

A Gathered Church? Studies in Unitarianism and Dissent

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Michaelmas Term 2023



Short abstract

Unitarian attempts to historicize its community were an integral part of authorising the church's existence. This thesis focusses on liturgical commemoration, literary commemoration, and institutional acts of historicization that reveal how the community presented an image of a gathered church despite the growth of anti-denominational tendencies that grew exponentially in the nineteenth century. The commitment to true, reformed Christianity and freedom of conscience in religion was integral to all Unitarians but historicization of the community revealed that these principles were used differently at the end of the nineteenth century when a flagship Unitarian institution, Manchester College, removed to Oxford in 1889. Here, freedom of inquiry in theology hastened the detachment of one section of the Unitarian community from its denominational roots in the late-eighteenth century. The gradual drift from denominationalism was reflected in literary commemorations as the long-nineteenth century progressed. Moreover, established modes of historicization were further challenged by the professionalisation of history writing and research at the end of the nineteenth century which precipitated the degradation of Christian duty over the historicizer. Adapting to new opportunities to historicize their community, Unitarian biography writers were notably industrious in contributing articles on Unitarians to the *Dictionary of National Biography*, installing this once marginalised and heretical community within the national canon. The effectiveness of Unitarian acts of historicization was such that literary critic and poet Donald Davie argued that Unitarianism was overrepresented in historiography, obscuring the real gathered churches in Old Dissent. This thesis illuminates how processes of historicization that

were central to community formation and development across the long-nineteenth century worked to perpetuate this idea but ultimately reveal a church much more divided than has been previously understood.

Long abstract

Unitarian history is well represented in historiography. For a denomination whose size was always small, it is remembered as an uncommonly influential denomination, often at the expense of other Protestant Dissenting denominations. Unitarians were often more affluent and better educated in addition to being a denomination whose faith was unorthodox and whose leaders were often outspoken. Theologically, it made a lasting impact on British religious life from the late-eighteenth century. Whilst studies have attended to examining why it was important in the context of British religious history, this study is more concerned with how it historicized itself. This thesis presents five connected studies that examine instances of Unitarian historicization from the late-eighteenth to the early-twentieth century before explicating the serious challenges presented against it by literary critic and poet, Donald Davie. Davie was exasperated by what he saw as not just the overrepresentation but the misrepresentation of Unitarians in historiography. The thesis, then, is concerned with how, in the mid-twentieth century, Davie found this to be the case. It comes to suggest that Davie's concerns, though not having received attention in historiography until now, are demonstrative of the unusual success that Unitarian historicizers had in raising the profile of their community and church in the long-nineteenth century, despite the church often not exhibiting the coherence that is sometimes presumed in historiography.

It does this by examining three major themes of Unitarian historicization: commemoration in liturgy, commemoration in biography, and institutionalization. Where acts of historicization are

located, isolated, and examined in the context of theological, political, and societal developments, they are also considered to be a part of a connected process. The generational development in the approach to historicization was profoundly important in how Unitarianism was able to present itself as a historical and historically significant community. Across the long-nineteenth century, approaches to the coordination of time – the past, present, and future – changed significantly and in turn affected the way in which historicization happened. Whereas Christianity was of prime influence at the start of the period examined here in the eighteenth century, its place as the normative basis for historical authority was increasingly challenged across the nineteenth and early-twentieth century. No longer bound by ideas of Christian time, history became a pursuit that was studied more like a science. Whilst there was not an inextricable rise in the secularity of history writing or secular history, Unitarian historicizers who desired to ensure that their community retained its historical normative assumptions based in Christian time adopted elements of the new methods in historical research and writing but at the expense of much of the Christian authority that their church had once relied on for conveying its historical significance.

Parallel theological developments within Unitarianism exacerbated the challenges faced by its historicizers. Under Lindsey and Joseph Priestley, Unitarianism's scriptural basis was well-established. This tradition remained the predominant form of Unitarianism throughout the period examined but was challenged by Biblical criticism whose influence increased from the early-nineteenth century. Within Unitarian circles, no one was more closely associated with this than James Martineau who emphasised the need for Unitarianism to accommodate a greater spirituality of religion and subsequently led to a rejection of the denominational precedent set by Lindsey at Essex Street. The doctrinal constraints associated with denominationalism were, according to Martineau, uncondusive to the principles that guided Unitarians. In search of truth,

liberty, and religion, theological development was necessary to remain a church that believed itself to be the most reformed in Christendom. Biblical Unitarian ecclesiology was now seen as antiquated and unsuitable for an age which was becoming increasingly sceptical of formulated religion. Whereas Unitarianism was once seen as progressive and liberal in the late-eighteenth century, it had effectively stood still and its once uniquely liberal reformed Christianity was now less appealing to nineteenth-century minds who had been exposed more often to new liberal and progressive ideas, religious, political, and social.

The desire to evolve was not, however, a sentiment shared by all. Liturgical commemoration juxtaposed revision – in search of ever more perfect forms of worship – with historical commemoration; the community of communicants who had, like their ancestors, received communion while using the same liturgy. A similar juxtaposition existed in literary commemoration, where the first generation of denominationally inclined Unitarians who valued formulated worship and Biblical authority were commemorated with less energy as the nineteenth century progressed. Yet Unitarianism relied on the authority of its historical community to validate its claim to universal truth. The challenge presented to Unitarian historicizers was in the need to commemorate a community who had been committed to ideas that were recognisable in Christian time – in the past, present, and future – whilst contending with new ideas of progress that were accommodating scientific and progressive approaches to history and theology. The evolution of historicization, then, is a central theme of this thesis. It serves to demonstrate how Unitarian historicizers responded to theological and historical changes across the long-nineteenth century, whilst keeping sight of the historicizing tradition that had been inculcated in the church since its foundation in 1774.

The thesis is divided into five chapters which are connected by the theme of historicization. Whilst the sources that are analysed in each chapter are notably varied, the community that is analysed is understood to have been contributing and responding to changes in society and theology in similar ways. Whether in the creation of liturgy, the writing of biography, the institutionalizing of academic institutions, or modern history writing, the thinkers, theologians, ministers, biographers, administrators, laymen, historians, and critics that feature in this study are connected by shared cultural references and understanding about the importance of history and historicization. The persistent exhibition of this understanding amongst Unitarians across multiple generations in the long-nineteenth century presents the image of a gathered church which closely guarded and perpetuated traditions of community establishment and construction. However, the changes in historical and theological thinking advanced by modernity expose how the presentation that twentieth-century historians received of Unitarianism was distorted by the strength of the culture of historicizing.

The connections between the subjects and periods examined by successive chapters are elucidated using varied methodologies. Overall, the thesis can be described as an intellectual and religious history of Unitarianism and Dissent which has adopted close literary and sociological analysis with contextual sensitivity to understand how individuals and groups conceived of history and their faith. The chapters reveal how acts of historicization were done in relation to one another, revealing a community that existed through as well as in time.

The first chapter considers how Theophilus Lindsey constructed a new Unitarian denomination at Essex Street Chapel in London in 1774. Central to his efforts was a revised liturgy which was an adaptation of Samuel Clarke's revised version of the *Book of Common Prayer* of 1724. Lindsey's use of Clarke's revised worship was a calculated attempt to attract latitudinarian

Anglicans to his church to initiate a movement that would spark reform of the Church of England. Prior to analysis of the liturgy itself, Lindsey is placed within the context of the eighteenth-century tradition of prayer book reform which was perpetuated by latitudinarian Anglicans like Lindsey. Although he only succeeded in attracting a handful of disillusioned Anglicans, only one of whom, John Disney, went on to become a Unitarian minister, Lindsey's attachment to structured worship and denominational design for his church was to have a lasting impact on Unitarianism in the nineteenth century. Despite Lindsey's intentions being rewarded with meagre results, the liturgy is considered in this chapter as an historical and historicizing text. It professed to connect communicants with a historic community of true Christians by omitting references to a divine Christ. In formulating Unitarian theology, Lindsey gave the denomination structural as well as Biblical authority.

The second chapter considers how Lindsey and his successor at Essex Street, John Disney, were commemorated by biographers in the nineteenth century. Biography writing was a particularly strong tradition in Unitarian circles. The need for individuals to commemorate men was considered a Christian duty. Although Lindsey was considered a founding father of the denomination, analyses of biographies and collective biographies exposes how this characterisation faded. Biblical criticism in the nineteenth century profoundly changed the way in which Unitarian historians were able to historicize the community. Theological developments created a generational divide between nineteenth-century Unitarians and those of the first generation such as Lindsey, Disney, Joseph Priestley, and Thomas Belsham who were synonymous with denominational and Biblical Unitarianism. Yet the urge to commemorate the contribution that these individuals made remained strong deep into the nineteenth century as the overarching tendency of the tradition was to place great value in demonstrating connections between the historical and contemporaneous Unitarian

communities. Two main arguments emerge from this chapter. First, that the Unitarian historicization tradition was intent on connecting the past to the present to revalidate their cause for the next generation. This was achieved by placing figures within a pantheon of other prominent Unitarians as well as highlighting who those individuals had commemorated themselves, revealing a literary genealogy alongside a religious one. Second, that despite the challenge presented to this tradition by developments that created theological divisions between historic and contemporary communities, the historicization tradition was still able to present itself as a gathered, undivided church.

Whereas the first and second chapters considered acts of historicization via the theme of liturgical and literary commemoration, the third chapter attends to historicization as institutionalization. Across the nineteenth century, nonconformists won liberties, amongst which was access to England's ancient universities of Oxford and Cambridge. Parallel to university reform was the liberalisation of theological study. As the Church's influence slowly receded both universities became less hostile environments for nonconformists seeking to gain high quality education. Disparate and organised communities within the University of Oxford sought to address concerns that nonconformist undergraduates were at risk of going over to the Church or, worse, losing their faith entirely. The concerns and proposed solutions are expanded on in this chapter to provide context for the central theme of institutionalization. In 1889, Manchester College, by then a Unitarian theological college, removed to Oxford. The chapter's concern is to examine the confluence of ideas that preceded this event and to expose how those associated with the college had divergent views on what its identity should be in Oxford. It explains that the theological developments that had complicated commemoration of the first generation of Unitarians gave rise to a strong culture of anti-denominationalism by the time of Manchester College's removal to Oxford. Concern about latent ideas harboured by some

Oxford intellectuals that Unitarianism was still a fundamentally heterodox and insidious denomination provoked those connected with Manchester College to take every effort to assimilate to Anglican Oxford. Anti-denominationalism was key to these approaches. Yet this was at odds with sections of the supporting network, mainly of affluent Manchester origins, whose attachment to Biblical Unitarianism and denominationalism came to be at odds with the advanced forms of theology taught at Manchester College.

As theological research was modernising at the end of the nineteenth century, complicating denominational, institutional, and historical identities in Manchester College, historical study and research was modernising too. Returning to considering commemoration as historicization, the fourth chapter attends to Unitarian biography writing and the emergence of denominational historical societies. In both cases, the Unitarian historicization tradition had to adapt and modernise as changes were occurring in the study and uses of history. The *Dictionary of National Biography* (*DNB*) offered Unitarian biographers the chance to historicize their community alongside a pantheon of national figures. Attention is drawn to the significance of this development whilst demonstrating that contributions were made to the *DNB* from similarly small and marginal communities, often ones closely associated with the most industrious contributors. Alexander Gordon, Principal of the Unitarian Home Missionary College, was one of the most industrious, contributing 699 biographies to all 63 volumes between 1885 and 1901, a large portion of which were Unitarians. Although the narrative that usually penetrated Unitarian biography writing for confessional audiences was more panegyric, the biographies of Unitarians in the *DNB* were enshrined in a national literary monument that would be used deep into the twentieth century. The *DNB* represented one national aspect of modern history writing and research at the end of the nineteenth century. The same period also saw the establishment of professional history journals and a proliferation of local, antiquarian, and

archaeological journals. The Victorian thirst for the organisation of knowledge did not except nonconformists, who set up denominational historical societies. Their concerns with gathering archives and collating information about chapels and congregations was exhibited within a wide culture of historicization, especially amongst Protestant nonconformity. The corresponding *Transactions of the Unitarian Historical Society (TUHS)* demonstrates the recession of Christian history in favour of professional history. While there remained a sense that there was a community necessity to contribute research, research was done for the sake of history rather than solely confessional allegiance. Despite these developments, historicizers in the *DNB* and the *TUHS* were able to present an image of a gathered church, despite the erosion of Christian time dictating the processes of commemoration and historicization.

Finally, the fifth chapter examines the concept of a gathered church, as presented by Donald Davie, in the mid-twentieth century. His poetry and literary criticism are examined in tandem to explain why Davie was concerned with the way that Unitarianism was still able to claim large amounts of affection and attention in historiography. Chief among his concerns was the overrepresentation of Unitarians in the *DNB*: not only was this an overrepresentation but an insidious misrepresentation of Unitarianism's significance in British Dissent's history. Unitarians, he argued, were not deserving of their Dissenting affiliations as upon their emergence in the late-eighteenth century, they destroyed what Davie considered to be true Dissent in its purest form, as best represented by Isaac Watts. The chapter coordinates Davie's academic career, his spiritual journey, and his political and social disillusionments in the 1950s and 1960s to explain that literary criticism remains an untapped area of research for exploring the reception of nonconformist and religious history in the twentieth century. While Davie's Clark Lectures of 1976, titled *A Gathered Church*, require qualification, his arguments about

Unitarianism's emergence and its impact on the historical reception of Protestant Dissent are worth greater consideration.

Having started as small and heretical denomination in a chapel in central London, Unitarianism came to be historicized alongside and within figures of national acclaim. Over the course of the long-nineteenth century, various acts of historicization were initiated to assure that Unitarianism's historical and theological significance was assured and validated by its adherents. The liberalisation and modernisation of society opened new opportunities for this to be achieved in settings with wider audiences. Although Unitarianism was successful in historicizing itself as a gathered church, this thesis ultimately reveals that some instances of historicization were vastly complicated by modernisation and theological developments.

Acknowledgments

This thesis has come to fruition with the support and guidance of many people. The staff at the John Rylands Library, Manchester, and the New York Public Library were immensely helpful at different points of the research and writing of the thesis. In Oxford, the Bodleian Libraries, Harris Manchester College, Mansfield College, Merton College, Worcester College, and Balliol College have been places of interest and inspiration. At the History Faculty, Avalon Floyd was a vital voice at numerous points, and Maya Blackwell has also provided important guidance. Perry Gauci and Simon Skinner were very helpful interviewers at the Confirmation meeting. Most thanks must go to Brian Young, my supervisor, who has been continuously understanding, supportive, and fascinating: one can only hope to have half the depth and breadth of knowledge that he possesses. His support has not just been intellectually stimulating but empathetic too.

I have so many friends I'd like to thank; some of whom I have drifted from. But to those who have been consistent where I often haven't: Shobhan, Dan, Mike, Rob; thank you. There are so many others in various places that I owe so much to: in Wolverhampton, Aberdeen, Oxford, and Charleston.

Schools and universities have their place in nourishing academic interest but the stories that have provided real inspiration are those told by relatives. For that, I have my grandparents to thank: stories of the farm, school, and medicine in Manchester and Liverpool, of people and

mischievous in Aberdeen, of the pub and life in Ruthin, of fun in Conway, Llandudno, and too many power stations to count.

Those that I'm closest to, my siblings Daniel and Isabelle, have been supportive and caring throughout and they have always reminded me about what really matters. Thanks, of course, must also go to Marina.

The patience and love Miller has shown me over many years is something more than I can ever hope to repay. Her support has been consistent through the high and low points of the research, the writing, and with so much beyond this project. I am incredibly fortunate to have met, let alone know, her. She has given me more than I could have ever seen coming.

My parents have provided unflinching support in every conceivable way. They have nurtured my love of learning and encouraged me at every turn. I owe to them so much and will always be grateful for what they have given to me. This thesis is for them.

Abbreviations

BCP – *The Book of Common Prayer, and administration of the Sacraments, and other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church, according to the Use of the Church of England: together with the Psalter or Psalms of David, Pointed as they are to be sung or said in Churches* (Cambridge, 1762)

BCP Reformed – Theophilus Lindsey, *The Book of Common Prayer Reformed According to the Plan of the Late Dr. Samuel Clarke: Together with the Psalter or Psalms of David* (London, 1774)

DNB – Leslie Stephen & Sidney Lee (eds.), *Dictionary of National Biography* (63 vols., London, 1882-1900)

ODNB – H. C. G. Matthew, Brian Harrison, Lawrence Goldman & David Cannadine (eds.), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004-), online edition

PWHS – *Proceedings of the Wesleyan Historical Society*

JFHS – *Journal of the Friends Historical Society*

JPHS – *Journal of the Presbyterian Historical Society*

TBHS – *Transactions of the Baptist Historical Society*

TCHS – *Transactions of the Congregationalist Historical Society*

TUHS – *Transactions of the Unitarian Historical Society*

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Introduction

The title of this thesis is taken from Donald Davie's Clark Lectures of 1976 which were delivered at the University of Cambridge.¹ The title of his lectures was in turn taken from a section of one of his poems titled 'Dissentient Voice' published in 1957.² Davie's poetic and critical concern was with the degradation of literary culture in Dissent. As his poem as well as his lectures explored, the concept of a gathered church referred to the way in which Dissenting churches were home to a distinct counterculture in English Christianity in the eighteenth century. The start of that century, to Davie, was home to the apotheosis of Dissenting literary culture which was grounded in a comprehensible Calvinist theology and complimented by social respectability, to which the hymns of Isaac Watts best exemplified 'simplicity, sobriety, and measure.' As the century wore on, as is the narrative of so many histories of the eighteenth century, these values were eroded as the Enlightenment took effect on English Dissent. The gathered church, so carefully constructed, came under siege by insidious, secularising forces, the most malicious of which was, to Davie, the coalescence of Unitarianism in the late-eighteenth century. From that point, Dissent was slowly and surely infiltrated by a denomination that considered itself Dissent, but whose literary and theological culture did not merit that title. Besides the broad strokes of Davie's polemic, a gathered church was something that had been lost in the nineteenth century; a century which was also partly responsible for the way in which historians of the twentieth century – Davie's contemporaries in the main –

¹ Donald Davie, *A Gathered Church: The Literature of the English Dissenting Interest, 1700-1930* (London, 1978).

