups, including the York Whig Club and an association to prevent landlords encroaching on ancient rights of way.

Wellbeloved's assistant throughout the York period, John Kenrick (born 1788), was the son of Exeter's radical Unitarian minister, Timothy. In May 1810 he graduated from Glasgow University where he attracted much attention by his abilities - he won various prizes and distinctions, including a gold medal for an essay on the Tudor constitution. For the

32. T. Southwood Smith to Wellbeloved 29 xi 1845 in DWL Mss. 24.81 (26)

33. Quoted in Kenrick p.153

34. A.D. Orange Philosophers and Provincials: The Yorkshire Philosophical Society from 1822 to 44 (York 1973) esp. p.23

rest of his long life he was connected with Manchester College: as a tutor at York until 1840 and subsequently as a Professor and Principal at Manchester and in later years a Visitor (i.e. external examiner). Kenrick even outshone Wellbeloved in his scholarship. His 'Times' obituary in 1877 noted: "Though merely a tutor at a Unitarian College at York, he was indisputably the greatest Nonconformist scholar of our day". He had studied at several German Universities and was widely respected - even among a section of the Church of England - for his classical and biblical scholarship. He was the author of several Latin and Greek textbooks, of a number of substantial works of Ancient History and biblical interpretation and contributed to leading organs of liberal culture such as the 'Westminster' and 'Edinburgh' reviews and the 'Philosophical Magazine'.³⁵

The third tutor for the years 1810-27 - William Turner Jnr. (1788-1853) - could not hope to compete with the arcane scholarship of his colleagues. The son and grandson of well-known Unitarian ministers - both similarly called William Turner - he was educated at Glasgow University. His field of teaching was science and he was a member of the Yorkshire Philosophical Society. In later years he was Unitarian minister at Halifax where he played an important part in the development of both the Mechanics Institute and the Literary and Philosophical Society.³⁶

Turner was succeeded at York in 1827 by William Hincks (1794-1871), son of an Irish Presbyterian minister who became Professor of Hebrew at the Royal Belfast Academical Institution. A former student at York himself, Hincks had ministered to Unitarian congregations at Exeter and Liverpool before moving to the college as a tutor in science. His competence

35. DNB; obituaries in The Times 26 v 1877 and The Inquirer 19 v 1877. See the cordial and respectful letters of Archdeacon Hare to Kenrick 10 xi 1843 and 3 iii 1846 in DWL Mss 24.81 (34,35)

36. F.E. Millson Two Hundred Years of Northgate End Chapel 1696-1896: A Sketch (Halifax 1896) p.28; Orange op.cit. p.24

in the field of natural science was unquestionable: he gave courses of lectures at York medical school and in later years was Professor of Natural History at Queen's College, Cork and at Toronto.³⁷

So, in its years at York, Manchester College could certainly claim to have tutors of as high a calibre as any contemporary educational institution in England. Dr. Samuel Parr praised them as men of "sound learning and thorough sense" and thought there was no better education available outside the two Universities.³⁸ Though all four tutors were Unitarian ministers at various points in their careers, they were worldly men, in touch with the larger intellectual culture of the period. They were liberals in both the specifically political sense of being supporters of parliamentary reform and laissez faire economic policy and in the broader sense of being opponents of religious sectarianism and any form of dogmatism. In 1826 the famous wit and radical clergyman Sydney Smith sent to Wellbeloved a Mr. Hamilton, author of a system of teaching languages: "Pray see if his plans and books can be of any use to your College. We reject everything new in our Schools. You are open to conviction".³⁹

IV

Between 1803 and 40 a total of 235 students passed through the college: 122 of these were preparing for the ministry (though a much smaller number eventually became ministers) and 113 were lay students.⁴⁰ There were occasional students from liberal Anglican families: Nicholas William Gibson, for instance, a lay student between 1816 and 18 went on to Cambridge, took

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37. DNB; obituary in The Inquirer 30 x 1871; Felix Holt 'The Hincks Family' TUHS Vol. VIII No. 2 (1944) pp. 84-5.
38. According to Edward Tagart in An Address Delivered in the Chapel in Little Portland Street, 9th July 1844 (1844) p.9
39. Sydney Smith to Wellbeloved 21 xii 1826 in The Letters of Sydney Smith ed. N.C. Smith (Oxford 1953) Vol. I p.456
40. For full list of students see 'List of Students educated at Manchester College, York' appended to Proceedings on the Presentation of the Testimonial to Rev. Charles Wellbeloved (1840); also Role of Students educated at Manchester Academy 1786-1803, Manchester College York 1803-40; Manchester New College Manchester 1840-53 and Manchester New College London 1853-67 (Manchester 1868)

holy orders and eventually became Canon of Manchester and Rector of Ardwick.⁴¹ But the vast majority of lay students came from Unitarian families. And they had to be wealthy: fees for a session, which lasted from early September to late June, were 80 guineas in the early years, and by 1815 had risen to 100 guineas. This sum simply covered the basics of board, lodging and tuition fees: there were also additional fees for Italian and French tuition as well as a variety of miscellaneous expenses. The cost of the education of the divinity students - from poorer backgrounds - was partly met out of lay fees, partly out of donations of various kinds and special collections at Unitarian chapels.

The regular supply of lay students was therefore crucial for the college's financial health. This was often a problem. In January 1812 the college treasurer noted the lack of wider support from Unitarian families in the South and Midlands: "Out of the circle of our Lancashire friends we appear only to be heard of for lay students by accident, and I fear we shall never have an adequate supply unless more is done".⁴² Over the years there were a few sons drawn from Unitarian families in the south, especially London, but primarily York students were the sons of the wealthy Unitarian elite of the north: wealthy manufacturers such as the Strutts of Belper and the Marslands of Stockport; successful merchants and manufacturers in Manchester such as Philips, McConnell, Robinson, Wood, Darbishire etc. The radical manufacturer, John Fielden of Todmorden, sent his son. From the West Riding there was a steady flow of students: the Sheffield bankers and landowners the Shores; the Heywoods from Wakefield, a family of merchants, bankers and barristers; Bradford coal-owners and ironmasters, the Dawsons; the Leeds industrialists, the Marshalls and the Benyons; the Stansfields, coalmasters and landowners near Wakefield⁴³

41. Venn Alumni

42. G.W. Wood to Wellbeloved 13 i 1812 MCO

43. 'List of Students' loc.cit.

And in later years many of these York students became important figures in the interlocking worlds of business and liberal politics. Edward Strutt for instance, became MP for Derby in 1830 and eventually Lord Belper. Mark Philips became Manchester's new MP in 1832 and John Marshall became MP for Leeds in the same year. Other former students became powerful men in the legal profession, in banking, in industry.

Yet some of these eventual paragons of Victorian virtue caused acute problems. Dissenting attempts to maintain a collegiate life at Carmarthen, Warrington, Hackney and Manchester between the 1770s and 1800 had all floundered because of the simple difficulty of controlling the general behaviour of young men with gentlemanly proclivities and money in their pockets. At Warrington some of the students had dispensed with college work altogether, flouting all attempts at restoring discipline. They provoked intense hostility among the local population: for instance they changed around all the sign boards on local inns one night; during the war with the Americans they illuminated all the college windows whenever the British army was defeated.⁴⁴ At Manchester student indiscipline caused the resignation of Dr. Barnes as principal of the college.⁴⁵ Hence Kenrick criticised those who argued that York was too remote and that the college should be removed to London; he warned of the "increased facilities and temptations which a metropolis affords" and questioned "what kind of acquaintance with the world a residence in a metropolis would be likely to give".⁴⁶ Yet even quiet York had its opportunities for 'mischief'. In June 1816 Wellbeloved was complaining about increasing misbehaviour among the students - particularly the frequenting of billard rooms - and added darkly: "I fear the fate of Warrington and Hackney".⁴⁷

44. McLachlan op.cit. pp. 24, 56, 224

45. Wellbeloved to William Wood 14 i 1798 MCO. See also G.M. Ditchfield 'The Early History of Manchester College' Transactions of the Historical Society of Lancashire and Cheshire 123 (1972) p.98.

46. Kenrick to Wood 19 iii 1817 MCO

47. Wellbeloved to Wood 4 vi 1816 MCO

There were continuing problems: students consorting with women of the town, consuming alcohol, staying out till late at night, refusing to do their college work. This was a serious matter. It gave the college a bad name and lost them potential lay students. As early as 1809 a Unitarian minister at distant Dudley informed a colleague: "...I know enough of the academy in that city to wish that the tutor's discipline was better".⁴⁸ It was difficulty with some of the students that forced Turner to resign from his tutorship in 1827. Since 1819 he and his wife had been responsible for providing meals for all the students as well as supervising their daily behaviour. However he found himself ill-equipped to deal with some students and explained to the trustees: "A more prompt, resolute, commanding spirit, which would excite fear and awe, as well as consiliate attachment, is almost necessary, in order, by a personal ascendancy, to secure the due observance of laws which can be enforced by no other effectual sanctions".⁴⁹ In the summer of 1827 William Turner Snr., in his official role as College visitor, gathered all the students together in private and harangued them. He told them: "The reports of insubordination rudeness, and neglect of discipline have circulated very freely, and been the subject of much conversation". Indulgence in "rude horseplay" by a group of students had he said, disturbed other students and their tutors "to the great discredit of the College".⁵⁰ Turner's successor Hincks also found some of the students very difficult. There was a crisis in 1828 over the smuggling of "spiritous liquors" into the college for all-night drinking parties. Kenrick impatiently remarked: "if all the enactment of law and magistracy are unable to prevent their being introduced into prisons, I know not how we can insure their

48. J.H. Bransby to Thomas Howe 2 xii 1809 Bransby Mss in UC Mss: JRL

49. William Turner Jnr. to Thomas Robinson 25 i 1827 in Manchester College Letterbook p.33 MCO

50. Draft copy of Turner's speech in this same letterbook p.32

never finding their way into a College, especially when it has the misfortune to be next door to a public house".⁵¹ Wellbeloved almost resigned in despair.⁵² By 1830, however, problems over student insubordination had largely been removed.⁵³

A different, external problem began to raise the questions about the continuing viability of the college. From its inception the college had not found favour with all parts of the Unitarian body. Both its location in York and Wellbeloved's marked refusal to take up a positive Unitarian stance had alienated some potential supporters. In 1812 a group of leading London Unitarians - including Robert Aspland, Thomas Belsham, William Frend and Jeremiah Joyce - set up a Unitarian college in Hackney. This caused a good deal of anxiety in York but it survived only until 1818.⁵⁴ The foundation of University College in London - a considerable number of its founders were Unitarians - provided a much more powerful competitor, particularly after its Royal Charter in 1836, which enabled it to confer degrees without subscription to the doctrines of the state church.

From 1831 there was a steady falling away of new lay students at York; five in 1831, three in 1832, two in 1833, one in 1834, two in 1835, one in 1836 and none afterwards. Increasingly a radical restructuring of the college was being debated. In 1834 when the college treasurer, George William Wood MP, put forward in the Commons a bill to abolish religious subscription at Oxford and Cambridge, Kenrick was optimistically speculating

51. Kenrick to Wood 8 i 1828 MCO. See also Wellbeloved to Wood 10 vi 1828 MCO
52. See Wellbeloved's bewildered and self-pitying letter to Wood 2 vii 1828 MCO
53. Such problems were not, of course, unique to York but appear to have been a characteristic of the progeny of the wealthy classes in this period. The East India College at Haileybury was plagued by indiscipline and riotous living; on Mackintosh's appointment as a professor there in 1810 Sydney Smith commented: "if he can keep clear of contusions at the annual peltings, all will be well. The season for lapidating the professor is now at hand; keep him quiet at Holland House till all is over". F.C. Danvers etc.al. Memorials of Old Haileybury College (Westminster 1894) pp. xxiv, 82-6; Lady Holland Memoirs of Rev. Sydney Smith (1858) p.331

about the possibility of moving the college to Cambridge as a theological seminary, exploiting the university's facilities for science and literature.⁵⁵ Finally in 1840, after long and arduous negotiations, the college was removed to Manchester where it developed with new staff a quite different character.

V

In the tradition of Warrington, Manchester College at York offered a curriculum that was largely secular in content, liberal in tone, in touch with wider developments in the fields of science, political economy and so on. At the same time it provided some of the rudiments of the dominant culture, developing in its students some of the acquirements of the English gentleman, necessary for access to the governing class. Its character as an educational institution reveals the extent to which the social elite of Unitarianism, especially in the North of England, were both opposed to and yet part of the status quo. And the picture of these students driving their solemn tutors to distraction by their behaviour in York - dallying with chambermaids, frequenting billiard rooms and local inns, holding night-long drinking parties - suggests that, at least among the Unitarians, future captains of industry and patriarchs of Victorian liberalism did not owe their positions solely to that stern, inner-directed and ascetic protestant psyche celebrated by Smiles and Weber.

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54. For the foundation of this College see Wood to Wellbeloved 8 vi and 18 vi 1811 MCO. For details about staff and students at this second Hackney College see R.B. Aspland Memoir of the Life, Work and Correspondence of Rev. Robert Aspland (1850) pp. 303-22. For the anxious interest of Kenrick and Wellbeloved in its progress and demise see: Wellbeloved to Wood 14 xi 1814, 29 iv 1817; Kenrick to Wood 1 ii 1816, 16 x 1816 MCO.
55. Kenrick to Wood 20 iv 1834 MCO
56. For a succinct account of the different opinions within the Unitarian body about the future of the college see the letter of J.J. Tayler to Wellbeloved 10 v 1838 DWL Mss 24.81(13). For some details of the depressed state of the college by the end of the 1830s see R.L. Carpenter op.cit. p.19

6. CONGREGATIONAL LIFE AND RELIGIOUS PRACTICE AMONG EARLY 19TH CENTURY UNITARIANS

I

"All superfluous ornament is rejected by the cold frugality of the Protestants", Gibbon noted, "but the Catholic superstition which is always the enemy of reason, is often the parent of the arts".¹ The ascetic intellectualism of the Unitarian paradigm was expressed in the simplicity of their chapels. According to Thomas Belsham in 1820 chapels should be appropriate to their object: "always neat, and occasionally elegant, and perhaps sometimes rising to a chaste and simple magnificence: but never degenerating to that gaudy and ambitious species of ornament which would be inconsistent with the simplicity and majesty of Christian worship".² Often dating from around 1700, Unitarian chapels tended to be prudently unobtrusive, simple box-like structures without steeple or decoration. Mill Hill Chapel in Leeds for instance, dating from the late 17th century, was a plain grey building in a grove of trees; "well according with the modest simplicity of rational religion", it was said in 1797.³ Mid-18th century chapels, such as Westgate Chapel in Wakefield dating from 1752, may have become more elegant as their members became wealthy but they remained simple in form, avoiding identification with the traditional Anglican church.⁴

There were occasional outbursts of architectural fancy among early 19th century Unitarians. The new chapel in Brighton, opened in 1820, was modelled on the Temple of Theseus, with a Doric portico. A local guide-book praised it in 1822 as "this very elegant and truly classical building"

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1. The Autobiography of Edward Gibbon (1911) ed. O. Smeaton pp. 113-14.
 2. Thomas Belsham Christianity Pleading for the Patronage of the Civil Power, but protesting against the Aid of Penal Law: considered in Three Sermons (1820) p.7
 3. J. Ryley A History of the Town and Parish of Leeds (Leeds 1797) p. 6
 4. For architecture of Westgate Chapel see Wakefield District Heritage ed. Kate Taylor (Wakefield 1976) pp. 96-7.

but five years later the 'Royal Brighton Guide' drily commented on its resemblance to a "heathen temple".⁵ In the late 1830s the fashionable architect Charles Barry designed a new Unitarian Chapel on Upper Brook Street Manchester in the Gothic style - upsetting puritan and High Church sensibilities alike. And in the 1840s a number of other Unitarian congregations of wealth pioneered Unitarian Gothic. As the Unitarian architect Henry Bowman argued, nonconformists were no longer a persecuted minority concealing their existence. Their chapels were no longer "mere lecture rooms or preaching houses" but, he said, "Temples in which the Divine Being is to be worshipped and glorified". Asceticism was an old-fashioned taste: "why should not our Temples, in which that faith is embodied, and by means of which it is diffused, be as appropriate, beautiful and imposing, as others?"⁶ However until the mid-19th century Unitarian chapels expressed the ascetic and prosaic sensibility of their adherents.

Yet if their chapels were externally modest and unadorned, internally they often projected an unpretentious affluence. In the late 1750s Wesley visited the newly-opened Octagon Chapel in Norwich and thought it "perhaps the most elegant in Europe": "The inside is finished in the highest taste and is as clean as any nobleman's saloon. The communion table is fine mahogany; the very latches of the pews' doors are polished brass".⁷ Days before it was to be sold off in 1901 an architect (son of a Unitarian minister) particularized the interior of the old early 18th century Chapel at Coseley: "the grand oak two-decker pulpit, with its inlaid sounding-board and brass candelabra...the dark oak-panelled pews, the gallery with

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5. John Rowland 'Christ Church (Unitarian) New Road, Brighton: a Short History' TUHS Vol. X No. 3 (1953) p.152
 6. Henry Bowman Observations on the Style Proposed to be Adopted in the New Unitarian Church at Leeds (Manchester no date) - copy in Mill Hill Mss.
 7. Quoted in C.B. Jewson The Jacobin City: Norwich in its Reaction to the French Revolution 1788-1802 (1975) p.10

its sturdy oak pillars and ballustraded stair-cases, the benches, the gate-legged vestry table...the chain-hung brass centre candelabra".⁸ In 1816 Aston described the "very spacious and handsome" interior of Cross Street Chapel in Manchester with its large galleries, fine oak-panelled pews, "large and powerful organ".⁹ Such chapels avoided the discomfort of hard bare seats and unheated churches often found among other denominations. Mosley Street Chapel in Manchester was the first in the town to have a carpeted floor and to have stoves - "to render it comfortable in winter for invalids", it was said, perhaps in deference to puritan fortitude.¹⁰ Of St. Saviourgate Chapel in York, Hargrove observed in 1818: "The interior of the chapel is not spacious, but neat and comfortable; being properly aired with stoves and well-lighted".¹¹

The main feature of Unitarian Chapel interiors was the pew system. In the late 17th century it seems that congregations sat in open benches, men at one side and women at the other. This was the case at the Presbyterian Chapel in Bridgwater, built in 1688. Here the first pew was constructed in 1699 and over the next couple of decades box-pews engulfed the open benches.¹² Symbolising private property the box-pew enabled a whole family to sit together, to keep their own bibles, prayer-books, cushions, blankets. Rents of pews usually varied according to their position. At Priestley's New Meeting in Birmingham in the 1780s the most expensive pews at the front were 14 shillings per annum, those at the back six shillings and some in the gallery cheaper still - by 1816 the former had risen to 23 shillings and the latter nine shillings.¹³ At Hanover Square Chapel, Newcastle, in 1807 quarterly pew rents varied from 1½ guineas to as little

8. Quoted by G.E. Evans in 'Our Communion Plate & Other Treasures' TUHS Vol. IV No. 1 (1927) p.60

9. J. Aston A Picture of Manchester (Manchester 1816) p.95

10. Ibid. p.95

11. W. Hargrove History and Description of the Ancient City of York (York 1818) Vol. II Part 2, p.336

12. C.E. Pike 'Pews and Benches' TUHS Vol. II No. 4 (1922) pp. 132-6

13. Emily Bushrod The History of Unitarianism in Birmingham from the middle of the 18th century to 1893 (University of Birmingham M.A. thesis 1954) pp. 106-8.

as a shilling.¹⁴ At Halifax's Northgate End Chapel in the early 19th century the wealthier members rented large comfortable pews in the gallery, some of them holding as many as eight seats and costing eight guineas per annum. Along the sides of the gallery were small cheap pews, mostly occupied by the servants of members. On the ground floor of the chapel were simpler and cheaper pews and free accommodation for the poor. Significantly the preacher stood at eye-level facing the expensive pews in the centre of the gallery while those downstairs gazed upwards at him.¹⁵

This kind of reproduction of social hierarchy within the chapel was not unthinkingly accepted. The radical Unitarian Thomas Fyshe Palmer declared in 1789 that "fanciful distinctions of rank" were irrelevant to the true Christian: "To such a one, there appears in Christianity neither high nor low, bond or free, but all are one equal brotherhood in Christ Jesus". Unfortunately this classless ideal was visibly contradicted by the realities of congregational life among the Unitarians.¹⁶ Henry Solly recalled how at Walthamstow Old Meeting the family's servants sat in the gallery but always got up and left shortly after the sermon, thus missing the final prayer and benediction, in order to get the horses and carriages ready and be waiting at the chapel gates: "Some audacious questionings, I believe, which however I scarcely dared to propound openly, arose in my mind as to the relative importance of religion to the coachman and footman compared with their 'betters'".¹⁷ The box-pew system was often perceived as a particular constraint on congregational life. In 1811 when the Dudley Chapel was being redecorated the congregation gathered in a schoolroom and

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14. Hanover Square Chapel Book Hanover Square Mss, Newcastle
 15. Pew Rent Register of Northgate End Chapel Halifax NEC 2 loc.cit.
See picture of interior of chapel in F.E. Millson Two Hundred Years of Northgate End Chapel 1696-1896: A Sketch (Halifax 1896) p.21
 16. Thomas Fyshe Palmer to Robert Millar 18 viii 1789 DWL Mss 12.46(89)
 17. Henry Solly These Eighty Years (1893) Vol. I p.55

the minister commented: "You cannot think how comfortable we all felt ourselves. The common practice of people shutting themselves up in separate pews or boxes is not the most favourable to sociality in worship".¹⁸ In 1831 William Turner advised a newly-established chapel to treat the whole question of social differences with great tact. He recommended that boxes be placed at the door of each pew so that each member could contribute, in secret, whatever he thought fit. "Thus", he said, "all invidious distinctions between the rich members and the poor will be avoided..." Turner also advised Chapel stewards to treat poor members with as much courtesy and respect as others: "to promote a more intimate, friendly intercourse among the several ranks of the Society...For are we not all of one rank, as children of God, and probationers for a future life? Surely, then a Christian society ought as much as possible to avoid all distinctions between rich and poor".¹⁹ Though there was continuing anxiety about the social effects of private property in pews the system persisted in most congregations well into the second half of the 19th century.

Another source of tension within chapels was the whole nature of church government. During the 18th century Presbyterian congregations were usually governed by a self-selecting oligarchy of the most affluent members. Generally there was little to cause political friction in the day to day running of chapel affairs. However, there were sometimes tensions between the trustees and the wider body of subscribers, especially after 1800. At Cross Street Chapel in Manchester, for instance, the trustees had upset a section of the membership by refusing to grant permission for the minister John Grundy to give a course of public lectures in the Chapel in 1814.²⁰ Continuing tension led the trustees to seek

18. J.H. Bransby to T. Howe 1 v 1811 Bransby Mss in UC Mss: JRL

19. W. Turner The Excellence and Advantage of Public Social Worship... A Sermon...To which is added A Letter to a Newly Formed Unitarian Church (Newcastle 1831) pp. 20-1.

20. Minute Book of Cross Street Chapel Trustees in Vestry of Cross Street Chapel, Manchester p.20.

legal advice on the exact distribution of rights and powers. Their advisor, a wealthy London barrister and Unitarian called Agar, stated that: "the congregation as such never appears to have been consulted in the choice of new Trustees, nor does there appear any provision for their appearance in the management of the Chapel, in the control over its funds or in the regulation of the mode of electing the ministers of the Chapel". In the 1780s the trustees had granted each pew-renter, no matter how large or small his rent, a single vote in the choice of minister but, as Agar noted, this did not amount to a right to control appointment of ministers or the use of funds. Moreover the pews in Cross Street were not sold but only rented "as in the ordinary cases of landlord and tenants". Agar thus underwrote the power of the ruling oligarchy but went on to advise: "it will be prudent that the Trustees should as far as they can consistently with the trusts reposed in them act agreeably to the wishes of the majority of the congregation".²¹

Elsewhere there was a measure of democratisation at work within congregations by the end of the 18th century. At Birmingham in 1782 Priestley maintained that Unitarian societies should be organized such that every member participated in its management. All offices, he said, should be filled by ballot: "The people who create, must likewise have the power to change their own officers".²² As a direct result it was decided at a meeting of all the subscribers to the New Meeting that anyone who contributed one guinea or more per annum should be registered as voters for an annual election of a twelve-man committee to manage chapel affairs. However, the same group of members tended to be regularly elected in

21. Ibid. pp. 54-9

22. Joseph Priestley The Proper Constitution of a Christian Church, considered in a Sermon preached at the New Meeting in Birmingham Nov. 3rd, 1782... Works XV pp. 66-7

subsequent years.²³ At Newcastle's Hanover Square Chapel, according to Turner in 1811, a committee of seven members was elected annually. One or more of this committee attended in the vestry each Sunday and acted as stewards - answering enquiries, finding a seat for visitors and so on. They received the quarterly pew rents, looked after the funds for the poor and special collections, paid bills and the salaries of the chapel clerk and minister, and at the end of each year gave a report to the congregation.²⁴ It was in 1815 that chapel affairs were restructured at Bridgwater and the decision-making process made more accountable. The trustees no longer acted autonomously but became accountable to the subscribers: a vote was taken on the appointment of the minister and the "Civil affairs of the society" were conducted henceforth by two wardens annually elected by subscribers, one of them a trustee. In the 1820s there was further decentralisation as chapel affairs became the business of a committee of three men annually elected by the subscribers.²⁵ At Salford in 1837 conflict between a ruling group of trustees and major subscribers, and the broader membership was conducted in the language of contemporary politics. "No close corporation, whose acts would not bear the public inspection, ever clung more tenaciously to office and power", it was said of the ruling elite who were contemptuously described as an "aristocracy" who deprived the majority of their democratic rights.²⁶ Too many congregations, one minister complained in 1839, were carelessly run by a small junto of trustees who acted without consulting either the minister or the broader membership. As a result

23. Bushrod op.cit. pp. 90-1

24. W. Turner A Short Sketch of the History of Protestant Nonconformity and of the Society Assembling in Hanover Square, Newcastle (Newcastle 1811) pp. 36-8.

25. C.E. Pike 'The Evolution of Church Government in an English Presbyterian Congregation TUHS Vol. III No. 1 (1923) pp 47-9.

26. No author To the Contributors to the Fund for Erecting a New Chapel for the Unitarian Congregation, Greengate, Salford (Manchester 1837) pp. 5,11.

the minister becomes dependent "on the caprice of a caste" and "the people, never appealed to, and totally ignorant of the affairs of the society, become regardless and indifferent to its welfare". He called for proper democratic organization with a chapel committee, annual reports and auditing of the accounts so that all members were involved in congregational management.²⁷ In general within Unitarian congregations the period between the 1780s and 1830s did mark a gradual transition from rule by a patriciate of self-selecting trustees to a more democratic system whereby an elected committee was held accountable to the broader body of subscribers.

There were even steps to incorporate women into congregational affairs. There were often women who were full subscribers to congregations in their own right. Such women were, at Birmingham New Meeting in the early 19th century, allowed to vote in the annual election of the congregational committee but only by proxy.²⁸ It was among some of the newer and primarily working class congregations that women were first allowed to participate on equal terms. At Alnwick in 1816 women were allowed to vote alongside men in the choice of minister.²⁹ In the same year the radical working men who established the Oldham Chapel involved women in both the opening of the chapel and in the dinner and celebrations at an inn afterwards.³⁰ In that most crucial decision of congregational affairs - the choice of minister - there were even steps towards universal suffrage. At Wakefield's Westgate Chapel in 1837 there was a secret ballot of all members over the age of twenty-one, male and female, as to the choice

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27. George Harris The Question, What should Christian Unitarians do? Answered (1839) pp. 22,3
28. Bushrod op.cit. pp. 92-3
29. George Tate The History of the Borough, Castle and Barony of Alnwick (Alnwick 1868-9) Vol. II p.206
30. A Marcroft Historical Account of the Unitarian Chapel, Oldham (Oldham 1913) p.27

between two candidates for the post of minister.³¹ Similarly at Hanover Square Chapel in 1841 anyone, male or female, who attended the chapel regularly and was over the age of 18 was given a vote in the secret ballot to ratify the acting assistant minister, McAlister, as Turner's successor.³² However this caused some anger and several subscribers withdrew. One of them spoke of the election as "a violation of common sense and common justice": "as the majority was composed of persons, who do not contribute one shilling to the Congregations' Expences, I can never admit their right to vote, consequently in my opinion Mr. McAlister's election is illegal".³³ However, if there were faltering steps towards broader democratic involvement in congregational affairs by the mid-19th century, Unitarianism was still wholly dominated by male property-owners, usually heads of families. There were no female Unitarian ministers, no female Chapel trustees, no female chapel officers of any kind. Women and the poor had to accept their own inferior wisdom.

II

Protestantism's break with Roman Catholicism involved a whole shift in the relations between the sacred and the secular. The 'disenchantment of the world' - Weber's phrase - meant that many of the mediations between man and God, the whole tissue of magic and miracle and mystery were abandoned. The Unitarians pushed this process further, to the very verge of secularization. Sacred rites and rituals of all kinds no longer had real effects for Unitarians. The reduction of religious practice to merely external and physical exercises was criticised as a weakening of the moral discipline which religion enjoined: if men and women could be

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31. See the account in Merrie Wakefield: (based on the diaries of Clara Clarkson (1811-89) of Alverthorpe Hall, Wakefield) ed. A.K. Jacques (Wakefield 1971) p. 103
32. Minute Book of Hanover Square Chapel 1829-45 in Hanover Square Mss pp. 101-2
33. Ibid. p.115

redeemed from sin by confession and the swallowing of a piece of bread then this relieved them from the imperative to reform their lives. As one preacher told his congregation in 1790:

"You perceive the blasphemy of considering the performance of ritual duties as a discharge from moral obligations. You are aware of the guilt and folly of deserting those secular offices, upon which yourselves and families depend for a decent subsistence, for daily and almost hourly public worship. You know that the sphere of usefulness is the most sacred temple of man; - that the shop, in which honest industry officiates, is consecrated ground; that the board, upon which merchandise is viewed and money is counted, while the tongue of truth, while the balance of justice, is there, is an altar of religion; - that the worship of God, even on the day, and during the hour, devoted to his worship, is to give place, in all cases of competition, to works of humanity, that charity keeps no sabbath; - that goodness only rests in the grave".³⁴

As a result of this ethical disposition sacred rites became largely peripheral. The central element of the Catholic mass was the sacrament of Holy Communion. For rational dissent this was no longer part of Sunday worship at all. The ceremony of 'Lord's Supper' - simply commemorating the Last Supper and without any magical celebration - was held occasionally, perhaps half a dozen times a year. However it was never popular. As William Turner noted in 1827: "no Christian ordinance has been made the subject of so much abuse and perversion, through the influence of superstition and priestcraft".³⁵ It combined a number of aspects especially detested by Unitarians: the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation, whereby the bread and wine actually turned into the flesh and blood of Christ, represented an especially barbaric and tasteless piece of superstition; then its saving properties made external ritual more important than a good and useful life; finally the ceremony's use by the British state as a test for office made it a symbol of political compromise. Priestley

34. Joseph Fawcett A Sermon on the Propriety and Importance of Public Worship (1790) pp 37-8.

35. W. Turner A Sermon preached at the Chapel in Hanover Square...being the last day of the Century Since its dedication to the public worship of God (Newcastle 1827) p.22

observed how few rational dissenters bothered to attend Lord's Supper and Turner said that at Newcastle it was "so thinly attended, that it can scarcely be considered as a part of PUBLIC WORSHIP".³⁶ Baptism too fell into disuse. Since Unitarians had abandoned the doctrine of original sin, the ritual of baptism could no longer be conceived of as cleansing the soul. In its place Unitarians sometimes carried out a simple act of dedication - without ceremonial form such as sprinkling water - in which the parents publicly acknowledge their commitment to the religious education of their child.³⁷

Unitarianism's ethical emphasis and its devaluation of ritual was seized on by its opponents. The Baptist Robert Hall called Unitarianism "a cold negation, a system of renunciation and dissent" and claimed that it prevented "devotion" since it had nothing to do with "the religion of the heart".³⁸ Andrew Fuller said that Unitarians thought political and domestic affairs of greater importance than religious salvation.³⁹ Even a Unitarian of the next generation could write in 1856 of Unitarians of half a century before as "a people eminently practical and prosaic, impatient of romance...scrupulous of the veracities but afraid of the fervours of devotion".⁴⁰ What then went on within their chapels each Sunday?

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36. Ibid. p.21
37. See for examples - W. Turner Introductory Address at the Baptism, or Religious Dedication, of Catherine, Daughter of John and Catherine Rankin (Newcastle 1797); Drummond and Upton op.cit. Vol. II pp. 95-6
38. Robert Hall 'Notes of Sermons' in The Works of Robert Hall ed. O. Gregory (1832) Vol. V pp. 31,39
39. Andrew Fuller 'The Calvinistic and Socinian Systems examined and compared'... (revised ed. 1802) in The Principal Works and Remains of the Rev. Andrew Fuller (1852) pp. 346 etc.
40. Drummond and Upton op.cit. Vol. I p.287

Nothing very surprising or unusual. Unitarian ministers generally preserved the old Presbyterian order of service. William Turner's 1811 account of the customary service closely matches that of Matthew Henry a century earlier: beginning with the singing of a psalm or hymn, the reading of some passages from the Old Testament and then their exposition; a general prayer, followed by a reading from the New Testament, then a psalm; the sermon; a short final prayer, the blessing of the congregation and end of service.⁴¹ Unitarian rationalism did not then extend so far as to abandon the traditional forms of religious worship such as hymn-singing and prayer. However, since they held that God did not usually intervene directly in human affairs prayer was not a petition for divine help but more of a kind of meditation. "The efficacy of prayer", William Turner Snr. said in 1780, "is on ourselves, by impressing the sentiments of piety, deep into our minds, and thereby preparing us for a more regular and persevering obedience to the laws of God".⁴² Priestley too saw the element of petitioning as vestigial and its main function as a mental discipline but he also stressed its practical role in the service - the whole congregation should be allowed to participate in the recital of short prayers he said: "For a want of something of this kind, there is too visible an indifference and inattention during prayer in most of the congregations of Dissenters".⁴³ In the 1840s Martineau was putting forward the same argument: "prayer should not be considered as being the instrument so much as the expression - it should not be used as a means of getting, but should come from us as the habitual expressions of a state of mind".⁴⁴

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41. Turner A Short Sketch etc... p.31; Duncan Coomer English Dissent under the Early Hanoverians (1946) p.37.
 42. Quoted in W. Turner Jnr. Lives of Eminent Unitarians (1843) Vol. I p.369
 43. J. Priestley Forms of Prayer and Other Offices, for the use of Unitarian Societies(1783) in Works XXI, p.493
 44. Drummond and Upton Vol. I pp. 169-70. See also A.E. Peaston 'Historic Prayer Book Revisions' TUHS Vol. XIII No. 1 (1963) pp. 9-12

Hymn-singing was similarly accepted as part of the service. However Unitarian scruples meant that a number of traditional hymns were censored. William Turner Jnr. described in 1785 how he had "considerably purged" the hymns in use at his Newcastle chapel - "but whether sufficiently is another question"; he wondered whether all direct addresses to Christ should be omitted or whether "a greater latitude of expression should be allowed in poetry than in prose".⁴⁵ This was a continuing problem. Mrs. Barbauld complained about the over-intellectualism of Unitarian worship: "From an over-anxious fear of admitting any expression that is not strictly proper, we are apt to reject warm and pathetic imagery, and, in short, everything that strikes upon the heart and the senses".⁴⁶ When in 1810 Robert Aspland produced a newhymn book which included a number of non-Unitarian pieces some of his Hackney congregation protested about the idolatrous character of some of the hymns.⁴⁷ Martineau in 1831 defended his altering some of the hymns in his own selection which contained passages "objectionable on the ground either of theology or of taste". At the same time he defended the right to bring "all the resources of lyric poetry (the poetry of affections) into the service of religion", arguing that there should be no difficulty in making the distinction "between religious homage and poetical invocation".⁴⁸

The dominating centre of the service was the sermon, often lasting around an hour, sometimes appreciably longer. Turner in 1827 grumbled that "it has become too common to resort to our religious assemblies rather for entertainment, or at most for information".⁴⁹ Wellbeloved

45. W. Turner to Newcome Cappe 15 v 1785 DWL Mss. 93. F56

46. Quoted in R.B. Aspland Memoir of the Life, Work and Correspondence of Rev. Robert Aspland (1850) p.258

47. Ibid pp. 258-9

48. Drummond and Upton op.cit. Vol. I p.64. See also H.L. Short 'From Watts to Martineau: A Century of Unitarian Hymn-books in England' in TUHS Vol. X No. 1 (1951) pp. 6-18

49. W. Turner A Sermon etc... (Newcastle 1827) p.19

complained in 1841 that among Unitarians the prayers were regarded as something to be got through as quickly as possible so as to get to the main part of the service - the sermon.⁵⁰ The Unitarians distrusted extempore preaching. In 1808 Bogue and Bennett stated that it was only among the Unitarians that the old-fashioned Presbyterian custom of reading a written sermon from the pulpit survived.⁵¹ When W.J. Fox, an Independent turned Unitarian, was mooted as a candidate at the Birmingham New Meeting in 1815 Kenrick remarked: "It will be a new era amongst us to have extempore preaching in one of our leading congregations".⁵² Martineau argued that extempore preaching: "is as little likely to produce a genuine Sermon as the practice of improvising to produce a great poem".⁵³ However, if there was always a contempt for popular evangelical styles of preaching, Unitarian ministers throughout the period stressed the need to speak clearly and directly to the moral consciences of their hearers. Toulmin in 1804 stated that the aim of preaching was simplicity, "not the ornaments of a false eloquence, not to display ingenuity, not to make a parade of learning".⁵⁴ John Kentish counselled ministers to keep in view the needs of their hearers - sermons had to be written appropriate to the type of audience: "what would be urged suitable enough before some audiences, and on some audiences, and on some occasions, would be worse than useless, were it urged before audiences of an opposite description, and on totally distinct occasions". It was a mistake, Kentish went on, to see preaching as a timeless communication - it had to be made topical:

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50. C. Wellbeloved 'Charge' in Services at the Presbyterian Chapel, Stand; on occasion of the Ordination of the Rev. P.P. Carpenter (Manchester 1841) pp. 12, 13.
51. D. Bogue and J. Bennett History of Dissenters from the Revolution in 1688 to the year 1808 Vol. IV (1812) p.347
52. John Kenrick to G.W. Wood 1 ii 1816 MCO
53. Drummond and Upton op.cit. Vol. I p.135
54. J. Toulmin The Aims of the Apostle Paul's Ministry considered in a Sermon (Birmingham 1804) pp. 18-19.

"from passing events we may often take fair and profitable opportunities of deducing moral and religious lessons, or of communicating religious consolations". The sermon also had to possess a tone of personal directness - "decent, affectionate familiarity" Kentish said.⁵⁵

Congregations laid great store by the preaching of their ministers - indeed they were often called 'preachers', showing how central this was to their role. There was disappointment and dissatisfaction if a minister preached old sermons.⁵⁶ And ministerial complaints about the valuing of a minister solely on his ability as a preacher, forgetting his other activities and purposes, shows the pressure they were under to keep up a constant supply of new sermons. Moreover they had to communicate with a broad range of hearers in most congregations - masters and servants, parents and children, rich and poor, educated and uneducated. It was sometimes the custom for Unitarian children to have to write up their recollection of the minister's sermon each Sunday. Harriet Martineau remarked: "When the minister preaches what children can understand, this practice is of the highest use in fixing their attention and in disclosing to their parents the character and imperfections of their ideas on the most important class of subjects".⁵⁷ However there were frequent complaints about Unitarian preaching being too abstruse. After preaching before the British and Foreign Unitarian Association in 1830 John James Tayler was told that his sermon was not "fitted for the multitude".⁵⁸ The young James Martineau at Dublin in the late 1820s struggled to write in simple language,

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55. J. Kentish The Public and Private Duties of the Christian Ministry: A Charge delivered...at the Ordination of Rev. Franklin Baker (1824) pp. 9-10, 12, 14.
56. See for instance the dissatisfaction with the minister at Wakefield in the 1830s for this reason, recounted in Merrie Wakefield etc. (1971) pp. 22-3, 58.
57. The Autobiography of Harriet Martineau (2nd ed. 1877) Vol. I p.33
58. Letters, embracing his Life, of John James Tayler BA. ed. J.H. Thom (1872) Vol. I p.87

finding it: "no easy task for a man to wage war with himself, to imprison his taste, to strangle all his best thoughts, and to clothe his feelings in the tatters and beggarly elements of colloquial phraseology..." His sermons were written under pressure, sometimes the final pages being finished while the carriage waited at the door to take him to the Sunday service. Some of his hearers found his preaching incomprehensible - one man grumbling that he needed a dictionary during Martineau's sermons.⁵⁹

III

Presbyterian ministers in the late 17th and early 18th centuries had constituted a highly educated, authoritative and jealously guarded intellectual caste. Fluency in Latin was a basic requirement since at the Dissenting Academies all text-books and even manuals for learning Greek and Hebrew were in Latin. To become a minister a candidate had to undergo a lengthy education under a recognised tutor - most also spent some time at a Scottish University - then serve a period of probation as a preacher and finally to undergo a gruelling ordination. This involved writing and presenting a theological thesis, followed by a rigorous syllogistic debate, all in Latin. After this there was a lengthy public examination by a panel of ministers who tested him in Languages and Philosophy. Finally there was a prolonged ordination ceremony. Only after this gruelling procedure was he allowed to use the title 'Reverend' and administer rites and services.⁶⁰ Such men exerted considerable authority and had the power to demand obedience from their congregations.

In the course of the 18th century there was a gradual dismantling of this position of authority. Classical scholarship and an austere intellectualism remained the sine qua non of a respectable minister and at

59. Drummond and Upton op.cit. Vol. I pp. 58-9

60. Alexander Gordon Cheshire Classis Minutes 1691-1745 (1919) pp. 127-30.

Warrington and Manchester College the denomination continued to support a full-time education for some of their ministers up to the age of 21 or 22 years. Many of the ministers at wealthier chapels in the early 19th century had been educated at one of the Scottish Universities as well. Among the Unitarian elite an uneducated minister was regarded as a scandal - much as an uneducated man practising law or medicine would have been. However the minister had lost the religious authority of the old Presbyterians. An old lady recalled Rev. Job Orton in the late 18th century coming out of the vestry of the Shrewsbury chapel and the whole congregation rising and waiting in silence until he took his place in the pulpit: "These mere outward marks of respect for the clerical profession are not now seen in the Unitarian body", a minister commented.⁶¹ More importantly, the emergence of rational dissent had brought with it a distrust of "priestcraft" in the sphere of doctrine. William Turner in 1811 described the minister's deference to the right of his members to complete freedom of opinion and the duty to avoid even the hint of dogmatism, so that if he ever declares his own opinion on any particular topic: "he conceives it to be at the same time his duty to do this with modesty and good temper, under a proper sense of the limited nature of the human powers, and of the necessary effect of the various influences of birth, education, and connections in life, to produce a justifiable variety in the opinions of men, and therefore with all due deference to this variety; and without the most distant wish to impose his own opinions on any single hearer, against his own serious and deliberate conviction".⁶² Bridgwater's Unitarian minister William James told his congregation in 1841 that the ministry had nothing in common with orthodox priesthods: "His functions confer upon him

61. William James A Memoir of Rev. Thomas Madge (1871) p.31

62. W. Turner A Short Sketch etc... p.30

no priestly power, give him no dominion over the faith of his hearers, no authority to interfere with any man's individual judgement of what is true or right".⁶³

Some Unitarians had gone so far in their revolt against 'priestcraft' that they saw the existence of a specialised religious minister at all as a compromise with sacerdotalism: "a great deal of their importance", Joseph Priestley argued in 1783, "is nothing more than the remains of that superstition with which the clerical character was so long respected in the dark ages".⁶⁴ If few others were quite so radical, most Unitarians - ministers and laymen alike - saw the continued existence of the ministry as simply a convenient convention and decisively rejected notions of the minister as a man apart. "Among us", Thomas Madge said in 1822, "no-one, I should suppose, imagines that a minister is possessed of any authority, personally considered, but what is conferred by those who appoint him". The minister, he argued, was not "under an especial call of illumination, or endowed with greater sanctity, or possessed of greater privileges, than others of the congregation of whom he is one..."⁶⁵

But if the Unitarian minister was an ordinary man among ordinary men - in the words of one minister: "neither a superior nor a servant - but a friend, an equal, a brother"⁶⁶ - he was also a man placed in a peculiarly delicate moral position. The central role of the minister as moral conscience to his congregation had implications for his social conduct. Clearly he had to distance himself from particular kinds of behaviour: quite how far was, though, a matter of lively debate among Unitarians sensitive to the dangers of 'priestly' presumptions among their ministers. In 1806 a

63. W. James The Reciprocal Duties of Ministers and People: A Sermon (1841) p.9

64. J. Priestley Forms of Prayer etc... loc.cit. p.481

65. T. Madge Reasons for Praise and Thanksgiving to God: A Sermon preached on the Opening of the Unitarian Chapel at Diss, in Norfolk (1822)pp.34-5

66. J.J. Tayler 'Address' in Services at the Presbyterian Chapel, Stand etc... (1841) p.30

letter of advice from an experienced minister, PQ, to a young minister was brought to the attention of the readers of the 'Monthly Repository'. It criticised card-playing as contradicting the dignity of a minister of religion, spoke fiercely of "the gaming table" and its encouragement of immorality and admonished those who associated with "the profane and worthless".⁶⁷ This provoked a number of replies from Unitarian ministers and laymen. One called it "a methodistical scarecrow". He said that as a Unitarian minister he did not wish to be accorded any special treatment:

"I love to be considered as a man amongst men, chosen to advise because I am supposed to have a little more knowledge than the mass of my congregation: but I cannot bear that any degree of sanctity should be connected with my office".⁶⁸

The latter, he argued, led to priestly pretensions. No moral laws applied to the minister more than to any individual Christian and hence he was free to participate in social life to the same degree as other men: "Let the minister intermix in the world as one destined equally with the rest to enjoy it. Let him partake of the innocent amusement of those whose situations will allow of their spending a part of their time in play".⁶⁹ From Norwich another letter described P.Q.'s advice as sounding remarkably like: "that farrago of bigotry and absurdity which appears monthly under the title of the Evangelical Magazine". P.Q., he said, derived his notions of card-playing from the gaming houses of St. James and Newmarket, failing to differentiate between "an assemblage of well-educated and well-bred people and a gang of professed sharpers and gamblers".⁷⁰ In all kinds of ways the character of the religious minister was being de-mystified among the Unitarians and he was permitted to share in the relaxed and worldly leisure activities of his wealthier hearers.

67. P.Q. 'On the Propriety of Dissenting Ministers Playing at Cards' MR Vol. I (1806) pp. 534-8.

68. R.S.T. 'On Dissenting Ministers Playing at Cards' *ibid.* pp. 646-7

69. *Ibid.* pp. 647-8

70. 'No Bigot' *Ibid.* pp. 648-9

Yet there were limits and the Unitarian minister still had to hold himself a little apart. Priestley observed: "the character they sustain in society obliges them to greater external decency of conduct, so as to lay them under some considerable restraint, at least with respect to a love of pleasure, and a taste for amusement".⁷¹ John Kentish warned the aspiring young minister against indulging in social behaviour which could be misconstrued, even though not in itself immoral.⁷² Similarly Robert Aspland advised the young minister to be wary of public opinion: "you have to preserve not only the uprightness and purity, but also the decorum of the ministerial character; for many things that may be lawful to a Christian minister are inexpedient, and he that will always go to the utmost verge of practical liberty will sometimes go beyond it and be convicted in public opinion as a transgressor".⁷³

The pastoral role of the Unitarian minister was another point of tension. It was widely accepted that part of his duties involved the visiting of the sick. However, traditionally, his role as a moralising influence required him to establish private and personal relations with all his members. Still in the 1780s Priestley's co-minister at the Birmingham New Meeting, Blyth, made a point of visiting every family in his congregation four times each year.⁷⁴ But increasingly pastoral visiting seems to have declined among Unitarians. The simple difficulty of regularly visiting perhaps as many as two hundred families scattered across a large city or tract of land was a limiting factor. "Modern habits may render it somewhat difficult, at least in a situation like yours, to teach literally from house to house", Kentish told one young minister

71. J. Priestley Four Discourses Intended to have been Delivered at Philadelphia (1806) in Works XVI p.426

72. Kentish op.cit. p.26

73. R. Aspland in The Services at the Ordination of the Rev. R. Brook Aspland M.A. in the Chapel, Crooks Lane, Chester... (Chester 1826) p.80

74. Priestley Memoirs 1 p. 340n

at Bolton in 1824.⁷⁵ And another minister noted of this pastoral responsibility: "amidst the numerous and pressing claims upon the time and attention of ministers, particularly in large cities, and in consequence of the remoteness of their people from them and from each other, it is too often but imperfectly fulfilled".⁷⁶

But also significant was aversion to "priestly interference" in private life on the part of Unitarians. "While you are the cordial, and, as far as possible, the equal, friend of all your hearers", Kentish advised, "refrain from any thing like interference in those of their concerns which are merely secular".⁷⁷ Tayler advised a young minister in 1852 of the need for great care in intervening in family or personal problems which can easily be misinterpreted as "having a spice of priestly interference in it". The Unitarian minister needs to establish his moral authority gradually and with great tact:

"If you can first win in any way the confidence and sympathy of persons - induce them to like your company and conversation proffered simply as those of a friend - and you can get them to listen to whatever you say earnestly and kindly and without any air of assuming authority, purely by force of a strong moral spirit - good will be done and may be done; but you must watch your opportunity, and use it meekly, courteously and discreetly..."⁷⁸

The Unitarian minister's religious role, then, reflected the broader demystification of religion among Unitarians. Thom contrasted their situation with that of other types of religious minister. On the one hand there was the Priest; "a spiritual Magician, the only authorized Performer of intercessory rites" as found especially in the Roman Catholic

75. Kentish op.cit. p.22

76. W. James The Work of the Ministry: and Prayer on the Part of a Christian Congregation for the Efficacy of the Ministry of the Gospel among them, Important to its Success: Two Sermons... (Bristol 1842) pp 18-19. Lant Carpenter, minister at Lewins Mead Chapel in Bristol, told Turner: "I see nothing, scarcely of the congregation, except in connexion with my professional engagements". Carpenter to William Turner 4 v 1822 in Turner Mss, Library of Newcastle Lit. and Phil.

77. Kentish op.cit. p.23

78. Letters etc... of J.J. Tayler (1872) Vol. I p. 335

Church; on the other hand there was the no less dogmatic role of the orthodox dissenting preacher - "an Instrument for feeding and exciting the warmth of certain doctrinal assurances".⁷⁹ The Unitarian minister had broken with both these static roles and stood at the verge of the secular - without special powers or offices, and without doctrinal authority, simply - as he was often termed among Unitarians - a 'Christian teacher'.

Turning next to the social situation of the minister: what was his income, his status, his relationship to other social groups? Ejected from the Church of England in 1662 and for a generation living a fugitive existence, the Presbyterian ministry emerged slowly and unsteadily as an autonomous profession. In the early 18th century regular stipends were unusual. The individual minister received sums of money from his hearers on a haphazard basis. Wealthy local patrons of Dissent often helped. Sometimes ministers were men of property with an estate or some other private source of income. More often they were forced to find other sources of income - usually schoolteaching, sometimes medicine, occasionally farming. In the course of the 18th century minister's stipends became formalised and regular but their inadequacy was a constant theme throughout the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Few went so far as Samuel Girle at Lancaster's Unitarian Chapel in the 1790s - who walked the streets of the town dressed in a ragged coat, patched breeches and old shoes taking every opportunity to tell passers-by that he dressed in a style befitting the contribution his congregation made for his support.⁸⁰ However in public and in private, in letters from the pulpit and in the press Unitarian ministers complained about their poor salaries. Estlin at his ordination in 1778 responded to the question of why he chose to enter the ministry

79. J.H. Thom 'The Pastoral Office' in The Christian Teacher
Vol. IV (1839) p.245

80. W. Hewitson An Account of the St. Nicholas St. Chapel Lancaster
(bound volume in DWL of cuttings from The Lancaster Observer
Sept. - Dec. 1890) no page numbers.

with the point that the job was such as to: "preclude all reasonable ground of suspicion, that I was originally influenced in my choice by a regard to worldly riches, pleasure or power".⁸¹ Priestley in 1782 commented on the "narrow and insufficient income" of dissenting ministers generally.⁸² In 1790 Theophilus Lindsey observed that "the poor pittance comparatively which dissenting congregations in the country with the best dispositions can afford their minister is but a slender support for a growing family in these days".⁸³ "It is not at all likely that a son, educated to this profession, should become the richest man of his family", Turner remarked in 1800.⁸⁴ And in 1826 Robert Aspland drily noted: "there is little temptation to any one to undertake the Protestant Dissenting Ministry from corrupt motives, and for mercenary ends".⁸⁵ And yet within the Unitarian body there was a good deal of variation in ministerial income and status.

By the end of the 18th century, it was said, average ministerial salaries varied between £60 and £30 per annum.⁸⁶ Benjamin Maurice, at Alcester, for many years received little more than £20 per annum and barely managed to leave enough money for his funeral.⁸⁷ At Wem between 1787 and 1813 William Hazlitt received £30 per annum - augmented by small grants of £5 from the Presbyterian Fund or Dr. Williams's Trust and occasional gifts from the wealthy Shrewsbury Unitarian William Tayleur.⁸⁸ However at Leeds in the early 1770s Joseph Priestley received £105 per annum as did his successor Wood until 1791 when it was increased to £120.⁸⁹

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81. See Services at the Ordination of John Prior Estlin... (1778) pp 38-9
82. J. Priestley The Proper Constitution of a Church etc...
Works XV p.53
83. Theophilus Lindsey to William Frend 14 vii 1790 CUL: Add. Mss. 7886/156
84. W. Turner A Sermon Preached at the Chapel in Hanover Square Newcastle, for the Support of New College, Manchester (Newcastle 1800) p.17
85. Aspland loc.cit. p.60
86. Protestant Dissenters' Magazine Vol. III (1796) p.68
87. H. McLachlan The Unitarian Movement in the Religious Life of England (1934) pp. 98-9
88. R.M. Wardle Hazlitt (University of Nebraska 1971) p.27
89. Mill Hill Chapel Mss.