² Davie, *Collected Poems 1950-1970* (London, 1972), 46-50.

received and learned about religion. The nineteenth-century version of Britain's religious history was a fundamentally skewed version. It was unrepresentative of the Old Dissenting churches in favour of the Unitarian church who had managed, in the space of one hundred years, to elevate itself from nothing – from a 'scattered' church – to being influential in the writing of the nation's historical monuments.

This thesis is concerned with this story. It seeks to demonstrate how processes of community construction were integral to the denomination's establishment and increase in influence between roughly 1750 and 1920 before turning to examine how such a narrative was received in the twentieth century through the lens of a disillusioned Dissenting poet and literary critic, Donald Davie. It uses the concept of 'a gathered church' to explore the connectedness of these processes. Through literary analysis of processes of historicization, it reveals fractures within conceptions of a Unitarian gathered church. Although each chapter focusses on different sources in different time periods, the thesis reveals to what extent the Unitarian church was a gathered church.

Because Unitarianism emerged out of Rational Dissent and latitudinarian Anglicans in the eighteenth century, there is a temptation to perceive the nascent denomination that was established by Theophilus Lindsey in Essex Street in 1774 as a theologically and religiously coherent church.³ In reality, Unitarianism long remained a composite of theological traditions which were reflected in a similarly divergent socio-economic character; elements of Presbyterianism, the Baptists, and Anglicanism remained important components under the

³ Martin Fitzpatrick, 'Latitudinarianism at the Parting of the Ways: A Suggestion' in John Walsh, Colin Haydon, & Stephen Taylor (eds.), *The Church of England c. 1689 - c. 1833: From Toleration to Tractarianism* (Cambridge, 1993), 209-27.

umbrella of the name Unitarianism.⁴ While the majority of Unitarians were from generally more affluent backgrounds, this characterisation, generally defined in comparison with other Dissenting churches, masks a diversity in the community. Where we see affluent families such as the Aikins, the Barbaulds, the Tates, the Darbishires, and Gregs, there are also poorer and ministerial families such as the Asplands, the Belshams, the Turners, the Carpenters, and the Beards. Yet in general, economic affluence somewhat softened the blow of the civic and religious restrictions imposed on anti-Trinitarian Dissenters, allowing them to secure excellent educational opportunities despite exclusion from Oxford and Cambridge. A community defined by what it was not able to do and motivated in securing freedom of conscience in religion, the Unitarian community was particularly conscious of social injustices. In the nineteenth century, the pacifist, abolitionist, social improvement, and philanthropic movements were populated by Unitarians.⁵ Challenging the status quo at nearly every turn, Unitarian involvement in social and political movements led to their characterisation as radicals whose leaders – notably Richard Price and Joseph Priestley – were also leaders of the more extreme factions of late-eighteenth-century society.⁶ These characterisations have been tempered since the end of the nineteenth century and the decline of Unitarianism and Dissent more broadly and the historiography now reflects the non-radical components with great depth too.

⁴ C. G. Bolam, Jeremy Goring, H. L. Short, & Roger Thomas (eds.), *The English Presbyterians: From Elizabethan Puritanism to Modern Unitarianism* (London, 1968); Kathryn J. Ready, 'Dissenting Heads and Hearts: Joseph Priestley, Anna Barbauld, and Conflicting Attitudes towards devotion within Rational Dissent', in *Journal of Religious History* (Jun., 2010), vol. 34, no. 2, 174-190; R. K. Webb, 'The Emergence of Rational Dissent', in Knud Haakonssen (ed.), *Enlightenment and Religion: Rational Dissent in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge, 1996), 12-41; Webb, 'The Faith of Nineteenth-Century Unitarians: A Curious Incident', in Richard J. Helmstadter & Bernard V. Lightman (eds.), *Victorian Faith in Crisis: Essays on Continuity and Change in Nineteenth-Century Religious Belief* (Stanford, CA, 1990), 126-149; Russell E. Richey, 'Did the English Presbyterians Become Unitarian?', in *Church History* (Mar., 1973), vol. 42, no. 1, 58-72; Alasdair Raffe, 'Presbyterians', in Andrew Thompson (ed.), *The Oxford History of Protestant Dissenting Traditions, Volume II: The Long Eighteenth Century c. 1689-c. 1828* (New York, 2018), 11-29; Michael Ledger-Lomas, 'Unitarians and Presbyterians', in Timothy Larsen & Ledger-Lomas (eds.), *The Oxford History of Protestant Dissenting Traditions, Volume III: The Nineteenth Century* (New York, 2017), 99-123; B. W. Young, 'Theology in the Church of England', in Jeremy Gregory (ed.), *The Oxford History of Anglicanism, Volume II: Establishment and Empire, 1662-1829* (New York, 2017), 392-428, 420-422.

⁵ Clyde Binfield, G. M. Ditchfield & David L. Wykes (eds.), *Protestant Dissent and Philanthropy in Britain 1660-1914* (Woodbridge, 2020).

⁶ Stuart Andrews, *Unitarian Radicalism: Political Rhetoric, 1770-1814* (Basingstoke, 2003).

Concerns with the formulation of communities and identities of communities continued to capture historical attention, just as identities and communities were important conceptions for historical figures. In religious communities, the connections that bind individuals together were more obvious: liturgy, sermons, catechisms, hymns, churches, schools, universities, festivals.⁷ Increased literacy and interest in religious, social, and political ideas in the period of the English Enlightenment necessitate that texts and objects that communicate and transfer ideas within and between communities offer deeper insights into the means of studying how identities were forged and subsequently developed: ‘Not only were the institutional structures of national and dissenting churches strong drivers of book publication and distribution in the period, but religious controversies animated scholarly endeavours and publishing, and devotional precepts and practice generated varied texts and reading methods.’⁸ Even before the rapid progression of ideas in the late-eighteenth century, expressions of community thought and identity were achieved via ‘many ways other than formal treatises for a religious minority to make its case, with poetry, martyrology and the writing of history’.⁹ With the proliferation of texts of all kinds came the ability to construct, challenge, develop, or deconstruct communities. Texts for circulation in a community obtained a simultaneous functions of representation to those outside of the community, just as attendance of church, schools, and universities were implicit expressions of community belonging. There is also a third function in that texts, unlike fleeting

⁷ Jeppe Sinding Jensen, ‘Conceptual Models in the Study of Religion’, in Peter B. Clarke (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Sociology of Religion* (New York, 2011), 245-262; Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised edition (London & New York, 2006); D. M. Thompson, *Denominationalism and Dissent, 1795-1835: A Question of Identity: Friends of Dr. Williams’s Library, 39th Annual Lecture, 1985* (London, 1985); W. Gibson and R. Ingram (eds.), *Religious Identities in Britain, 1660-1832* (Aldershot, 2005).

⁸ Tessa Whitehouse & N. H. Keeble, ‘Introduction’, in idem. (eds.), *Textual Transformations: Purposing and Repurposing Books from Richard Baxter to Samuel Taylor* (New York, 2019), 1-10, 9. See also Isabel Rivers, *Vanity Fair and the Celestial City: Dissenting, Methodist, and Evangelical Literary Culture in England 1720-1800* (Oxford, 2018); Whitehouse, *The Textual Culture of English Protestant Dissent, 1720-1800* (New York, 2015).

⁹ Gabriel Glickman, *The English Catholic Community, 1688-1745: Politics, Culture and Ideology* (Woodbridge, 2009), 9.

and ultimately temporary physical acts, had the ability to historicize a community. In transferring memory to history, texts were documents of identity in a way that oral and physical acts struggled to be.

This thesis is concerned with the connections between these acts of historicization: in the expectations that they implied and the experiences that they wished to preserve and encapsulate. This thesis examines how acts of historicization within Unitarianism developed in response to new theological, social, and intellectual environments. In articulating their history, Unitarians did not always successfully convey community cohesion. In fact, the desire to historicize the community was so powerful and prevalent within the community that other iterations of identity came to be somewhat neglected by twentieth-century Unitarianism.

Ultimately, this is a story of processes that articulate continuities and changes. At the core are a series of ‘commemorative acts, [which] since they so often have a collective purpose and a dual aspect, [look] both to the past and the future.’¹⁰ Yet this is too narrow for this study whose chapters coordinate a set of substantively different ‘commemorative’ acts, and in turn, different processes of community change. More appropriate is ‘acts of historicization’, and the accompanying word ‘historicizer’, which incorporates acts of commemoration, liturgy creation, and institution-founding: ‘By attending closely to the material and imaginative processes by which memorials are constructed, we can better understand how memories are changed by their treatment in different hands and how versions of the past inculcate, are fixed or are forgotten.’¹¹ The term historicizer is used to refer to a broader array of acts that address or use the past than a term such as ‘historian’ could. Historicizers refer to those who write about

¹⁰ Whitehouse, ‘Memory, Community and Textuality in Nonconformist Life-Writings, 1760-1810’, in *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* (2018), vol. 41, no. 2, 163-178, 175.

¹¹ *ibid.*

history, write histories, commemorate, mourn, institutionalise, write biography, and who are historians: all are connected in their different contexts in a common act that, in any capacity, coordinates the past and the future. In communities the transmutation of history occurs as transmutation of memory occurs but the change that is effected in the present is fundamentally responsive to the continuities of history and memory: ‘One cannot in fact think about the events of the past without discoursing upon them. But to discourse upon something means to connect with it in a single system of ideas, our opinions as well as those of our circle.’¹² That system of ideas – genealogies of history, historical thought, and memory – is as horizontal *in* time as it is vertical *through* time. In historicizing the community in a different generation and for a different generation, the historicizer is doing so in relation to that system of ideas; in relation with historicizers before him and, in anticipation, after him. Tessa Whitehouse has conceived of the author as part of a group of authors in the present in that they collaborate in acts of composition, editing, revising, abridging, recommending, distributing, extracting, teaching, and rewriting. These are essential dynamics and ‘put pressure on the idea of ‘author’ as a single individual.’¹³ So too, then, it is possible to conceive of authors collaborating with generations that have preceded them. Yet where Whitehouse’s notions of authorship are of overwhelmingly positive, constructive acts, vertical authorial collaboration has the potential to be negative and destructive, in addition to the constructive aspects of the horizontal collaborations.¹⁴ Responding to contemporary developments in ideas, society, and politics, authors and historians may find it prudent to manipulate the inherited past within their community to improve the intellectual, social, and political viability of the community in the present day.

¹² Maurice Halbwachs, trans. Lewis A. Coser (ed.), *On Collective Memory* (Chicago, IL & London, 1992), 53.

¹³ Whitehouse, *The Textual Culture*, 8.

¹⁴ Whitehouse’s focus is on printed and non-printed textual objects that are central to identifying the connectedness of Dissenting communities of the eighteenth century; the deference to the sources as a guiding figure of her study also leads to overwhelmingly positive views of the acts of creation of those sources and as such produces a narrowly focussed study which, regardless of its limitations, is valuable in placing the dynamic between author and reader as a central relationship in community formation and development.

Accounting for the cynical version of these acts of collaboration, this thesis argues that Unitarians of later generations discoursed with their predecessors via similar processes to affirm and reaffirm their history, perpetuating the historicizing efforts of earlier generations for different audiences in the future. However, the genealogy of ideas that connects historicizers through time is also responsive to changes in the coordination of time itself.

As a Christian community who were committed to revelation and the search for Christian truth, Unitarians were conscious of the relevance of the future in relation to the present. A further similarity with other Dissenting communities is the inheritance of a past, laced with social and religious injustices at the hands of a powerful and, they claimed fundamentally erroneous Established Church. In this regard, Dissent and Unitarianism were communities characterised by an acute sense of the temporal past and the divine future; the ‘space of experience’ and the ‘horizon of expectation’.¹⁵ Acts of historicization coordinated these concepts yet they maintained a potentially persuasive character for the present in which they were committed: ‘cultivation of the ability to make an imaginative leap into the minds and lives of others – that is, the cultivation of empathy itself.’¹⁶ Acts of historicization, embodied by this process of cultivation of empathy for one’s cause, were, in the case of Unitarians, imbued with a sense of Christian righteousness and of the continuation of Reformation principles that would take society and Christianity to a more perfect state. In 1782, Joseph Priestley thought it was a great ‘satisfaction, to perceive that, according to the predictions contained in the books of scripture, christianity has begun to recover itself from [a] corrupted state, and that the reformation advances apace.’¹⁷ Such optimism was hardly befitting for a book whose chief concern was to

¹⁵ Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time* (trans. Keith Tribe), (Cambridge, Mass. & London, 1985), 255-275; Keith Tribe, ‘Intellectual History as *Begriffsgeschichte*’, in Richard Whatmore & B. W. Young (eds.), *A Companion to Intellectual History* (Chichester, 2016), 84-95

¹⁶ Marci Shore, ‘Can We See ideas? On Evocation, Experience, and Empathy’, in Samuel Moyn & Darrin M. McMahon (eds.), *Rethinking Modern European Intellectual History* (New York, 2014), 193-211, 208.

¹⁷ Joseph Priestley, *An History of the Corruptions of Christianity, in two volumes* (London, 1782), I, xi.

point out the litany of defilements of Christianity since the early Church but it illustrated Unitarianism's most prominent figure coordinating the historic past and the past he had witnessed – his experience – with expectations for the future. He continued, but with a more muted tone: 'The clear and full exhibition of truly *reformed christianity* seems now to be almost the only thing that is wanting to the universal prevalence of it.'¹⁸ The gravity of the qualification is too much to reason that Priestley thought that such a future was a near future but it attended to validating Unitarianism as the solution – the only right solution – to reform Christianity back to its true, primitive state. Yet it further articulated Unitarianism as *the* historical church and as such, historicization of such an inherently historical community were acts that affirmed and reaffirmed the truth and righteousness of it: its relevance for the divine future was, in turn, considered of the utmost importance as its doctrines put it in closer contact with the divine future (salvation, judgment) than any other church. As such, Priestley conceived of a wholeness in history from past to future that was integral to the understanding of Unitarianism's purpose and significance;¹⁹ a sort of proto-Whiggish understanding of the inevitability of progress in history, powered by Providence:²⁰ there was a 'government of God [where] all evils... terminate in, a greater good.'²¹ The historian had agency in the system of history in that the more one studied the past, the more one could have better defined expectations about the future: 'the more we study history in this view, the more thoroughly we shall be satisfied with our situation and connexions.'²²

¹⁸ *ibid.*, xii.

¹⁹ James T. Hoecker, 'Joseph Priestley as a Historian and the Idea of Progress', in *The Price-Priestley Newsletter* (1979), vol. 3, 29-34; Daniel Rosenburg, 'Joseph Priestley and the Graphic Invention of Modern Time', in *Studies of Eighteenth-Century Culture* (2007), vol. 36, 55-103.

²⁰ David Spadafora, *The Idea of Progress in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (New Haven, CT & London, 1990), 222; Jack Fruchtman Jr., 'The Apocalyptic Politics of Richard Price and Joseph Priestley: A Study in Late Eighteenth-Century Republican Millennialism', in *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* (1983), vol. 73, no. 4, 1-125.

²¹ Priestley, 'Lectures on History and General Policy' in John Towill Rutt (ed.), *The Theological and Miscellaneous Works of Joseph Priestley*, (25 vols., London, 1817-32), xxiv, 47.

²² *ibid.*, 438.

The past and the future were, then, integral components of Unitarianism's ability to position itself as a historical community. Harnessing its authority from the recovery of uncorrupted Christianity in the early Church – obtained via scriptural means – allowed itself to identify as the most advanced form of reformed Christianity: thus, experiences derived from the past were able to inform expectations of the future. Yet Unitarianism formed as a denomination in an age where there was a massive proliferation of ideas in an increasingly well-connected, well-read world, where there was a concurrent multiplication of temporalities.²³ As such, history and conceptions of history were fundamentally changed and changing as implicit and explicit understandings of temporality took hold. Otto Brunner maintained that the nineteenth century witnessed a monumental break with the past in social, economic, political, and cognitive terms but that the century was also the connection between pre-modernity and modernity.²⁴ Reinhart Koselleck agreed with this premise but found dynamics that shaped that change that to him had started in the late-eighteenth century with its revolutions, disillusionments, excitements, and radicalisms. He identified three core components of temporal change. First, individuals, as had always been the case, drew from experiences of the past to inform their expectations of the future; 'circumstantial time'.²⁵ Second, there was a demand for difference between the past and the future, between experience and expectation which opened a 'horizon of planning from which the present situation can be changed.' As change is both demanded and expected in the future, new time will be experienced. Yet the demand for difference meant that the difference between the past and the future, between experience and expectation is perpetually maintained: 'historical perspective.'²⁶ Third, and most dynamically, Koselleck drew on Christian

²³ Lucian Hölscher, 'Time Gardens: Historical Concepts in Modern Historiography', in *History and Theory* (2014), vol. 53, no. 4, 577-591, 590-591.