At Wakefield Turner received £60, a regular annual gift of 20 guineas and the free use of a house.⁹⁰ John Disney was paid £150 at Essex Street Chapel in the 1780s - comparable to the £150 which Archdeacon Blackburne got as a dignitary of the established Church.⁹¹

In the early 19th century the gap between small town congregations, where the salary was generally around £60, and prosperous urban congregations seems, if anything, to have widened. When W.J. Fox became minister at South Place Chapel in London in 1817 his salary was £200 and a year later was increased to £300. At Cross Street Chapel in Manchester the two ministers were paid £200 each in 1815 plus a regular bonus of £100 until 1820 when the latter was increased to £130. In 1825 one of the ministers John Gooch Robberds was presented with 1000 guineas by the trustees.⁹² And at a number of other Chapels Unitarian ministers were receiving salaries of between £200 and £300 in the 1820s and 30s. At Leeds in the late 1830s Charles Wicksteed received £400 per annum.⁹³ For a number of ministers, then, their career offered them material rewards comparable to other members of the professional middle class. Tax assessments in the early 1850s show that out of a total of 5,423,000 occupied males only 19,000 (less than half a per cent) earned more than £200 per annum.⁹⁴ Unitarian ministers in opulent congregations like Cross Street and Mosley Street in Manchester, Mill Hill in Leeds or a dozen or so others were affluent members of the middle class with fine houses, servants, well-stocked wine cellars,

90. T. Chalmers Manuscript History of Westgate Chapel in WCL: JG Mss

91. T. Lindsey to William Tayleur 25 xi 1782 UC Mss: JRL

92. M.D. Conway Centenary of South Place Society (1894) p.38;
Minute Book of Cross Street Chapel Trustees op.cit. pp. 21-7, 63-4.

93. Mill Hill Chapel Mss

94. See J.A. Banks Prosperity and Parenthood: A Study of Family Planning among the Victorian Middle Classes (1954) p.108

accustomed to attend the theatre and concerts, to visit London regularly, to go on long European tours occasionally. William Gaskell of Cross Street had succeeded in accumulating £1500 by the end of the 1840s which was invested in Dock shares.⁹⁵ However these were exceptions. Even at a relatively substantial chapel, such as that in Hull, a young minister found it impossible to square his model of a respectable family life with a minister's wage. William Oke Manning resigned in 1805 because of "the smallness of the salary". It was said: "he wanted to marry a young lady in London...who had but very little fortune and he saw no prospect of being able to maintain a family. Therefore he has not only left Hull but has given up his profession, and is gone into trade as a Stock Broker..."⁹⁶

SALARIES AT A RANGE OF EARLY 19TH CENTURY
UNITARIAN CHAPELS

Birmingham New Meeting 1803	£150	Hull 1828	£110
Wakefield early 19th century	£120	North Shields 1832	£70
Leeds 1808	£160	Liverpool 1832	£200
Sheffield 1810	£180	Sunderland 1835	£80
Walmsley 1811	£90	Malton 1838	£53
Chesterfield 1813	£100	Yeovil 1839	£65
Bridgwater 1816	£90	Newcastle-upon-Tyne 1841	£120
Mosley Street, Manchester 1820	£200	Tavistock 1842	£70
Glasgow 1825	£250	Kings Lynn 1843	£70
Todmorden 1825	£100	Huddersfield 1845	£60
Salford 1825	£120	Billingshurst 1851	£45
Rivington 1826	£67	Salford 1851	£210
Halifax 1826	£144		

95. Elizabeth Gaskell to E. Holland 13 i 1849 in The Letters of Elizabeth Gaskell ed. Chapple and Pollard (1966) pp. 826-7.

96. Mrs. Kenrick to J.H. Bransby 6 xii 1805 in Bransby Mss UC Mss: JRL

Though in Kings Lynn in the 1840s William Mountford was supposed to have lived much on bread and milk to afford books out of his salary of £70⁹⁷ - even among the smaller poorer Unitarian chapels the minister was in no sense in a situation of material deprivation. He was paid appreciably more than most craftsmen or skilled workmen, and indeed more than many clergymen. Complaints about salaries really involved the status of the ministry, and fears that he was becoming reduced to the level of a servant. Tayler commented in 1829 that "the plain and simple life which his circumstances may render it necessary for him to adopt" should not lead members of the congregation to treat their minister as a social inferior.⁹⁸ Mrs. Oliphant's novel Salem Chapel, published in 1863, presented a grim picture of the predicament of a young and intelligent Independent minister in a small town congregation of shopkeepers, dressmakers, schoolteachers. His ministerial role was primarily to confirm the inarticulate prejudices of his hearers against Bishop and aristocrat - and at the same time to fill the pews by ensuring that his preaching was enjoyable. He was expected to constantly visit and take tea with the families of leading members, to take sides in their mutual jealousies and resentments, to provide an eligible husband for one of their daughters. His leading members arrogated to themselves the right to control his social life. "If a minister ain't a servant, we pays him his salary at least, and expects him to please us," as one of them put it.

W.P. Scargill's embittered account of his twenty years as minister

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97. A History of the New Meeting House Kidderminster 1782-1800
ed E.D.P. Evans (Kidderminster 1900) p. 276
98. J.J. Tayler Motives to Industry and Zeal in the Christian Ministry:
A Discourse (Manchester 1829) p.13

to the old Presbyterian congregation in Bury St. Edmunds suggests that the Unitarian minister could be in a position no less enviable. The whole nature of the contract between minister and people gave all power to the latter Scargill claimed: "we find everywhere that a dissenting minister is but the tool of his flock, they are his instructor, and not he theirs. He must preach and pray in such fashion as may be most pleasing to them; he must be always of their opinion in all matters, religious, political, or otherwise".⁹⁹ As in Salem Chapel, Scargill found that the leading members claimed the right to interfere in the minister's private life. If he married into one of the congregation's ruling families he makes his domestic life especially vulnerable to their dictates: "he is hen-pecked by all his wife's relations, - his house is open to their inspection, every dish upon his table is criticised by them, and he can scarcely drive a nail into the wall to hang his hat upon, without their permission."¹⁰⁰

Henry Solly's experiences at Yeovil in the early 1840s were different but hardly less difficult. His salary of £65 was too small to travel much or enjoy what little cultural diversion there was in the area. He later recalled the "sacrifices my wife had to make in coming to share my lot, and the privations which inevitably arise from the 'genteel poverty' of a minister of religion's life": from the wealthy Unitarian family, the Shaens, she actually had to do some domestic labour herself though they managed to afford to keep one servant.¹⁰¹ Solly's problem was not fending off the demands and attentions of his hearers - on the contrary it was his isolation which bothered him. The congregation's leading family - with whom he felt to be on terms of intellectual equality - treated him as a social inferior, almost one of their tradesmen and he was not admitted to

99. The Autobiography of a Dissenting Minister (1834) p.213

100. Ibid. pp. 183-4

101. Henry Solly op.cit. Vol. I pp. 365-7

their society. The congregation was small and the other members were largely shopkeepers, tradesmen and a group of intelligent working men with whom he at length began to socialise. Yeovil society in general was closed to him and he had no contact with anyone outside his chapel: "I found, in short, that I was regarded as a sort of theological leper, to be feared and shunned".¹⁰²

This represents one extreme of the Unitarian minister's situation. Clearly among the larger urban congregations in towns like Manchester, Leeds Birmingham and so on, the minister was accorded more respect. There were, for instance, many cases of ministers - without fortune or family connection - being accepted into wealthy Unitarian families as a suitable son-in-law. Old Job Orton advised a young dissenting minister against marrying the sister of one of his colleagues, a woman without fortune: "you may reasonably expect, considering your education, profession and station, that you may meet a wife with a handsome fortune, as many other Dissenting ministers have done".¹⁰³ William Shepherd, for instance - an orphan, educated at two Dissenting Academies through charity, frugal living and hard work - married at the age of 24 into a substantial merchant family in Liverpool in the 1790s. Others in a similar situation married into wealthy families belonging to their chapel: at Leeds William Wood married into the Oates family; at Liverpool J.H. Thom married Hannah Rathbone in 1838, daughter of the mayor; Lewis Loyd in the 1790s married the daughter of John Jones, Manchester banker; in the 1830s Charles Wickstead married into a leading Leeds family the Luptons, and so on. The role of a number of ministers in public life - as active figures in voluntary societies, as intellectuals, as political

102. Ibid. p. 337

103. S. Palmer Letters to Dissenting ministers and to Students for the Ministry from the Rev. Mr. Job Orton...to which are prefixed memoirs of his life (1806) Vol. I p. 140

disputants - similarly earned them respect. Indeed George Harris was sharply critical of the incorporation of the Unitarian minister into the middle class, being seen only "in the drawing rooms of the wealthy" while disregarding "the hard-working inmates of the cottage" and "the unwashed artificer".¹⁰⁴

Yet as Turner noted in 1800, there was an "aversion" among wealthier Unitarians to have their sons educated for the Unitarian ministry - it was not seen as a proper profession or career for the son of a merchant, a doctor, a lawyer or a manufacturer.¹⁰⁵ Henry Solly himself had considered the Unitarian ministry as a low status occupation in the 1830s when he was struggling to establish himself in London commerce:

"I knew how the London Unitarian ministers were looked down upon by some of the wealthy laymen of the connection; and, though I never heard a disrespectful word about them from my father and mother (who had, indeed, always been on terms of intimate friendship with Dr. Priestley and Mr. Belsham), yet I heard them spoken of by my brothers in jesting and disparaging language which, in conjunction with traits of character in some of those whom I knew, insensibly coloured my whole conception of the status and character of the dissenting ministry".¹⁰⁶

Evidence of the occupations of fathers of more than thirty leading Unitarian ministers of the early 19th century confirms the point that they rarely came from wealthy commercial, professional or industrial families.¹⁰⁷ Only five could be said to have emerged from a family situation of substantial economic security which provided other professional options - John Gooch Robberds, for instance, came from a family of successful Norwich merchants and was originally intended for business. A third of these ministers were the sons of shopkeepers, tradesmen, artisans - including

104. Harris op.cit. pp. 27-8

105. W. Turner A Sermon...for the Support of New College, Manchester (1800) p.17

106. H. Solly op.cit. Vol. I p.300

107. This data is drawn from DNB for several ministers, obituaries in the Monthly Repository, the Christian Reformer, and The Inquirer, printed memoirs already cited.

OCCUPATIONS OF FATHERS OF 34 UNITARIAN MINISTERS
IN THE EARLY 19TH CENTURY

dissenting minister	13	shopkeeper	draper
shoemaker		sail-cloth manufacturer	grocer
bookseller		merchant	paper-manufacturer
naval officer		cutlery manufacturer	pawnbroker
schoolmaster		tradesman	carpet-manufacturer (bankrupt)
doctor		farmer	timber merchant (bankrupt)
watchmaker		parish clerk	silk manufacturer (bankrupt)
artificer			

William Shepherd, Wellbeloved, John Relly Beard, W.J. Fox. A further three were the sons of bankrupted commercial men - James Martineau, Lant Carpenter, Henry Solly. The largest number (more than 40%) were sons of dissenting ministers. In a number of cases the ministry was something of a family dynasty. The Turner family provide an outstanding example of this ministerial cousinage.¹⁰⁸ John Turner (b. 1689) was a Presbyterian minister in the early 18th century at Preston, Rivington and Knutsford; his son William Turner (1714-94) was a minister and schoolmaster in Cheshire and from 1761 at Wakefield; his son, also William, was minister at Newcastle-upon-Tyne from 1782 until 1841 and married the daughter of another minister, William Willets; he in turn had a son Henry Turner who became minister at Nottingham, a son William who was tutor at Manchester College and then minister for many years at Halifax, and a daughter Mary who married Robberds of Cross Street - two of their sons in turn became Unitarian ministers. In the early 19th century other leading ministers were interconnected by marriage - Timothy Kenrick married the sister of Belsham, two of his sons by a previous marriage George and John became ministers and both married the daughters of ministers, the latter Wellbeloved's. In the next generation such leading ministers as James Martineau, Samuel Bache and Edward Higginson were related by marriage.

108. See obituary of William Turner Snr. in Protestant Dissenters' Magazine Vol. I (1794) p.424; Alexander Gordon op.cit. pp. 209-10, 214; William Wood A Sermon preached Sept. 7th 1794 on occasion of the death of the Rev. William Turner...to which are added Memoirs of Mr. Turner's Life and Writings (Newcastle 1794) p. 33ff; W. Turner Lives of Eminent Unitarians (1843) p. 337ff; Obituary of William Turner (the second) in The Gateshead Observer 30 vi 1859

Among the Unitarians the relative lightness of ministerial duties allowed him time for other activities. Joseph Dawson at the small congregation at Idle in the 1770s and 80s ran a school, superintended several coal mines which he opened in the area, became a partner in a stone quarry, gave free medical advice to poor people in the village, stored fodder for his cattle in part of the chapel and kept his hens penned in the graveyard - while his congregation faded away.¹⁰⁹ Ralph Harrison of Cross Street Chapel, Manchester, was said to have made a fortune by "the judicious purchase of undeveloped land" in the town.¹¹⁰ Thomas Olivers Warwick, minister at Rotherham 1793-1816, combined the ministry with a medical practice - he initiated the town's Infirmary and was its first doctor. At the same time he was a partner with John Aldred, the chapel's largest subscriber, in a local dye-works.¹¹¹ Thomas Southwood Smith combined the Unitarian ministry with a medical practice at Yeovil between 1816 and 20.¹¹² James Pullin Hinton was a practising solicitor while Unitarian minister at Frenchay, near Bristol, in the 1820s.¹¹³

However the most obvious resource for a Unitarian minister was always schoolteaching and few were not engaged in it for some part of their career. Often a school was seen as the natural concomitant of the ministry. In 1812 a vacancy for a minister at Rochdale was reported, with a salary of £120, a small parsonage and "fair prospects for a school".¹¹⁴ A couple

109. A. and S. Henry Fortunes Made in Business (1887) Vol. I pp. 93-128; Gary Firth 'The Origins of Low Moor Ironworks, Bradford, 1788-1800' Yorkshire Archaeological Journal Vol. 49 (1977) p.129; J.G. Miall Congregationalism in Yorkshire (1868) p.295

110. W.E.A. Axon 'Buxton Chapel' TUHS Vol. III No. 4 (1926) pp 322-3; Sermons on Various Subjects by the late Rev. Ralph Harrison: to which is prefixed a Biographical Memoir of the author (Manchester 1813) pp. iii-vii.

111. W. Blazeby Rotherham: The Old Meeting-House and its Ministers (Rotherham 1906) pp. 161-4, 168-9.

112. DNB.

113. J. Murch op.cit. p.73

114. G.W. Wood to C. Wellbeloved 13 i 1812 MCO

of years later at Bridgwater a minister's acceptance of the pulpit was made conditional upon there being good prospects of establishing a successful school.¹¹⁵ Sometimes these schools drew pupils from among the gentry. Thomas Astley, minister at Chesterfield, ran a boarding school in the late 18th century which was said to have educated the social elite of Derbyshire.¹¹⁶ At Palgrave in East Anglia Rochemont Barbauld ran a select boarding school which prepared a number of sons of local gentry and of Norwich merchants for Oxford and Cambridge.¹¹⁷ Such small boarding schools could be highly profitable. At Hindley in Lancashire between 1779 and 1812 Jonathan Hodgkin preached to a congregation of farmers, country traders, husbandmen, weavers and was paid only £30 per annum. However his boarding school for 'Young Gentlemen', with annual fees of 25 guineas, brought him ten times this sum.¹¹⁸ At Mansfield Samuel Catlow's boarding school - he called it a 'Literary and Commercial Seminary' - proved so lucrative with fees a minimum of 25 guineas, that he gave up the ministry altogether in 1798.¹¹⁹

Such secular activities helped augment poor salaries but, as Tayler noted in 1829, they forced on the minister "secular feelings and duties", made it difficult to maintain a religious disposition "amidst the constant bustle and excitement of secular employments", and diverted energy away from religious duties.¹²⁰ So that the very character of the Unitarian ministry as a professional career tended to reinforce the process of religious demystification at work within Unitarianism.

115. G.E. Pike 'The Evolution of Church Government...' loc.cit. p.46

116. See obituary in The Northern Star, or Yorkshire Magazine Vol. I (1817) pp. 474-5

117. N. Hans New Trends in Education in the 18th century (1951) p.60

118. J.I. Jones 'The History of the Presbyterian or Protestant Dissenting Chapel, Hindley - II' TUHS Vol. VII No. 2 (1940) pp. 158-9.

119. J.H. White The Story of the Old Meeting House, Mansfield (1959) pp 50-1. For more detailed account of the character of Unitarian ministers' schools see John Seed 'Unitarian Ministers as Schoolmasters, 1780-1850: Some Notes' TUHS forthcoming 1982.

120. J.J. Tayler Motives to Industry etc... (1829) p. 31-2.

IV

What of the constellation of other church activities - the prayer-meetings, the tea-meetings, the lovefeasts, the special weeknight services - which among Methodists and dissenters often absorbed the energy of their members throughout non-working time? Unitarian indifference to 'other worldly' purposes meant that diversion of energy into religious observances was frowned upon - so too was the public effluence of religiosity which such gatherings usually aspired towards. However other kinds of church activity - libraries, book societies, schools and so on - which could prove their utility did have a place within Unitarian congregations.

Sunday Schools were always the natural adjunct of any religious society from the end of the 18th century. In some cases Unitarians pioneered their development. At Newcastle-upon-Tyne William Turner set up at the end of 1784 the first Sunday School in the region. In 1786 he publicised the system before a gathering of dissenting ministers from the Northern counties.¹²¹ Elsewhere - at Manchester, Derby, Birmingham - rational dissenters in the 1780s cooperated with churchmen and other groups to set up non-denominational Sunday Schools, a transcendence of sectarianism which did not outlast the 1790s.¹²² However, compared to Methodists and other dissenters Unitarians were often slow to establish Sunday Schools and often half-hearted in supporting them. George Harris was critical of Unitarian apathy in 1823 and pointed to nine congregations in Lancashire which had no Sunday School at all.¹²³ In 1851 a third of Unitarian congregations throughout England still had no Sunday School. Many others were small, though the pupil-teacher ratio was often very good.¹²⁴

121. W. Turner Sunday Schools Recommended in a Sermon Preached before the Associated Dissenting Ministers in the Northern Counties (Newcastle 1786)

122. W.R. Ward Religion and Society in England 1790-1850 (1972) pp. 13-15, 41-4.

123. G. Harris Motives to induce Unitarians to excel their Brethren: A Sermon (2nd ed. 1823) pp. 22-3. See also T.W. Laqueur Religion and Respectability: Sunday Schools and Working Class Culture 1780-1850 (Yale 1976) p.46

124. See Appendix III

The primary rationale of Unitarian Sunday Schools was similar to those of other denominations - the moralising of the labouring poor, the eradication of disorderly traits. The aim of the Old Meeting Sunday School at Birmingham, it was said in 1837, was to prepare the labouring class "for enduring with a Christian spirit the hardships and privations attendant on a life of poverty".¹²⁵ Most Sunday Schools also had a number of ancillary societies within their orbit - savings clubs, friendly societies, insurance schemes, clothing funds, which reinforced this ethic. At Plymouth for instance the Unitarian Sunday School had a Savings Fund through which the annual sum each child had contributed in the course of the year was returned with a premium of two pence for each shilling saved: "to promote habits of forethought and economy among the children, and thus prepare them for the prudent performance of the duties of life".¹²⁶ At York the St. Saviourgate Sunday School had a Benefit Society through which contributions of one penny a week insured against illness; the superintendent noted that such societies: "are eminently calculated for inculcating that foresight and provident calculation of consequences, the neglect of which is one of the chief causes of all the miseries of the poor".¹²⁷

Though sharing the characteristic stress of evangelical political economy, Unitarian Sunday Schools differed in one important respect - their secular curriculum. Turner in 1786, perhaps with an eye to the Calvinist prejudices of his audience, had been somewhat Sabbatarian about Sunday Schools. He criticised the old canard that education of the lower orders made them discontented, but affirmed the propriety of confining the Sunday School curriculum to moral and religious training.¹²⁸ However in the early 19th century, particularly after the victory of Tory reaction in the 1790s

125. Quoted in E. Bushrod op.cit. p.178

126. W.J. Odgers A Brief History of the Plymouth Unitarian Congregation (1850) p.26.

127. CR Vol. XVIII (1832) p.91

128. W. Turner Sunday Schools Recommended etc... pp. 30n, 35.

had frightened the Wesleyans into forbidding writing in their Sunday Schools, the Unitarians were almost unique in offering secular subjects to their pupils on a Sunday. In many towns only the Unitarian Sunday School taught writing and arithmetic. At Mill Hill Chapel Sunday School in the late 1830s and early '40s subjects taught included scripture, reading, spelling, writing, arithmetic, scripture history, geography; among texts in use were a history of Judea, Paley's 'Moral Philosophy', a History of England and a Geography of the British colonies - the only Sunday School in the town to offer such a broad curriculum.¹²⁹

This characteristically Unitarian belief in intellectual culture made their Sunday Schools attractive to young workmen seeking knowledge. A Manchester millwright told a government commission in 1833 that he had attended the Unitarian Sunday School on Mosley Street because he found their teaching useful, in contrast to the Methodists: "I consider the manner the Methodists treat their children in Sunday-schools a complete loss of time, it keeps them out of the streets and that is all".¹³⁰ At Birmingham in the 1830s the young George Holyoake came into contact with Unitarians at the Mechanics Institute and became involved in the New Meeting Sunday School. He later recalled:

129. Sunday School Secretary's Book 1835-48 in Mill Hill Mss (back of book); see also Laqueur op.cit. p. 103

130. Report of Commissioners on Employment of Children in Factories (1833) Vol. XX D1 p.22; Susanna Winkworth, who taught at the Mosley Street Schools in the 1840s and 50s recalled that half the 'pupils' were over 15 - she herself taught a class of women aged between 17 and 30 - and attended not just for the range of classes, which included Singing and Natural History, but also as a social centre: "The school with its various institutions, was a sort of general meeting-place round which the interests - social religious and intellectual - of the young people clustered". M.J. Shaen Memorials of Two Sisters: Susanna and Catherine Winkworth (1908) p.35. See also 'An Old Scholar' Sketch of the Origin and Progress of Lower Mosley Street Day and Sunday Schools (Manchester 1867) esp. p.26

"My preference for the acquaintance of Unitarians was that there was so much more to be learned among them than among any other body I had known...I could see that young men of my age trained in Unitarian schools were very superior to Evangelical youths who had merely spiritual information".¹³¹

Of course this enthusiasm for "useful knowledge" could be ineptly implemented and of very little value. At Sheffield's Unitarian Sunday School in 1843 an inspector found a class of girls struggling through Chamber's 'Introduction to the Sciences': "Girls who could not read without spelling every long word were wading through accounts of Oxygen and hydrogen, and of chemical phenomena, of which I do not believe they had the most distant comprehension".¹³²

Some Unitarians thought the stress on secular subjects had gone too far - that "useful knowledge" should be balanced by religious belief, since the primary purpose of the Sunday School was the formation of virtuous habits.¹³³ At Mill Hill Leeds the Sunday School was criticised by its own Committee for neglecting "the moral and religious culture of the Scholars" in 1845: there was "no regular and systematic inculcation of morality, theology or religion in any class".¹³⁴ The lack of sectarianism of Unitarian Sunday Schools was also a source of complaint; one subscriber to the Birmingham Sunday Schools grumbled that: "probably not eight out of every ten pupils we educate even know what our principles are, much less become Unitarians!!!"¹³⁵

131. J. McCabe Life and Letters of George Jacob Holyoake (1908) Vol. I p.12

132. Children's Employment Commission: Appendix to the Second Report of the Commissioners, Trades and Manufacturers Part I (1843) E 28-9.

133. See for examples: Samuel Bache 'The Peculiar Importance of Religious Instruction in Sunday Schools' CR Vol. XIX (1833) pp. 8, 12; Franklin Howorth Our Older Sunday Scholars; means suggested for their continued Improvement and Usefulness: A Discourse (Manchester 1849) pp. 1-3.

134. Sunday School Secretary's Book 1835-48 loc.cit. p.118

135. Bushrod op.cit. p.189. And see the evidence of the Unitarian minister Samuel Wood in Report from the Select Committee on the State of Education (1834) pp. 159, 164. See also Laqueur op.cit. p.80

Another problem - one shared by Sunday Schools of all denominations - was the lack of involvement of Unitarian laymen in the running of Sunday Schools. Complaints were perennial. There were some laymen of wealth who devoted considerable time to Unitarian Sunday Schools: Thomas Henry Robinson, for instance, a Manchester merchant and first superintendent of Lower Mosley Street Schools who, it was said: "largely forsook the pleasures of society in which his lot was cast, that he might labour both on Sundays and week-nights for the good of those less favoured".¹³⁶ If most congregations had one or two affluent members who involved themselves in the running of the Sunday School and its attendant charities - men like Thomas Asline Ward at Sheffield, the Leeds flax-spinner Joseph Buckton, William Hutton at Newcastle - by and large the teaching and management were left to a committed group of teachers from lower social strata, often working men, who resented their segregation. "We have looked in vain hitherto for the manifest tokens of Interest in our proceedings from the wealthy and otherwise well-disposed members of our Congregation", the superintendents of the Northgate End Sunday School complained in 1836.¹³⁷ Similar complaints were regularly voiced at Leeds and Newcastle.

Apart from occasional misbehaviour of the pupils during service and intermittent monetary outlays the Sunday School and its attendant institutions for improving the moral character of the labouring poor impinged very little on the social and cultural life of most Unitarians. Clearly they saw them as 'good things' but as filling a gap for others not themselves. "The children of the upper and middle classes do not generally attend Sunday Schools", Baines observed in 1843.¹³⁸ And this was often

136. 'An Old Scholar' op.cit. p.4

137. Report of Northgate End Chapel Sunday School, Halifax, 1836 in Northgate End Chapel Mss NEC 172 loc.cit. See also, for details of this separation among other denominations: T.W. Laqueur op.cit. pp. 92-3

138. Edward Baines The Social, Educational and Religious State of the Manufacturing Districts (1843) p.25

the case with other worthwhile denominational activities: benefit clubs, tract societies, fellowship funds, clothing societies and so on. As Rev. Thomas Johnstone of Westgate Chapel in Wakefield told the Yorkshire Tract Society in 1820:

"so few comparatively of that humble class of Christians, who are readers of the Tracts, and to whom they would be most useful, belong to the congregation there, that little hope can be entertained of any able support of the Tract Society. Most of the members are already supplied with the books they want, and the more wealthy members of the congregation are supplied from other sources, convenient to them..." 139

There were some ancillary societies which did serve a function for middle class members of a congregation. Many chapels had vestry libraries, sometimes dating from the early 18th century which served to give access not just to religious works but to all kinds of literature. The vestry library at Newcastle-upon-Tyne, founded in 1787, included standard authors of rational dissent (Priestley, Lindsey, Enfield, Kippis, Lardner) and latitudinarian authors such as Tillotson and Paley, but also works of poetry, nonconformist history, texts on education by Locke and Joseph Lancaster, Mary Wollstonecraft on women's subordination, Clarkson on slavery.¹⁴⁰ The Chapel library at Bowl Alley Lane Chapel in Hull - dating from 1716 - included alongside works of theology and religious history editions of Horace, Juvenal, Cicero and a number of works of history, including Thoresby's 'Leeds' and Camden's 'Brittannia'.¹⁴¹ Chapels often had book clubs too. At Halifax's Northgate End Chapel in the early 19th century there was a 'Pamphlet Society' with fifteen or so members who paid an annual subscription of eight shillings. Meeting for tea every eight weeks the society subscribed to the large periodicals - the Edinburgh Review, the Monthly Review, the Quarterly Review as well as the Monthly Repository - and newly-published pamphlets, tracts, books. These were

139. The Fifth Report of a Religious Tract Society, In the West Riding of the County of York (1820) p.3

140. W. Turner Catalogue of the Books in the Vestry Library, Hanover Square Chapel, Newcastle (Newcastle 1809); Joan Knott 'The Vestry Library of the Hanover Square Unitarian Chapel, Newcastle-upon-Tyne' Library History Vol. I No. 5 (1969) pp. 159-60.