²⁴ James Van Horn Melton, 'Otto Brunner and the Ideological Origins of *Begriffsgeschichte*', in Hartmut Lehmann & Melvin Richter (eds.), *The Meaning of Historical Terms and Concepts: New Studies on Begriffsgeschichte* (Washington D. C., 1996), 21-34, 22.

²⁵ Koselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts* (trans. Todd Samuel Presner et al.) (Stanford, 2002), 112-113.

²⁶ Koselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History*, 112-114.

eschatology to argue that shortening spans of experience contributed to a sense of accelerating into the future.²⁷ ‘historical acceleration’ effected a move away from natural time – such as those evident in generational progressions and Christian eschatology – to shorter temporal rhythms based upon the acquisition of new experience at a faster rate. Thus, new time is experienced more often. To exemplify the development of historical acceleration, Koselleck pointed to the chronological expanses, epochs, or eras in which new time – *Neuzeit*, modernity – was experienced in different ways, and at different rhythms: the Middle Ages (around 700-800 years in length), the Renaissance (around 300 years), and the Industrial Revolution (around 100 years). In each case, the experience of new time (that is, the break away from the experience of the former) is shorter and shorter. People experienced more things in a more condensed timescale – things changed faster. Because of this ‘constantly accelerating shift in experience’ people were able to distinguish from the past better. Awareness of change is heightened, thus, another criterion that distinguishes the idea of modernity, or progress, is formed: historical acceleration.²⁸

The transformation of premodernity into modernity was characterised by these temporal changes and were most prevalent in the years 1750 to 1850: a period that Koselleck termed the *Sattelzeit* (literally, saddle time, i.e. transitional period). This had two major implications. First, concepts that underwent changes effected by the period became

“Janus-faced”: facing backwards, they pointed to social and political realities no longer intelligible to us without critical commentary; facing forward to our own time, concepts have taken on meanings that may not need further explication to

²⁷ Gabriel Motzkin, ‘On Koselleck’s Intuition of Time in History’, in Lehmann & Richter, *The Meaning of Historical Terms and Concepts*, 41-45, 41. María Pía Lara refers to acceleration as ‘compression’. See María Pía Lara, *The Disclosure of Politics: Struggles Over the Semantics of Secularization* (New York, 2013), 61.

²⁸ Koselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History*, 165.

be directly intelligible to us. From this point on, we understand and conceptualize simultaneously.²⁹

Second, these dynamics were not experienced in tandem by all in this period where premodern understanding of concepts still held great power. Yet in being able to perceive greater difference between the past and the future history had, by around 1850, transformed into an entity markedly different from eighteenth-century conceptions where it was grounded in notions of cyclicity and Christian eschatology: *Histoire*.³⁰ After 1850, history became detached from these cycles that encompassed the present, meaning that historicizers could manipulate it to explain genealogies of tradition, ideas, and experiences: *Geschichte*.³¹ The detachment of history from natural systems engendered an age where acts of historicization were acts of creativity:

Romanticism inaugurated yet another new view of the nature and capacities of human beings, a view that has dominated the Modern era. Humans appeared as living being in a historical order. Man and the universe were not united in a single rational order. Rather, the inorganic realm was alive and so able to create an order for itself in a way the organic realm could not. The nature and purpose of humans came from the creativity of their inner selves.³²

This was only possible because the *Sattelzeit* period was ‘when the basic concepts [*Grundbegriffe*] took on their modern meaning or at least when the range in which their meaning could be contested became limited.’ Furthermore, the social, economic, and political

²⁹ Koselleck, ‘Introduction and Prefaces to the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*’ (trans. Michaela Richter), in *Contributions to the History of Concepts* (Summer, 2011), vol. 6, no. 1, 1-37, 9. Richter translates *Sattelzeit* as ‘threshold period’ in this text.

³⁰ Koselleck, *Futures Past*, 13.

³¹ *ibid.*, 26-32; John Robertson, ‘Introduction: Time, History, and Political Thought’, in *idem* (ed.), *Time, History, and Political Thought* (Cambridge, 2023), 1-36, 4-5; Christophe Bouton, ‘The Critical Theory of History: Rethinking the Philosophy of History in the Light of Koselleck’s Work’, in *History and Theory* (May, 2016), vol. 55, 163-84. For a recognition of the separation of history from explicitly Christian time in the Victorian era, through analysis of primarily Victorian novels, see J. H. Buckley, *The Triumph of Time: A Study of the Victorian Concepts of Time, History, Progress, and Decadence* (Cambridge, Mass., 1966).

³² Mark Bevir, *Life after God: An Encounter with Postmodernism* (Leiden, 2022), 35.

upheavals during the period allowed ‘the “ideologization” and “democratization” of increasingly abstract concepts – and thus, a new kind of mass politics, and, not least, the reign of dangerous philosophies.’ Where acts of historicization became a creative enterprise, they were simultaneously part of a new era, ‘diagnosed as one of actual or latent ideological civil wars’.³³ The changes that happened in the *Sattelzeit* to produce *Neuzeit* were transformative in that they decoupled history from its cyclical foundation – often conceived of as being something that calibrated time in Christian terms – and forced it to compete with other interpretations. As such, history as *Geschichte* ‘could confidently be equated with progress towards a chosen goal, whether freedom, nation-statehood, socialism or communism.’³⁴ Regardless of the chosen goal, increased agency in the creativity of history was what characterised *Neuzeit* or modernity. There was an infinitude to the ‘horizon of expectation’ that did not exist in the trappings of premodernity that had previously been contained by Christian eschatology.³⁵

Yet Christian time remained a powerful force after the birth of Koselleck’s modernity. Indeed, religion was relegated as a concept and explanatory force in Koselleck’s estimation to something that was in competition with newly conceived notions of history. This is not to say that he does not value Christian time and Christian history past 1850, rather that it is one of a range of options for individuals to draw on in their coordination of the past, present, and future.

³³ Jan-Werner Müller, ‘On Conceptual History’, in Moyn & McMahon, *Rethinking Modern European Intellectual History*, 74-93, 78.

³⁴ Robertson, ‘Introduction’, 5. The collection of essays edited by John Robertson, released too late for full consideration in this study, promises to address the challenge of the Anglophone uses of *Begriffsgeschichte*. Conceived of in uniquely German – and Germanic – contexts, Koselleck’s work has, as Keith Tribe and others have argued, struggled to be properly understood and applied with full effect to Anglophone contexts. The linguistic base for identifying concepts is an acute problem in the appropriateness of Koselleck’s work for Tribe even though he envisages that there could be a reconciliation. See Tribe, ‘Intellectual History as *Begriffsgeschichte*’ and Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann & Kathrin Kollmeier, ‘Introduction: *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* Reloaded? Writing the Conceptual History of the Twentieth Century’, in *Contributions to the History of Concepts* (Winter, 2012), vol. 7, no. 2, 79-86.

³⁵ Robertson, ‘Introduction’, 8, 10.

He saw that continuities between premodernity and modernity were essential for arriving at a true history of any concept: ‘The task of *Begriffsgeschichte* is to ask what strands of meaning persist, are translatable, and can again be applied; what threads of meaning are discarded; and what new strands are added.’ For instance, on democracy as defined in modernity:

once coined, [it] has its own history, which is not identical with the history of constitutional forms [one of its predecessor concepts]. Yet it is impossible to write the history of constitutions without knowing how, over time, its forms have conceptualized.³⁶

A similar approach can be seen for the concept of historicization. Unitarian acts of historicization carried forward meaning *and* modulated to meet the demands for change initiated by modernity. Thus, as acts of historicization changed, so too did the concept of historicization itself. The modulation of history from *Histoire* to *Geschichte* over the course of the nineteenth century was reflected in how Unitarians historicized their community. Historicization in liturgy and commemoration writing in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries modulated to historicization in institutionalization, national biography writing, and history writing in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. This thesis suggests that Unitarian acts of historicization were responsive to changes in history and the concept of historicization between 1750 and 1920. It also suggests that the individuals who historicized their community were doing so to maintain connections, across the conceptual divide of modernity, to present their community as a holistic, historical entity, whose perpetual commitment to progress, true religion, and liberty was, to them, a unique characteristic, irrespective of the developments made within the community in terms of theology and ecclesiology.

³⁶ Koselleck, ‘A Response to Comments on the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*’, in Lehmann & Richter, *The Meaning of Historical Terms and Concepts*, 59-70.

Recent literature has explained that in British contexts, history as understood in its premodern concept, was still imbued with Christian thought. Challenges on its supremacy were made across the nineteenth century when competing understandings of history emerged as viable alternatives. The idea of progress rose to prominence as one such method, but ‘Since the faith in progress has no generally accepted source of authority, it has shown marked variations.’³⁷ As such, the legitimacy of history whose authority was derived from Christian systems of thought was, in turn, developed to retain a potency that enabled it to compete with other explanations about the normative purpose of history. Biblical criticism emerged as a powerful determinant in historical authority, impacting fiction as well as history writing literature.³⁸ More fundamentally, religion remained an important part of history: for those who were anxious to move away from its influences and for those who wished to recalibrate its influences. The inescapability of these recalibrations and competing systems of thought has been shown to penetrate the minds of public intellectuals of all varieties and all religious creeds who were active and writing in the earlier stages of modernism.³⁹ Importantly, amendment has also been made to how ecumenicism emerged more insistently in the early-twentieth century: ‘It became possible to accept, and even to celebrate, religious plurality, changing ethical sensibilities, and the growth of biblical criticism and scientific knowledge by interpreting them as belonging to the spiritual unfolding of time.’⁴⁰ Undoubtedly, the challenge to secularisation debates and historiography that claim a gradual secularisation from the eighteenth century, has been

³⁷ David Bebbington, *Patterns in History: A Christian Perspective on Historical Thought* (Vancouver, 1979), 90.

³⁸ Timothy Larsen, *A People of One Book: The Bible and the Victorians* (New York, 2011).

³⁹ Joshua Bennett, *God and Progress: Religion and History in British Intellectual Culture, 1845-1914* (New York, 2019); James Kirby, *Historians and the Church of England: Religion and Historical Scholarship, 1870-1920* (New York, 2016); Michael Bentley, *Modernizing England's past: English historiography in the age of modernism, 1870-1970* (Cambridge, 2005); Julia Stapleton, *Political Intellectuals and Public Identities in Britain since 1850* (Manchester & New York, 2001).

⁴⁰ Bennett, *God and Progress*, 245.

qualified by these important contributions.⁴¹ The religiosity of historical thought bore similarities in Dissent (and nonconformity) and Anglicanism, in addition to more minor sections of the British religious landscape, but the commerce of ideas and thought between these sections held greater difference when it came to how they were received and influenced acts of historicization. Accounts of nonconformity stress the importance of the 1906 general election as a point where the potency of nonconformity reached its apex and was absorbed into the establishment, particularly in political terms. Parity had been achieved in social and political contexts and there is a substantial reduction in nonconformist activism in these arenas from the 1900s.⁴² Yet the historicization of nonconformity did not abate.

Developments in theology and religion, then, were impactful on historical thought throughout the nineteenth and early-twentieth century. Yet how these developments impacted the ways in which historicization happened is not always reflective of those changes. With the primacy of Christian history under duress Unitarianism, as with Dissent, was receptive to some but not all these changes as the century progressed.

Prominent Unitarian minister, theologian, and philosopher, James Martineau, was influential in loosening the attachment of Unitarianism to Priestleyianism.⁴³ Unitarianism had, by the 1830s, become stilted and thus ill-prepared to meet the demands of the new century. He came

⁴¹ The literature in this field is vast. Some recent significant contributions are C. G. Brown, *The death of Christian Britain: understanding secularisation 1800-2000* (Abingdon & New York, 2001); S. J. G. Green, *The Passing of Protestant England: secularisation and social change, c. 1920-1960* (Cambridge, 2011); Clive D. Field, *Periodizing Secularization: Religious Allegiance and Attendance in Britain 1880-1945* (Oxford, 2019). See for an imaginative exploration via Victorian fiction, Norman Vance, *Bible and the Novel: Narrative Authority and the Death of God* (Oxford, 2013).

⁴² Michael Watts, *The Dissenters, Volume III: The Crisis and Conscience of Nonconformity* (Oxford, 2015); Bebbington, *The Nonconformist Conscience: Chapel and Politics, 1870-1914* (London, 1982); Helmstadter, 'The Nonconformist Conscience', in Peter Marsh (ed.), *The Conscience of the Victorian State* (Syracuse, NY, 1979), 135-172.

⁴³ Ralph Waller, 'James Martineau: the development of his religious thought', in Barbara Smith (ed.), *Truth, liberty, religion: essays celebrating two hundred years of Manchester College* (Oxford, 1986), 227-264.

to believe that even using the name ‘Unitarian’ implied a theological inflexibility that could not accommodate spirituality that was increasingly popular by the mid-nineteenth century. Instead, ‘Free Christian’ was a more appropriate name that allowed latitude in theology and spirituality.⁴⁴ Given the young age of Unitarianism, Martineau’s theological arguments complicated the process of historicization in the community: if the Unitarianism of Priestley, Lindsey, and Belsham was inadequate for the modern day, how was one to commemorate the founders of the denomination? Departures from older versions of Unitarianism were also made with Martineau’s publication, with fellow Unitarian minister Thomas Sadler, of *Common prayer for Christian worship* (1861). It was largely designed after the *BCP* but Martineau composed two extra services that reflected his hopes for a communion that could appeal to the instincts of liberal Protestants who valued piety over form. This reflected a tradition in Unitarian circles of a fascination with the *BCP* ‘because their desire to move to the rhythms of ancestral piety was constantly frustrated by their scrupulous refusal as individuals to commit to what were or soon might be outdated forms.’⁴⁵ Attempts to anticipate developments in liberal Christianity complicated the ways in which the denomination could historicize itself. Although the ruptures created by Martineau did not induce splintering of the denomination, uncertainty about Martineauian Unitarianism impacted Manchester College’s removal to Oxford from 1889, despite concurrent acts of historicization of the community still being done with a firm grasp of late-eighteenth century denominational Unitarianism.

Committed to recovering the spirit of nonconformity that was based in a looser interpretation encapsulated by ‘anti-dogmatic’, Martineau was concerned with how historicization of the communion was not reflective of its post-Reformation past.⁴⁶ The Unitarian historian George

⁴⁴ Webb, ‘The Faith of Nineteenth-Century Unitarians’, 136-142.

⁴⁵ Ledger-Lomas, ‘Unitarians and the *Book of Common Prayer*’, 227.

⁴⁶ Webb, ‘The Faith of Nineteenth-Century Unitarians’, 142.

Eyre Evans wrote to Martineau for advice on the title for a forthcoming book that combined prosopography of ministers with records of congregations' plates and other biographical details of congregants and administrators in governing bodies of 'Unitarian, Liberal Christian, Free Christian, Presbyterian, and other Non-Subscribing or kindred congregations'. Martineau's reply illustrates the divergent aspects of Unitarianism and the impact on Evans's attempt to historicize the community:

I heartily wish, though I cannot sanguinely hope, that your valuable historical labours may check the tendency of our fellow-worshipping people to lose sight of the fundamental anti-dogmatic principle of their forefathers. The protesters against the abuse of the name 'Unitarian' are, I fear, a small minority; the great mass of our congregation being as much wedded to their type of 'orthodoxy' as the professors of the Westminster Confession of Faith to their ample formulary. Under present circumstances the question of title is difficult. On looking over your table of contents, I fancied that the whole would be covered, and not more than covered, by such a phrase as 'Documents and Vestiges of Early Nonconformity of' (proper descriptions of the geographical range) ... The term 'Anti-trinitarian' is, I think, still more misleading than 'Unitarian' as applied to the old congregations legalised under the Toleration Act.⁴⁷

The eventual title, *Vestiges of Protestant Dissent*, was redolent of the attenuated position of nonconformity in the late-nineteenth century. Certainly, it suggested that there was a nostalgia for something that was once more potent and could not be compared with the prevailing Victorian antiquarian impulse to unearth information in the name of progress. Evans was prolific in his contributions to the Unitarian newspaper, the *Inquirer*, and the *Transactions of the Historical Society*; contributing numerous articles and regular notes on Unitarian congregations and their communion plates to the extent that 'Interest in the plate led in some

⁴⁷ Quoted in George Eyre Evans, *Vestiges of Protestant Dissent: Being lists of ministers, sacramental plate, registers, antiquities, and other matters pertaining to most of the churches (and a few others) included in the national conference of Unitarian, Liberal Christian, Free Christian, Presbyterian, and other Non-Subscribing or kindred congregations* (Liverpool, 1897), viii.

cases to a revival of interest in the sacramental service.’⁴⁸ Martineau’s emphasis on what had been lost in embracing inadequate terms to describe Unitarianism’s history in terms of its vestiges was somewhat repelled by Evans’s legacy but similarly, it demonstrated an instance of how Unitarian acts of historicization were reflective of Unitarianism’s discomfort with the discord between Biblical and spiritual Unitarianism.⁴⁹

The erosion of Biblical authority in theological and historical senses had, then, profound effects on the ability of historicizers of Unitarianism in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries to present a cohesive denomination that had clear objectives and understandings of the Christian nature of its work. This did not, or not at least to any great extent, affect the work of Unitarians to seize opportunities to historicize their community in national biography from the 1870s and it is from the entries in the *DNB* and the birth of the Unitarian Historical Society that the twentieth century was able to easily access Unitarianism’s history. In these instances, Unitarianism was presented very much as a church; gathered and cohesive. Yet, the *Transactions of the Unitarian Historical Society* utilised history in a far more dispassionate way, melding local history and professional historical research methods, effectively detaching Christian deed from the act of historicizing. Fundamentally, the Unitarian Historical Society distanced the past from the present in a way that had not been demonstrated so clearly before; history was now used far less as an explanatory tool for the direction of the denomination which in turn authorised its work, rather, in the same way that *Vestiges* implied the erosion and loss of something, the *Transactions* similarly treated history as a place no longer completely recognisable to the present.

⁴⁸ W. H. Burgess, ‘George Eyre Evans: An Appreciation’, in *TUHS* (1940), vol. 7, no. 2, 199-203, 201.

⁴⁹ Larsen, *A People of One Book*, 138-140; R. K. Webb, ‘The Limits of Religious Liberty: Theology and Criticism in Nineteenth-Century England’, in Richard Helmstadter (ed.), *Freedom and Religion in the Nineteenth Century* (Stanford, CA, 1997), 120-150, 143.

The religious character of academia and intellectuals in the twentieth century has gained greater definition in recent years, with much thought given to defining what a ‘public intellectual’ was and did.⁵⁰ Historians and politicians have been examined in substantial depth to shed more light on the implications of nineteenth-century religion and irreligion.⁵¹ Political and social developments have been central to understanding the motivations of historians, literary critics, and poets. Naturally, much has been written on the influence of Marxism and the reactive and corrective movements that have countered its impact on historians from the mid-twentieth century.⁵² However, the religion of historians of Protestant Dissent has garnered little attention and there remains a lacuna around the ‘vestiges’ of Dissent in academic circles. Perhaps this is due to it being relegated from its nineteenth-century position of influence: ‘Its role in British society may well have been secondary... on a par with the public schools or the Liberal Party’.⁵³ Yet historians of Dissent have often been Dissenters themselves: Geoffrey F. Nuttall and Alan P. F. Sell were Congregationalists (and ministers of that denomination), which is also Clyde Binfield’s church; R. K. Webb was from a Baptist family; more tentatively, E. P. Thompson was from a Methodist manse, Christopher Hill was from a devout Methodist home; Gordon Rupp was a Methodist preacher and John Walsh shared that faith; David Bebbington is an ardent Baptist; Patrick Collinson came from a Quaker family; historians in America are far more open about their affiliations.⁵⁴ In some ways, history of dissent has remained a confessional affair,

⁵⁰ Bentley, *Modernizing England’s Past*; Stapleton, *Political Intellectuals and Public Identities*; Stefan Collini, *Public Moralists: Political Thought and Intellectual Life in Britain* (Oxford, 1991); idem., *Absent Minds: Intellectuals in Britain* (New York, 2006).

⁵¹ Maurice Cowling, *Religion and Public Doctrine in Modern England*, 3 vols. (Cambridge, 1980-2001); Robert Crowcroft, Richard Whiting, S. J. D. Green (eds.), *The Philosophy, Politics and Religion of British Democracy: Maurice Cowling and Conservatism* (London, 2010), particularly the essays in Part III.

⁵² Stefan Berger & Christoph Cornelissen (eds.), *Marxist Historical Cultures and Social Movements during the Cold War: Case Studies from Germany, Italy and Other Western European States* (Cham, 2019).

⁵³ David Cornick, ‘Twentieth-Century Historians of England Protestant Nonconformity’, in Alan P. F. Sell & Anthony R. Cross, *Protestant Nonconformity in the Twentieth Century* (Carlisle, 2003), 63-77, 77.

⁵⁴ Clyde Binfield, *So Down to Prayers: studies in English nonconformity, 1780-1920* (London, 1977), xi: it is explained that the title is from a comment the author’s great-grandfather said in his capacity as a deacon. Sandra Herbert, ‘In Memoriam: Robert K. Webb (1922-2012)’, <https://www.historians.org/research-and-publications/perspectives-on-history/november-2012/in-memoriam-robert-k-webb>; David L. Wykes, ‘Geoffrey Fillingham Nuttall (1911-2007)’, *ODNB* (2011), <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/99038>; John Rule, ‘Edward Palmer Thompson (1924-1993)’, *ODNB* (2015) <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/40259>; Owen Chadwick,

although these affiliations are, in the main, undetectable.⁵⁵ Histories of religion have also been pursued to corroborate twentieth-century political worldviews: the work of Thompson and Hill, for example, saw the seventeenth century as an anticipation of future economic and social equalities. Outside of the world of denominational historical societies whose publications are often the domain of spiritually aligned historians, history of Dissent, as with religion more generally had become detached from its Christian framework: ‘For some explicitly, and for most implicitly, ideas and religion could be treated as trivialities[:] Religion, particularly in its intellectual aspect, seemed marginal in all the best historical works.’⁵⁶ Indeed, the marginalisation of religion as a central part of historical understanding was reflective of a broader adjustment of social and political attitudes in the post-war years when British anxieties about national identity were being foregrounded by decolonisation and imperial decline, most viscerally brought to light by the Suez Crisis in 1956. Paralleled to these national and international political concerns was the ascendance of the permissive society that eroded the footing of the Church in legal and social arenas.⁵⁷ Nonconformity suffered decline in congregation numbers that it was destined to never win back,⁵⁸ but while Christianity’s influence in public and private life had been reduced, the real effect of its contraction was the absence of an organised opposition in favour of irreligion: ‘if Christianity had been really

revised, ‘(Ernest) Gordon Rupp (1910-1986)’, *ODNB* (2004), <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/40003>; Eileen Bebbington, *A Patterned Life: Faith, History, and David Bebbington* (Eugene, OR, 2014). Prominent American institutions that have contributed to a reinvigoration of the history of religion include Wheaton College (Evangelical), the University of Notre Dame (Roman Catholic), and Fuller Theological Seminary (Evangelical), and there are many other Christian-aligned institutions that are notable for contributing to British religious history. However, these are largely aligned with Methodist, evangelical, Roman Catholic, and Baptist churches.

⁵⁵ B. W. Young, ‘Religious History and the Eighteenth-Century Historian’, in *The Historical Journal* (2000), vol. 43, no. 3, 849-868, particularly 854-856.

⁵⁶ David Bebbington, ‘The Discipline of History and the Perspective of Faith since 1900’, in Roger Ludin (ed.), *Christ across the Disciplines: Past, Present, Future* (Grand Rapids, MI), 20-34, 25.

⁵⁷ Ian Machin, ‘British Churches and moral change in the 1960s’, in W. M. Jacob & Nigel Yates (eds.), *Crown and Mitre: Religion and Society in Northern Europe since the Reformation* (Woodbridge, 1993), 223-241; Matthew Grimley, ‘Law, Morality and Secularisation: The Church of England and the Wolfenden Report, 1954-67’, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, vol. 60, no. 4 (2009), 725-41.

⁵⁸ Clive D. Field, *Secularization in the Long 1960s: Numerating Religion in Britain* (Oxford, 2017); idem., *Counting Religion in Britain, 1970-2020: Secularization in Statistical Context* (Oxford, 2022).

powerful, it would have evoked the sort of equal-and-opposite reaction that emerged in the Victorian period'.⁵⁹

However, nostalgia in the face of social revolution placed Britain's religious and cultural past back at the centre of intellectual debates and movements in the mid-twentieth century. In an atmosphere of 'an almost universal dislike of Victorian things, and the widespread destruction of Victorian buildings as the post war reconstruction continued apace' and led by John Betjeman and Nikolaus Pevsner, the Victorian Society was founded in 1958 to preserve Victorian and Edwardian buildings after a meeting that took place on November 5th, 1957, in the wake of the Suez Crisis and the launch of the doomed dog Laika on Sputnik 2.⁶⁰ In literature, C. S. Lewis and Dorothy L. Sayers produced novels inspired by their Anglicanism; Kingsley Amis's alternative history of unreformed, Erastian Christianity in England presented a cautious argument for the liberalising merits of the Protestant churches in *The Alteration* of 1974. In 1965, W. H. Auden, with absolute sincerity, wrote with nostalgia of the mining village of Rookhope, County Durham in his poem 'Amor Loci'. The mining industry's decline was semi-analogous with the fading of Christianity, but visiting the past in Rookhope enabled its recovery, however fleeting:

How, but with some real focus
of desolation
could I, by analogy,
imagine a love
that, however often smeared,
shrugged at, abandoned
by a frivolous worldling,
does not abandon?⁶¹

⁵⁹ Brian Harrison, *Seeking a Role: The United Kingdom 1951-1970* (New York, 2009), 340.

⁶⁰ William Filmer-Sankey, 'History of the Victorian Society', <https://www.victoriansociety.org.uk/about/history-of-the-victorian-society>; Asa Briggs, '2008 Victorian Society 50th anniversary lecture', delivered, 12th May 2008 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_aOXBhUu-zQ.

⁶¹ Donald Davie, (ed.), *The New Oxford Book of Christian Verse* (Oxford, 1981), 280.

The sense of recovering or preserving the past, then, was detectable in literary culture, just as it was in other cultural arenas. Disillusionment with society had long been an industry unto itself before the 1950s and 1960s. Literary criticism had long striven to fill the void that the professionalisation of history in the universities had left by seeking to recover a sense of the nation's past in an age of extremes in the 1930s and 1940s.⁶² T. S. Eliot's influence was unmatched. F. R. Leavis's *Scrutiny* came in a close second.⁶³ Together, their corpus of work was received favourably by the next generation of literary critics, poets, and academics in English faculties before the obscurant tendencies of Modernism were dismissed as inappropriate for an age of the common man. The Movement was one such group that formed (however synthetically) in favour of plain language but after its peak in the 1950s, the splintering of the group made it hard to believe that there was any discernible relationship between the likes of Philip Larkin, Thom Gunn, and Donald Davie.⁶⁴ But it is the very fact that they became so detached from one another that is indicative of the complexities that literary critics, public figures, and private individuals alike had to navigate and attempt to resolve from the 1950s. Yet again, literary criticism attended to national identity, albeit in a much more 'nationalistic' way than the preceding generation had done.

As Marxist historians focussed on the seventeenth century, so too did literary critic William Empson in *Milton's God* (1961) which presented a sustained challenge to Christianity. The contestation of Christianity in favour of another normative reading of history – Marxist or secularist – was not, however, the angle all critics took. Davie was born and raised in a Baptist

⁶² Stefan Collini, *The Nostalgic Imagination: History in English Criticism, The Ford Lectures 2017* (Oxford, 2019).

⁶³ I. D. MacKillop, *F. R. Leavis: a life in criticism* (New York, 1997).

⁶⁴ Blake Morrison, *The Movement: English Poetry and Fiction of the 1950s* (Oxford, 1980); Zachary Leader (ed.), *The Movement Reconsidered: Essays on Larkin, Amis, Gunn, Davie and Their Contemporaries* (New York, 2009).

family but later converted to Anglicanism. He had a firm grasp on what nonconformity in the early-twentieth century looked and felt like: its rhythms, its plainness, its uncomplicatedness. After studying English at Cambridge and embarking on an academic career that took him from Cambridge to Essex, Dublin, Stanford, and Vanderbilt, Davie tried to reconcile his literary interests with his faith. His Clark Lectures of 1976 were part of the attempt to ‘find out why and when and how the contrary impression was created in the public mind, the impression that philistinism and religious nonconformity go together.’⁶⁵ There exists in some a temptation to dismiss Davie’s literary criticism as ‘essays that combined close reading with a somewhat stiff-backed Nonconformist Protestantism [which] don’t commend themselves to either academic or lay readers now’.⁶⁶ But the Clark Lectures, *A Gathered Church*, written with flourish, anger, and fluidity, foregrounded the eighteenth century as the site of real Dissent as Davie recognised it. Historians who had prioritised the seventeenth century with its Ranters, Diggers, and Muggletonians, were, Davie said, wrongheaded and furthermore, misrepresentative of the real character of Dissent which was embodied by Isaac Watts’s hymns and lyrical verse. The self-styled ‘Augustan pasticheur’ was a defender of Old Dissent in the face of Unitarianism too.⁶⁷ Not only was their faith heretical and malicious, but their representation in history – its monuments such as the *DNB* and its history books – obscured the literary prowess of eighteenth-century Dissent. This gathered church was what Davie set out to save; from nineteenth-century misrepresentations that were partly constructed by Unitarian acts of historicization, and from twentieth-century historical tendencies to receive those nineteenth-century representations uncritically.

⁶⁵ Davie, *These the Companions: Recollections* (Cambridge, 1982), 13.

⁶⁶ Collini, ‘Self-positioning’, in *London Review of Books* (25 June, 2009), vol. 31, no. 12.

⁶⁷ Davie, ‘Homage to William Cowper’, *Collected Poems* (Manchester, 1990), 17.

The thesis is arranged broadly according to chronology. Its earliest point is the mid-eighteenth century, where liturgiology is considered as the earliest act of denominational Unitarian historicization. Unlike other Dissenting communions, Unitarianism was founded in a ‘positive’ way. Where Presbyterians and Independents were effectively pushed out of the Church in 1662, Unitarianism was intentionally established as a community and a communion when Theophilus Lindsey opened Essex Street Chapel in 1774. Central to this event was the liturgical document which Lindsey conducted services with until the early-nineteenth century. Eighteenth-century theology was a dynamic and highly contested arena of thought but was crucially incredibly broad. The divergent origins of Unitarianism reflect this. Liberal Anglicanism, or latitudinarianism, was the breeding ground for many eventual Unitarians, not least Lindsey himself. Rational Dissent – a broad theological grouping of those dissatisfied with the constrictive theology of Dissenting churches – was a similarly fruitful context where notable Unitarian ministers such as Joseph Priestley, Thomas Belsham, and Robert Aspland originated from. Liturgy creation and adjustment was a historicizing process that individuals undertook to reflect the doctrines of the fledgling denomination with the intent on properly commemorating true, reformed Christianity.

Chapter two considers historicization in a literary sense. Biography writing and memorialisation of the founding generation of Unitarians were important acts of historicization in the Unitarian community. Yet the strong Anglican roots of the founding generation, notable in the background of Lindsey and his successor at Essex Street Chapel, John Disney, were points of contestation for Unitarians historicizing their community in the years after their deaths. In contrast, Joseph Priestley featured, and still features, prominently in the representations and commemoration of Unitarianism from the mid-nineteenth century. Theological identities of the eighteenth century remained influential for nineteenth-century

Unitarians who were increasingly concerned about the denominational aspects of their church. Biographies were also compiled in volumes of 'lives', revealing lineages and genealogies that preferred to accentuate traditions of thought in the denomination, something that was practiced widely by Protestant Dissenting churches throughout the nineteenth century. However, Unitarianism's strong links with Anglicanism, especially via its modified use of Anglican forms of prayer, complicated how biographers and commemorators could present their denomination as a church with definite origins and narratives of development for new audiences.

The third chapter develops the concerns about denominationalism in a different setting. Manchester College had long been a central part of the Unitarian community which since 1786 had moved around the country in search of a viable base that reflected its outlook, encapsulated by its motto: Truth, Liberty, Religion. These ideas, it would seem, were increasingly widely accepted as the university reform in the mid-nineteenth century allowed nonconformists to enter and take degrees at Oxford and Cambridge. Such shifts in religion and society attracted denominations to open institutions of their own in the city, providing for their own and intending to draw from the religious fervour that was in both universities. At Oxford, Congregationalists and Unitarians opened institutions in 1886 and 1889 respectively. Unitarians, with Congregationalists, saw these developments as symbolic of an atmosphere of toleration in society that they had long campaigned and agitated for. For Manchester College and its supporters, the act of historicization of the Unitarian community was a vital part of the College's institutionalization.

Chapter four turns to the *DNB* and the denominational historical societies that emerged around the turn of the century. Although history was modernising and professionalising in this period, history was still the domain of writers affiliated with the churches. Unitarian historians were

as active as their Church of England and Dissenting counterparts. The tradition of historicizing their community no longer had to exist as a counter-establishment narrative. The Victorian tendency to organise knowledge and form societies around knowledge areas allowed Unitarians to historicize their community in national biography, an enterprise led by the *DNB*. Whilst the literary form of previous Unitarian biography writing had to be altered to fit in the *DNB*'s parameters, the efforts of industrious Unitarian historians, led by Alexander Gordon, meant that Unitarians were extremely well represented alongside a wide expanse of notable figures in British history. It was symbolic of Unitarianism's journey from persecution in the eighteenth century to assimilation in the late-nineteenth century. Yet Unitarian historicization retained a more Christian aspect when the Unitarian Historical Society was established in 1915. As with other denominational historical societies founded in the same period, publication of *Transactions* was an important way of connecting their community. These publications reveal how elements of professionalised and modernised history that was, by the early-twentieth century, prevalent in universities, were synthesised with methods of local history that remained popular. Overall, the chapter suggests that by the early-twentieth century acts of historicization in the Unitarian community had shed much of their Christian significance. Indeed, the concept of historicization was now also understood in terms that placed greater value in pursuing historical knowledge for posterity, rather than out of a specified religious duty, somewhat contrasting the atmosphere inculcated by other denominational historical societies.