141. H. McLachlan The Unitarian College Library: Its History, Contents and Character (Manchester 1939) p.16

circulated among the members and at the annual meeting auctioned off to the highest bidder.¹⁴²

As well as access to books in towns where bookshops were bad and there was no other adequate supply of books, such Chapel libraries and book clubs provided a degree of intellectual stimulus. Most chapels also had discussion groups of one kind or another, often linked to the vestry library. At the Stockton Old Meeting, for instance, a society was founded in 1808 for "improving each other in religious knowledge and virtue", meeting monthly to discuss theological reading.¹⁴³ At the Unitarian Chapel at Ipswich in these years the members of the vestry library met monthly to debate their reading - eloquence was encouraged by a supply of gin.¹⁴⁴ Such groups, though small and generally short-lived, were doubtless a source of stimulation to the Unitarian autodidact and taking as their starting-points texts by Priestley, Belsham and so on, can never have moved very far from the political sphere or other kinds of dangerous speculation. At the 'Friendly Society for Discussion of Religious and Moral Subjects', set up at Hanover Square Chapel in Newcastle in March 1818, this was recognised and it was resolved at the founding meeting: "to obtain the full benefit of such an Association, it is expedient that freedom of Speech, within the limits of Christian Charity and Decorum, be allowed to its Several Members, without the hazard of offence or censure".¹⁴⁵ This tolerance, and the maintenance of the privacy of the society's debates, was made a condition of membership. The Book Society at the Unitarian Chapel in Dundee earned Theophilus Lindsey's disapproval by its ordering of Rousseau's Confessions and Volney's Deist classic The Ruins of Empire in 1797.¹⁴⁶

142. Pamphlet Society Book Northgate End Chapel Mss. Halifax NEC 197

143. Thomas Richmond A Brief History of Protestant Nonconformity and of the Society Assembling in the Old Meeting House, High Street, Stockton (Stockton 1856) pp 44-5.

144. A.P. Hewett The Story of an Old Meeting House (Ipswich 1959) pp 10-11

145. Minute Book of Conversation Society 1818 in Hanover Square Mss.

146. T. Lindsey to R. Millar 21 ii 1797 DWL Mss 12.46 (14)

However, even these kind of ancillary groupings were increasingly inappropriate to the needs of Unitarians. At Newcastle, for instance, the Vestry Library was underused: "most of the real contributors, having libraries of their own, conceived that they had little occasion to make use of this, - while those who were most likely to reap the benefit of it, having had little concern in its formation, did not easily get into the habit of resorting to it, as what belonged to them".¹⁴⁷ As wealthier Unitarians found such libraries unnecessary they tended to become, like Sunday Schools, a charitable provision. Several were appropriated to Unitarian Sunday Schools. Others were handed over to local authorities after the passing of the Free Libraries Act of 1850 or presented to the Unitarian College at Manchester.¹⁴⁸ Book clubs and discussion groups were generally short-lived. The Hanover Square 'Friendly Society for Discussion', like others at the chapel before it, was ephemeral. Its 39 original subscribers rapidly dwindled to a dozen by the middle of 1819 and attendance was only three or four.¹⁴⁹ It ceased to exist soon after.

One Unitarian minister commented in 1829: "There is a deadness in many of our most useful institutions - a flatness and apathy, in regard to religious matters too frequently prevailing among those of our lay-brethren, from whom we are most entitled to look for support and assistance, which are very depressing to a minister's spirits..."¹⁵⁰ This chapter has highlighted some aspects of this situation of weakness in Unitarian congregational life - the Sunday service attenuated to a few traditional gestures and a lengthy lecture, the ministry demystified and stripped of authority, the failure of the chapel to fulfill the cultural needs of

147. No Author Friendly Society etc. (Newcastle 1803) p.1

148. McLachlan The Unitarian College Library etc... pp. 16-17

149. Minute Book of Conversation Society 1818 loc.cit.

150. J.J. Tayler Motives to Industry etc... (1829) p.16

Unitarians in their leisure-time. Yet, paradoxically this situation was to a large extent the result of the success of Unitarian laymen in developing new cultural institutions without sectarian underpinnings - Subscription Libraries, Literary and Philosophical Societies and so on.

7. UNITARIANS IN THE BUILDING OF LIBERAL CULTURE AND THE WIDENING OF THE OLIGARCHY.

"As it is expressly asserted, that Christ came 'to bless mankind, in turning them away from their iniquities'... I think I am authorized to consider the Christian religion as a means to an end; and therefore, if the great end of it, namely the reformation and virtue of man, be, in fact, attained by another means, the benevolent author of it will not be offended..."¹

In turning away from the closed interior of sectarianism and active religious observance, Unitarians diverted their energy into non-sectarian and secular activities. From the last years of the 18th century they brought a religious zeal to secular causes for the 'improvement' of society. Subscription Libraries, Literary and Philosophical Societies, Mechanics' Institutes, schools of all kinds, Dispensaries, and so on, often originated, or at least owed a great deal, to a group of local Unitarians who gave financial support, served on committees and were tireless propagandists for 'the good cause'. Looking at Statistical Societies in the 1830s in such towns as Bristol, Liverpool and Manchester Dr. Eileen Yeo remarked: "The incidence of Unitarian ministers and members in these societies is quite remarkable and out of all proportion to their numbers in the town".² In this chapter these cultural practices will be reviewed - looking first at the intellectual role of the Unitarian minister, then at the broader contribution of laymen in some important Northern towns - before proceeding to the way in which Unitarians contributed to the movement for political reform in the years after 1815. It is argued that the English Unitarians were important contributors to the emergence of a liberal public sphere outside the control of state or

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1. Quoted in J.J. Tayler A Retrospect of the Religious Life of England (2nd ed. 1876) p. 296n.
 2. Eileen Yeo Social Science and Social Change (University of Sussex D. Phil. Thesis 1972) p.95

church which Jurgen Habermas has argued was so important in the development of democracy.³ It also brought Unitarians political rewards.

I

William Hazlitt wrote of his father, ministering from 1787 to 1813 to a small Unitarian congregation at Wem in rural Shropshire:

"he had been relegated to an obscure village...far from the only converse that he loved, the talk about disputed texts of Scripture and the cause of civil and religious liberty. Here he passed his days, repining but resigned, in the Study of the Bible, and the perusal of the commentators - huge folios, not easily got through, one of which would outlast a winter".⁴

This represents one extreme of the minister's situation among the Unitarians. If some, isolated and under-employed in a hostile environment, like Hazlitt, lost themselves in endless Biblical exegesis, others engaged in more secular intellectual effort. Some were patient students of history, becoming experts in local antiquarianism or the complexities of dissenting evolution.⁵ Others were amateur scientists, playing a part in the early development of the British Association of the Advancement of Science.⁶ Manchester College York, as already detailed, often

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3. Jurgen Habermas 'The Public Sphere' trans by S. and F. Lennox in Communication and Class Struggle Vol. I: Capitalism, Imperialism ed A. Mattelart and S. Siegalaub (New York 1979) pp 198-201. This is a condensation of Habermas Strukturwandel der Offentlichkeit, Untersuchugen zu einer Kategorie der burgerlichen Gesellschaft (Berlin 1965) - unfortunately not translated into English.
 4. W. Hazlitt 'My First Acquaintance with Poets' in Uncollected Essays. The Complete Works of William Hazlitt Vol. XVII (1933) p. 110
 5. For instance, Joseph Hunter, author of a famous history of his native Hallamshire in 1819: see DNB and H. McLachlan The Unitarian Movement in the Religious Life of England (1934) pp 259-60: Thomas Walker Horsfield, author of several antiquarian works on Sussex and a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries: see R.B. Aspland Memoirs...of Robert Aspland (1850) p. 329; William Shepherd, author of works of Italian history: DNB.
 6. William Smith, for instance, built up an international reputation as a botanist while a Unitarian minister, then became Professor of Natural History at Queen's College, Cork: F. Holt 'The Rev. William Smith of Ballymoney' TUHS Vol. VII No. 3 (1941) pp 239-41. Jack Morrell and Arnold Thackray Gentlemen of Science: Early Years of the British Association for the Advancement of Science (Oxford 1981) esp. pp 228-9.

encouraged a respect for a gentlemanly intellectual dilettantism - not markedly different from that of the educated Anglican clergyman of the period and not threatening the established culture. However if some Unitarian ministers were traditional intellectuals, others linked liberal ideas and values to effective social practice, and especially to the interests of particular groups.

At Newcastle-upon-Tyne William Turner provides a particularly conspicuous example of how the intellectual activities of the Unitarian minister could converge to the cultural economic needs of his congregation and the broader society. Born and brought up in the 1760s among wealthy and politically conscious rational dissenters at Wakefield, where his father was minister, educated at Warrington Academy and Glasgow University, he was already in his twenties conversant with Enlightenment thought and with such figures as Priestley, Lindsey and Benjamin Franklin - all guests at his father's house. In March 1784 Turner gave a cogent lecture to the Manchester and Literary Philosophical Society criticising the whole English legal system, referring to the work of Voltaire, Beccaria and Montesquieu.⁷ In Newcastle from 1782 until his retirement nearly 60 years later, Turner was an assiduous minister and a ubiquitous figure in charitable and educational fields. He was one of the founders in 1810 of the Royal Jubilee School and from its inception served as secretary to its Committee of Management. For many years he was President of the Schoolmaster's Association and clerk and treasurer to the Society for the Benefit of the Widows and Orphans of Dissenting Ministers. In 1811 he was one of the founders of the Bible Society and one of its secretaries for 20 years. He was a founder of the Newcastle Savings Bank in 1817, an original committee member and active chairman. He was a

7. William Turner 'An Essay on Crimes and Punishments' in Memoirs of the Literary and Philosophical Society of Manchester Vol. II (1785) pp 297-324.

founder of the Newcastle Mechanics' Institute in 1824, delivered the introductory address at its first monthly meeting and was one of its original Vice-Presidents.⁸

It was through the Literary and Philosophical Society that Turner's intellectual concerns and secular zeal were most profitably brought together. Formed early in 1793 at the instigation of Turner, who had circulated a series of arguments in favour of such an institution called 'Speculations on a Literary Society', he became one of its original secretaries and over the next few years played a leading role.⁹ From the beginning Turner saw the function of the Lit. and Phil. as bringing science to bear on the primary economic needs of the district. In his original 'Speculations' he had argued that the area's primary natural products - coal and lead - were in urgent need of scientific study to develop knowledge of their chemical properties and of geological conditions for more safe and efficient mining.¹⁰ During the 1790s Turner gave a whole series of papers on coal and lead-mining, initiated contacts with coal-owners and in 1800 was elected a member of the newly-formed British Mineralogical Society, a body which he canvassed before the Newcastle Lit. and Phil.¹¹ His scientific expertise was recognised when in 1802 he was elected as lecturer of the 'New Institution' - a series of courses of science lectures under the auspices of the Lit. and Phil.¹² Over the

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8. R. Welford Men of Mark 'Twixt Tyne and Tees (1895) Vol. III p.544; obituary of Turner in Gateshead Observer 30 iv 1859; George Harris The Christian Character...as illustrated in the Life and Labours of William Turner: A Discourse (1859) p.23. On the Mechanics' Institute see W. Turner to Henry Brougham 13 i 1825 in Brougham Mss 8664, in Library of University College London.
 9. A Historical Sketch of the Transactions of the Literary and Philosophical Society of Newcastle-upon-Tyne during the first twelve years from its commencement... (Newcastle 1807) pp i-ii; Robert Spence Watson The History of the Literary and Philosophical Society of Newcastle-upon-Tyne 1796-1896 (1897) pp. 33-4.
 10. A Historical Sketch... pp. ii-iv.
 11. Ibid. pp x-xvi, xxii-iii, xxvi
 12. Ibid. pp xxx-xxxii; William Turner A General Introductory Discourse on the Objects, Advantages and Intended Plan of the New Institution for Public Lectures on Natural Philosophy, in Newcastle-upon-Tyne (Newcastle 1802).

next 30 years - he resigned in 1833 saying he could no longer keep up to date with scientific progress - he gave over 600 lectures on science and technology.¹³ And his primary aim was always to make scientific knowledge contribute to economic development.¹⁴ Certainly the young George Stephenson profitted directly from Turner's practically-oriented lectures. In 1812 - two years before Stephenson's first steam-engine had run at Killingworth - Turner gave a lecture on a new moving steam engine working at a colliery near Leeds.¹⁵ At this time, too, Stephenson was working on a new safety-lamp for miners and received help from Turner - some of Stephenson's experiments were made with Turner apparatus. Many years later Stephen^{son} acknowledged his debt to the Unitarian minister:

"Mr. Turner was always ready to assist me with books, with instruments, and with counsel, gratuitously and cheerfully. He gave me the most valuable assistance and instruction, and to my dying day I can never forget the obligations which I owe to my venerable friend".¹⁶

The famous Newcastle mathematician Charles Hutton, a Fellow of the Royal Society and Professor at Woolwich Academy, subscribed to Turner's science courses regularly, though living in London; he told a Newcastle friend in 1816: "there is no end to their usefulness. He cannot be too much encouraged to proceed. I see his assisting or directing hand in everything and on all occasions".¹⁷ Turner earned too the admiration of the excellent Thomas Bewick, engraver and radical.¹⁸ He even, in 1826, earned the thanks of Newcastle Corporation for analysing various specimens of Newcastle drinking-water and drawing up a report for the Mayor.¹⁹

13. R. Spence Watson op.cit. pp 223-4.

14. See, for instance, Turner A General Introductory Discourse... pp 9-10

15. Watson op.cit. pp 144-5

16. Quoted ibid. pp 146-7.

17. Quoted in John Bruce Williamson Memorials of John Bruce, Schoolmaster in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, and of Mary Bruce his Wife (Newcastle 1903) p.109.

18. A Memoir of Thomas Bewick, Written by himself ed. I. Bain (1975) p.113

19. John Clayton to Turner 21 xii 1826 in Turner Mss in Newcastle Lit. & Phil. Library

Turner was in no way the 'typical' early 19th century Unitarian minister - the range of his commitments was remarkable and sustained in Newcastle for upwards of half a century. However in many other towns Unitarian ministers involved themselves in the same way in secular activities of different kinds. Rational dissenting ministers often played a leading role in the founding and managing of Subscription Libraries in the late 18th century. Priestley, who had been involved in developing the Warrington Circulating Library, was a key figure in the setting up of the Leeds Library in 1768: he was the first secretary (1768-9) and the second President (1769-73).²⁰ In 1780 he radically re-organized the Birmingham Subscription Library, set up by dissenters a year earlier.²¹ At Bradford the minister John Dean was a founder and the first treasurer of the Bradford Subscription Library in 1774.²² At Whitby a year later the minister at the Old Flowergate Chapel, Thomas Watson, established the town's Library and was its President and Treasurer until 1822.²³ At York Charles Wellbeloved was a key figure in the founding of the 'Subscription Library'.²⁴ In the early 19th century in many towns the Unitarian minister was a familiar figure on the committees of a range of cultural and philanthropic bodies, a prolific contributor of papers to literary societies and Mechanics Institutes, a stalwart of charitable agencies. Dr. Nathaniel Phillips at Sheffield's Upper Chapel from 1805 to 37 was a proficient astronomer with his own observatory and laboratory. He was a founder of the Sheffield Book Club in 1806; a founder of the town's Literary and Philosophical Society in 1822, its President in 1825,

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20. Frank Beckwith 'The Beginnings of the Leeds Library' in Thoresby Society Publications Vol. XXXVII (1941) p. 148
 21. John Money Experience and Identity: Birmingham and the West Midlands 1760-1800 (Manchester 1977) pp 126-8.
 22. A. Cobden Smith Chapel Lane Chapel Bradford: 1719-1919 (Bradford 1919) p.12
 23. Rev. Thomas Watson Sermons on Various Practical Subjects to which is prefixed a Brief Memoir of his Life and Writings (1826) p.x.
 24. Yorkshire Genealogist ed. J. Horsfall Turner (1890) Vol. II p. 168

and gave several courses of lectures on scientific subjects.²⁵ At York Charles Wellbeloved was a founder (in 1827) and a Vice-President of the Mechanics Institute, an original member of the Yorkshire Philosophical Society and from 1823 its curator of antiquities, a founder and committee member of the Bible Society, on the committee of the Blind Institute, a governor and for over 30 years chairman of the committee of the York Asylum, on the committee of the County Hospital and a local charity school and led the forming of an association to prevent landlords encroaching on public rights of way.²⁶ Thomas Olivers Warwick, after ministering at the small Rotherham Unitarian Chapel for four years, was sent by his hearers in 1797 to Edinburgh University to study medicine. Qualifying as M.D. he returned to the chapel in 1799 and combined the ministry with medical practice. He initiated the Rotherham Infirmary and was its first doctor. He engaged in scientific research and gave courses of public lectures on science in the chapel on Sunday evenings. In 1801 he began, with the chapel's main subscriber John Aldred, a chemical works and developed a successful new dye.²⁷ Ministering at Stand and then Warrington in the 1840s, Philip Pearsall Carpenter was an enthusiast for teetotalism, sanitary reform and education. He wrote in 1846: "This manufacturing district is full of life and energy...Education, teetotalism, peace, anti-capital punishment, prison discipline, sanitary reform, short hours and hosts of good movements, are getting on so fast that persons cant be quiet, wish they it ever so much".²⁸ At Warrington in the late 1840s he ran a soup-kitchen, organised an industrial school for the unemployed,

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25. W. Smith Porter Sheffield Literary and Philosophical Society: A Centenary Retrospect (Sheffield 1922) pp 22-3; J.E. Manning A History of Upper Chapel, Sheffield (Sheffield 1900) pp 95-6, 99.
26. John Kenrick A Biographical Memoir of the late Rev. Charles Wellbeloved (1860) pp 81, 130-1, 139, 166-7, 180; A.D. Orange Philosophers and Provincials: The Yorkshire Philosophical Society from 1822 to 44 (York 1973) p.23.
27. W. Blazeby Rotherham: The Old Meeting-House and its Ministers (Rotherham 1906) pp 161-4, 168-9.
28. R.L. Carpenter Memoirs of the Life and Work of Phillip Pearsall Carpenter (1880) p.88

was secretary of a Working Man's Sanitary Association, formed a Temperance Society and a Peace Society linked to the chapel, established his own printing press which poured out tracts, books and a monthly periodical for his causes.²⁹

In their different ways individual ministers tried to put into practice the ethical imperative to improve society, to implement Priestley's programme of "enlightening the minds and improving the hearts and the conduct of their hearers" not just inside the chapel but in the whole sphere of social life. As Henry Solly wrote:

"... it is curious to note how frequently Unitarian ministers have thrown themselves into Social, Educational, Literary, Municipal, and Civic Work generally, with greater ardour than into what is considered the more appropriate labours of disciples of Christ. This, however, can perhaps be explained by reflection on the reaction they have experienced from ceremonialism and their dread of cant, as well as from their strong desire to apply their religion practically to the wants and woes of this world, in a word, from their deep convictions as to the duty of helping to cause the will of God to be 'done on earth as it is in heaven', and not merely to 'save men's souls'." ³⁰

II

Focusing on the development of cultural institutions in early 19th century Manchester, the strategic role of Unitarian laymen, the members of Cross Street and Mosley Street Chapels, is clear. The Literary and Philosophical Society had emerged in 1781 from a group of friends - a number of them rational dissenters - who gathered regularly at the house of Dr. Percival. It met, until 1799, in Cross Street Chapel rooms and chapel members played a leading role in sustaining it: Percival was President throughout the 1780s and 90s, the ministers were active in its management - Dr. Thomas Barnes, for instance was vice-President 1781-5 and Secretary 1785-7 - and such rational dissenters as Butterworth Bayley,

29. Ibid pp 100 ff.

30. Henry Solly These Eighty Years (1893) Vol. I pp. 391-2.

Thomas Henry and Dr. John Ferriar served on the committee and gave papers regularly.³¹ This provided a platform for further initiatives. In 1783 Barnes put forward an ambitious scheme for a 'College of Arts and Sciences' which for several years provided courses of public lectures on chemistry, experimental philosophy, commerce and the fine arts.³² These aspirations were frustrated however. In 1781 Henry had made an eloquent appeal to the town's merchants and manufacturers advocating the value of a broad humanist culture. The arts and sciences were a moralising influence, providing an alternative to "the tavern, the gaming table or the brothel", were a useful social accomplishment and even a source of profit to businessmen.³³ But indifference was endemic and some initial sympathisers among the local clergy became rapidly alienated by the subversive implications of this intellectual zeal.³⁴ The Lit. and Phil. alone survived into the early 19th century and continued to be sustained largely by Unitarians. Throughout the 1820s they provided both the office holders and much of the intellectual output. In 1824, for instance, all four vice-presidents - Dr. Edward Holme, Dr. William Henry, George William Wood and Peter Ewart - were Unitarians; the treasurer Benjamin Heywood was a Unitarian; one of the two secretaries was a Unitarian minister; and among the six-man Council were two Unitarian laymen and a Unitarian minister.³⁵

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31. F. Nicholson 'The Manchester Literary & Philosophical Society 1781-1851' in Memoirs of the Literary and Philosophical Society of Manchester Vol. LXVIII (1924) pp 98-104; R.H. Kargon Science in Victorian Manchester: Enterprise and Expertise (Manchester 1977) pp 7-8.
32. John Yates A Funeral Discourse on the Death of Rev. Dr. Barnes... (Liverpool 1810) pp 62-3.
33. Thomas Henry 'On the Advantages of Literature and Philosophy in General, and especially on the Consistency of Literary and Philosophical with Commercial Pursuits' in Memoirs of the Literary and Philosophical Society of Manchester Vol. I (1785) pp 14-15, 27.
34. See Thomas Henry's account of these secessions in W.V. and K.R. Farrar and E.L. Scott 'The Henry's of Manchester. Part I: Thomas Henry (1734-1816), in Ambix: Journal of Alchemy and Early Chemistry Vol. XX (1973) pp 192-4.
35. The membership and officers were printed in each volume of the society's 'Memoirs'. Unitarian involvement is pinpointed in A. Thackray 'Natural Knowledge in cultural context: The Manchester model' in American Historical Review Vol. LXXIX (1974) esp. pp. 694-6.

Other early 19th century initiatives in the field of higher education and intellectual culture owed much to Manchester Unitarians. G.W. Wood played a leading role in the launching of an Institution for the Encouragement of the Fine Arts (later the Royal Manchester Institution) in 1823 and became the first chairman of its original board of trustees. Unitarians predominated in its first council in 1825.³⁶ In April 1824 the founding committee of the Mechanics Institute included among its 22 members no less than 11 Unitarians including G.W. Wood and the first president, Benjamin Heywood.³⁷ The Statistical Society was developed in the early 1830s, meeting initially at Benjamin Heywood's house, by a group of liberals among whom Unitarians predominated, including Samuel and W.R. Greg, Samuel and James Robinson, John Kennedy, Henry McConnell, Samuel Dukinfield Darbishire and R.N. Philips.³⁸ In 1836 James Heywood sponsored the project of Longueville Jones to set up a University in Manchester and paid for the printing of his Plan for a University in Manchester. There were various meetings and a general committee was set up in which Unitarians were prominent - including Benjamin and James Heywood, G.W. Wood, R.H. Greg, Edmund Potter and William Fairburn - though the project failed to get off the ground.³⁹

In their private lives too Manchester Unitarians evinced a commitment to intellectual culture. Their religious dissent and their involvement in business entailed no dour and puritanical philistinism. The Greg household at Styal for instance most impressed Mrs. Fletcher - the famous Whig hostess in Edinburgh - when she visited in 1808. She described "the cultivation of mind and refinement of manners which Mrs. Greg preserved in the midst of a money-making and somewhat unpolished

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36. See R.F. Bud 'The Royal Manchester Institution' in D.S.L. Cardwell (ed) Artisan to Graduate: Essays to Commemorate the foundation in 1824 of the Manchester Mechanics' Institution, now in 1974 the University of Manchester Institute of Science & Technology (Manchester 1974) pp 120-4
37. T. Heywood A Memoir of Sir Benjamin Heywood (Manchester no date) pp 40-1.
38. M.J. Cullen The Statistical Movement in Early Victorian Britain (Hassocks 1975) pp 105-17. See also Benjamin Heywood to Henry Brougham 30 x 1833 in Brougham Mss.17.565. University College London Library.
39. R.H. Kargon op.cit. p.154

community of merchants and manufacturers. Mr. Greg too was most gentlemanly and hospitable, and surrounded by eleven clever and well-educated children".⁴⁰ Catherine, wife of Edward Stanley, vicar of Alderley, found almost to her surprise that this dissenting industrialist was "quite a gentleman": "He is rich and spends just as people do not generally spend their money, keeping a sort of open house, without pretension...with the almost certainty of finding a family party at home, a large circle of connections, and literary people, and foreigners, and Scotch and Irish, are constantly dropping in, knowing that they cannot come amiss".⁴¹ Brought up in this kind of cosmopolitan environment, the Greg sons were encouraged to see intellectual values as superior to money-making. Samuel Greg Junior worked in the family firm's counting house but also found time for a constant diet of classical reading, history, social philosophy. "What do you think", he asked a friend in 1826, "of my being turned oil-painter - handling the pencil and the pallet with the zeal, though with little of the inspiration, of Raphael, rushing to my canvas before six in the morning and retiring from it with a sigh, and many a longing look, near midnight!"⁴² His brother W.R. Greg was an enthusiastic student at Edinburgh University and a voracious reader. He wrote to his sister in 1830 about his new theory of population and his preparation of a course of lectures on history: "My other occupations at present are reading through the best authors and orators of our country... as Hooker, Taylor, Burke, Canning, Erskine, Fox, etc., after which I shall take to French literature, and make myself as well acquainted with Voltaire, Moliere, Bossuet, Massillon, Flechier, and Condorcet, as I am with Mdme. de Stael and Rousseau and Montesquieu and Volney".⁴³

40. The Autobiography of Mrs. Fletcher (3rd ed. Edinburgh 1876) p.97

41. Quoted in John Morley 'W.R. Greg: A Sketch' Macmillan's Magazine Vol. XLVIII (1883) p.111.

42. A Layman's Legacy in Prose and Verse: Selections from the Papers of Samuel Greg, with a Prefatory Letter by Arthur Stanley & a Brief Memoir (1877) pp 9-10.