Chapter five stems from Donald Davie's suggestion that Unitarians are overrepresented in British historiography to the detriment of Methodism and Old Dissent: particularly Baptists and Congregationalists; he was suspicious of Presbyterianism's association with Unitarianism. In qualifying Davie's claims, the chapter explores why Davie, with much bluster, sought to single out Unitarians and Unitarianism to illustrate his grievance. It attends to his claims that

the *DNB* was a source that had misrepresented Old Dissent in favour of New Dissent, especially Unitarianism, and in doing so demonstrates how literary criticism, however polemical, is a rich source for historians of religion seeking to explore nonconformity in the twentieth century, particularly in the minds of some intellectuals. Davie sought to demonstrate his point by focussing on the eighteenth century as a period when Dissent was at its purest, most evidence in the literary contributions made by Isaac Watts. The eighteenth century remained a site of contestation. He felt that it had been grossly misrepresented by nineteenth- and twentieth-century historians who had fallen for the attractiveness of a denomination which did not deserve to be classed as Dissent in any meaningful cultural terms. In railing against Unitarianism, Unitarians, and their historians, Davie was anxious to recover England and Dissent in its truest form. The chapter is a reading of Davie's criticism and poetry in tandem and demonstrates how Unitarianism's acts of historicization since the 1770s were received in mid-twentieth-century nonconformity. Davie's claim that Unitarianism was an insincere faith whose focus was more social and political warrants defence in some respects that previous chapters serve to highlight and qualify. Ultimately, acts of historicization were vital to Unitarianism's community formation and development across the long-nineteenth century. Those efforts were successful in presenting Unitarianism as a gathered church despite divisions and challenges that emanated from theological, social, and intellectual developments in various contexts that form the basis for the subsequent chapters.

Chapter 1

Liturgy and the creation of a Unitarian church

In the preface to the *Common prayer for Christian worship* in 1861, Unitarian ministers James Martineau and Thomas Sadler explained that extempore prayer was more suitable to the ‘scattered, unorganised, and [as they still hoped] merely provisional life’ of English Presbyterians after their ejection from the Church of England in 1662.⁶⁸ Since then, the occasional attempts to establish a liturgy of their own was ‘betraying the old tendency to qualify individual fervour by regulated order’,⁶⁹ evocative of the historical origins of Presbyterianism and its position in English religious life as the rightful inheritors of the Reformed church from the sixteenth century. *Common prayer*, then, was representative of a strong historical tradition grounded in ecclesiological as well as theological traditions. It was ‘quite in harmony’ that the new attempt to regulate worship was a simultaneous ‘protest against creeds which divide Christians, ... [and] a longing for a worship which unites’ in order ‘to be gathered, in a catholic spirit, from the devotional writings of every Christian age.’⁷⁰

Martineau’s and Sadler’s emphasis on the creation of liturgy as a vital part of English Presbyterians moving from a ‘scattered’ to a ‘gathered’ life was far from being a novel

⁶⁸ James Martineau & Thomas Sadler, *Common prayer for Christian worship: in ten services for morning and evening, with special collects, prayers, and occasional services* (London, 1861), v. See also, A. E. Peaston, ‘Nineteenth Century Liturgies’, in *TUHS* (1941), vol. 7, no. 3, 215-225; idem., ‘Dr. Martineau and the “Ten Services”’, in *TUHS* (1942), vol. 7, no. 4, 290-293.

⁶⁹ Martineau & Sadler, *Common prayer*.

⁷⁰ *ibid.*

appreciation of the centrality of a liturgy to change the nature of a community of Christians in England after the Reformation.⁷¹ As they acknowledged, seventeenth-century Presbyterians ‘pressed no scruple against a stated form of worship’.⁷² Any associations of Presbyterians with an aversion for regulated worship akin to the *Book of Common Prayer* (hereafter *BCP*) was, to Martineau and Sadler, ill-founded. Rather it was the *BCP*’s theology that inspired Presbyterian revulsions. Even though extempore prayer played a critical role in nonconformist worship after the 1660s, Martineau and Sadler’s conviction that these traditions held a longstanding appreciation and desire for formalised worship was to be proved by a litany of liturgies published between 1661 and 1861.⁷³

Revisions of the *BCP* were not the sole domain of English Presbyterians after the Act of Uniformity in 1662. Authors of revisions often originated from within the Church of England’s Latitudinarian movement in the eighteenth century.⁷⁴ Yet the patchy nature of the attempts to revise or improve the prayer book, regardless of the doctrinal angle, found little traction amongst eighteenth-century clergy who considered it to be ‘the unequivocal badge of Anglican churchmanship’; this was confirmed by the fact that, despite the challenges of the Oxford Movement in the early-nineteenth century, the 1662 version of the *BCP* remained unaltered until 1928.⁷⁵

⁷¹ A. E. Peaston, *The Prayer Book Tradition in the Free Churches* (London, 1964).

⁷² Martineau & Sadler, *Common prayer*, iv.

⁷³ Peaston, *The Prayer Book Tradition*.

⁷⁴ Martin Fitzpatrick, ‘Latitudinarianism at the Parting of the Ways: A Suggestion’ in John Walsh, Colin Haydon, & Stephen Taylor (eds.), *The Church of England c. 1689 - c. 1833: From Toleration to Tractarianism* (Cambridge, 1993), 209-27.

⁷⁵ Jeremy Gregory, ‘The Prayer Book and the Parish Church: From the Restoration to the Oxford Movement’ in Charles Hefling & Cynthia Shattuck (eds.), *The Oxford Guide to the Book of Common Prayer: A Worldwide Survey* (New York, 2006), 233-264, 233; Gregory ‘“For all sorts and conditions of men”: the social life of the Book of Common Prayer during the long eighteenth century: or, bringing the history of religion and social history together’ in *Social History*, 34, 1 (2009), 29-54.

This chapter is divided into three parts. In the first section, attention is drawn to the intellectual, religious, and political contexts in which Theophilus Lindsey resigned from his living at Catterick in 1773. It will start with a brief survey of the evolution of historiography from the Victorian era to the start of the twenty-first century, drawing attention to how commentary has been affected by the challenge of refocusing on the Anglican Church as a site of historical interest in broader eighteenth-century English society. The section will then focus on the tradition of latitudinarian thought in the eighteenth century to introduce the subscription controversies that engulfed the Anglican and Dissenting communities in the late 1760s and early 1770s. In doing so, it will demonstrate that Lindsey's resignation was intrinsically connected to both larger, national debates amongst orthodox and latitudinarian Anglican voices, and to his personal connections and discussions with prominent Dissenting individuals, especially Joseph Priestley.

The second section presents instances of liturgical reform in the eighteenth century. It starts by setting out the importance of the *BCP* to English society. It argues that the prevalence of a structured form of worship should be seen as a central tenet of theological and denominational identity and therefore as key sites of identity formation. To this end, John Jones's *Free and candid disquisitions* (1749) suggested key areas of reform that would make the Church's orthodoxy, he thought, appeal to as many clergy as possible. Jones was intimately connected with latitudinarian thinkers, notably Francis Blackburne, who was believed to have been influential in the creation of *Free and candid disquisitions*. In all, the primacy of the *BCP* and the prominence of liturgical reform are demonstrated, indicating how liturgy was paramount to defining the denomination's identity and whether individuals could participate in it in line with their commitment to faith.

The third section focusses on Lindsey's *Book of Common Prayer Reformed* (1774). Michael Ledger-Lomas has argued that Unitarians were 'fascinated with the *BCP* because their desire to move to the rhythms of ancestral piety was constantly frustrated by their scrupulous refusal as individuals to commit to what were or soon might be outdated forms.'⁷⁶ Lindsey's revisions confirm this assessment. Yet what Ledger-Lomas's argument does not emphasise enough is the appreciation of how Lindsey's liturgy was a foundational text in more ways than one for the denomination. Not only was it a central part of how the denomination and community was bound together and connected in historic communion and commemoration, but it was also a historicizing text which codified Unitarian theology in Biblical foundations, commemorating the significance of the community for future Unitarian generations just as much as it signified importance to adversarial contemporary Christian communities. The third section, then, considers Lindsey's *BCP Reformed* considering Lindsey's resignation, his motivations in founding a new congregation, and the historicizing components that his commitment to denominational structure established in the historicizing tradition of the nascent Unitarian community.

In addition to the chapter drawing attention to early Unitarianism's inheritance of Anglican, Dissenting and latitudinarian traditions, emphasis is placed upon liturgy as a distinct and significant site of identity creation and evolution. In doing so, liturgy is understood as a public confession and a private affirmation of the sincerity in conviction of conscience. It is seen as enactment, materialisation, and realisation of religious outlook; 'not only models *of* what they believe, but also models *for* the believing of it.'⁷⁷ Beyond the religious significance of liturgy

⁷⁶ Ledger-Lomas, 'Unitarians and the *Book of Common Prayer* in Nineteenth-century Britain', in *Studia Liturgica* (2013), vol. 43, 211-228, 227.

⁷⁷ Clifford Geertz quoted in Kieran Flanagan, *Sociology and Liturgy: Re-presentations of the Holy* (Basingstoke & London, 1991), 239.

as a ritual that connects worshipper with deity, liturgy must be seen as a ritual that harbours as much potential for divergence as it does for cohesion:⁷⁸ ‘ritual provides an appropriate medium through which the values and structures of a contradictory world may be addressed and manipulated’.⁷⁹ In this light, Lindsey’s *BCP Reformed* is an essential text that connects Unitarian thought with earlier instances of liturgical divergence. The chapter identifies the text as a revision that simultaneously attempted to adhere and diverge from Anglican norms. The *BCP* was appreciated by Lindsey as a document of distinct historical significance, rejection of which would have been tantamount to his own wholesale rejection of the Church of which he was a product. That he revised the *BCP* is therefore a significant literary, theological, historical, and historicizing act. Lindsey was the latest in a line of liturgical reformers, none of whom had previously followed their theological consciences with action in the form of resignation. Latitudinarian tradition, Clarke’s *Scripture-Doctrine*, and Jones’s *Free and candid disquisitions* had provided theological and literary precedent for Lindsey’s *BCP Reformed* but none had committed to their theological consciences in the form of resignation as Lindsey did in 1773. His step was significant because financial and social uncertainty lay ahead in a way in which previous reformers did not have to contend. His commitment to conscience gave credence to the Unitarian allegiance to truth in the face of perceived corruption: the Church of England’s corruption.

BCP Reformed demarcated Unitarian theological difference. It commemorated true Christianity and in turn historicized Lindsey’s new church as one that was continuing the Reformation of Christianity. The congregants at Essex Street who partook in the services formed by the revised liturgy were witnesses to this historical and historicizing act. This was

⁷⁸ Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, (New York, 1973), 142-43.

⁷⁹ Catherine Bell, *Ritual: perspectives and dimensions* (New York, 2009), 147.

an integral part of how Unitarianism came to establish a tradition of historicization, which sought to commemorate God and the community. Yet, as will be seen in later chapters, the tradition moved away from putting primary value in Christianity as an authorising principle in Unitarian acts of historicization.

i. Latitudinarianism, Theophilus Lindsey, and the subscription controversies

Throughout the twentieth century, the history of Anglicanism during the eighteenth century has been slowly reintegrated into historical research concerned with the same period in England. Victorian historiography had banished the Georgian Church into relative obscurity. Charles Abbey and John Overton remarked on its ‘spiritual lethargy’, ‘sluggish calm’ and ‘moral and spiritual poverty, such as hardly finds a parallel in our history’.⁸⁰ Attempts to challenge Abbey and Overton’s characterisations were initiated by Norman Sykes’s *Church and State in England in the Eighteenth Century* in 1934 whose work lay the foundations for more rejuvenation in J. H. Plumb’s *England in the Eighteenth Century* in 1950. Yet Plumb, although with greater delicacy, recalled Victorian pessimistic perceptions when he noted that ‘time hung heavily’ on the hands of parish clergy.⁸¹ Complete eradication of criticism had not waned by 1982 either, when Roy Porter asked that when ‘the year 1800 dawned with the Anglican Church ill-equipped to serve the nation... How much was it missed?’⁸² John Walsh and Stephen Taylor answered Porter’s query. Their volume in 1993 recalibrated eighteenth-century Anglicanism from its reputation as an indistinct era between the ruptures of the seventeenth century and the

⁸⁰ C. J. Abbey & J. H. Overton, *The English Church in the Eighteenth Century* (2 vols., 1878), II, 4.

⁸¹ J. H. Plumb, *England in the Eighteenth Century* (Harmondsworth, 1950), 43-44.

⁸² Roy Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century: revised edition* (London, 1991), 191. Porter’s revised edition expresses a different question to the one that John Walsh and Stephen Taylor cited in idem., ‘Introduction: the Church and Anglicanism in the ‘long’ eighteenth century’, in Walsh et al. (eds.), *The Church of England c. 1689-1833*, 1-64, 3.

revisions of Tractarianism in the nineteenth century. Instead, the eighteenth-century Church underwent important, if subtle, changes to the parties within the Church as well as navigating the Church's position in relation to the wider English religious landscape.⁸³

Within the trend of restoring eighteenth-century Anglicanism as a site of historical importance, research also moved to integrate thought originating from the Church of England with research on political thought of the same period. J. C. D. Clark and J. G. A. Pocock drew attention to inextricable links between orthodoxy and establishment politics on one hand, and heterodoxy and radical politics on the other.⁸⁴ Assimilated political and theological thought were also deployed to rebuff tendencies to prioritise narratives of secularization and modernization that were said to have originated in eighteenth-century English society.⁸⁵ Peter Gay's anti-Christian enlightenment was pithily rebuffed by Sheridan Gilley's point that '[a]n idea is not defeated when it still has to be refuted by scholars writing in the twentieth century.'⁸⁶ It was not just that the enlightenment was not anti-Christian, but that it was deeply indebted to Christian thought and Christianity in the English iteration of it.

'[C]riticism, sensibility or faith in progress' - once seen as the harbingers of Christianity's downfall - were recognised by Porter as being enlightenment values that 'throve in England

⁸³ *ibid.*, 60-64.

⁸⁴ Clark, *English Society, 1688-1832: Ideology, Social Structure, and Political Practice During the Ancien Régime* (2nd edn., Cambridge, 2000); *idem.*, 'England's *ancien régime* as a confessional state', in *Albion* (1989), vol. 21, 450-74; J. G. A. Pocock, 'Within the margins: the definitions of orthodoxy', in Roger Lund (ed.), *The Margins of Orthodoxy: Heterodox Writing and Cultural Response, 1660-1750* (Cambridge, 1995), 33-53. For a broad overview of recent developments on heterodoxy, see Sarah Mortimer & John Robertson (eds.), *The Intellectual Consequences of Religious Heterodoxy, 1600-1750* (Leiden, 2012).

⁸⁵ For a recent overview of the debates, see Clark, 'Secularization and Modernization: The Failure of a 'Grand Narrative'' in *The Historical Journal* (2012), vol. 55, 161-194, particularly 177-78. Abbey and Overton's *The English Church* refers to the 'general depravity' of the clergy and lay members of the Church in the eighteenth century; see particularly, I, 51-55.

⁸⁶ Gilley, 'Christianity and Enlightenment: An Historical Survey', in *History of European Ideas*, 1, 2 (1981), 103-121, 107; Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation* (2 vols., New York, 1966-69).

within piety.⁸⁷ Unlike Scotland, France or Geneva, England did not owe its enlightenment to a '*parti des philosophes*'. Instead, the clergy 'of the Church of England restored in 1660' were responsible for the English experience.⁸⁸ At the end of the twentieth century, B. W. Young expanded on Pocock's thesis, recognising the dominance of Lockean thought in the eighteenth century.⁸⁹ But rather than re-examining the heterodox-radical (and secularizing and modernizing) versus orthodox-conservative debates, Young explained the divisions within the Church of England itself, providing nuance to the hegemonic orthodox-conservative alliance in historiography concluding that it was not uniformity,⁹⁰ but 'controversy [that] was endemic to Anglicanism' in the eighteenth century,⁹¹ less a somewhat faltering commitment to eirenicism indicative of a clerical desperation to part with the ruptures of the seventeenth century.⁹²

Young's study did not draw upon debates between heterodox and orthodox proponents within the Church, rather within the orthodox party itself, closing the door to criticisms that might assume another instance where historians, in 'neglect[ing] the silent majority... distort the course of Anglican history by focusing on the writings of controversialists and extremists'.⁹³ Yet 'controversialist', 'ginger groups'⁹⁴ such as the Feathers Tavern association engaged with

⁸⁷ Porter, 'The Enlightenment in England', in idem & Mikuláš Teich (eds.), *The Enlightenment in National Context* (Cambridge, 1981), 1-18, 6.

⁸⁸ Pocock, 'Clergy and commerce. The conservative Enlightenment in England', in *L'Età dei lumi: studi storici sul settecento Europeo in onore di Franco Venturi*, (Napoli, 1985), vol. 1, 523-68, 525, 528-9, 530. See also, idem., 'Conservative Enlightenment and Democratic Revolutions: The American and French Cases in British Perspective', in *Government and Opposition*, vol. 24, no. 1, (1989), 81-105, particularly 91-2.

⁸⁹ B. W. Young, *Religion and enlightenment in eighteenth-century England: theological debates from Locke to Burke* (Oxford, 1998), 3, 12-13.

⁹⁰ William Gibson, *The Church of England, 1688-1832: Unity and Accord* (London & New York, 2001), 1-7, 24. Gibson's reading of the work of churchmen during the eighteenth century contributes to his thesis that irenicism prevailed over any rifts, either between heterodox and orthodox or amongst orthodox churchmen themselves.

⁹¹ Young, *Religion and enlightenment*, 19. See also his 'A History of Variations: the identity of the eighteenth-century Church of England', in Tony Claydon & Ian McBride (eds.), *Protestantism and National Identity: Britain and Ireland: c. 1650-c. 1850*, (Cambridge, 1998), 105-28.

⁹² Gibson, *The Church of England*, 3.

⁹³ Walsh & Taylor, 'Introduction: the Church and Anglicanism in the 'long' eighteenth century', 51.

⁹⁴ *ibid.*

long-standing doctrinal divergences just like their orthodox colleagues. The difference between the association and the orthodox majority lay in the former's pursuit of reform via political rather than ecclesiastic authority. Explanation of their cause can be found by considering the seventeenth century's impact on the relationship between Church and state.

The ire of the Feathers Tavern association was subscription to the thirty-nine articles of religion; according to Abbey and Overton an 'eighteenth-century question'.⁹⁵ The Church's imposition of subscription compromised the Protestant right to private judgement as well as inhibiting Reformation-inspired commitment to *sola scriptura*. Yet it is within the orthodox response to these ruptures that Young found division under the guise of unity. Caroline and Hanoverian debates were enlivened again and in the new century, Trinitarianism 'was gradually sacrificed by some in favour of intellectual clarity and philosophical rather than theological respectability'.⁹⁶ The latitudinarian, somewhat proto-unitarian, Feathers Tavern association, represented the late-eighteenth century's latest iteration of questions directed at the '[f]undamental questions about the relationship of the monarch to parliament, parliament to people and the Church of England to a protestant nation deeply penetrated by Dissent'.⁹⁷ If, as Grotius observed, there was 'the utmost confusion' about England's constitutional structures at the beginning of the seventeenth let alone of the eighteenth centuries,⁹⁸ there is little evidence to suggest that answers in the decades before the 1760s and 1770s quelled bewilderment, going some way to explain why familiar questions and topics were debated throughout the eighteenth century.

⁹⁵ Abbey and Overton, *The English Church*, I, 190.

⁹⁶ Young, *Religion and enlightenment*, 11.

⁹⁷ Nicholas Phillipson, 'Politeness and politics in the reigns of Anne and the early Hanoverians', in Pocock, G. J. Schochet, & L. G. Schwoerer (eds.), *The varieties of British political thought, 1500-1800* (Cambridge, 1993), 211-245.

⁹⁸ H. Grotius, *The Rights of War and Peace in three books. Wherein are explained the Laws of Nature and Nations, and the Principal Parts relating to Government... to which are added all the large notes of Mr J. Barbyrac*. 3rd edn., (London, 1738, 1st edn., 1625), 71-2; cited in Phillipson, 'Politeness and politics', 212.

The tradition of latitudinarian thought in the eighteenth century provided the basis for the Feathers Tavern association. Amongst its adherents were followers of Locke and Newton in the form of Samuel Clarke and Benjamin Hoadly whose thinking was articulated in the mid-eighteenth century by figures such as Edmund Law and Francis Blackburne. The next section will seek to connect these two generations. Their theological and political concerns reveal a concerted effort in revealing the Church of England as a mere tradition, not a divinely ordained Christian institution, akin to Rome, who abused its ecclesiological alliance with the state so as to prescribe orthodoxy via the articles of religion and the *BCP*.

The prevalence of controversy in the eighteenth-century Church, particularly amongst orthodox and latitudinarian parties, was in no small part due to the debates on subscription to the thirty-nine articles of religion. Martin Fitzpatrick and John Gascoigne have demonstrated that Anglican latitudinarians and Old Dissenters shared outlooks regarding toleration of differences by looking to the essential tenets of Christianity as defined by the Reformation and not to the differences that were chiefly located in dogmas and creeds.⁹⁹ Subscription to the articles was a direct contradiction of these beliefs and was the target of the Archdeacon of Cleveland, Francis Blackburne, in *The Confessional* in 1766. Theophilus Lindsey's role at the centre of the Feathers Tavern association in the early 1770s can be seen as a synecdoche for Fitzpatrick's thesis that divergences between latitudinarians and Dissenters would escalate and result in the decline of the former group. For later sections to explain how focus on Lindsey can challenge Fitzpatrick's assessment of latitudinarian deterioration, the origins of the

⁹⁹ Fitzpatrick, 'Latitudinarianism at the parting of the ways: a suggestion', in Walsh et al., *The Church of England*, 209-27, 209-10; Gascoigne, 'Anglican latitudinarianism and political radicalism in the late eighteenth century', in *History* (Feb., 1986), vol. 71, no. 231, 22-38.

subscription debates in latitudinarian thought must be examined and related to Dissenting thought on subscription to provide intellectual and religious context for Lindsey's journey.

Latitudinarian thought originated in the early-eighteenth century, claiming Benjamin Hoadly (1676-1761) and Samuel Clarke (1675-1729) as its main advocates. It insisted on the protestant traditions of the church, pointing to the Reformation as a near perfect expression of Christianity as defined in opposition to Rome. Authority of Scripture and individual conscience were valued over more Catholic matters of creeds, dogmas, and Papal or ecclesiastical authority over doctrine. Out of a broad anti-Catholicism, questions about human authority over scripture and tests of orthodoxy ascended with the thirty-nine articles being a primary target in the latter dissatisfaction. Since the introduction of the Act of Uniformity (1662) and the Test and Corporation Acts (1661 and 1673 respectively), clergy within the Church of England had to assent to the articles of religion. Subscription was required upon matriculation at Oxford, graduation at Cambridge, and upon assuming new office in the Church itself. The measures were also extended to those wishing to pursue professional careers outside of the Church, indicating wider social ramifications for those who might have harboured misgivings about their faith more generally. The Toleration Act of 1689 provided a degree of leniency in some civil instances, but requirements still included obligation to receive communion according to the Anglican rite, to renounce transubstantiation and the Covenant, to swear the Oaths of Allegiance and Supremacy to King and Church, as well as submission to the Doctrine of Passive Obedience. The same act reduced the number of articles to which subscription was necessary, but the Trinitarian ones remained. In all, subscription was a legal matter, obedience to which was essential to participate in Church sanctioned ecclesiastical, educational, professional, and civil careers. Whilst latitudinarian thought was born out of conscientious objections to measurements of orthodoxy based on ecclesiastical and theological arguments,

there were necessarily implied social objections. In Hoadly and Clarke then, articulation of argument coincided with articulation of action. Those who subscribed to latitudinarian thought were able to lean on the work of respectable divines in positions of real authority (the sees of Bangor, Hereford, Salisbury, and Winchester for Hoadly; the Rectory of St. James's, Westminster and Chaplain in Ordinary to Queen Anne for Clarke) for intellectual and theological validation in the controversies of the mid-eighteenth-century Church.

In Hoadly, latitudinarians had an example of a theologian who made it clear that complete conformity was not required to maintain one's position in the Church. When confronted with a question regarding his conformity in services, Hoadly replied that he had always 'observed the rules prescribed; and, amongst other injunctions... had never omitted the Athanasian Creed, when ordered to be read in the church.' Yet, he sympathised with those that could not, in good conscience, conform, recounting 'with an agreeable smile upon his countenance' that much like his friend Samuel Clarke, his conversant also possessed scruples but "'would yet continue in his ministry to the church established [whilst] not [being] willing to enter into new engagements by repeating the subscriptions, &c.'" "'I leave you", he continued, "'to God, and to your own judgment and conscience: for I never go farther!'"¹⁰⁰ Hoadly's inferred toleration and implied practice of leniency in subscription was balanced by the more audacious Clarke.

The rector of St James's was the most prominent early-eighteenth century example of clerical Arianism. His *The Scripture-Doctrine of the Trinity* (1712) emphasised the latitudinarian commitment to the primacy of scripture in protestant belief: 'The *only Rule of Faith* therefore

¹⁰⁰ *The Gentleman's Magazine* (1783), vol. 53, no. 1, 1029.

to every Christian, is *the Doctrine of Christ*'.¹⁰¹ In analysing 1,251 biblical texts and all the relevant passages in the liturgy of the Church of England, Clarke provided validity for Arians and Anglicans harbouring misgivings about doctrine and measures of orthodoxy more broadly. Indeed, the thirty-nine articles were a target of his criticisms. Clarke saw that Churches, in response to growing impiety, had enlarged 'their Creeds, and Confessions of Faith; and grew more minute, in determining unnecessary Controversies; and made more and more things explicitly necessary to be understood... things much harder to be understood than the Scripture itself'.¹⁰² There was an overzealous extension of authority to quell decline in religious fervour. Yet in doing so, Churches were leading their congregants astray, and were now almost irrevocably 'departed from the Fountain of Catholic Unity [and] the Apostolic Form of sound words', save for the 'original words of Christ himself and the Spirit of Truth'.¹⁰³ To Clarke, the articles of religion were part of such deviations from the early church. In addition to them being articulations of man's interruption of divine authority, they rested on Church-led corruptions regarding the nature of the Godhead. Clarke did not take new preferments after the publication of *Scripture-Doctrine* as obligatory subscription would compromise his commitment to the *Rule of Faith*.

Clarke's exegesis provided the basis for his own reconciliation with the Church of England's prescribed Christianity. His 'Assent to the Forms by Law appointed, and to all words of Humane Institution, is given only *because they are, and in That Sense wherein they are...* agreeable to that which appears to Me... to be the Doctrine of Scripture'.¹⁰⁴ 'Every sincere

¹⁰¹ Samuel Clarke, *The Scripture-Doctrine of the Trinity wherein ALL the Texts in the NEW TESTAMENT relating to that Doctrine, and the principal Passages in the Liturgy of the Church of ENGLAND, are collected, compared, and explained*. (London, 1712), iii.

¹⁰² *ibid.*, vii-viii.

¹⁰³ *ibid.*, vii, viii.

¹⁰⁴ *ibid.*, xxiv-xxv.

Christian' who assented to the 'Use of any Forms of Words; must take care to assent to them in such a Sense, as may make them consistent with the Scripture... and in such a Sense, as may make them consistent with Themselves'.¹⁰⁵ It was a Christian's duty to be scrupulous in the face of prescribed institutional authority and *Scripture-Doctrine* made it plain to clerics with similar doubts about Anglican doctrines and creeds that Protestant values did not have to be compromised when faced with conducting the forms of worship, for the Doctrine of Scripture could be located in it.

Clarke's emphasis on scriptural authority was not in keeping with orthodox views on the Trinity. Thomas Emlyn saw that Clarke's Boyle Lectures delivered in 1706 were not the product of a mind consistent with 'the common notions of a Trinity of co-equal divine persons', nor 'a right *Athanasian*'.¹⁰⁶ In the third part of *Scripture-Doctrine*, Clarke's propositions included numerous points that relegated the Son from his divinity as set out by orthodoxy. Clarke asserted that '*all the honour and Worship, which we pay to Him [the Son], must redound to the Father, and be referred as the Fountain of Divinity.*'¹⁰⁷ Therefore, prayers and praises 'ought *primarily* or *ultimately* to be directed to the Person of the *Father*, as the *Original and Primary Author* of all Good.'¹⁰⁸ The inferiority and subordination of the Son and Spirit to the Father, found in the pursuit of a doctrine of scripture, had implications for clerical subscription and public worship.

In the third part of *Scripture-Doctrine* Clarke meticulously listed what he considered to be the principal passages of the Church's liturgy whereby a degree of orthodox latitude concerning

¹⁰⁵ *ibid.*, xxv.

¹⁰⁶ Emlyn, *The works of Mr. Thomas Emlyn* (3 vols. London, 1746), ii. 479.

¹⁰⁷ Clarke, *op cit.*, 359.

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.*, proposition XLIV, 354.

the doctrine of the Trinity could be identified. Clarke noted 72 passages in the Church's liturgy where God was styled as the Father alone. There were 44 times '*wherein is expressed the Opinion of the Church, that Prayers and Praises should generally be directed to the Person of the Father, in the Name and through the Mediation of the Son.*'¹⁰⁹ The '*Subordination of the Son to the Father*' was expressed 29 times and the '*Subordination of the Holy Spirit to the Father*' expressed 39 times. Clarke's efforts were designed to support proposition X, which claimed that '*Whenever the Word, God, is mentioned in Scripture, with any High Epithet, Title, or Attribute annex'd to it; it generally (if not always) means the Person of the Father.*'¹¹⁰ It was implied, therefore, that instances where prayers and praises were directed to the Trinity, as prescribed by the Church of England in its liturgy, were in fact instances that should be amended in line with scriptural authority.

In addition to highlighting the liturgical passages which had little or no scriptural authorization, Clarke suggested ways in which liturgical reform could bring the *BCP* back in line with the rule of truth and faith. In a private prayer book, printed in 1724 by John Baskett, Samuel Clarke's private amendments to the *BCP* can be seen. Notably, the Athanasian Creed is struck through and significant rephrasing in various prayers appear in line with Clarke's *Scripture-Doctrine* that maintains the subordinate nature of Christ.¹¹¹ From the 1724 prayer book, it is possible to see how Clarke maintained conciliation between his faith and the orthodoxy prescribed by the Church in the *BCP*. Clarke was able to navigate his theological differences with the Church by not ever needing to re-subscribe to the articles of religion again and officiating at an amended form of worship to his congregation at St James's, Westminster.

¹⁰⁹ *ibid.*, 393.

¹¹⁰ *ibid.*, 263.

¹¹¹ Clarke, *The Book of Common Prayer, etc.* (London, 1724), British Library (C.24.b21).

As co-progenitors of latitudinarianism in its eighteenth-century manifestation, Hoadly and Clarke demonstrated how two differing examples of churchmen could navigate theological and ecclesiastical debates when faced with self-doubt about adhering to Church or scriptural authority. Hoadly embodied a more practical example. He demonstrated how to subscribe where necessary whilst discreetly tolerating unorthodoxy, going only as far to agree with Clarke's doubts about the nature of the Trinity as to proclaim personal judgement as the final stop in determining accordance with his close adversary.¹¹² Clarke offered a less realistic example. The beneficiary of a wealthy rectory and being a prominent philosopher, his scope for undermining Church authority was not readily available for lower clergy, whose requirement to subscribe would have had economic pressures as well as pressures of Christian conscience; a factor that would not only be manifested as anxiety for Lindsey in 1773 but also be attestation to his commitment to conscience.

It might not be a coincidence therefore that the next major work that contributed to the debate amongst latitudinarians and orthodox counterparts was by a man who made an identical choice to Clarke. As Archdeacon of Cleveland, though not a benefice with the same wealth as that of Clarke's Westminster preferment, Francis Blackburne was comfortably enough positioned to spark controversy with his publication of *The Confessional* in 1766. Early on in his life in Yorkshire, Blackburne 'had settled with himself, never to subscribe to the XXXIX articles again.'¹¹³ Without a desire, less a need, to subscribe to advance or translate to new pastures, Blackburne emulated Clarke's blueprint for latitudinarian navigation. His decision made him, according to his son, '[i]mpregnable therefore to the common influences of hope and fear' that

¹¹² Recounting the vigorous debates sparked by Clarke's *Scripture-Doctrine*, Hoadly wrote that 'I AM far from taking upon Me, to determine, in so difficult a Question, between Him, and Those who made Replies to Him.' idem., 'Introduction', *The Sermons of Samuel Clarke, D. D. Late Rector of St. James's Westminster* 5th edn. (2 vols., London, 1742) I, vii.

¹¹³ Francis Blackburne, 'Life of Francis Blackburne', in Francis Blackburne (ed.), *The works, theological and miscellaneous -- of Francis Blackburne* (7 vols., 1804-05), I, lxxiii.

might have pressed upon a career churchman.¹¹⁴ Leslie Stephen, ever brusque, accounted for Blackburne's 'prized... integrity' in his stubbornness in addition to his conviction of conscience.¹¹⁵ Strong-headedness at least partially explains Blackburne's determination to attack subscription in *The Confessional*, eventually pushing broad sections of latitudinarianism towards a more public and active campaign to relieve doubting churchmen from impinging upon their own consciences.

Yet while *The Confessional* had a decidedly larger political impact than that of Clarke's *Scripture-Doctrine*, Blackburne's polemic did not exhibit any great development in thesis but was rather a reiteration of Clarke and Hoadly's arguments. This places Blackburne in a tradition of animadversion on the articles, inspired by the early eighteenth-century forefathers of latitudinarianism. *The Confessional* fought against a common enemy; enforced subscription to the articles of religion that was a 'yoke which neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear'.¹¹⁶ The Reformation, and advanced protestant arguments articulated by Clarke and Hoadly found another, more stringent mouthpiece in Blackburne. Fellow Cambridge graduates John Jackson and Thomas Herne were earlier examples of reiteration, the former pointing to the Church's intruding authority on liturgy in addition to the articles.¹¹⁷ Gascoigne noted how Cambridge was a profitable breeding ground for clerics sympathetic to latitudinarian causes, committed to the simplicity of doctrine in all matters.¹¹⁸ Institutional commonality in Cambridge would prove a familiar theme with future advocates of Blackburne's *The*

¹¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹¹⁵ *ibid.*, lxxiv; Leslie Stephen, *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century* (2 vols., London, 1876), I, 423.

¹¹⁶ Blackburne, *Works*, V, 160.

¹¹⁷ John Jackson, *The Ground of Civil and Ecclesiastical Government* (London, 1718); Thomas Herne, *An Essay on Imposing and Subscribing Articles of Religion* (London, 1719), for particular relation to liturgy, see 63.

¹¹⁸ Gascoigne, 'Anglican latitudinarianism', 37.

Confessional.¹¹⁹ In rejuvenating theological and ecclesiastical arguments, in keeping with the latitudinarian tradition as espoused by Hoadly and Clarke, it initiated a new generation of interest that helped lend early eighteenth-century arguments a distinctly political edge. Latitudinarian thought, though inherently Anglican in nature, had maintained a degree of support from Dissent in the eighteenth century. If Blackburne's *The Confessional* provided the ideological basis for attacks on subscription, it was Theophilus Lindsey who proved a key individual in converging latitudinarian, dissenting, and ecclesiastical thought in the early 1770s. It is to Lindsey that the section now turns to introduce relevant dissenting lines of thought before surveying Lindsey's own journey to eventual resignation from his living in Catterick and publication of his *BCP Reformed*, inspired by latitudinarian thought's architect, Samuel Clarke.