43. Morley op.cit. p. 114

The Gregs were by no means unique. Other Manchester Unitarians were as serious in their pursuit of 'the life of the mind'. Samuel Robinson - educated at Manchester College York - combined industrial management with literary scholarship: involved in various cotton firms he also published before he was thirty the first English translation of Schiller's William Tell and in later years published many translations of German and Persian poetry.⁴⁴ Peter Ewart ran his own cotton mill for forty years in Manchester but was also author of papers on mathematics and theoretical physics which brought him a reputation in serious scientific circles.⁴⁵ Other Manchester Unitarians were supporters of the Portico Library, the Lit. and Phil. the Royal Institution and other emerging cultural institutions. They subscribed to the large quarterly reviews, engaged in amateur science, patronised rising artists like Turner and generally constituted an enclave of high culture in the town. The Winkworth sisters, by upbringing Anglican, moved into Unitarian circles in the 1840s; as Susanna recalled: "The Unitarians in Manchester, were, as a body, far away superior to any other in intellect, culture and refinement of manners..."⁴⁶

Manchester Unitarianism was especially strong and its adherents part of an especially self-confident middle class. Elsewhere in the early 19th century, however, these two facets of Unitarian activity were also in evidence - zeal for establishing new cultural institutions and the feeling for intellectual culture, especially science. At Newcastle-upon-Tyne William Turner's efforts were always supported by a number of members of his congregation. Among the committee set up in 1793 to launch the Newcastle Lit. and Phil. were, as well as Turner, four members of Hanover Square Chapel: Dr. Ramsay, David Stephenson, Thomas Gibson and Malin Sorsbie. Ramsay was vice-president

44. Obituary in MPL Biographical Collection.

45. W.C. Henry 'A Biographical Notice of the later Peter Ewart' Memoirs of the Literary and Philosophical Society of Manchester, 2nd series Vol. VII (1846) p. 126-30, 132-3, 136.

46. M.J. Shaen (ed) Memorials of Two Sisters: Susanna and Catherine Winkworth (1908) p.26

in 1795-6, as was his fellow physician and rational dissenter John Clark from 1793-7.⁴⁷ In the early 19th century a solid core of Unitarians provided stalwarts of the Lit. and Phil. In the year 1829 for example, one of the Lit. and Phil's three vice-presidents was a Unitarian (Losh), the secretary was a Unitarian minister, and on the 12 man council were three Unitarians - Emerson Charnley, W.A. Mitchell and William Hutton.⁴⁸ Another Unitarian, Henry Atkinson, had served on the council each year from 1817 to 28. There were other Unitarian figures involved in the success of the Lit. and Phil: John Marshall was the librarian, Charnley was the principal bookseller to the society, Thomas Hodgson not only served on the council but in 1829 reorganised the whole library catalogue, George Burnett was a vice-president.⁴⁹ These men also played a part in a number of parallel institutions. The Newcastle Antiquarian Society always had their active support. Losh was a vice-president for many years. In 1829, for instance, the council of 12 men included five Unitarians - Turner, Charnley, Hutton, Hodgson and Thomas Bell.⁵⁰ Hutton was also the honorary secretary of the Natural History Society from its formation in 1829.⁵¹ Turner, Hutton, Losh, Atkinson, Mitchell and other Unitarians were also among the founders of the Newcastle Mechanics Institute in 1824. Indeed Losh used his considerable

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47. R. Spence Watson op.cit. pp 41-2, 46.
48. The Northern Year Book or Annual Register for the Counties of Northumberland and Durham and Cumberland for the Year 1829 (Newcastle 1830) p.50.
49. R. Welford Men of Mark... Vol. I. pp 140-3 Vol. II p. 550; R.W. Hetherington 'Newcastle Fifty Years Ago' (c. 1883: Volume of cuttings in Library of Newcastle Lit. and Phil.) p. 82; R. Welford and J.C. Hodgson 'Biographies of Contributors to the Society's Literature' in Archaeologica Aeliana: Centenary Volume 3rd series Vol. X (1913) pp 132-3: J. Fenwick Obituaries of some of the more distinguished members of the literary and philosophical society notice in the reports of the committee of the society between the years 1844-51 (Newcastle 1857) pp 8, 11-12.
50. The Northern Year Book... (1830) pp. 3-4; J.C. Bruce 'A Few Jottings Respecting Some of the Early Members of the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle' Archaeologica Aeliana 2nd series Vol. XI (1886) pp 163, 166-7.
51. R. Welford and J.C. Hodgson op.cit. pp. 163-4.

influence with the Whig gentry and others to encourage the formation of Mechanics Institutes in Durham, Sunderland, Shields and Alnwick.⁵²

As in the case of Manchester, a number of these Newcastle Unitarians were not just reliable committee men but intellectuals of some standing providing much of the intellectual input of these bodies. William Hutton, for instance, was co-author in the 1830s of a three volume The Fossil Flora of Great Britain, a Fellow of the Geological Society, a Fellow of the Royal Society and author of a number of papers in such respectable journals as the Philosophical Magazine and the Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society.⁵³ Henry Atkinson contributed papers and lectures on mathematics and astrophysics to the Newcastle Lit. and Phil., the Mechanics Institute and the London Astronomical Society.⁵⁴ Hugh Lee Pattinson was a Fellow of the Geological, Astronomical and Royal Societies.⁵⁵ W.A. Mitchell as well as editing the Tyne Mercury from 1819, when his father died, ran the Newcastle Magazine throughout the 1820s and was himself a prolific author. At the age of 21 years, fresh from Manchester College York, he produced a 500 page philosophical tome, published anonymously.⁵⁶ He subsequently wrote poetry, plays, political controversy - "as much printed matter", Fraser's Magazine drily observed in 1834, "as might fill a tolerably-sized library".⁵⁷

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52. See letter of James Losh to Henry Brougham Oct. 1824 in The Diaries and Correspondence of James Losh Vol. II Surtees Society Publications Vol. CLXXIV (1959) p. 176.
53. DNB; Welford & Hodgson op.cit. pp 163-5; T.R. Goddard History of the Natural History Society of Northumberland, Durham and Newcastle 1829-1929 (Newcastle no date) pp. 160-1.
54. DNB; R. Spence Watson op.cit. p. 227; Welford Men of Mark... Vol. I pp 248-50.
55. DNB; H. Lonsdale The Worthies of Cumberland (1873) Vol. IV pp 273-320.
56. See Welford Men of Mark... Vol. III pp 201-4. The tome was entitled An Essay on Capacity and Genius; To Prove that there is no Original Mental Superiority between the most illiterate and the Most Learned of Mankind; and that no Genius, whether Individual or National, is Innate, but solely produced by, and Dependent on, Circumstances (1817)
57. 'Political Unions No. III: The Members of the Northern Union No. II' Fraser's Magazine Vol. IX (1834) p.67.

In other northern towns small groupings of Unitarians were involved in the founding and maintenance of these kinds of cultural institutions: George Lee, John Alderson, William Spence, Henry Blundell, Rev. Edward Higginson and others, at Hull: Thomas Asline Ward, Henry Piper, Dr. Nathaniel Phillips, the Shores, Luke Palfreyman, Peter Wright, and others, at Sheffield; the Bischoffs, John Marshall, Luptons, Stansfelds, Luccocks, T.W. Tottie, and others, at Leeds; William and Rawdon Briggs, Dr. Richard Moulson, Rev. William Turner Jnr., Richard Kershaw, James Stansfeld, and others, at Halifax. These Unitarians figured prominently in the setting up, the management and financial support, and a good deal of the intellectual content of Subscription Libraries, book clubs, Literary and Philosophical Societies, Mechanics Institutes and other more specialised intellectual bodies. The same impulse was at work even in smaller provincial backwaters. At Stockton-upon-Tees, for instance, the Unitarian minister J.C. Meeke - said to be "a man of scientific attainments" - ran a Young Man's Improvement Class in the Chapel which grew in 1825 into the Mechanics Institute of Stockton, Yarm, Norton and Neighbourhood. The small group of Unitarians gave it strong support - Meeke was a vice-president, William Fallows the secretary and Unitarians, including Thomas Richmond, served on the managing committee - but the hostility of the local elite and the indifference of others led to its discontinuance in 1830.⁵⁸ Rev. J. Guinness Rogers, a noted Congregationalist minister of the late 19th century, recalled the influence of Unitarians in early 19th century Prescot where his father was an Independent minister:

58. No Author Two Hundred and Fifty Years: A Short Account of the Establishment and Subsequent History of the Society of Protestant Dissenters...at Stockton (1938) pp 4-5; Thomas Richmond The Local Records of Stockton and the Neighbourhood (Stockton 1868) p. 144

"I remember still the Unitarian Chapel...Its congregation was not large, but their influence in the town was greater than their number, for the few it included were men of high character, public spirit and considerable intelligence, on whom it was possible to rely for sympathy in all works of philanthropy or reform".⁵⁹

The Hammonds represented industrialisation and the ascendancy of laissez-faire in 19th century England as blighting the whole cultural life of towns like Manchester. Profit became privatised while public life was left behind as a squalid and impersonal struggle for survival.⁶⁰ Whether or not this can stand as a broader judgement of the period, for successful Unitarian capitalists in Manchester and elsewhere devotion to political economy and economic expansion did not prevent them investing considerable energy, time and money in public schemes, as we have seen, and often enough consciously opposed to "the gross and sordid spirit, which is too often the result of an undivided attention to mercenary pursuits".⁶¹ And this public commitment was part of a whole ethic.

John Gooch Robberds - minister at Cross Street from 1811 till his death in 1854 - preached again and again about the Christian duty of public service: "Churches are not purely and perfectly churches of Christ, if they are merely associations of men for purposes, however praiseworthy, in relation to their own faith and worship - if they are not also intended to be diffusive sources of beneficial influence around them".⁶² He went on, in the same sermon, to point to the large numbers of Unitarians taking a leading role in "useful institutions" in the town. On another occasion Robberds told his congregation that to despair of bringing

59. J.G. Rogers An Autobiography (1903) p.19

60. See esp. J.L. and B. Hammond The Rise of Modern Industry (3rd ed. 1927) Ch. XIII.

61. A comment in the first Council Minute Book of the Royal Manchester Institution, quoted in N.J. Frangopulo Tradition in Action: the Historical Evolution of the Greater Manchester County (Wakefield 1977) p.94

62. J.G. Robberds The Duty of a Christian Church in Relation to the World: A Sermon (Manchester 1839) p.5

about "beneficial changes in society" was "a kind of impiety". He hoped that all of his hearers were involved in some kind of active work for moral, social or intellectual improvement.⁶³

This was linked to the old puritan notion that wealth was not the exclusive property of the private individual - wealth was not solely a result of the individual's own efforts but also a gift of Providence. The individual was thus the trustee or steward of wealth "in the management of which he is to keep in view the honour of God and the service of his fellow-men".⁶⁴ In 1845 Robberds pointed to Sir Thomas Potter - who had arrived in Manchester in 1802 with little capital and became a wealthy man and the town's first mayor - as approaching this Christian ideal: "Of neither his time, nor his industry, nor his wealth was he sparing, when he had in view the accomplishment of what he believed a public good..."⁶⁵

Throughout the 1820s and 30s, and after, this group of wealthy Manchester Unitarians supported with considerable sums of money, with endless public meetings, speeches and committees a whole range of strategies to construct a coherent cultural order. Benjamin Heywood, for example, gave substantial sums of money to the Mechanics Institute; as he said in a public address: "The improvement of the working classes is an object of paramount and urgent importance, and as it is the duty of every man to mark out for himself some sphere of active usefulness to his fellow-men, I would select the furtherance of this object for mine".⁶⁶ James Kay-Shuttleworth's description of the squalor in which the local working class were forced to exist - The Moral and Physical Condition of the

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63. J.C. Robberds 'Hope for Men a Duty of Piety to God' (1830) in Christian Festivals and Natural Seasons; Discourses suggested by the Principal Epochs of the Christian and of the Natural Year (1855) pp 250, 258.
64. J.G. Robberds 'Jesus the best teacher how to use the divine blessings' in Christian Festivals etc... p.214
65. J.G. Robberds 'The Value of Energy in Union with Benevolence' in Robberds and William Gaskell A Prayer and a Sermon delivered in Cross Street Chapel, Manchester, on Sunday after the interment of Sir Thomas Potter (Manchester 1845) p.17
66. B. Heywood Addresses to the Manchester Mechanics' Institute 1825-40 (Manchester 1843) p.60

Working Classes of Manchester in 1832 - was an extension of this kind of involvement. As he later wrote:

"It was published with the hope of strengthening the hands of those who in their several spheres of action were represented by Mr. George William Wood, Sir Thomas Potter, Sir Benjamin Heywood and Mr. (afterwards Alderman) John Shuttleworth. Each of these gentlemen was the centre of energetic efforts for improvement - all consciously tending with more or less of harmony, to raise Manchester and Salford from the condition of rude, unorganised, overgrown villages into one great city, worthy of being the emporium of the cotton manufacture and the metropolis of trade".⁶⁷

Again all four of these men - Potter, Heywood, Shuttleworth and Wood, belonged to the town's two Unitarian congregations.

Of course these various institutions established in the towns of the late 18th century and early 19th century had widely differing aims - the moral reformation of the labouring poor, the diffusion of scientific knowledge among the business community, the inculcation of technical skills among the workforce, the rationalising of health care, the provision of leisure facilities for the wealthier middle class, and so on. However, underlying these various purposes such voluntary institutions provided local centres of social intercourse for the propertied classes - a whole new public world which began to break down the boundaries imposed by the sectarian divisions of religious life and some of the distances between strata within the propertied classes.

And, despite the prohibition of political debates in Lit. and Phils, Mechanics' Institutes and other such bodies, this had political implications. The Unitarian writer Lucy Aikin believed that the developing plethora of voluntary societies "are useful in our country by their levelling effect". She told the American Unitarian W.E. Channing in 1830:

67. J. Kay-Shuttleworth 'Sketch of the Progress of Manchester in Thirty Years from 1832 to 62' in Four Periods of Public Education (1862) pp. 93-4

"In a bible society or missionary meeting, the zealous labourers, and still more the effective speakers, find themselves enabled to give the law to wealth and title. Scientific and literary institutions concur to the same results, and so does the cultivation in higher ranks of letters and of arts. There is no fact, no talent, no acquirement, either useful or ornamental, no celebrity of any kind, but what serves its possessor as a ticket of admission to the company of some of his superiors".⁶⁸

Certainly in towns like Manchester, Leeds and Newcastle their involvement in cultural institutions, accrued prestige and authority to individual Unitarians. Men like G.W. Wood, Benjamin Heywood and Thomas Potter in Manchester, became identified as social leaders, as public benefactors - their names and even their faces became widely known. And their involvement also brought them into contact with a broader group of educated men, often belonging to the gentry or old merchant elite. This was certainly the case at Newcastle-upon-Tyne where a simple Unitarian minister like William Turner became part of a social circle including Whig MPs, county landowners and men of great wealth. When in 1831 - as a response to the ejection of Turner from the Newcastle Bible Society by evangelicals bitterly opposed to his Unitarianism - his friends organised a public dinner to honour his services to the town the stewards included important figures in the power structure of the district, including Sir John Swinburne, John Clayton, Sir Matthew Ridley MP, William Ord MP, John Hodgson MP, Armorer Donkin and the Bigges. Henry Brougham sent his respects via his friend Losh.⁶⁹

However, Unitarianism was politically effective in a less mediated fashion. Indeed the High Church periodical the Christian Remembrancer complained in 1825: "The Unitarians are a political rather than a

68. Memoirs...of Lucy Aikin ed. P.H. Le Breton (1864) p.211; Other kinds of voluntary agency helped break down social and religious barriers. Thus the severely evangelical Lord Shaftsbury noted "Many Dissenters" at one of his early Ragged School Meetings in London in 1845: "but it is high time to be thinking where we agree, not where we differ". Quoted in G.F.A. Best Shaftsbury (2nd ed. 1975) p.62.

69. See Thomas Bigge to Turner Jan 1832; J. Fenwick to Losh undated; Losh to Turner 31 xii 1831; W. Ord to William Hutton 17 xi 1831; Matthew Ridley to Hutton 28 xi 1831; J.E. Swinburne to Hutton 29 xi 1831 - all in a Letterbook in Hanover Sq. Mss. See also Welford Men of Mark... Vol. III pp 544-5.

religious sect - radicals to a man".⁷⁰ The following section sketches in how their belief in a liberal public sphere informed their political principles, especially in the years after 1815, and brought them into accord with important political groups.

III

For Unitarians "free inquiry" was a fundamental and active principle.. Too often, Priestley argued in 1771, Christians advocated only a limited freedom - wide enough to include their own particular tenets, but excluding others they opposed. Priestley, however, argued for "universal liberty" - unconditional:

"Whatever be the particular view of the numerous tribes of searchers after truth, under whatever denomination we may be ranked; whether we be called, or call ourselves, Christians, Papists, Protestants, Dissenters, Heretics, or even Deists, (for all are equal here, all are actuated by the same spirit, and all engaged in the same cause,) we stand in need of the same liberty of thinking, debating, and publishing".⁷¹

In a sermon before the congregations of the Old and New Meetings in Birmingham in 1785 he argued that intellectual freedom should be granted even if it were to lead to the destruction of Christianity itself: "for we can only wish for the prevalence of Christianity on the supposition of its being true; and if it fall before the influence of the free inquiry, it can only do so in consequence of its not being true".⁷² At his ordination in 1782 William Turner similarly adopted this bold position, arguing that religious freedom should be unimpeded: "it would be agreeable not only to Christian charity, but also to Christian policy, to invite its enemies to attack the gospel with all the weight of their

70. Quoted in F.E. Mineka The Dissidence of Dissent: The Monthly Repository 1806-38 (Chapel Hill 1944) p.22.

71. Joseph Priestley An Essay on the First Principles of Government, and on the Nature of Political, Civil and Religious Liberty... (2nd ed.) 1771 Works Vol. XXII p.137.

72. J. Priestley The Importance and Extent of Free Inquiry in Matters of Religion: A Sermon... (1785) Works Vol. XV p.78

abilities and learning, and to oppose them, not with the languor of rancour and invective, but with the mild and gentle spirit of the messenger of peace". The gospel would triumph in such a contest and the effects would be beneficial in teaching Christians to abandon "the weak outworks of ancient error, and retire to the citadel of the gospel".⁷³

This idea of a complete freedom of opinion - a public sphere of discourse in which all individuals were untrammelled by the state - continued to inform the perspective of Unitarians on a whole range of issues in the early 19th century. When in 1813 the Unitarian MP William Smith was charged that the repeal of specific acts against Unitarianism, which he had piloted through parliament, did not go far enough towards freedom of opinion he affirmed his own unconditional opposition to legal restrictions of any kind: "let Truth stand or fall as she is able to support herself, nor seek assistance from means equally applicable to the defence of falsehood".⁷⁴ To this end Unitarians in the early 19th century were the most active section of dissent in opposition to the Test and Corporation Acts. They were also, until the 1830s, uncompromising critics of the Church of England's support by the state. But Unitarian commitment to this principle of free trade in religion was especially tested, and largely vindicated, in the early 19th century by their response to the Roman Catholics and the infidel tradition. As Unitarians had generally upheld the right of Catholics to complete religious freedom in the 1770s and 80s,⁷⁵ so in the years after 1815 they supported moves to repeal anti-Catholic legislation. This brought them into opposition to a substantial section of religious dissent but both in the Unitarian Association and in

73. 'Address and Questions by Rev. Joseph Dawson, with the answers by the Rev. William Turner Jnr.' in Services at the Ordination of the Rev. W. Turner Jnr. (Wakefield 1782) pp 69-70.

74. Quoted in Richard W. Davis Dissent in Politics 1780-1830: The Political Life of William Smith MP. (1971) p.194.

75. See for instance (Joseph Priestley) A Free Address to those who have petitioned for the Repeal of the late Act of Parliament in favour of the Roman Catholics. By a Lover of Peace and Truth (1780) Works Vol. XXII p. 499ff.

the Protestant Dissenting Deputies - in which Unitarians were of influence - they remained uncompromisingly pro-Catholic.⁷⁶ As one writer to the Monthly Repository was quick to point out, it was the failure of Dissenters to live up to the ideal of universal liberty which had brought about some of their own difficulties: "Their jealousy of the Catholics loaded themselves and their posterity with the Test and Corporation Acts..."⁷⁷ And immediately after Catholic Emancipation in 1829 Aspland told the annual meeting of the British and Foreign Unitarian Association: "However much Catholics doubted the support of other bodies of Dissenters, they always counted upon the votes of the Unitarians, as a matter of course".⁷⁸

The question of Deism and atheism was even more sensitive. Priestley, Kippis, Turner and others had been uncompromising on the right of non-Christians and anti-Christians to freedom. However in the 1790s in England infidelity was no longer a gentlemanly theoretical idiosyncrasy but part of a radical popular attack on the whole established order. And so it continued in the early 19th century as Carlile sharpened Paine's critique of organized religion. Unitarians were keen to dissociate themselves from such theological friends yet remained loyal to the ideal of "universal liberty". When William Hone was prosecuted in 1817 for publishing certain "scandalous, irreligious, profane, impious and seditious libels" - in fact political squibs parodying the Ten Commandments, the Athanasian Creed, the Lord's Prayer and the Litany - he called on Hackney's Unitarian minister Robert Aspland for help. Aspland responded: he helped Hone in the drafting of his defence, sat at his side throughout the trial at the Guildhall taking notes, prompting, passing notes and quotations to him during his much-interrupted six hour speech.⁷⁹ Among the subscribers to a fund to help Hone - alongside Whig

76. R.W. Davis carefully reviews the different positions within dissent on the Catholic question in 'The Strategy of 'Dissent' in the Repeal Campaign 1820-28' in The Journal of Modern History Vol. XXXVIII No.4(1966) pp. 374-93.

77. MR Vol. XIII (1818) p. 708

78. Christian Reflector Vol. V (1829) p.190

79. R.B. Aspland Memoir of the Life...of Robert Aspland (1850) pp 386-8;

F.W. Hackwood William Hone: his Life and Times (1912) p. 239

leaders and radical intellectuals (among them Shelley) - were a number of Unitarians: there were the ministers Aspland, W.J. Fox, William Turner and Benjamin Treleaven; a number of London laymen such as William Frend, Richard Taylor, Samuel Parkes, Benjamin Flower and George Dyer; the Strutts of Derby contributed; and from Manchester the Unitarian Edward Baxter sent over £50 among the contributors of which were the Potters, G.W. Wood, T.B.W. Sanderson, Samuel Jackson and Ashworth Clegg.⁸⁰

Carlile's trial and imprisonment in 1819 was a thornier problem. Several Unitarians - including James Losh at Newcastle⁸¹ - welcomed the sentence. Leading ministers however publicly opposed it. Lant Carpenter of Bristol expressed his sympathy with the desire of the authorities to suppress "the spirit of ribaldry and licentious falsehood with which Christianity has been assailed" by such as Carlile and congratulated the authorities for having conducted the trial with "dignity and forbearance". However, almost with regret, he was forced to oppose the imprisonment of an individual for his religious opinions.⁸² Aspland, in two letters to The Times, similarly expressed his antipathy to Carlile's opinions and was critical of booksellers who, he claimed, made substantial profits from infidelity and courted prosecution for their own fame. He too, however, refused to support state repression of infidels arguing on grounds of both principle and tactics that only argument and persuasion were appropriate.⁸³ A far more uncompromising position was put forward by W.J. Fox, another London Unitarian minister. He expressed his shame at the attitude of Christians after the trial whose "common language" he said: "with the exception of a liberal minority, was that of joyous congratulation, as if

80. Listed in The Three Trials of William Hone for Publishing Three Parodies... ed. William Tegg (1876) pp. 233-43.

81. Diaries etc...of James Losh Vol. I p. 102.

82. Lant Carpenter An Examination of the Charges made against Unitarian and Unitarianism, and the Improved Version, by Bishop Magee... (Bristol 1820) p. xl n.

83. R.B. Aspland op.cit. pp. 416-18.

a Waterloo victory had been gained over Infidelity".⁸⁴ In fact the result of the trial, Fox argued, was a revived threat to Unitarians in particular and religious freedom in general. Fox sharply rebutted Carlile's charge that Unitarians were Deists and was critical of the latter's limitations. However he boldly underwrote some of the central planks of Carlile's position - especially the account of state manipulation of religious superstition to keep the people chained to the status quo - and concluded his sermon with a fierce attack on the Anglican Church:

"In your absurd creeds, in your rapacious claims, in your unholy alliance with the State, in your bigotry and persecution, in your tenacity of what is untenable, and in your want of practical conformity with the pure morality of Christianity, lies all the strength of unbelief".⁸⁵

Fox's uncompromising liberalism caused something of a stir. One writer to the Monthly Repository complained that Fox had handed over weapons to the enemy.⁸⁶ Another regretted that the sermon had ever been given because of the damage it had done to the Unitarian body by providing a justification of the canard "that a natural and close alliance subsists between Unitarians and Unbelievers".⁸⁷ However some big guns rallied to Fox's defence - including Belsham, Aspland, J.T. Rutt and Richard Taylor.⁸⁸ The latter argued that the legal establishment of religion placed its authority on "a level with a Turnpike Bill".⁸⁹

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84. W.J. Fox The Duties of Christians towards Deists: A Sermon, preached at the Unitarian Chapel, Parliament Court...On Occasion of the Recent Prosecution of Mr. Carlile for the Re-publication of Paine's Age of Reason (1819) p.v
85. Ibid. p. 47
86. MR Vol. XIV (1819) pp 71-2.
87. Ibid Vol. XV (1820) p. 212.
88. Ibid. pp 346-8, 408-11. See also Russell Scott Coercion in Propagating, Defending and Supporting the Religion of Jesus, Shewn to be in Direct Opposition to his Teaching and Practice in a Discourse... (1820); Thomas Belsham Christianity Pleading for the Patronage of the Civil Power, but protesting against the Aid of Penal Law: considered in three Sermons (1820)
89. MR Vol. XIV (1819) pp. 707-12.

Unitarians continued to criticise legal persecution of "infidels". In Manchester Richard and Thomas Potter, among others, took up the cause of Joseph Swann, radical hatmaker of Macclesfield sentenced in 1820 to four and a half years in prison for selling Carlile's writings. They helped Swann's family, sent him letters and parcels, wrote to the Home Office.⁹⁰ M.D. Hill, a young Birmingham Unitarian barrister defended several infidels, including Carlile's wife in 1820 and his shop boy two years later. Many years after Hill recalled how he and a few other young barristers used all their skill and some chicanery to help these people, who they felt were "objects of cruel persecution".⁹¹ In 1823 Aspland tried to induce - without success - the General Body of London Dissenting Ministers to take up a liberal position on prosecution of 'infidels' and Deists.⁹² At the same time the Unitarian Association drew up a petition calling for universal liberty in the sphere of religious belief, got 2000 signatures within 10 days and, with the support of Lord Holland, succeeded in generating a debate in the Commons in which Joseph Hume and David Ricardo forcefully put the Unitarian arguments.⁹³ The prosecution and imprisonment of Carlile's coadjutor Robert Taylor in 1827 was criticised in the Monthly Repository.⁹⁴

Their consistent stance of opposition to state involvement in religion - finding expression in their hostility to legal restrictions on Catholics, anti-Christians, Dissenters, to the existence of a State Church

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90. Georgina Meinertshagen From Ploughshare to Parliament: A Short Memoir of the Potters of Tadcaster (1908) pp 209-10, 213-14.
91. R. and F. Davenport Hill The Recorder of Birmingham: A Memoir of Matthew Davenport Hill (1878) pp 52, 55; W.H. Wickwar The Struggle for the Freedom of the Press 1819-32 (1928) pp 197-8. See also his paper 'On Freedom in Matters of Opinion' in MR Vol. XVI (1821) pp 452-63.
92. R.B. Aspland op.cit. p. 453
93. Ibid. pp 436-7; Unitarian Association for Protecting the Civil Rights of Unitarians: Report...at the Yearly Meeting, 10th June 1824 (1824) p.6. The text of the petition is given in MR Vol. XVIII (1823) pp. 362-4. For the parliamentary debate see Hansard new series Vol. IX (1st May - 19th July 1823) 1367-1400.
94. MR new series Vol. I (1827) p. 930

and in this support for secular education - brought Unitarians into sympathy and cooperation with other liberal groupings such as the Utilitarians in London.⁹⁵ Unitarians figured prominently among the supporters of the new non-sectarian University of London in the mid-1820s. On the Committee of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge in 1827 alongside Whig leaders, liberal MPs and utilitarians were a substantial number of Unitarians: The MPs John Marshall of Leeds, John Carter of Portsmouth and George Philips of Manchester; the ministers William Turner (Newcastle) and William Shepherd (Liverpool); laymen: William Sturch, Samuel Rogers, M.D. Hill (London), Joseph Parkes and Thomas Eyre Lee (Birmingham), John Marshall Jnr. (Leeds), James Losh (Newcastle), J. Ashton Yates (Liverpool), Joseph Wedgewood (Etruria), E. Carter (Portsmouth) and G.W. Wood (Manchester).⁹⁶

Deriving much of the language of their liberalism from Locke, Hartley and Priestley, early 19th century Unitarians had a close intellectual affinity with Benthamite utilitarianism. Long before Bentham's own writings became public Unitarian ministers were deriving utilitarian arguments from this shared 18th century tradition. Thus in 1805 a Unitarian minister preached: "It is the nature of rational beings to act from motives. In all men the great spring of action is the attainment of happiness;...we cannot reasonably suppose, that any rational being would voluntarily sacrifice what appeared to be the greatest good, and

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95. John Stuart Mill recalled the attention that state persecution of infidelity excited among the utilitarians: J.S. Mill Autobiography ed. J. Stillinger (Oxford 1971) p. 54. The first statement of their new journal on the subject put forward precisely the same arguments as the Unitarians, even noting M.D. Hill's "eloquent and admirable plea for toleration" in his legal defence of Carlile's followers, see 'Religious Prosecutions' in Westminster Review Vol. II (1824) esp. p. 22. See also Elie Halevy The Growth of Philosophic Radicalism trans. Mary Morris (new ed. 1972) esp. pp. 293-5; Asa Briggs The Age of Improvement 1783-1867 (1959) p.222.
96. Membership list reprinted in Appendix C of Harold Smith The Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge 1826-46; A Social and Bibliographical Evaluation (Halifax, Nova Scotia 1974) pp. 60-1.

subject to the greatest evils and wretchedness, with the view of destroying his own happiness, or of pleasing others".⁹⁷ Two years later a reviewer in the Monthly Repository put forward another characteristic utilitarian proposition: "The whole business of life is a competition between individual and individual, to procure as great a portion of happiness as can be compassed by each single effort".⁹⁸ In 1811, a decade before Bentham reached a wider public, the Monthly Repository used a quotation from Bentham as a motto on its title page and in subsequent years it printed several extracts of Bentham's work and, in 1821, a poetical tribute.⁹⁹ On his death in 1832 the Christian Reformer called him "a wonderful man": "His faculties were infinite. In him were united the acuteness of a lawyer with the comprehension of a philosopher".¹⁰⁰

Individual Unitarians figured prominently in utilitarian circles: John Bowring, editor of the Westminster Review and Bentham's right-hand man;¹⁰¹ Thomas Southwood Smith, former Unitarian minister, who pronounced his funeral oration and then dissected his corpse;¹⁰² W.J. Fox who opened the first issue of the Westminster Review with a cogent defence of radical reform;¹⁰³ the radical barrister M.D. Hill whose career was shaped by Bentham and who dined with him weekly throughout the 1820s;¹⁰⁴

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97. John Marsom A Prevailing Regard to the Approbation of Men inconsistent with the Christian Character: A Sermon... (1805) pp. 4-5.
98. MR Vol. II (1807) p. 383.
99. Mineka op.cit. pp. 145-8 usefully summarises Benthamite writings in the Monthly Repository.
100. CR Vol. XVIII (1832) p. 281. Halevy op.cit. pp. 437-9 looks at the role of early 19th century Unitarians in developing the utilitarian tradition.
101. G.F. Bartle 'Jeremy Bentham and John Bowring: A Study of the Relationship between Bentham and the Editor of his COLLECTED WORKS' Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research Vol. XXXVI (1963)
102. See W.J. Fox's account of the proceedings in MR new series Vol. VI (1832) pp. 450-8.
103. Westminster Review Vol. I (Jan-April 1824) pp 1ff.
104. R. and F. Davenport Hill op.cit. 42-3, 63.

Edward Strutt and Joseph Parkes had links to the group; and the Unitarian minister James Lindsay, a close friend of Ricardo and James Mill, cited by Bentham to Richard Carlile as a Christian minister who concurred with them both in opposing persecution of any opinion, including infidelity.¹⁰⁵ Conversely David Ricardo was a member of the Unitarian Chapel at Hackney for the several years that he lived in East London.¹⁰⁶ Even Carlile expressed some tolerance for Unitarians, commenting in The Republican: "Though not themselves free from superstition, they would lessen the sum total among all the sects, and, in so doing, do a certain amount of good".¹⁰⁷

However, more important than the relationship between Unitarians and Utilitarians in the early 19th century, was their involvement in Whig politics. In their support for the claims of the Catholics, for the cause of anti-slavery and their implacable opposition to successive Tory governments the Unitarians were the natural allies of the Whig Opposition and in particular that enclave of Foxite fidelity Holland House.¹⁰⁸ And this affinity on the ground of policies, reinforced by their shared religious moderation - was underpinned by a network of relationships, sometimes stretching back over several generations. In the 1790s the Unitarians Samuel Heywood and William Smith MP, had both provided a meeting place for the Whig elite at their London houses.¹⁰⁹

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105. See Alexander Bain James Mill: A Biography (1882) pp 120n, 121n, 121-3, 149; F.W. Hackwood *op.cit.* p. 239.
106. The Works and Correspondence of David Ricardo ed. P. Sraffa Vol. X Biographical Miscellany (Cambridge 1955) pp. 39-40.
107. Quoted in G.J. Holyoake The Life and Character of Richard Carlile (1853) p.22
108. For a succinct account of the characteristic political dogma of Holland House in this period see Leslie Mitchell Holland House (1980) esp. Chapter IV. For the religious perspective of the Whigs see G.F.A. Best 'The Whigs and the Church Establishment in the Age of Grey and Holland' History Vol. XLV (1960) pp. 103-18.
109. R.W. Davis Dissent in Politics... p.98

From the 1790s Smith was a loyal follower of Fox and from 1802 a member of that select dining club of the Whig elite - 'The King of Clubs'.¹¹⁰ He was also a habitue of Holland House, as was another Unitarian MP, George Philips. Unitarians made a more collective gesture of support for the Whig opposition on occasion. On the death of Fox in 1806 Aspland preached to his Hackney congregation on his exemplary political stance - his support for the persecuted Dissenters and Catholics, for "the rights of the harrassed Irish, the oppressed Hindoos, and the suffering Africans": "Never, during the whole of his long Parliamentary life, was his voice lifted up to justify oppression or persecution; never did the injured or oppressed appeal to the British senate that he did not exert his noble eloquence on their behalf. He made the cause of all that were wronged his own". The sermon was published - "in testimony of the admiration felt by the Gravel-Pit congregation for Mr. Fox's character as a statesman" - and prefaced with a dedication to his nephew and political heir Lord Holland, who reciprocated with a polite letter.¹¹¹ Aspland was later of service to Holland as a political informant.¹¹²

During the 1807 election - which was bitterly contested in many areas - Unitarians were particularly zealous in the Whig cause. One of the students at Manchester College York, a future Unitarian minister, Thomas Madge, was so conspicuous in giving public "harangues" and mustering voters in the cause of Lord Milton that the latter thanked him personally and hinted that one of the 26 livings of his father (Earl Fitzwilliam) could be his reward.¹¹³ Wakefield's Unitarian minister Thomas Johnstone was a guest at Wentworth House to a ball celebrating Milton's victory.¹¹⁴ And London's Unitarian ministers - Aspland, Belsham,

110. Ibid. pp. 102-3.

111. R.B. Aspland op.cit. pp. 179-81.

112. Ibid. p. 420 and n.

113. William James A Memoir of Rev. Thomas Madge (1871) p.22

114. T. Chalmers Manuscript History of Westgate Chapel Wakefield
WCL: JG Mss.

Lindsay, Jervis and Rees - were invited to a small party of Whigs, including Lord Holland, Lord Grey, Lord Stanley, Whitbread and Smith; according to Belsham: "The zeal of the Dissenters, and particularly of the Dissenting ministers in Yorkshire...in favour of the late Administration, and the disdain with which ^{they} generally treated the cry of 'No Popery', has given the leaders of that party a more favourable opinion of Dissenters, and induced some of them to desire an interview with a few of the Dissenting ministers in London".¹¹⁵

While the Whigs in these years did not constitute a political party in any modern sense, they depended on more than wealth and the traditional ties of landlord and tenant, master and servant for electoral survival and political influence. Especially in the growing towns and industrial areas, political power necessitated a network of agents and supporters, informal local associations of the propertied and cultured, special gatherings such as Fox dinners.¹¹⁶ As in the 1770s and 80s, so in the early 19th century Unitarians were an important strand of Whig strength. In many areas individual Unitarians, men of wealth who inherited a tradition of loyalty to the Whig cause, served as advisors to Whig leaders and were suitably rewarded. Additionally Unitarians provided a mechanism of party propaganda, sensitive to rapidly shifting conditions, through their involvement in the development of the provincial press.

James Losh, a Unitarian barrister in Newcastle-upon-Tyne from 1799 until his death in 1833, exemplifies one kind of contribution to the Whig cause. Son and brother of solid Whig landowners in Cumberland, he moved in radical circles in London in the 1790s where he was one of the rising young stars of the 'Friends of the People' and a friend of Frennd, Tooke,

115. R.B. Aspland op.cit. p. 205.

116. For broader discussion of this kind of political formation see: Lewis Namier Monarchy and the Party System (Romanes Lecture 1952); Max Weber 'Politics as a Vocation' in From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology edited and translated by H.H. Gerth and C.W. Mills (1948) esp. p.99-102.

Godwin, Coleridge, Southey and Wordsworth.¹¹⁷ However a nervous collapse, the responsibility of a family and the dark political context led him to settle to the routine of a provincial barrister on Tyneside. Initially he had been embittered by the collapse of the reform movement and his hatred for Pitt was vitriolic. In September 1800 he wrote in his diary of his refusal to ever dirty his hand in political activity again and described himself as "unfit for any office under any government whatever".¹¹⁸ However his attitude softened. In February 1811 he confided in his diary: "I begin to feel that I am gradually gaining ground in the public opinion in this district".¹¹⁹ From 1802 he had been a Vice-President of the Literary and Philosophical Society in Newcastle. From 1811 his diary begins to note occasional invitations to the country houses of the Whig elite for dinners, political discussion and over-night stays - at Lord Grey's and Lord Lambton's in particular.¹²⁰ And his connections with Brougham and Romilly kept him in touch with political news. In March 1812 Sir Charles Monck retained Losh as a political advisor at the Northumberland election.¹²¹ In 1814 an hour long speech before a public meeting of the Slave Trade Committee brought him before a different section of liberal opinion in Newcastle.¹²² However, though a visible

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117. See 'A Memoir of the late James Losh' appended to William Turner A Sermon preached on October 6th 1833 in Hanover Square Chapel, Newcastle, on occasion of the late lamented death of James Losh Esq. (Newcastle 1833) pp. 26-7. See also Mary Moorman William Wordsworth: the Early Years 1770-1803 (Oxford 1965) pp. 263-4, 309-10; L. Hanson The Life of Coleridge: The Early Years (New York 1962) p.263
118. Manuscript Diaries of James Losh in The Jackson Library, Carlisle Central Libraries, Tuillie House, Carlisle: B320; 23 ix 1800. I have cited Hughes's selection where possible (see footnote 52 above), abbreviated to Losh Diaries (Hughes).
119. Losh Diaries (Hughes) I p.13.
120. See for instance Losh Diaries (Hughes) I pp. 15, 27, 72-3, 82-3, 85.
121. Ibid. p.11
122. Ibid. p.37

public man and a confidante of Grey it was only in 1820 that Losh was drawn closer into Whig circles. The defence of the Manchester magistrates after the Peterloo massacre by two local churchmen aroused his ire and he quickly dashed off a pamphlet which, by its cool and balanced authority and its avoidance of even a hint of compromise with popular radicalism, brought him praise from the liberal gentry.¹²³ A couple of months later in January 1820 he took the leading role in a Newcastle meeting of 1000 members of the propertied class calling for parliamentary reform: he spoke for an hour and moved the resolutions.¹²⁴ In the course of 1820 Losh was retained as an advisor for the elections of Ridley at Newcastle, Lambton at Durham and the Whig candidate James at Carlisle - a sudden rush of interest which he put down to his Peterloo pamphlets and public speech.¹²⁵ In the course of the 1820s he took an active part in Anti-Slavery campaigns, on one occasion delivering a speech of one and a half hours in which he especially dwelt on the capacity of negroes "to conduct themselves as moral and religious men in a state of freedom".¹²⁶ He also proved his loyalty to the Whig elite of Northumberland by his patient handling of Thomas Wentworth Beaumont - a young Whig of great wealth and instability.¹²⁷ By 1826 Losh was recognised as a political leader.

123. An Observer (James Losh) Some Observations as to the Propriety of an Enquiry into the Late Proceedings at Manchester; being an Examination of the Arguments contained in the pamphlets of Rev. Henry Philpotts, Prebendary of Durham, and Rev. John Davison Rector of Washington (Newcastle 1819); An Observer Appendix to some Observations as to the Propriety of an Enquiry into the late Proceedings at Manchester... (Newcastle 1819). For the political context of the controversy over Peterloo in the North East see Chester W. New Lord Durham: A Biography of John George Lambton (Oxford 1929) pp 51-4. See also Newcastle Chronicle 13 xi and 20 xi 1820.

124. Losh Diaries (Hughes) I p.106; Newcastle Chronicle 19 i 1820

125. Losh Diaries (Hughes) I pp. 108-9, 110, 113-14.

126. Ibid II p.6.

127. Ibid I pp. 107, 177, 186, 188-9, II pp.2,4; see also Losh's letters to Lord Grey Ibid II p.163 and passim. On Beaumont, a young man of wealth and radical-Whig principles who succeeded in insulting and quarrelling with the leaders of local Whiggery - even fighting a duel with Lambton in 1826 - see DNB; C.H. Blair 'Members of Parliament for Northumberland and Newcastle 1559-1831' in Archaeological Aeliana 4th series Vol. XXIII (1945) pp. 129-31

A radical tract of that year was dedicated to him as "the most enlightened inhabitant" in the county, loyal to the cause of civil and religious liberty; it spoke also of his role in the Northumberland election:

"it was mainly through your influence that the disgraceful words 'No Popery' were so speedily removed from the walls at Alnwick during the late election".¹²⁸ In the late 1820s and early 30s Losh continued to be active - giving speeches in the cause of reform, corresponding with Grey and Brougham, advising the Whig elite while negotiating with the radical movement and generally attempting to mediate between the different forces supporting parliamentary reform. "Mr. Losh has long been looked up to as the head of the Whig party in Newcastle", Turner noted.¹²⁹ His reward was the Recordership of Newcastle-upon-Tyne shortly before his sudden death in 1833.

In early 19th century Yorkshire there was a much more extensive involvement of Unitarians in Whig politics. At Wakefield the Milnes family continued to play a role. Richard Slater Milnes was MP for York until 1802 and his son Robert represented Pontefract from 1806 to 18. Benjamin Gaskell was MP for Maldon from 1812 to 26 and members of the Whig elite like Lord Morpeth were guests at Thornes House in Wakefield.¹³⁰ From 1807 Earl Fitzwilliam's political agent was Thomas William Tottie, a solicitor and a member of Mill Hill Unitarian Chapel in Leeds.¹³¹ He served as a mediator between the Leeds businessmen and Fitzwilliam - forwarding petitions from the former to the latter and returning Fitzwilliam's

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128. Three Letters to the Editor of the Tyne Mercury, on the Catholic Claims by a Protestant (North Shields 1826) p.iii.
129. 'A Memoir of the late James Losh' loc.cit. pp. 26-7. Note however that Losh was not a servile follower of the Whigs - he was a friend and admirer of Major Cartwright, suspicious of Whig politicking and frequently contemptuous of upper class morality and intelligence, see for instance Losh Diaries (Hughes) I pp. 73, 82-3, 190.
130. See obituary of Gaskell in The Inquirer 26 i 1856; for something of the society at Thornes House in the late 1820s see The Gladstone Diaries Vol. I 1825-32 (Oxford 1968) pp. 259, 579.
131. R.V. Taylor The Biographia Leodiensis; or Biographical Sketches of the Worthies of Leeds and Neighbourhood... (1865) pp. 486-8.

assurances and mentioned to his patron "my watchfulness, which is the sum of my service".¹³² However Tottie was much more active and important than that. During the County election of 1818, for instance, he was in almost daily communication with Fitzwilliam and his son Milton, conveying information on the ebb and flow of political feeling and organization among supporters and opponents, had appropriate advertisements inserted in the newspapers, handled election expenses, kept in touch with leading men in the West Riding and gave public speeches for Milton - for instance placating the Trustees of the Leeds Mixed Cloth Hall. "Nothing can be more zealous or active than his services", Sir Francis Wood told Fitzwilliam.¹³³

Tottie was not above flattering the prejudices of the landed interest. He told Fitzwilliam in 1817 that in his view the English state, since 1688, had been based on land and the community of interest between landowners and yeomanry: "all LEGISLATIVE change, which would further decrease the steady influence of independent LANDED proprietors, in the legislature, and tend to substitute in the plan of it, either the caprice of popular feeling, or the fluctuation and speculative spirit of commercial adventurers, would prove subversive of all that is necessary to the well being of Society".¹³⁴ But he also managed in the same letter to convey to Fitzwilliam that "the Commercial body" were equal in political weight to the landed aristocracy and that the latter depended upon "respectable and worthy men" to handle lower class agitation for parliamentary reform: "to moderate and temper the ignorant and uninformed, but mainly well disposed multitude".¹³⁵ This, of course, was precisely the

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132. T.W. Tottie to Earl Fitzwilliam 4 vii 1818 in SCL: WW Mss F48/35
133. Sir F. Wood to Fitzwilliam 19 vi 1818 *ibid.* F48/72
134. Tottie to Fitzwilliam 24 iii 1817 *ibid.* F83/16
135. *Ibid.*

kind of recognition of realities which was to push the Whig elite towards an acceptance of parliamentary reform. Tottie was also instrumental in pushing Fitzwilliam and Milton into fulfilling their political duties - making sure, for instance, that electoral addresses were forthcoming. For instance, during the 1818 election he told Fitzwilliam: "Your Lordship will be pleased to pardon me but I cannot conceal my chagrin at not having received Lord Milton's Address to the Freeholders of Yorkshire".¹³⁶ The address arrived soon after.

Tottie, then, played a pivotal role in mobilising support for Fitzwilliam's political dynasty, keeping the centre informed and ensuring that it fulfilled its duties and was cognisant of changing realities, especially in the West Riding. Among Whig supporters were a network of other Unitarians in urban centres where the Whig gentry had little direct influence: Benjamin and John Pemberton Heywood in Wakefield, Rawdon Briggs at Halifax, Thomas Asline Ward and the Shores at Sheffield, Samuel Martin at Hull. Tottie, along with Ward and Offley Shore, were elected to a Committee of Yorkshire Whigs in 1822.¹³⁷ Such service to the Whig cause brought its material rewards. Tottie, for instance, was appointed by Fitzwilliam to the post of Subdivision Clerk to the Deputy Lieutenant in the West Riding and then Clerk to the general Lieutenancy.¹³⁸ Others got prestigious honorary positions like High Sheriff or Deputy Lieutenant. The Unitarian Banker in Halifax, Rawdon Briggs, owed Fitzwilliam a greater debt: during the 1826 financial crisis the latter provided the former with money to the tune of £10,000 to help stave off the hysterical demand for cash which followed the collapse of Wentworth's Bank.¹³⁹ However, the thanks of such patronage was never blind obedience

136. Tottie to Fitzwilliam 13 vi 1818 F48/55

137. Leeds Mercury 24 viii and 9 xi 1822

138. Tottie to Fitzwilliam 22 xii 1812, 20 v 1816 SCL: WW Mss F52/25 & 26.

139. Rawdon Briggs to Fitzwilliam 17 i 1826 ibix. F132/7

and - as in the 1780s - such party followers were not slow to voice their dissatisfactions with their political master. Thus, during the 1818 election Benjamin Heywood forcefully pointed out the extent to which Milton's failure to adequately represent the economic interests of woollen merchants and manufacturers had alienated supporters in the West Riding:

"tho' he was to argue with the tongue of an Angel he might as well endeavour to remove a mountain as make the least impression upon the minds of these men and your ladyship may tell him from me that if he cannot soften down his sentiments upon this matter he will lose the good opinion of both the Merchants and Manufactu^rers".¹⁴⁰

The election of the Leeds Unitarian industrialist John Marshall as MP for Yorkshire in 1826 is an indication of the extent to which urban liberal groups were penetrating the inner ramparts of the state within the shell of traditional Whig aristocratic forms.¹⁴¹ In 1818 Tottie had written to Fitzwilliam from Leeds: "the People here, of course, wish to have a Man of Business for their representative".¹⁴² And in the early 1820s John Marshall, one of the richest industrialists in the area with landed property in Cumberland and Yorkshire and well enough accepted in the county to be High Sheriff in 1821, began to be canvassed. He began to seek nomination himself in 1825 and had the support of Edward Baines and the Leeds Mercury.¹⁴³ Finally in March 1826, after Lord Morpeth's refusal to stand for the Whigs, Tottie brought Marshall to the attention of Fitzwilliam as a fit running mate for Lord Milton: "he has been mentioned as a fit man for one of the representatives of Yorkshire on the commercial Interest, and if he were to be returned would be found not only a very useful man for local Business, but an enlightened and

140. Benjamin Heywood to Fitzwilliam 18 vi 1818 *ibid.* F48/71.

141. Professor Thompson suggested that Marshall's election marked the opening of the alliance between the landed Whigs and the urban/commercial Liberals: F.M.L. Thompson 'Whigs & Liberals in the West Riding 1830-60' English Historical Review Vol. XXIV (1959) p.219. I would prefer to argue that it signalled a qualitative shift in the balance of power within an alliance stretching back to the mid-18th century: see above pp.120-9.

142. Tottie to Fitzwilliam 10 vi 1818. SCL: WW Mss F48/42

143. W.G. Rimmer Marshalls of Leeds Flax-Spinners 1788-1886(Cambridge 1960) p.1

Independent Legislator". Tottie also pointedly mentioned that Marshall was wealthy enough to incur considerable expense.¹⁴⁴ Marshall himself was uncompromising and told Fitzwilliam: "when in Parliament I should act upon my own opinions respecting Parliamentary Reform and the Corn Laws, which I apprehend were somewhat different from those of the Party".¹⁴⁵ Though accepted by Fitzwilliam and Milton as an appropriate candidate before the end of March, Marshall continued to await his moment. On May 27th the Leeds Mercury listed five points in Marshall's favour - his great wealth, his appropriateness as a representative of the manufacturing interest, his knowledge of political economy ("a master of that science"), his contacts in London society where he lived for several months of each year, and his adherence to the policies of parliamentary reform, free trade and rigid economy in public spending. Baines called for a public show of support for Marshall to bring him forward.¹⁴⁶ A few days later a gathering of woollen merchants at the Cloth Hall called for Marshall to run and they circulated a requisition to that effect which was, according to the Mercury, "signed with extraordinary zeal and unanimity throughout the manufacturing districts".¹⁴⁷ Thus Marshall moved into the election in June on a rising and carefully engineered wave of support and was at length elected, with Milton, without a contest - though it still cost him £27,000.¹⁴⁸

After a spell of ill-health Marshall did not stand for re-election in 1830. But once again the urban liberals of the West Riding asserted

144. Tottie to Fitzwilliam 3 iii 1826 SCL: WW Mss F132/13

145. Rimmer op.cit. p.112. Marshall also signalled his uncompromising position when he told Brougham that the mobilising of the "manufacturing interest" was necessary in the election and the Whigs "must not be squeamish at the steps I shall take to do it". Marshall to Henry Brougham 3 vi 1826 Brougham Mss 1424 in Library of University College London.

146. Leeds Mercury 27 v 1826

147. Ibid. 3 vi 1826

148. According to Derek Fraser in Politics in Leeds 1830-52 (University of Leeds Ph.D. thesis 1969) p.30.

their power. Against the wishes of an important section of the Whig gentry they succeeded in getting Henry Brougham nominated for the seat. Marshall put him forward and Tottie chaired the dinner celebrating his subsequent election.¹⁴⁹ Individual influence within the narrow circles of Whig influence certainly had a great deal to do with this increasingly visible role of urban liberals - especially Unitarians - in Yorkshire elections. However also important was the ability of the urban groups to mobilise support from the broader population of voters - the shopkeepers, the small businessmen and houseowners who were proliferating in the West Riding. The Tory Leeds Intelligencer in 1830 ascribed the defeat of the Whig gentry over the nomination of Brougham to the influence of the Leeds Mercury - "aided by a small train of Unitarian and Presbyterian Dissenters, and the stray sheep of the Radical interest".¹⁵⁰ And the ideological influence of a liberal press was a significant factor in political influence in the early 19th century.