As has been shown, latitudinarian thought maintained familiar theses throughout the eighteenth century. The controversies initiated by the latest iteration of latitudinarian arguments in Blackburne's *The Confessional* in the late 1760s now strayed more overtly into the political. Lindsey, married to Blackburne's stepdaughter, Hannah, already maintained a unique closeness with *The Confessional* and its author. He was among the 'association' of Anglican clerics who met during the summer of 1771 at the Feathers Tavern in the Strand, London, to draw up a petition to present to parliament. The petitioners did not call for an end to the supremacy of the Church but for the authorities to adopt a scriptural approach to the governing and endorsement of the doctrines of the Church. Insistence that clergy subscribe to the articles and use the *BCP*

¹¹⁹ Young, "The Soul-Sleeping System': Politics and Heresy in Eighteenth-Century England', in *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* (Jan., 1994), vol. 45, no. 1, 64-81. See 74 particularly for reference to the intellectual collaboration between Edmund Law (1703-87), Bishop of Carlisle (1768 to his death) and master of Peterhouse (1756 to his death), and Blackburne on the overtly heretical doctrine of soul-sleeping or mortalism, and the connections between Law and the generation of Cambridge graduates involved in the Feathers Tavern petitions in the early 1770s. Law's own contribution to the subscription debates placed him too in line with Clarke, Hoadly, and Blackburne in objecting to the Church's corruption in pursuing wider orthodoxy.

was the embodiment of unscriptural Christianity akin to the ‘tyranny and bigotry of Rome’. It risked the ‘destructi[on] of that piety and strict morality which is recommended in the Gospel – and therefore pernicious, and even dangerous, to the State.’¹²⁰ The petition itself, reprinted in *The Gentleman’s Magazine* in February 1772, noted that it was the petitioners ‘undoubted right as Protestants’ to interpret scriptures for themselves, ‘without being bound by any human explications thereof.’ This was the basis of true religion. Any infringement of that process would ‘divide Communion, and cause mutual dislike between fellow Protestants.’¹²¹ Adhering to another’s interpretation of scripture was contradictory to the right to free inquiry and had the potential to be more divisive than cohesive. The petition sought to politicise the latitudinarian thesis; warning that imposing regulated orthodoxy in the Church would have broader social ramifications. Greater tolerance was needed to accommodate broad latitudes of theology.

Lindsey’s involvement in the campaign to attract signatories was formative. Armed with this argument, Lindsey travelled the length and breadth of the country, often to remote areas, and generally found little success. Aside from the 197 clergy who ended up signing the petition in 1771-72, he wrote to Cambridge education reformer John Jebb, lamenting the passivity of some clergy whom he found generally ‘asleep, totally ignorant of, or totally indifferent about, the true gospel of our Lord and Master’. Yet he was adamant that they ‘would subscribe [to] any code whatsoever with the same ease as they do the articles, &c., and abide by it.’¹²² The laity, he assured William Turner, a dissenting minister at Wakefield, were no better; ignorance being their most abiding characteristic.¹²³ The clergy that Lindsey met in his efforts to gain supporters demonstrated that the Feathers Tavern petitioners were a minority. Met with clerical reluctance

¹²⁰ ‘Paper circulated by the Objectors to the Thirty-nine Articles’, *The Gentleman’s Magazine*, 41, (Dec., 1771), 599-600.

¹²¹ ‘Copy of the Petition of the Clergy, &c.’, *The Gentleman’s Magazine*, 42, (Feb., 1772), 61.

¹²² *Letters*, I, ‘To John Jebb 6 September 1771’, 115.

¹²³ *ibid.*, ‘To William Turner of Wakefield 19 November 1771’, 119-20.

to commit to latitudinarian modes of thought, Lindsey recognised that the petitioners' attempt to wake the 'minds of many... of the Clergy and excite 'em with freedom to look into the holy scriptures for themselves' was a difficult task in the face of such ignorance.¹²⁴

Geographic trends evidenced by the petition's signatories can be seen to correlate with latitudinarian sympathies rather than a national trend of enthusiasm for the petitioners' cause. Printed in the Unitarian *Monthly Repository* in 1818, the petition listed the names of the signatories, their qualifications, their benefices, and the corresponding county. In keeping with its latitudinarian sympathies, Cambridge provided many signatories to the petition. Other key counties were represented by the twenty-three clerics from Yorkshire, thirty-one from Essex, fourteen from Lincolnshire, fourteen from Northamptonshire, thirteen from Suffolk, and eight from Kent.¹²⁵ The dominance of signatories from the East of England might be accorded to the relative proximity of Cambridge, the institutional affiliation which the majority of the petitioners shared, and between Lindsey's connections, not just to his own living in Yorkshire, but to close friends and correspondents such as William Chambers (Northamptonshire), John Jebb (Peterhouse, Cambridge), and John Disney (Lincolnshire), whose residences were also not far from Cambridge. The nature of this geographic dispersal will be revived in later chapters to assess the location of Unitarian communities in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century.

There were many close relationships harnessed between dissent and Anglican latitudinarians in the eighteenth century. Commitment to a true form of Christianity acted as the theological underpinnings for this extensive connection between the two groups. Blackburne's offspring

¹²⁴ *Letters*, I, 'Turner 19 November 1773', 120.

¹²⁵ 'List of the Petitioning Clergy, 1772', in *Monthly repository of theology and general literature*, 13, 145, (Jan., 1818), 15-18.

are again notable for drawing him closer to both the latitudinarian and dissenting network. His son and biographer Francis was under eminent dissenter and arch-controversialist Joseph Priestley's care at Warrington Academy. During his time as minister at Mill Hill Chapel, Leeds, Priestley made another significant connection to latitudinarianism via Blackburne after the latter introduced him to Lindsey whilst visiting Richmond with William Turner.¹²⁶ Priestley remarked upon the value of the correspondence between himself and Lindsey, in which - Belsham, Lindsey's eventual successor at Essex Street Chapel, biographer, and memorialist, suggests - Lindsey found similar value.¹²⁷

The connection to dissent was not just familial and extended to the topic of subscription to the articles. In the wake of the Anglican clergy's failure to be granted relief from subscription, dissenting ministers created their own petition to parliament in 1773, seeking relief from subscription on familiar grounds to their latitudinarian counterparts. The interactions between latitudinarians and dissenters over subscription reiterated the common ground they shared over dissatisfaction with Anglican ecclesiology and the integration of Church and state more generally. Presbyterian minister and serial biographer, Andrew Kippis, implored legislators to grant relief on the conditions set out in their appeal, arguing that the petitioners only requested improvement to their current 'precarious tenure of connivance and compassion' stipulated by the Toleration Act. Once their legal position was secured, they would 'have nothing more to ask of the state' and 'thankfully return to their private employment', not being individuals with 'desire[s] to be troublesome to men of rank, or to haunt the levées of the great.'¹²⁸ Importantly,

¹²⁶ J. T. Rutt (ed.), *Life and correspondence of Joseph Priestley, LL. D., F. R. S., &c.* (2 vols., London, 1832) I, 80-81.

¹²⁷ *ibid.*, 82. Belsham, *Memoirs of the late Reverend Theophilus Lindsey, M. A.* (London, 1812), 36.

¹²⁸ Andrew Kippis, *Vindication of the Protestant Dissenting Ministers with regard to their Late Application to Parliament*, 2nd edn. (London, 1773), 110.

Kippis could not represent the views of Dissent in its entirety and it is in Priestley that we are introduced to the more assertive strand which deeply concerned the establishment.

Priestley's attitudes towards the endeavour reveal more deep-seated dissatisfactions with the system of debate in addition to his shared beliefs that religion had been corrupted by the imposition of fallible measurements of orthodoxy in the Church of England, one half of the Church-state nexus. Parliamentary rejection of the Feathers Tavern petition by 217-71 votes on 6 February 1772 led Lindsey to push Priestley in the direction of supporting his dissenting colleagues in their petition to parliament. He maintained to Lindsey that no temporal authority had business in the reformation of religion and as such, petitioning the establishment, founded on Anglican ecclesiology, was a fruitless task.¹²⁹ Furthermore, Dissent's request for relief would merely 'disgust our statesmen, as it might lead them to think that if they once begun that work, there would be no end of it'.¹³⁰ His own motivations, outlined in 1769, contravened Kippis's calming appeal to legislators. Whilst individuals should be granted relief from the strictures of Anglicanism in the form of subscription, he could not promise that all Dissenters would live harmoniously under the authority of a national Church even if satisfactory ecclesiastical reform was reached.¹³¹ This only confirmed the fears of parliamentarians who debated the dissenting ministers' petition in 1773. It was the unknown motivations of Dissenters, coupled with their heterodoxy and destructive tendencies designed to 'injure the established religion of our country', and in turn be 'detrimental to the Church or State.'¹³² The dissenters' petition was also rejected by parliament.

¹²⁹ 'Priestley to Lindsey, Leeds, March 2, 1772', in J. T. Rutt (ed.), *Life and correspondence of Joseph Priestley, LL. D., F. R. S., &c*, I, 160.

¹³⁰ 'Priestley to Lindsey, Leeds, March 9, 1772', in *ibid.*, 162.

¹³¹ [Priestley], *A free address to Protestant Dissenters, as such. By a Dissenter* (London, 1769), vii.

¹³² 'Sir Walter Bagot & Sir Roger Newdigate', *The history, debates and proceedings of both Houses of Parliament of Great Britain from the year 1743 to the year 1774*. (7 vols., London, 1792), vol. 6, 446.

Lindsey's claim that he held "very slender hopes of success"¹³³ for the Feathers Tavern petition was realised by the failure of the petition. In taking the lead in presenting a political iteration of latitudinarian arguments to the legislative branch of the Church-state relationship, he can be viewed as indicative of a small number of Anglican clergy whose desperation for reform had driven them to the point of resignation. Prior to the formation of the Feathers Tavern association, Lindsey had resolved to "give up my benefice, whatever I suffer by it, unless I would lose all inward peace and hope of God's favour and acceptance in the end."¹³⁴ In delaying his secession from the Church, he would participate in the push for reform from within Anglicanism one last time.

ii. John Jones and the *Book of Common Prayer* reform tradition

So far discussion has related to eighteenth-century latitudinarian thought, latitudinarian connections to Dissent via Lindsey, and his experiences of the subscription debates in the 1760s and 1770s. The present section will affirm how liturgy was of similarly great concern to those holding out for substantial ecclesiological and theological reform. It will explain how liturgical reform, a key site of identity and community formation, became an established tradition. The previous section examined Clarke's contribution to the tradition and this section will look to another latitudinarian in John Jones, Vicar of Alconbury, to demonstrate how Lindsey's project in 1774 was not unique but was rather a part of an eighteenth-century tendency to suggest reforms to the Church's liturgy. In assigning historical and sociological significance to

¹³³ Belsham, *Memoirs of Lindsey*, 46.

¹³⁴ *ibid.*, 43.

liturgical reform, the section will end by signalling the attraction of structured forms of worship, a theme developed in the preceding section on Lindsey's project, which came to define the Essex Street chapel congregation and early Unitarianism.

This section will explain that the challenge to subscription seen in the first section constituted a simultaneous challenge to liturgy as defined by the *BCP*. This necessarily characterises both texts as sites of ritual performance and participation where crises of faith originated and ensuing divergences were observed.¹³⁵ Additionally, it also outlines how Lindsey's *BCP Reformed* was but one instance of liturgical creation that set about to redress the Church's institutional delineations of faith and belief on the worshipper, instead referring to scripture as the authority.

To this end, the historical and theological importance of the Church of England's *BCP* cannot be overestimated. Orthodox Anglicans saw it as a near perfect expression of the word of God, as set out in the Carolinian restoration in 1662. Yet it simultaneously excluded rafts of clergy from conscientious participation. Those who suffered most were Presbyterians, whose pursuits for comprehension within the Established Church were dismissed by the start of the eighteenth century.¹³⁶ To the Church, the *BCP* was a way of providing and ensuring a standardised experience of worship in its parishes, although this proved difficult due to local interpretations and desires interfering.¹³⁷ Nevertheless, participation in the ritual of liturgy as outlined by the

¹³⁵ Walsh & Taylor, 'Introduction', 46-49.

¹³⁶ For excellent accounts of the genesis of the *BCP* in the seventeenth century, see Jeremy Gregory, 'For all sorts and conditions of men': the social life of the Book of Common Prayer during the long eighteenth century: or, bringing the history of religion and social history together', in *Social History* (Feb., 2009), vol. 34, no. 1, 29-54 and E. C. Ratcliff, 'The Savoy conference and the revision of the Book of Common Prayer', in G. F. Nuttall and O. Chadwick (eds.), *From Uniformity to Unity, 1662-1962* (London, 1962), 89-148. More recently, Bryan D. Spinks, 'The Book of Common Prayer, Liturgy, and Worship', in Gregory (ed.), *The Oxford History of Anglicanism, Volume II: Establishment and Empire, 1662-1829* (New York, 2017), 254-69.

¹³⁷ Gregory, 'The Prayer Book and the Parish Church: From the Restoration to the Oxford Movement' in *The Oxford Guide to the Book of Common Prayer: A Worldwide Survey* (New York, 2006), 233-264, 235 & 238.

BCP was to assent to the seventeenth-century connection between Church and State. This is key to recognising the *BCP* and the liturgical experiments presented here as indicators of the participants' adherence or challenge to the Church-State nexus.

Although concern has largely been centred on the articles of religion in this chapter, it is important to point out that the articles themselves were attached to the 1662 *BCP*. It might therefore be suggested that attacks on the articles of religion were implicitly attacks on the *BCP*; their shared theological expressions being compounded by a shared textual format. Concern with the articles of religion have sometimes overshadowed the importance of the *BCP*, as pointed out by Anthony Waterman who, in line with Jeremy Gregory, notes that it was the *BCP* and not the articles of religion that 'every church-going English man, woman and child heard continually from the earliest infancy to the last hours of their lives.'¹³⁸ Additionally, Waterman argued that in the long-eighteenth century a 'widely accepted body of establishment social theory rooted in Catholic ecclesiology, ultimately biblical in origin, [was] transmitted unimpaired to the post-Reformation Church of England, and expressed most authoritatively in the *BCP*.'¹³⁹ By 'establishment', Waterman referred to the lay as well as the clerical majority. Therefore, in challenging the authority of the *BCP*, critics were also contesting the very fabric and structures of the Church-State relationship. This point does not diminish the importance of the articles of religion, but instead affords even more significance to the views of latitudinarians and other challengers to the Trinitarian ecclesiological makeup of eighteenth-century English society. To attack one of the key tenets of the Church was to attack the very structure of society.

¹³⁸ A. M. C. Waterman, *Christian Theology and Political Economy since the enlightenment: essays in intellectual history* (Basingstoke, 2004), 36; Gregory, 'The Prayer Book' & idem., 'For all sorts and conditions of men'.

¹³⁹ Waterman, 'The nexus between theology and political doctrine in Church and Dissent', in Haakonssen (ed.) *Enlightenment and religion: rational dissent in eighteenth-century Britain* (Cambridge, 1996), 193-218, 193.

Between Samuel Clarke's *Scripture-Doctrine* and Lindsey's *BCP Reformed*, John Jones's *Free and candid disquisitions* (1749) provided an iteration of the latitudinarian challenge to the Church-State relationship. At first anonymously published, the work aimed to make the Anglican liturgy more palatable for a broader section of the clergy and laity. Jones desired to prevent dissatisfied churchmen from leaving the communion and finding communities that were more suitable to their doctrinal views. In this, Jones was motivated to maintain the established Church, not to destroy it. Addressing his suggestions to Church authorities, he appealed with 'all the modesty, all the decency, and all of the candor [sic], that lies in their power'.¹⁴⁰ Jones's close relationship with Blackburne, who later defended¹⁴¹ *Disquisitions* prior to the publication of the more assertive *Confessional*, might go some way in explaining why he was characterised as being 'excessively cautious of giving offence to the higher powers'.¹⁴²

Yet *Disquisitions* casts a voice frustrated by the Church's inability to adapt to mitigate the pressures of more liberal and latitudinarian theological thought in the eighteenth century.¹⁴³ Remedial action should be 'timely done' by authorities of Church and State to avoid greater problems in the future. *Disquisitions* depicts the status of religion diminishing in society and the lack of liturgical reform is at the centre of the crisis as well as being the solution to the problem. Although Jones is careful not to undermine the authority of the Houses of Convocation, his appeal to authorities in state demonstrates how he saw religion as being an integral part of society, reaching far beyond the confines of the Church. It is, he says, 'after all,

¹⁴⁰ [John Jones], *Free and candid disquisitions* (London, 1749), 2.

¹⁴¹ Blackburne, *An apology for the authors of... Free and candid disquisitions relating to the Church of England, &c. Wherein the contents of the first letter of remarks on that treatise, by a presbyter of the Church of England are... examined* (London, 1750).

¹⁴² Nichols, *Literary Anecdotes*, vol. 3, 15.