Party leaders had long recognised the political importance of controlling the press and invested considerable sums of money in buying the good opinion of editors. As Sir William Milner complained at York in 1788, where both papers were pro-Pitt: "If all our enemies' publications are to be printed and ours refused we fight an unequal battle".¹⁵¹ During the 1780s the Foxite Opposition organized agents to write for newspapers and helped editors with subsidies - at least £800 went to the "country newspapers" in 1789-90.¹⁵² In the 1790s Pitt appointed a special

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149. See John Marshall to Henry Brougham 24 viii 1830 Brougham Mss 9391 loc.cit; Arthur Aspinall Lord Brougham and the Whig Party (Manchester 1927) p.175; Norman Gash 'Brougham and the Yorkshire Election of 1830' Proceedings of the Leeds Literary and Philosophical Society Vol. VIII Part 1 (1956) pp. 19-35.
150. Quoted in A.S. Turberville and F. Beckwith 'Leeds and Parliamentary Reform 1820-32' Thoresby Society Publications Vol. XLI (1954) pp. 31-2.
151. Quoted in Donald Ray McAdams Politicians and the Electorate in the late 18th century (Duke University Ph.D. Thesis 1967) p.152.
152. Donald Ginter 'The Financing of the Whig Party Organization 1783-93' American Historical Review Vol. LXXI (1966) pp. 423, 433-6.

officer to liaise with provincial papers which were sent two or three government controlled London papers with particular articles marked in red which they were encouraged to print verbatim.¹⁵³ After 1800 Unitarians played a central role in various parts of the country in the construction of a liberal press, not to be bought by government money and following a flexible line, responsive to local conditions.

At Newcastle-upon-Tyne a young member of Hanover Square, Solomon Hodgson, took over the Newcastle Chronicle in 1784 on the death of his father-in-law. A rational dissenter and political reformer his epitaph in 1800 declared: "In times of unexampled difficulty, the honest and independent conductor of the Newcastle Chronicle...through the medium of an uncorrupted press, delighted in disseminating the principles of rational liberty and eternal truth".¹⁵⁴ His wife continued the paper - "upon better and more consistent Whig principles than the leaders themselves of that party exhibited", James Losh commented on her death in 1822¹⁵⁵ - until their sons Thomas and James, both Unitarians, took over. The Newcastle radical Eneas Mackenzie described the Chronicle in 1827 as "a cool, moderate advocate of the Whig party" and Hetherington recalled it in the 1830s as "respectable Whig...never stooping to scurrility or personal abuse".¹⁵⁶ With a smaller circulation and taking a more radical line, another Newcastle Unitarian, John Mitchell, edited and printed a weekly newspaper - the Tyne Mercury. Set up in 1802 it struggled to make a profit. By 1812 its circulation was said to be around 1500 but Mitchell's financial base remained unsteady.¹⁵⁷ In 1815 the principle of

153. Edward Baines Jnr., The Life of Edward Baines, Late MP for the Borough of Leeds (1851) p.42n.

154. R. Welford Men of Mark... Vol. II pp. 543-4.

155. Losh Diaries (Hughes) I pp. 170-1.

156. E. Mackenzie A Descriptive and Historical Account of the Town and County of Newcastle-upon-Tyne (Newcastle 1827) Vol. II p.728; R.W. Hetherington Newcastle Fifty Years Ago... p.36

157. R. Welford op.cit. p.193; M. Milne 'The Tyne Mercury and Parliamentary Reform' Northern History Vol. XIV (1978) p. 229

Manchester College York, Wellbeloved, was complaining of Mitchell's unpaid bill of £50 - the residue of fees for his son's attendance at the College between 1812 and 15. In August 1816 the bill remained unpaid and Wellbeloved told the College treasurer: "I hear he has been in difficulties".¹⁵⁸ After Mitchell's death in 1819 his sons William and Henry maintained the same Whig-radical political line.¹⁵⁹

In Yorkshire there were a number of liberal newspapers established in the early 19th century. The Leeds Mercury was the most important. In 1801 a newcomer to the town, Edward Baines, was enabled to purchase the almost defunct newspaper by a loan of £1000 from a group of Leeds and Wakefield reformers, with one or two exceptions Unitarians - including the Milnes family and John Marshall.¹⁶⁰ Baines himself was associated with Mill Hill Chapel at first, though later moving over to the Independents. However his assistant editor and right-hand man from 1804, John Talbot, remained a member of Mill Hill until his death in 1839.¹⁶¹ At Hull in 1808 a small group of Whigs and Unitarians celebrated the 1807 election victory of Lord Milton by setting up a newspaper called the Hull Rockingham. This was edited by William Spence until 1811 and George Lee from 1811 to 43, both members of Bowl Alley Lane Chapel - the latter had been a Unitarian minister for a number of years. Its name signalled its Whiggish affinities and Fitzwilliam's Hull agents Richard and Daniel Sykes were the main financial supporters initially.¹⁶² Its prospectus claimed: "Though the votaries of certain political principles, they are independent of any personal influence, and not impelled by motives of faction".¹⁶³

158. C. Wellbeloved to G.W. Wood 14 xii 1815 and 23 viii 1816 MCO.

159. M. Milne op.cit. pp. 230, 232f.

160. E. Baines op.cit. pp 14-15, 45-7.

161. Copies of the Inscription on the Tombstones in the Burial Ground: Mill Hill Chapel Leeds 1889: Mill Hill Mss.

162. William Andrews 'An Old Hull Newspaper' Hull Literary Club Magazine Vol. II (1899-1904) p.62; G. Pryme Memoir of the Life of Daniel Sykes Esq. (Wakefield 1834) pp. 15, 22; obituary of George Lee CR Vol. IX. (1842) pp. 532-3.

163. Prospectus printed in Hull Rockingham 7 v 1808.

Certainly it became less Whiggish and in the 1820s the spokesman of urban liberalism.

The Sheffield Independent, founded in 1819, was edited from 1824 by one of its three owners, the Unitarian Thomas Asline Ward who followed the Whig-radical line of parliamentary reform, free trade, opposition to state religion.¹⁶⁴ And in Wakefield the Unitarian printer Rowland Hurst, with his co-religionist Thomas Lumb and the liberal Anglican clergyman Dr. Martin Naylor ran the Wakefield Star from 1804 to 11 when it absorbed the Halifax Journal and became the Wakefield and Halifax Journal - remaining in their hands until 1833.¹⁶⁵

In Manchester in 1821 the Manchester Guardian was set up by a group of middle class reformers, most of whom were Unitarians - including Richard and Thomas Potter, G.W. Wood, Edward Baxter, Robert and George Philips and T.B.W. Sanderson. Its first editor John Edward Taylor was a young reformer and a member of Cross Street Chapel.¹⁶⁶ When in the mid-1820s the thriving new paper - which had absorbed several local rivals and increased its circulation to over 3,000 - softened its radical stance and became more pro-Whig the Potters helped finance Archibald Prentice to produce the Manchester Times from 1828, adhering to a more radical line.¹⁶⁷

The Unitarian conception of the Christian ethic as requiring effort to reform and improve society meant that, in marked contrast to the evangelical sectarianism of much of the rest of dissent, it provided a legitimation for all this secular, intellectual and political effort. When the newspaper editor, businessman or political activist sat in his

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164. G.D. Jennet Thomas Asline Ward: His Life and Achievements and their Effect upon the Development of Sheffield (University of Sheffield M.A. thesis 1954) pp 59-66.
165. Henry Clarkson Memories of Merry Wakefield (Wakefield 1889) p.210; J.W. Walker Wakefield, Its History and People (3rd ed. 1966) Vol. II p.564; Wakefield and Halifax Journal 23 viii 1833.
166. Donald Read Press and People: 1790-1850 (1961) pp 80-1; Obituary of Taylor in Manchester Guardian 10 i 1844.
167. Read op.cit. pp. 87-90.

pew, far from finding himself admonished for his devotion to the things of this world, he found himself praised and his activities underwritten. Insofar as they were in harmony with the cause of reform and enlightenment then they were sanctioned by Unitarianism.¹⁶⁸ And this even extended to the political sphere. Thus at Birmingham in October 1831 before a massive meeting of 150,000 in the cause of parliamentary reform the Rev. Hugh Hutton, Unitarian minister at the Old Meeting, led prayers from the platform - a platform on which all other religious ministers in the town refused to stand.¹⁶⁹ Other Unitarian ministers played an active role in campaigns for radical reform. In London the Rev. W.J. Fox was a leading figure in the Political Union, speaking regularly, and to great effect, to large public meetings in Leicester Square.¹⁷⁰ In Manchester John Relly Beard, Unitarian minister at Salford, spoke on political platforms during the reform crisis and William Shepherd described him to Brougham in 1834 as "a clever and influential man who was a very efficient partisan of Lord Molyneux at the last County election".¹⁷¹ Shepherd himself, Unitarian minister at Gateacre near Liverpool, was a political correspondent of Brougham, a writer for the Westminster Review and a mediator between Whigs and radicals in Liverpool. His radical reputation was such that he was invited to join the staff of the Westminster - but, as he told Brougham in 1828:

"The position I have long held at Liverpool has led these Utilitarians and many others into a mistake as to my political feelings. I have long posted myself at the head of our Radicals - but I have done this, with the perfect knowledge that I am not up to their mark, for the purpose of keeping them in bounds - a dangerous and troublesome experiment - but hitherto almost uniformly successful. I have had influence to induce them in public matters to cooperate with their Whig townsmen".¹⁷²

168. See for instance, sanctifying the role of an enlightened press, J. Gooch Robberds The importance of conscientiousness in the use of influence: A Sermon...on occasion of the death of Mr. John Edward Taylor (Manchester 1844)

169. R.D. Woodall Midland Unitarianism: 1662-1962 (1962) pp. 22-3.

170. F.E. Mineka op.cit. p.187.

171. W. Shepherd to Brougham 17 iii 1834 Brougham Mss 25.599 in the Library of University College London.

172. Same to same 11 x 1828 Brougham Mss 26.830 ibid.

Even in small towns where Toryism was predominant Unitarian ministers often took an uncompromising political stance in public. At Whitby Joseph Ketley spoke from the platform of the reform candidate at several public meetings in 1832.¹⁷³ At King's Lynn the Unitarian minister, William Selby, was recalled as: "A man of considerable ability... a great Radical politician, and very active in writing and speechifying, for his party..."¹⁷⁴

For Unitarians - ministers and laymen alike - such political zeal for reform was a simple extension of their faith: the role of rational religion was to improve man and to make society a more virtuous place. The vices of men and women were inextricably fused with, for instance, electoral corruption. Parliamentary reform, as George Harris argued in 1832, was part of a new "Reformation", replacing servility, ignorance and superstition with "a panoply of regenerated virtue".¹⁷⁵ The action of the Bishops in opposing the Reform Bill in the Lords, and the role of the Church of England in general in sustaining a corrupt political system made political action imperative for the Unitarian minister:

"whilst this monstrous combination of lordly craft and priestly servility is allowed to exist, it is the imperative duty of the Christian teacher, who would not have Christ mistaken for Belial, and corruption misplace purity, and despotism usurp universal freedom, and bigotry put down charity, to stand forth, and whilst protesting against the abomination, task himself to the utmost to accelerate the advancement of that knowledge, which will shame to its congenial darkness such outrages on reason, benevolence and Christianity".¹⁷⁶

For laymen too political reform and religious commitment were closely linked. In March 1829 John Shuttleworth sent his fellow-Unitarian and fellow radical in Manchester, Richard Potter, a religious article he had written, adding: "I have no news that you have any interest in, for I imagine unless it was connected with Radicalism or Unitarianism you would

173. Hull Advertiser 25 v 1832 and 3 viii 1832.

174. 'A Lynn Sexagenarian' Personal Recollections (Kings Lynn 1891) pp 48-9.

175. George Harris Christianity, Universal Liberty: A Thanksgiving Sermon on the Passing of the Reform Bills... (Glasgow 1832) p.7.

176. Ibid. pp 13-14.

set no value upon it".¹⁷⁷

Such secular devoutness - when combined with wealth and the right kind of links with the Whig elite - brought its rewards and in the expansion of the oligarchy brought about by the Reform Bill of 1832 Unitarians were often well placed to profit. They swept into the parliamentary representation of several Northern towns, some of them newly-enfranchised: at Leeds John Marshall Junior; at Wakefield Daniel Gaskell; at Halifax Rawdon Briggs; at Manchester Mark Philips; in the new Southern Division of Lancashire G.W. Wood; Richard Potter at Wigan; and, from a less Whiggish direction, John Fielden at Oldham. At Hull the Unitarians, led by Henry Blundell and George Lee, dominated the Parliamentary Reform Association and got their candidate, the Unitarian M.D. Hill elected. "The revolution is made", said the Duke of Wellington: "power is transferred from one class of society, gentleman professing the faith of the Church of England, to another class of society, the shopkeepers, being Dissenters from the Church, many of them Socinians, atheists".¹⁷⁸ If the new men from the Unitarians were indeed Socinians in theology, they were not shopkeepers, with all that implied, but bankers, industrialists, professional men - educated gentleman as a rule, long entrenched in Whig circles, having less and less in common with the evangelical culture of the Independents, the Baptists and the Methodists. But the numerical weight of the latter - the evangelical shopocracy - began to prove as great a threat to the Unitarians in the new dispensation as to the traditional landed Churchman.

177. G. Meinerthagen op.cit. p. 251

178. Quoted in R.V. Holt The Unitarian Contribution to Social Progress in England (2nd ed., 1952) p.132

IV

In the 1830s Unitarians continued to profit from the new Whig hegemony. They remained pre-eminent in the parliamentary representation of dissent. According to Mark Philips, Unitarian MP for Manchester since 1832, there were 11 Unitarians in the Commons in 1840 - "one small section of the liberal party", he called them.¹⁷⁹ A year later Lucy Aikin told Channing, with a touch of bravado, that the numerical strength of orthodox dissent had no political corollary: "These dissenters have no political power or weight whatever, as their ministers have confessed or complained. They have not even a single member of parliament belonging to them, while the little Unitarian aristocracy has about fifteen".¹⁸⁰ Within local government too Unitarians became part of the new Whig-liberal elite. James Losh became the Recorder of Newcastle in 1832 and in the same year a Unitarian, John Wood, became Recorder of York.¹⁸¹ At Newcastle the Unitarians George Burnett and Emerson Charnley were among the handful of new men allowed into the Common Council in 1830 and among the "Whig clique" which swept into power after the Corporation was reformed in 1835 were a number of Unitarians - W.A. and Henry Mitchell, Thomas Bell, James Hodgson and Dr. T.M. Greenhow.¹⁸² At Hull too Unitarians entered the reformed Corporation in 1835, among them two new Aldermen, Henry Blundell and Richard Tottie. The first seven Mayors of Leicester belonged to the Unitarian Chapel and at both Bolton and Hyde the first two Mayors were Unitarians.¹⁸³ In the twelve years after

179. Proceedings on the Presentation of the Testimonial to the Rev. Charles Wellbeloved (1840) pp 45-6.

180. Memoirs...of Lucy Aikin ed. P.H. Le Breton (1864) p.426

181. On Wood's appointment see John Kenrick to G.W. Wood 16 iv 1833. MCO

182. See Peter Cadogan Early Radical Newcastle (Consett 1975) p. 109; 'A Late Councillor' The Corporation Annual; or Recollections (not Random) of the first Reformed Town Council of the Borough of Newcastle-upon-Tyne (Newcastle 1836)

183. Records of 19th century Leicester ed. Isabel C. Ellis (1935) p.305; R.V. Holt op.cit. pp. 240-1.

Municipal Reform there was only one Baptist and one Independent Mayor of Leeds but six Unitarians: Tottie (1837), H.C. Marshall (1842), Hamer Stansfeld (1843), Darnton Lupton (1844), J.D. Luccock (1845), Francis Carbutt (1847).¹⁸⁴ In many areas too such Unitarians entered the magistracy or were the recipients of other kinds of patronage as reward for political loyalty through the long winter of Whig impotence.¹⁸⁵

However Unitarian monopoly of the parliamentary representation of religious dissent was increasingly a thing of the past. There was only one orthodox Dissenter in the first reformed parliament, Wilks of Boston, until Edward Baines joined him in 1834. But already an anxious Unitarian minister noted how the Unitarians were being outflanked in the Commons:

"Time was when an Unitarian W. Smith represented the Dissenting body in Parliament: the Calvinists gnashed their teeth, but they could not help themselves, none of their body had any chance to find his way there. Now it is Mr. Wilks and Mr. Baines who identify themselves in parliament with the interests and sentiments of the Dissenters".¹⁸⁶

Another minister, William Shepherd, told Brougham in 1834 that the Unitarians stood apart from the rising tide of dissenting anger against the Whigs but were few enough in number: "the strength of the Dissenters lies with the Calvinists, who looked coolly on whilst we Unitarians fought our enemies, and only buckle on their armour to harrass our friends".¹⁸⁷

Underpinning the gradual shift in the balance of power within dissent was a longer-term hostility between Unitarians and the rest of dissent.

Theological hostility to Unitarian rationalism had from the 1790s found

184. Derek Fraser Urban Politics in Victorian England (Leicester 1976) p.266. See also E.P. Hennock Fit and Proper Persons: Ideal and Reality in 19th century Urban Government (1973) esp. pp 221-2.

185. On the changing character of the Lancashire magistracy after Holland became Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancashire in 1830 and liberal MPs, especially Unitarians like G.W. Wood, began to exert pressure on him see David Foster The Changing Social and Political Composition of the Lancashire County Magistracy 1821-51 (University of Lancaster Ph.D. 1971) Chapter 3.

186. John Kenrick to G.W. Wood 11 iv 1834 MCO

187. William Shepherd to Lord Brougham 5 iv 1834 Brougham Mss 25.612 loc.cit.

expression not just in intermittent polemics and public abuse but in a degree of social and cultural apartheid. Unitarian Sunday Schools were, from 1819, excluded from the non-denominational Sunday School Union for instance.¹⁸⁸ Many other voluntary agencies, in which Independents, Baptists, Methodists and even some Churchmen cooperated, excluded Unitarians. In 1831 there were moves to exclude Unitarians from the British and Foreign Bible Society and in a number of local Bible Societies - among them Hull, York and Newcastle-upon-Tyne - Unitarian ministers were forced to resign.¹⁸⁹

Relations between Unitarians and the Independents - the largest and most powerful of the orthodox dissenters - deteriorated markedly in these years, soured especially by legal wrangles. The Lady Hewley Case, instituted by Independents in 1824, claimed that property endowed by Trinitarian Presbyterians could not rightfully be appropriated by Unitarians who were on every theological principle opposed to the founders and, moreover, illegal until 1813. Long and tangled litigation finally led to the Unitarians losing control of the lucrative Lady Hewley Fund in 1836.¹⁹⁰ A dangerous legal precedent was thus established and for a time the vast majority of Unitarian Chapels were under threat until a new act of parliament, with the support of Peel's Conservative Government, made them secure in 1844. The bitterness caused by these prolonged legal battles affected relations between Unitarians and Independents in every sphere. On retiring in 1832, the Unitarian MP William Smith, who had actively represented the interests of dissent in parliament for 40 years, expressed his anxieties about the growing disunity, even within the

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188. William Henry Watson The Sunday School Union: its History and Work (1869) p.23.
189. See detailed account of the British and Foreign Bible Society's annual meeting in CR Vol. XVII (1831) pp. 195-220.
190. For the Hewley Case see especially T.S. James The History of the Litigation and Legislation respecting Presbyterian Chapels and Charities... (1867). The opening shot in the case was George Hadfield The Manchester Socinian Controversy; with Introductory Remarks and an Appendix (1825)

Protestant Dissenting Deputies: "Some of our brethren seemed to think", he wrote to the Deputies, "differences of opinion on controverted points of theology sufficient grounds of separation even as to the intercourse of life in civil affairs".¹⁹¹

Local relations between Independents and Unitarians were damaged. At Leeds, for instance, relations between Mill Hill's minister Joseph Hutton and R.W. Hamilton, minister at the Albion Independent Chapel, where Edward Baines and other influential liberal politicians gathered, sharply deteriorated in the late 1820s.¹⁹² Hamilton spoke of: "Cold looks and supercilious obeisances where hitherto the civilities of life have been interchanged..."¹⁹³ Hutton responded sharply:

"so far as the change in outward deportment of your Unitarian friends amounts merely to an abatement of cordiality, you have given just and sufficient cause for it. You have pronounced your anathema upon them, not merely without a sigh, but with many sneers. You have attacked their moral character in terms which may be truly denominated libellous".¹⁹⁴

In fact Hamilton had accused Unitarians of being secret atheists, had aggressively denounced their improper appropriation of Presbyterian property and had "abjured religious communion" with them.¹⁹⁵ Such tensions did not undermine liberal alliances during the Reform Crisis.

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191. Quoted in B.L. Manning The Protestant Dissenting Deputies ed. O. Greenwood (Cambridge 1952) p.68. Chapter 5 of this book provides a useful overview of tensions between Unitarians and the rest of dissent in the early 19th century though it takes up an unremittingly hostile position towards the Unitarians.
192. For their original amicable relations see the compliments to Hutton in Richard Winter Hamilton Strictures on a Sermon entitled Omniscience the Attribute of the Father Only...in a Letter to the Author (Leeds 1820) pp 3,7.
193. R.W. Hamilton The Religionists, Designating themselves Unitarians not entitled to the Christian name: Being a Reply to a Sermon preached in Mill Hill Chapel Leeds...by Joseph Hutton (1831) p.iii
194. J. Hutton Unitarian Christianity Vindicated in Four Letters to R.W. Hamilton... (1832) p.10
195. R.W. Hamilton The Religionists etc. passim. See also J.G. Miall Congregationalism in Yorkshire (1968) p. 186

Thus attempts at Leeds in 1832 to use the Unitarianism of John Marshall Jnr. to harm his electoral chances were firmly rebutted by Baines in the Leeds Mercury and even a section of the Methodists placed the political policies of the liberal candidates above their dubious religious status.¹⁹⁶ Elsewhere too - at Hull and at Sheffield, for instance - evangelical moves to exploit the Unitarianism of reform candidates in the 1832 election were unsuccessful.¹⁹⁷

However on religious issues Unitarians were increasingly rebuffed by the rest of dissent. At Leeds in December 1833 the Independents and Baptists refused to let Unitarians participate in the sending of a petition to parliament against Church rates or in the standing committee that was subsequently set up.¹⁹⁸ Similarly at Hull the Unitarians were not invited to participate in a public meeting early in 1834 of the 'Associated Dissenting Congregations' to organize a campaign for relief from dissenting grievances. The Unitarian minister Edward Higginson and George Lee, editor of the Hull Rockingham attended but neither were called upon to speak or even acknowledge. Higginson complained bitterly, pointed to the consistent support of dissenting causes by Hull Unitarians and argued that their exclusion contravened the basic principles of religious dissent.¹⁹⁹ An anonymous Hull Unitarian argued that their

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196. For instances of anti-Unitarianism during election see the editorial in the Leeds Patriot 1 xii 1832; Early Victorian Methodism: The Correspondence of Jabez Bunting 1830-58 ed. W.R. Ward (Oxford 1976) pp. 17-18. G.O. Trevalyan The Life and Letters of Lord Macaulay (Popular Ed. 1889) pp. 204-5. See rebuttals in the Leeds Mercury 20 x 1832 and 11 xii 1832. As Hamilton stated: "Philosophy and Policy were grounds on which we were willing and anxious to meet and embrace the Socinian as our colleague and compatriot...but we always knew when to draw the religious line, and to act upon the religious dissociation": R.W. Hamiton Animadversions upon the Rev. Dr. Hutton's pamphlet entitled 'Unitarian Christianity Vindicated' (1832) p.iii.
197. See Hull Advertiser 31 viii 1832, 26 x 1832; Hull Rockingham 3 xi 1832, 17 xi 1832. For Sheffield see Peeps into the Past: being passages from the Diary of Thomas Ashine Ward ed. A.B. Bell (Sheffield 1909) p. 299.
198. Leeds Mercury 7 xii 1833
199. Hull Rockingham 11 i 1833; Edward Higginson Unitarian Dissent permitted to speak for itself (Hull 1834) esp. pp. 18-20

exclusion was engineered by Anglicans to weaken the dissenting campaign.²⁰⁰

Such tensions, as William Smith MP had feared, were reflected back on the Protestant Dissenting Deputies. Smith's retirement from the Deputies was greeted by the Eclectic Review with unconcealed delight and the call for his replacement by a Calvinist. "Gratitude is not, it appears, a virtue, nor courtesy a grace, in the new 'Evangelical' code of morals", the Christian Reformer drily commented.²⁰¹ Since Baptists and Independents held other governing positions it was expected that a Unitarian would be appointed to replace Smith. The appointment of another Independent caused anger. The Christian Reformer remarked: "This is another instance of the scheme, regularly acted upon by the Independents of London, to monopolize to themselves Dissenting institutions and trusts, to the exclusion of the Presbyterians, and with no studious regard to the Baptists, who too have their own knot of exclusionists".²⁰² Continuing disputes led finally to the secession of the Unitarians from the Deputies in 1836.²⁰³

The Unitarian secession seriously damaged the Protestant Dissenting Deputies, which was forced to sell off its shares of £1000 in University College London to help it over the resulting withdrawal of financial support. Lord Holland, ever attentive to dissenting arguments, suddenly turned his back on the Deputies.²⁰⁴ And the Unitarians themselves increasingly sought shelter from the onslaught on their property and their rights. John Kenrick welcomed Lord Grey's refusal to receive a deputation from the orthodox dissenters of Nottingham in January 1834 and argued: "The Unitarians under present circumstances will do well to keep aloof from

200. 'Nonconformist' Characteristics of the Present Controversy between the Church and the Dissenters (2nd ed. Hull 1834)

201. CR Vol. XVIII (1832) p.130

202. Ibid. p. 144

203. The best account is K.R.M. Short 'London's General Body of Protestant Ministers: its disruption in 1836' Journal of Ecclesiastical History Vol. XXIV No. 4 (1973); see also Manning op.cit. pp. 69-79.

204. Manning op.cit. pp 81-2.

the proceedings of their violent brethren and by doing so may impress the government with the conviction that it is not for their interest to allow the peaceable, loyal and moderate Presbyterians to be trampled under foot by the violent and fanatical Independents".²⁰⁵

Many other Unitarians looked with similar alarm at the growing influence of an evangelical and Calvinist dissent as hostile to their survival as any Churchman. And they held back from involvement in the campaigns for disestablishing the Church of England. As J.J. Tayler, Unitarian minister in Manchester, put it in 1845:

"the spirit too often displayed by those who are most eager for the separation of Church and State, has caused no unreasonable apprehension, that the liberty of the individual mind may not be increased by the event, and that the tyranny of a fanatical public opinion would prove more intolerable than the ascendancy of a favoured Church".²⁰⁶

Thus in the 1830s the political influence of religious dissent was seriously weakened by the displacement of the Unitarians from its ranks. For the Unitarians these events signalled the limitations of an important section of the liberal rank and file. Those who leaned more to the Whigs, to moderate and gradual reform, to the survival of the state's patronage of the church had their position powerfully strengthened. And there were cases of Unitarian ministers slipping into the kind of cultural distaste for nouveaux riches one usually associates with the Anglican clergyman. Some of his hearers must have sat up sharply when James Martineau told a gathering of Unitarians in Manchester in 1835 that the ascendant "moneyed classes" were seriously distorting civilised values:

"Prosperity is their idol; the spread of luxury, the multiplication of external refinements, their measure of civilization; the cheapness of food and clothing, their criterion of a nation's happiness; the tendency to produce wealth, their prevailing standard of utility. By this test they estimate the worth of mental and moral qualities; the education that will tell upon the purse is indeed essential; of that which only unfolds the faculties, refines the tastes, elevates the feelings, they cannot discern the practical use!"

205. John Kenrick to G.W. Wood 29 i 1834 MCO

206. J.J. Tayler A Retrospect of the Religious Life of England (2nd ed.1876) p. 314. He put the same case in The Present Position, Prospect and Duties of Unitarian Christians: A Sermon (1839) pp 9-11.

Unitarian influence survived the bitter hostilities of the 1830s and though its monopoly was gone - already in 1852 there were 13 Independent MPs compared to 11 Unitarians, as well as two Baptists and two Wesleyans²⁰⁸ - it continued to provide a remarkable number of MPs relative to its numerical strength. Religious differences inevitably had political implications in the 1830s and 40s. Unitarian distaste for Sabbatarianism sometimes led to public disputes with other dissenters.²⁰⁹ Unitarians felt little of the hostility of many other dissenters towards the government grant to the Catholic seminary at Maynooth in 1845.²¹⁰ More importantly, Unitarians generally were averse to the uncompromising voluntarism that was increasingly predominant among other dissenters and thus they played little part in the campaign for the disestablishment of the Church by, for instance, the Anti-State Church Association from 1844.²¹¹ On the vexed question of education Unitarian

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207. J. Martineau The Need of Culture for the Unitarian Ministry reprinted in J. Martineau Essays, Reviews and Addresses (1891) Vol. IV pp. 361-2. From the 1830s Martineau and Taylor edited The Christian Teacher which periodically canvassed a somewhat romantic ideology which, while not abandoning central liberal policies, marked a more conservative anti-industrial position among Unitarians.
208. See G.I.T. Machin Politics and the Church in Great Britain 1832-68 (Oxford 1977) p. 248n. Among noted Victorian Unitarian MPs were Joseph Cowen, Peter Taylor, James Stansfeld and Joseph Chamberlain. For later Unitarian involvement in parliamentary politics see Stephen Koss Nonconformity in Modern British Politics (1975) passim.
209. See for instance the disputes about Sunday opening of the Leeds Zoological and Botanical Gardens in the early 1840s in which Unitarians stood against the Sabbatarian zeal of other sects: recounted in R.J. Morris Organization and Aims of the Principal Secular Voluntary Organization of the Leeds Middle Class 1830-51 (University of Oxford D.Phil. thesis 1970) pp 395-8.
210. See G.I.T. Machin 'The Maynooth Grant, the Dissenters and Disestablishment 1845-7' English Historical Review Vol. LXXXII (1967) pp 61-73.
211. David M. Thompson 'The Liberation Society 1844-68' in Pressure from Without in early Victorian England ed. Patricia Hollis (1974) p.217.

support for a state system, providing it avoided the imposition of Anglican creeds, brought them into opposition to other dissenters and on occasion - as at Leeds in 1847 - seriously disrupted the liberal alliance.²¹² However, though shadowed by a degree of bitterness on both sides, Unitarians and other dissenters did cooperate in political organizations and stood shoulder to shoulder in opposition to the Corn Laws. Differing with Independents and Baptists on important issues, and standing apart from dissenting circles as much as from those of the Church of England, Unitarians nevertheless continued to constitute one of the active elements of the developing liberal regime in Victorian England.

212. Derek Fraser *op.cit.* pp. 369-407.

CONCLUSION

In 1962 Kitson Clark complained that the term "middle class" had done more "to stultify thought about Victorian England than anything else". He envisaged "the task of revision" as requiring a much more careful account of social strata in 19th century England, of religious and cultural values, and especially of "that curious legend that the middle class came to dominate politics and the country immediately after the Reform Bill of 1832".¹ In the intervening years that broad and complex entity the "middle class" has received considerably less attention from social historians than either the landed elite² or the working classes.³ In this thesis - as well as filling a specific but important gap in historical research - I hope to have contributed to the clarification of some of the important questions about the character of middle class values and especially the relationship between landed Whigs and urban liberals.

The Unitarians portrayed here - merchants, industrialists, doctors, solicitors, religious ministersⁱ_k - had an extremely complex and subtle relationship to the Whig elite. In terms of intellectual culture there was a good deal of congruence. In political relations the outward appearance of aristocratic dominance masks a degree of power on the part of urban Unitarians. Already in the 1770s and 80s Wakefield merchants were directing Whig aristocrats like Rockingham and Fitzwilliam as to their political duties and publicly overturning their authority when they failed to fulfill them; and an empty-handed dissenting minister

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1. G. Kitson Clark The Making of Victorian England (new ed. 1965) p.5
 2. See for instance F.M.L. Thompson English Landed Society in the 19th century (1963); G.E. Mingay The Gentry: The Rise and Fall of a Ruling Class (1976)
 3. See for instance R.Q. Gray The Labour Aristocracy in Victorian Edinburgh (Oxford 1976); John Foster Class Struggle and the Industrial Revolution: early industrial capitalism in three English towns (1974); I.J. Prothero Artisans and Politics in Early 19th century London: John Gast and his Times (1979); G. Stedman Jones Outcast London: A Study in the Relationship between Classes in Victorian Society (1971)

like Joseph Priestley was sternly lecturing the future King on his public obligations and refusing to kowtow to his paymaster, great landowner and sometime Prime Minister, Earl Shelburne. Similarly in the early 19th century the relationship between Fitzwilliam and the Unitarian individuals who provided him with political advice, though having much of patronage in it, also gave a considerable degree of latitude to the latter. John Marshall, for instance, clearly stood in no awe of Fitzwilliam and the Whig aristocracy. He was 'elected' MP for Yorkshire in 1826 not as their factotum but as an independent representative of urban interests, liable - as he forthrightly declared himself - to oppose the Whigs on major political questions. The continuities of aristocratic power throughout the period are undeniable⁴ but such examples, I would argue, are indices of a much broader political influence exerted by both business and dissenting interests prior to parliamentary reform.

Of course the Unitarian body in no sense constituted a unified political group. Unitarians always differed over political strategies or precise policies. Some were uncompromising radicals looking to popular extra-parliamentary campaigns, others were devoted to the Foxite Whigs. In the 1830s Unitarian MPs, for instance, ranged from cautious Whigs like G.W. Wood to Philosophic Radicals like John Bowring to others, John Fielden and Richard Potter, who questioned the New Poor Law and economic policy in general. The complexity of the liberal ranks should not be distorted by the imposition of stereotyped oppositions between town and country, land and industry, the bilious Tory Squire and the

4. For a succinct account see W.L. Arnstein 'The Survival of the Victorian Aristocracy' in The Rich, the Well Born and the Powerful: Elites and Upper Classes in History ed F.C. Jaher (Chicago 1973) pp. 203-57.

honourable member for Coketown.⁵ For Unitarians, however, differences were contained within certain broad ideological coordinates. Unlike many of the new evangelical dissenters, Unitarians inherited a tradition of loyalty to the Whigs. The bitter experiences of the 1790s made sure that they felt no friendship for Pitt or the Toryism which continued to claim his paternity. Moreover Unitarian religious principles precluded much affinity with the English state, deeply imbricated as it was with a hostile religious authority and a symbolic order hostile to both dissent and rationalism.

The relationship of Unitarianism to the evangelical culture of much of the rest of religious dissent was equally complex. As a whole, Matthew Arnold argued, the middle class had: "entered the prison of Puritanism and had the key turned upon its spirit there for two hundred years".⁶ With the emergence of rational dissent, however, a section of the dissenting middle class emerged from that prison after the mid-18th century and remained untouched by the revitalisation of evangelical religion at the end of the 18th century. The weakening of sectarian boundaries against the world in the late 18th century rational dissent, the tolerance of worldly amusements like dancing and the theatre, the respect for the intellectual graces have already been described. In the early 19th century Unitarians continued to espouse an easy-going worldliness in their leisure pursuits and a secular zeal for 'the life of the mind'. John Stuart Mill dismissed the Monthly Repository in 1832

5. This is usefully pinpointed in W.C. Lubenow The Politics of Government Growth: Early Victorian Attitudes Toward State Intervention 1833-48 (Newton Abbott 1971) p. 147 who cogently rebuts claims that Factory Reform was especially linked to Toryism, landed gentlemen and clergymen. Many liberals, industrialists and dissenters were ardent supporters.
6. Quoted in Asa Briggs The Age of Improvement 1783-1867 (1959) p.476

as "the 'Evangelical Magazine' of the Unitarians"⁷ and there were in its pages instances of sectarian narrowness. In 1819 for example, one Unitarian minister advocated the preparation of a "revised and corrected" version of Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress removing various passages which, he thought, encouraged superstition or pessimism.⁸ However the Monthly Repository contained as much secular material as religious and it carried not only poetry, philosophy, social and political criticism but also translations of Goethe, Schiller, Lessing, Novalis. And a number of Unitarians figured not just in its pages but in the intellectual and literary circles of early 19th century London, among them Harriet Martineau, John Bowring, William Roscoe, George Dyer, Henry Crabb Robinson, Mrs. Barbauld, Thomas Noon Talfourd, William Taylor, W.J. Fox.⁹

Perhaps more important was the role of Unitarians in the building of cultural institutions which made intellectual debate possible in provincial towns, which generated interest in science and new philosophies, and which contributed to the emergence of a liberal public sphere. Within such institutions the projects of different groups and individuals were brought together, debated and refined - theory and practice converged in a public and social space. For instance Benjamin Heywood told Brougham of the Statistical Society in Manchester, meeting regularly at his house, that its aim was to investigate the feasibility of schemes for "the intellectual, Moral or Social Improvement of the Community in which we live": "those of us who have any projects connected with the objects of the society will have the advantage of bringing them under discussion and having them digested and their practicability ascertained previous to their coming before the public".¹⁰ Of course Unitarians were not the only

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7. J.S. Mill to T. Carlyle 17 ix 1832 in Collected Works of John Stuart Mill Vol. XII: The Earlier Letters 1812-48 ed. F.E. Mineka (1963) p. 117
 8. MR Vol. XIV (1819) p.30
 9. F.E. Mineka The Dissidence of Dissent: The Monthly Repository 1806-38. (Chapel Hill 1944) passim.
 10. Benjamin Heywood to Brougham 30 x 1833 Brougham Mss 17.565 Brougham Mss loc.cit.

grouping engaged in this formation, but the important point is that it was out of such diversified local activities that liberal policy emerged, not out of the head of Adam Smith or Bentham. As E.P. Thompson has argued, the forces active in the emergence of liberal culture in this period were not usually self-conscious intellectual coteries in London or the Universities, generating 'great minds' and immense theoretical syntheses, but highly localised and differentiated groupings: "the historian of British intellectual culture in the later 18th and much of the 19th centuries is impressed with the vigour of the tradition of dissent, the manifold collisions and mutations - not the distinction of this or that mind, but the number of lesser talents, each with some particular but limited distinction". This tradition, he notes, owed much to "that mixed middle class society, both metropolitan and provincial, somewhat Unitarian in tone".¹¹ The credo of the Unitarian - the turning away from ritual and belief in the efficacy of religious observances, the faith in science and enlightened common-sense, the commitment to a public sphere transcending sectarian and social boundaries - brought something distinctive to the making of that liberal culture.

If the stern evangelical morality evoked by the very word 'Victorian' predominated within middle class culture in the 19th century - and especially within dissenting circles - this account of the Unitarians indicates that there were always significant enclaves in which liberal values such as sobriety, self-reliance, the accumulation of capital were linked to other virtues. Whether or not Arnold's strictures about the 'Philistinism' of the dissenting middle class as a whole were justifiable - and little detailed analysis of their culture has yet been carried out,

11. E.P. Thompson 'The Peculiarities of the English' in The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays (1978) p. 59

especially in the case of that major component the Independent denomination - it was clearly not applicable to the Unitarians. Nor should the term 'dissenter' automatically conjure up the frugal, avaricious, anti-intellectual world-picture of the so-called 'protestant ethic'. A picture of a Unitarian woollen merchant like Richard Slater Milnes among young bucks in a Mayfair gambling house or riding to hounds in a painting by Stubbs; of a radical barrister like James Losh reading Bacon's Life of Henry VII in Latin and criticising the "mistaken views of political economy"¹² therein; or of a Manchester millowner like Samuel Robinson translating German and Persian poetry, finding intellectual pleasure in Sir Walter Scott and Wordsworth as well as in Bentham and political economy - are warnings of how rich and complex that liberal culture around Unitarians was and how poor are the thin historical stereotypes of the dissenting middle class.

12. The Diaries and Correspondence of James Losh Vol. I Surtees Society Publications Vol. CLXXI (1956) p. 173.

APPENDIX I

FOUNDING MEMBERS OF THE UNITARIAN SOCIETY IN 1791

Those persons marked * are members for life

R. Alderson, Esq. No. 12, Harcourt-buildings, Temple
Henry Ainslie, M.D. Kendal Westmorland.

Mr. Robert Aldersey, jun. Wigan, Lancashire.

Mr. Allen, Petty Bag Office, Chancery Lane.

W.A. of Woodbridge, by Mr. Lindsey.

* Rev. Thomas Belsham, New College, Hackney.

* William Belsham, Esq., Bedford.

William Blackburne, M.D. Spring Gardens.

Mrs. Bull, Westminster.

Edward Barron, Esq. New College, Hackney.

John Bayly, M.D. Chichester.

Mr. William Basnett, Bath.

Rev. Newcome Cappe, York.

Rev. Dr. Calder, Croydon, Surrey.

Mr. William Cecil Chambers, Birmingham.

Alexander Christie, Esq., Montrose.

* Mr. William Christie, Woodston, near Montrose.

Mr. John Craven, Buckle-Street, Goodman's-fields.

Mrs. Chambers, Mincing Lane.

* Richard Hall Clarke, Esq., Bridwell, near Cullumpton, Devon.

John Carter, Esq. Wimering, near Portsmouth.

Michael Dodson, Esq., Boswell-court; Carey Street.

* Rev. Dr. Disney, Sloane Street, Knightsbridge.

Rev. Thomas Dalton, Carisbrook, Isle of Wight.

Mr. John Davis, Witon, Cumberland.

Mr. A. Doeg, in the name of a society, in and near Manchester.

Mr. James Darbyshire, Bolton, Lancashire.

William Esdaile, Esq., Clapham.

Mr. John Easte, Mile-end.

Rev. Edward Evanson, near Ipswich.

Mr. Friend, Jesus College, Cambridge.

Mr. William Frost, Bury, Suffolk.

Rev. William Field, Warwick.

Rev. Samuel Fawcett, Taunton.

A friend to free inquiry, by Mr. Belsham.

Mrs. Freeman, Fawley-court, Henley, Oxfordshire.

Rev. Robert E. Garnham, jun. Bury, Suffolk.

Joshua Grigby, jun. Esq. Drinkston, near Bury, Suffolk.

T.G. Suffolk, by Mr. Rogers.

Mr. Thomas Giles, Woodbridge, Suffolk.

Thomas Brand Hollis, Esq. the Hide, near Ingatestone, Essex.
John Hollis, Esq. High-Wycomb, Bucks.
Rev. John Hammond, Fenny-Stanton, Cambridgeshire.
Benjamin Hobhouse, Esq. Hartham House, near Chippenham, Wilts.
Rev. Edward Harries, Hanwood, near Shrewsbury.
William Hunt, Esq. Birmingham.
Samuel Heywood, Esq., Harpur Street.
Rev. John Holland, in the name of the congregation of protestant dissenters, at Bolton, Lancashire.
Nathaniel Harris, Esq. Peckham, Surrey.
C.C.H. Newcastle upon Tyne, by Mr. W. Turner.
N.H. by Mr. West.
Rev. John Hornebrooke, Plymouth.

Rev. David B. Jardine, Bath.
Mr. Johnson, Bookseller, St. Paul's Church-yard.
Rev. Jeremiah Joyce, Mansfield Street.
Rev. Thomas Jervis, No. 3, Thavies-Inn, Holborn.
Mrs. Jebb, Half-moon Street.
Edmund Jenings, Esq. London.
Edward Jeffries, Esq. St. Thomas's Hospital, Southwark.
Mr. William Jacob, Old Fifth Street.

Rev. Dr. Kippis, Crown Street, Wesminster.
Godfrey Kettle, Esq. Gower Street, Bedford-square.
Rev. Sampson Kingsford, Sturry, near Canterbury.
Rev. Thomas Kerrich, Horringer, near Bury, Suffolk.
Rev. Timothy Kenrick, Exeter.
Rev. John Kentish, Plymouth.
Francis Kemble, Esq. Swithin's Lane.
John Kerrich, Esq. Harleston, Suffolk.

Rev. Theophilus Lindsey, Essex Street, Strand.
Capel Lofft, Esq. Trofton-Hall, near Bury, Suffolk.
Rev. George Lewis, Mare Street, Hackney.
Mr. James Lee, No. 6, St. Paul's Church-yard.
Joseph Littlefear, Esq., Exeter.
Rev. John Williams Lewis, Parliament Street.
Mr. Samuel Lawrence, Poultry.

James Martin, Esq. M.P. Downing Street.
John Moggridge, Esq. Leigh-House, near Bradford, Wilts.
John Moggridge, jun. Esq. Bradord, Wilts.
Richard Slater Milnes, Esq. M.P. Fryston, near Ferrybridge, Yorkshire.
James Milnes, Esq. Wakefield.
James Milnes, Esq. jun. Thornes-house, near Wakefield.
Angus Macaulay, Esq. Bath.
Rev. M. Maurice, Yarmouth.
Rev. Henry More, Liskeard, Cornwall.
Rev. Thomas Morgan, Prescot Street, Goodman's Fields.

Mr. Nash, Attorney at Law, Royston, Cambridgeshire.
Mr. William Notcutt, Ipswich, Suffolk.
Mrs. North, New Bridge Street.
Mrs. Norman, Bromley Common, Kent.

- * Late Rev. Dr. Price, Hackney.
- Rev. Dr. Priestley, Clapton.
- Rev. Thomas Fysh Palmer, Dundee, North Britain.
- Rev. Thomas Porter, Plymouth.
- Mr. Joseph Priestley, Manchester.
- Mr. Thomas Pine, Maidstone, Kent.
- Mr. Pearson, Essex Street.
- Mr. Robert Phillips, Manchester.
- Rich. Perkins, Esq. Oakhill, near Shipton Mallet, Somersetshire.
- Samuel Pett, Esq.
- Mr. W. Porter, Portsmouth.
- * Mr. Thomas Paget, Ibstock, Leicestershire.

- Mrs. Rayner, Great Titchfield Street.
- Richard Reynolds, Esq. Paxton, Huntingdonshire.
- William Russell, Esq. Birmingham
- Mr. Thomas Russell, jun. Birmingham.
- Rev. George Rogers, Sproughton, near Ipswich, Suffolk.
- Dr. Rodbard, Ipswich, Suffolk.
- Rev. C. Rotheram, Kendal, Westmorland.
- Rev. John Rowe, Shrewsbury.
- Mrs. Reynolds, Hatton-garden.
- Mr. John Cole Rankin, Newcastle upon Tyne.
- Mr. George Russell, Birmingham.

- Samuel Shore, Esq. Clapham, Surrey.
- Samuel Shore, jun. Esq. Norton-Hall, near Sheffield, Yorkshire.
- * William Smith, Esq. M.P. Clapham.
- Rev. John Simpson, Bath.
- * Mr. Small, Holywell, Flintshire.
- John H. Stone, Esq. Hackney.
- Joseph Spurrell, Esq. Friday Street, Cheapside.
- Rev. Russell Scott, Portsmouth.
- Thomas Sandon, M.D. Chichester.
- Samuel Salte, Esq. Poultry.
- T.S. by Mr. Lindsey.
- Mr. Sanderson, Manchester, in the name of the congregation of protestant dissenters, at Monton, Lancashire.
- Mr. Robert Smith, jun. Glasgow.
- James Skey, Esq. Upton.

- * William Tayleur, Esq. Shrewsbury.
- Richard G. Temple, Esq. Mortlake, Surrey.
- Isaac Thompson, Esq. Cross Street, St. Mary Hill.
- John Towgood, Esq. Clement's Lane.
- John Tingcombe, Esq. Plymouth.
- Mr. Jonathan Tingcombe, Plymouth.
- Rev. Joshua Toulmin, Taunton, Somersetshire.
- Rev. Henry Toulmin, Chowbent, near Manchester.
- Rev. William Turner, Wakefield.
- Rev. William Turner, jun. Newcastle upon Tyne
- Ditto, for a society, Hanover Square, Newcastle.

Samuel Vaughan, Esq. Mincing Lane.

William Vaughan, Esq. ditto.

Mr. Peter Valentine, in the name of the congregation of protestant dissenters, at Chowbent, near Manchester.

James West, Esq. Cheapside.

Robert Wainwright, jun. Esq. Hatton Garden.

Rev. J. Wiche, Maidstone, Kent.

S.W. Kent, by Mr. Lindsey.

A Well-wisher to the society, by ditto.

Robert Walpole, Esq. Beyton, near Bury, Suffolk.

Rev. Thomas Watson, Chichester.

James Wardrop, Esq. Glasgow.

* Thomas Walker, Esq. Manchester.

Rev. ——— Wiche, in the name of protestant dissenters at Monton, near Manchester.

L.Y. Suffolk, by Dr. Disney.

John Yorke, Esq. Richmond, Yorkshire.

Rev. John Yates, Toxteth-park near Liverpool.

A.Z. by Mr. Lindsey.

B.S. by ditto

Source: Unitarian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge
(1791) pp. 9-14.

APPENDIX II: SELECTED STATISTICS OF UNITARIAN WORSHIP 1851

Unitarian places of worship in England and Wales: 229.
Total sittings: 68,544.

Total attendance (including Mann's estimates of 7 defective returns;
Morning 28, 483; Afternoon 8881; Evening 12,697. Total attendance 50,061.

Average sittings per chapel: 299. Average % of attendants to sittings: 24%

Unitarian Chapels built: before 1801 = 147; between 1801-11 = 8;
between 1811-21 = 14; between 1821-31 = 12; between 1831-41 = 15;
between 1841-51 = 18. Plus 15 unspecified.

TABLE: UNITARIAN STATISTICS BY ENGLISH COUNTIES 1851

REGION	COUNTY	UNITARIAN CHAPELS	TOTAL OF UNITARIAN SITTINGS	ATTENDANCE ON CENSUS SUNDAY		
				MORNING	AFTERNOON	EVENING
NORTH	NORTHLND	3	1282	499	-	176
	DURHAM	3	540	64	-	286
	CUMBRLND	1	-	28	25	-
	WSTMRELND	1	312	120	-	125
YORKS	CITY OF YORK	1	40 (pews)	97	-	60
	NTH.RIDING	3	610	88	52	122
	E. RIDING	2	520	220	-	143
	W. RIDING	17	5302	2122	663	1385
NORTH WEST	CHESHIRE	14	3232	1683	1301	357
	LANCS	35	12,384	5648	2967	1049
N.MIDLANDS	DERBSYRE	11	1990	377	171	502
	NOTTS	2	850	674	-	52
	LINCS	5	773	191	38	109
	LEICS	3	1270	430	40	280
	RUTLAND	None	-	-	-	-
W. MIDLANDS	WORCS	9	2461	1109	474	412
	STAFFS	6	571	340	280	78
	WARWICKS	10	4504	2613	60	793
	SALOP	1	218	83	-	79
	GLOUCS	7	1805	980	60	511
	HEREFORDSHIRE	None	-	-	-	-

REGION	COUNTY	UNITARIAN CHAPELS	TOTAL OF UNITARIAN SITTINGS	ATTENDANCE ON CENSUS SUNDAY		
				MORNING	AFTERNOON	EVENING
S. MIDLANDS	OXON	1	325	203	-	214
	NORTHANTS	2	540	317	129	160
	BUCKS	None	-	-	-	-
	HUNTS	1	130	64	89	40
	CANTAB	1	200	38	51	-
	HERTS	2	250	72	68	-
	BEDS	None	-	-	-	-
EAST	NORFOLK	7	1750	913	80	266
	SUFFOLK	3	1270	442	47	579
	ESSEX	None	-	-	-	-
S. WEST	CORNWALL	2	200	8	-	23
	DEVON	12	3834	1181	647	756
	SOMERSET	8	1794	975	166	420
	WILTS	2	300	165	80	120
	DORSET	4	1104	426	-	406
S. EAST	BERKS	1	220	61	-	70
	SURREY	2	700			
	KENT	2	662	269	137	50
	HANTS	6	1775	644	134	709
	SUSSEX	5	1852	793	148	402
	MIDDLESEX	7	2600	1240	-	573

SOURCES: RELIGIOUS CENSUS 1851

APPENDIX III: UNITARIAN SUNDAY SCHOOLS IN 1851

COUNTY	NO. OF UNITARIAN SUNDAY SCHOOLS	TOTAL PUPILS	TOTAL TEACHERS
BEDFORDSHIRE	None		
BERKSHIRE	1	15	4
BUCKINGHAMSHIRE	None		
CAMBRIDGESHIRE	2	56	10
CESHIRE	11	1307	167
CORNWALL	None		
CUMBERLAND	None		
DERBYSHIRE	3	557	53
DEVON	10	531	116
DORSET	2	134	35
DURHAM	2	42	10
ESSEX	None		
GLOUCESTERSHIRE	5	327	62
HAMPSHIRE	4	293	51
HEREFORD	None		
HERTFORDSHIRE	None		
HUNTINGDONSHIRE	None		
KENT	2	153	35
LANCASHIRE	26	4053	676
LEICESTERSHIRE	3	414	57
LINCOLNSHIRE	None		
MIDDLESEX	2	321	43
NORFOLK	4	416	83
NORTHAMPTONSHIRE	1	80	-
NORTHUMBERLAND	2	284	57
NOTTINGHAMSHIRE	2	543	99
OXFORDSHIRE	1	91	9
RUTLAND	None		
SHROPSHIRE	None		
SOMERSET	5	391	78
STAFFORDSHIRE	2	317	2
SUFFOLK	3	87	12
SURREY	1	27	9
SUSSEX	5	277	34

COUNTY	NO. OF UNITARIAN SUNDAY SCHOOLS	TOTAL PUPILS	TOTAL TEACHERS
WARWICKSHIRE	10	1993	280
WESTMORELAND	1	17	7
WILTSHIRE	1	15	5
WORCESTERSHIRE	8	617	67
EAST YORKSHIRE	2	104	26
NORTH YORKSHIRE	1	30	3
WEST YORKSHIRE	10	1017	268
T O T A L	132	14,509	2,358

Avge. No. of pupils per school: 110

Avge. No. of teachers per school: 18

Avge. Pupil-Teacher ratio: 1 to 6

SOURCE: 1851 EDUCATION CENSUS TABLE R.

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The following bibliography does not attempt to cover the whole literature of Unitarianism in this period which would run to thousands of sermons, tracts, theological polemics and debates. I have listed only those works which have been directly cited, or could have been cited, as part of the specific arguments unfolded in this thesis. Nor have I listed all the town directories consulted - those directly cited are contained in the text; or all the local sources of relevance, though those cited are listed. The secondary works of relevance again would run to many hundreds and I have selected only those directly cited or closely related.

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