¹⁴³ *ibid.*, v-vii.

the great support of the Nation.’ Should ‘every thing else be regarded, and Religion alone be neglected?’ It should be given attention by state authorities just as economic or international relations are, as it ‘is so essential to the happiness of a Nation’. Indeed, if religion is neglected and declines within a state, ‘the State itself must expect to decline with it’. Historical examples of neglecting religion ‘[confirm] this observation’ and future experiences will continue to support it.¹⁴⁴ For Jones, religion is vital in maintaining authority as well as peace and prosperity for a nation. Thus, it is the concern of governors of Church and state to tend to its health and ensure its appeal to maintain the fortunes of the nation. Liturgy is the most essential cog in the process of reform and preservation of the Anglican communion and community that enjoin in it. Its reform would not only satisfy those who held divergent or incompatible doctrinal opinions, but also prevent Christianity ‘losing ground... giving way to something very pernicious, and at last destructive, both to Church and State.’¹⁴⁵

Jones’s concerns primarily lay in the content of the liturgy. He proposed omitting repetitions of the Lord’s Prayer, moving the Litany and Holy Communion to more appropriate days, and condensing the three Sunday services into the matins alone: one was ‘*ordinarily sufficient*’.¹⁴⁶ Abbreviating services would be more appealing to worshippers and ministers. Yet Jones was also concerned with the functionality of the liturgy. He doubted its practicability and again cited historical examples to embolden his claim. ‘The practice of the primitive Christians,’ he argued, ‘might very well content us, without giving offence either to God or man.’ They used the Lord’s Prayer once in worship, ‘was this not enough for modern Christians too?’¹⁴⁷ The trope of recovering practices adopted by ancient Christian worshippers was to become

¹⁴⁴ *ibid.*, vii-ix.

¹⁴⁵ *ibid.*, 29.

¹⁴⁶ *ibid.*, 33-35, 37.

¹⁴⁷ *ibid.*, 29.

synonymous with those arguing that the Anglican Church was corrupted. Some Dissenters and disillusioned Anglicans would come to argue that it was their plans, their Christianity, and their form of worship and ritual that was the true Christianity, unsullied by years of Roman Catholic, and now Anglican supremacy. Yet *Disquisitions* is an example of an author who wished not only to recover that Christianity and its practices but to maintain the Church. Only liturgical reform on his lines would allow the maintenance of the current community that the *BCP* drew together and the expansion of it to include those who could not partake in the Church's communion and those who were on the verge of deciding that they could no longer be a part of it.

Whilst reform of the ritual of liturgy was central to regaining disillusioned Anglican or Dissenting clergy, the character of the individuals in that demographic was an important aspect of including a wider range of clergy in the Church. Jones thought that 'fellow-protestant Divines of the several Dissenting denominations' would be able to overcome 'some obstructions' and 'concur with us as heartily and effectually, in defending and promoting our common Christianity' if actions like the those laid out in the *Disquisitions* were taken. These men were not dissimilar from orthodox Anglican churchmen who had adhered to the rituals stipulated by the *BCP*. "Reconversion" would be feasible due to them being 'men of as much good sense, good learning, and good breeding, as most other men'.¹⁴⁸ Whilst liturgy had to be amended to appeal to a greater community of worshippers, some individuals were more likely to join in that reformed version than others. Jones identified key social values that those who were more inclined to re-join the reformed Anglican communion might hold. The *Disquisitions*' 'wise and seasonable precautions' would prevent 'a prevailing, tho' more secret

¹⁴⁸ *ibid.*, 220.

dissatisfaction’, not just among the ‘inferior and less discerning (yet well-meaning) members of our communion’, but also among the ‘superior and more intelligent’.¹⁴⁹

Jones’s proposed reformed liturgy was designed to include those similar to the existing community and exclude those who did not. This reform proposal illustrated how liturgy could be a site of community and identity formation. *Disquisitions* offers an example of how proposed reform to the structures of worship and Church authority necessarily implied dissatisfaction with the connection between Church and State, rendering liturgy as a site of difference within the Anglican communion. In limiting the extent of reform, a specific type of clergyman would be appealed to, maintaining a degree of familiarity between the community that centred on the existing *BCP* and the proposed reformed version. In appealing to a limited set of social values, held by only a few individuals, the potential for liturgy to act as a site of identity and community division or destruction, would be postponed.

iii. Lindsey’s *Book of Common Prayer Reformed*

This section connects the latitudinarian tradition, subscription debates and Lindsey’s journey to resignation with Lindsey’s desire provide a structurally orthodox form of worship. Its primary concern is in the use and evolution of *Book of Common Prayer Reformed* until its sixth edition, edited by Thomas Belsham, was published in 1813. Whereas instances of liturgical reform were previously only ever propositions, Lindsey’s liturgy was used extensively. It was the keyway in which the young Unitarian denomination could commemorate Christianity, believed to be truest, in addition to commemorating the historical significance of that act. Previously, the

¹⁴⁹ *ibid.*, 223.

tradition of prayer book reform amongst latitudinarians was a relatively subversive tradition whose adherents were desirous to retain their anonymity. Lindsey's *Book of Common Prayer Reformed*, then, took on a new character in that it was a key part of Unitarian identity, defined against the *BCP* and other modes of doctrinal allegiance and expression.

Lindsey opened his version by indicating the historical tradition which had inspired him to place it at the heart of services at the newly opened Essex Street Chapel in 1774:

The Liturgy now offered to the Public, is the Liturgy of the church of England, with the amendments of *Dr. Clarke*, and such farther alterations as were judged necessary, to render it unexceptionable with respect to the OBJECT of religious worship: and at the same time, other blemishes and improprieties are removed, which have been taken notice of by some of the greatest Names in the English church.

The advertisement to Lindsey's reformed liturgy, first published in April 1774, was a public declaration of a theological journey that he had withstood for many years prior. It was to become the liturgy of 'a society of like-minded Christians' with the aim of attracting others to make it 'a more rational and edifying composition', to encourage 'virtue and true religion', and 'conduce ... the REFORMATION, so long wanted, and *now so loudly called for in the national church*.'¹⁵⁰ Writing to William Turner of Wakefield five months prior to the opening of Essex Street Chapel, Lindsey declared that 'Whatever becomes of my scheme, this [the liturgy based on Clarke's amendments], will be of use.'¹⁵¹ Lindsey placed Clarke's liturgy at the heart of his plan. Being a liturgy based on the Church of England's *BCP*, instead of being a design drawn up either from new or other plans of worship, contented him with not being sinful, as he

¹⁵⁰ Theophilus Lindsey (ed.), *The Book of Common Prayer reformed according to the plan of the late Samuel Clarke together with the Psalter or Psalms of David*. (London, 1774), iii-vii.

¹⁵¹ *Letters*, I, no. 112, 'To William Turner of Wakefield, 19 December 1773', 170.

contended the *BCP* was.¹⁵² Lindsey was forceful in his consternation, but he could not bring himself to completely reject the *BCP*. Not ‘every thing in the common-prayer book ... was agreeable to the Word of God’ but he thought that ‘Many of the prayers in the liturgy are truly excellent, and are quite agreeable to this rule [of directing prayers to God alone] and example of holy scripture.’¹⁵³ Opposition was based on the fallibility involved when men interfered with Biblical supremacy. The Bible alone was the conveyor of God’s word; ‘the religion which men have made out of it, whether contained in the common-prayer book, or any other book... will be liable to errors and imperfections, and often want amendment.’¹⁵⁴ Furthermore, other objections to the *BCP* were based on the fact that in reading the liturgy, the minister himself was repeatedly ‘mak[ing] it more his own.’ By contrast, the congregation’s association and identity with it was minimised due to the fact that if one disapproved of a certain part of the service, one ‘may pass it over, and so far not join in it’.¹⁵⁵ Priestley’s influence is clear; he thought that attending worship in the established Church was tantamount to countenancing ‘*antichristian errors*’ as well as approving of ‘*antichristian hierarchy*’.¹⁵⁶ What then, were the implications for the minister, whom Lindsey thought implicated far more than the congregation? Clarke’s liturgy offered a form of worship that did not, he thought, incriminate him in any perpetuation of antichristian error; theological or ecclesiastical.

Examination of the first service conducted in the new chapel at Essex Street reveals the extent to which Lindsey managed to express his blend of latitudinarianism and anti-Trinitarianism. On Sunday 17th April 1774, Lindsey would have opened the first service at Essex Street with the familiar ‘WHEN the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed,

¹⁵² *ibid.*, I, no. 106, ‘To William Turner of Wakefield, 12 November 1773’, 164.

¹⁵³ Lindsey, *A farewell address to the parishioners of Catterick* (London, 1774), 11.

¹⁵⁴ *ibid.*, 7-8.

¹⁵⁵ *ibid.*, 11.

¹⁵⁶ [Priestley], *A free address* (1769), 70.

and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive.’¹⁵⁷ The Collects were also familiar: ‘ALMIGHTY God, who hast given thine only Son to be unto us both a sacrifice for sin, and also an example of godly life... through the same Jesus Christ our Lord.’ The Epistle; 1 *Peter* 2. 19., and The Gospel; *John* 10. 11.¹⁵⁸ Yet it was the congregation’s voices, not Lindsey’s that followed the initial proclamation of *Ezek.* 18. 27: ‘*O God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things that are therein; have mercy upon us miserable sinners.*’¹⁵⁹ The Absolution and *Benedictus* were omitted, the *Te Deum* replaced, the Apostles’ Creed edited to change its emphasis, and many instances of ‘through Jesus Christ our Lord’ were cut, transmittance of prayer being largely to God only. Changes were made to Prayers and Thanksgivings on several occasions, as were Prayers and Thanksgivings on general occasions, the Litany heavily altered, a new Order for the Administration of Baptism included, and the Ministration of Baptism for adults omitted; the Form of Solemnization of Matrimony suffered the same fate. Some of the more substantial alterations would not all have been delivered on 17th April, but the reasons for adopting the reformed liturgy, further edited by Lindsey, were explained in his sermon.¹⁶⁰

The Book of Common Prayer Reformed did not overtly demonstrate Lindsey’s dissatisfactions with the Church-State relationship. In line with the *BCP*, Lindsey did not address Parliament or its members at all,¹⁶¹ nor is there a section that calls for increased civic and religious liberties for Dissenters, or those who are not accommodated by the *BCP*. There is no evidence that Lindsey attempted actively to undermine the relationship between Church and State. His

¹⁵⁷ *BCP*, The ORDER for Morning Prayer, Daily throughout the Year.

¹⁵⁸ *BCP*, *The Second Sunday after EASTER*.

¹⁵⁹ Lindsey, *BCP reformed*, Morning Prayer, 38.

¹⁶⁰ *The Gentleman’s Magazine*, vol. 44, (May, 1774), 224. The summariser was more than happy to defer to Lindsey’s Sermon from the same day which was briefly noted in the same as being a ‘rational discourse on unity, and on the reasons which induce this divine to form a separate congregation distinct from the national church.’, 221.

¹⁶¹ *BCP Reformed*, 61-66.

careful choice of words meant that he was able to avoid being cast as a radical and someone who wanted to destroy the very foundations of the British constitution. His opponents would have to search further to be able to articulate how belief in the unity of God, necessitated by the homousian understanding of Christ's nature, was indicative of Lindsey's desire to undermine the establishment.

Yet Lindsey's anti-Trinitarianism, a theology inconsistent with the Church-state relationship, was apparent within the first service. The prayer before the sermon assured worshippers that '*For thou art God alone; and beside thee there is no other.*' He continued, imploring that the congregation gathered were '*thy true worshippers; such as thou seekest to worship thee*'.¹⁶² Just as he had explained the implications in committing oneself to worship in the Anglican church which arbitrated an erroneous 'object of worship', Lindsey assured the congregation that their act of attending this worship was indicative of their commitment to true Christianity as it directed prayers to the true 'object of worship': participating in this specific ritual was completely distinct from participation in the regular one. Concerned with the theme of the unity of the spirit, Lindsey sought to show just how the individual can be a philosopher, affording Scripture 'due examination' based on Lockean principles of man's capacity for reason and scrutiny.¹⁶³ Consistent application of reason would prevent the designs of certain Christians within the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of England who desired to force every Christian to be 'of one mind' which Lindsey condemned as contributing to a '*constrained dead uniformity*'. Participating in worship that had recovered the true object of worship was just a

¹⁶² Lindsey, *A Sermon Preached at the Opening of the Chapel in Essex-House, Essex-Street, in the Strand, on Sunday, April 17, 1774. By Theophilus Lindsey, M. A. to which is added, A Summary Account of the Reformed Liturgy, on the Plan of the late Dr. Samuel Clarke, made Use of in the said Chapel*, 1st edn. (London, 1774), 3.

¹⁶³ *ibid.*, 14.

starting point. It needed to be part of the Christian's broader efforts to live and set examples in the face of corrupted religion.

Contrary to the perception amongst commentators that Lindsey desired to impose his will upon the Church of England in its entirety, the sermon provides a nuanced picture that demonstrated Lindsey's intention to install 'unity of the spirit' amongst Christians. This was not the same as unity of mind – something that 'God never designed' – or unity of doctrine.¹⁶⁴ Encouraging more sects who have their aims set on rational enquiry would, Lindsey believed, foster a greater understanding of true religion. The effects on civil society would be two-fold: in becoming better Christians, the environment would in turn 'make them more useful and peaceable members of society'; as a result, the wiser world that will have emerged would necessitate increased tolerance and freedom of thought, meaning that 'all shall enjoy alike protection from the state, who give alike security for their obedience to it.'¹⁶⁵ In pursuing rational enquiry on a personal basis, Christians pursuing true religion and unity of the spirit could help advance the case for increased toleration, improving society and obedience as a result; enhancing the civic polity, not subverting it. Lindsey used his first sermon at Essex Street to ensure that the new project did not aim to subvert, supersede, or endanger the relationship between Church and State, but to show that it wished to be incorporated within it, albeit after it had been reformed further.

In total, the liturgy and sermon used at the first service at Essex Street Chapel clarified Lindsey's ideas about the new religious community he was founding. The sermon exhibited a continuation of Lindsey's conviction from before his resignation to find a place for those who

¹⁶⁴ *ibid.*, 13

¹⁶⁵ *ibid.*, 18-20.

could not subscribe to the Articles within the established Church, reforming its approach to toleration as a result but not so much as to disturb the public peace.¹⁶⁶ By deploying an argument that advocated for greater toleration of those who could prove to have adhered to the core principles of Christian rationalism and enquiry in pursuit of true Christianity, Lindsey validated his own project's aims and principles. The legacy of Lindsey's latitudinarianism and the latitudinarianism as defined by Samuel Clarke was combined with commitment to reason, appealing to curious churchmen and Dissenters alike. In total, the first service at Essex Street exhibited the importance of ritual being a site of difference, whilst other elements demonstrated Lindsey's commitment to reform, in liturgical as well as in matters of Church authority.

Yet for all the important differences it established for the new society at Essex Street under Lindsey's direction, reviewers found the liturgy contradictory to the doctrines upheld by that fledgling congregation. A review in *The Critical Review* of July 1774 spouted little venom towards Lindsey's *Book of Common Prayer Reformed* which, in some places, 'breathe[d] a noble and elevated spirit of devotion'.¹⁶⁷ But it was noted that the service of communion betrayed a doctrinal contradiction. Lindsey directed the minister to say 'Take, and eat this in remembrance of Christ.' Lindsey's rationale for alteration originated, as the reviewer said, 'in conformity to our Saviour's own: 'Do this in remembrance of me.'¹⁶⁸ But the difference in context was key. Lindsey's, as with any contemporaneous communion service, was different in that one was a command issued by Christ himself to his followers, and subsequent services were ones of commemoration: 'A different mode of expression is therefore extremely proper.' The reviewer's main issue with this service was not the language of devotion, rather that it existed in Lindsey's prayer book at all. Its very presence was inconsistent with Lindsey's

¹⁶⁶ *ibid.*, 14.

¹⁶⁷ [Anon] 'IV. The Book of Common Prayer Reformed according to the Plan of the late Dr. Samuel Clarke.', in *The Critical Review, or Annals of Literature* (Jul., 1774) vol. 38, 27-34, 29.

¹⁶⁸ *ibid.*, 32.

‘system of christianity’ whose adherents at Essex Street Chapel might more appropriately, even reasonably, ‘discontinue that posture of reverence and humility, in which the member of the church of England receive the sacrament’. The charge was that the doctrines at the heart of Lindsey’s prayer book required further alterations to be consistent with the design. The continued practice of receiving the sacrament served to undermine the design of Unitarian doctrine and infringe on the devotional rituals of other Christian communicants. It would, said the reviewer, ‘have the tendency to render the sacrament one of the slightest, and most unaffecting ceremonies in the Christian church.’¹⁶⁹ Whereas there were acknowledged weaknesses in the *BCP*, it remained ‘an admirable composition; free from that air of pedantry and affectation, which appears in almost all co[n]temporary publications; that the sentiments are in general devout, manly, and rational; expressed with great energy, and, at the same time, a beautiful simplicity.’ Reform of the *BCP* was desirable for the reviewer, but it would require a man ‘with an uncommon share of judgment’ to reform it properly. Based on his *Book of Common Prayer Reformed*, this was not Lindsey, whose attempt to inspire others into further reform of the *BCP* was only ‘fit to be transmitted to the remotest posterity.’¹⁷⁰

iv. Conclusion

Regardless of the quality of Lindsey’s attempt to produce a liturgy redolent of apostolic worship, this was not central to the value of the work when viewed from a historicizing standpoint. Lindsey’s desire to provide a worship that would be attractive to disillusioned Anglicans and Dissenters was the first instance in the Unitarian church where an attempt to

¹⁶⁹ *ibid.*, 32.

¹⁷⁰ *ibid.*, 34.

historicize the community had been made. Persistent revision of Lindsey's liturgy until 1854 is indicative of how a community of believers, as a community of commemorators, was connected via the authority of the *Book of Common Prayer Reformed*.¹⁷¹ Revision was wholeheartedly viewed as an attempt to perfect the forms of worship in line with the Biblical foundation of the denomination. It did not allow for extempore prayer, a tradition more closely associated with the Dissenting and evangelical churches, and as such installed the importance of structured worship, commemoration, and historicization at the heart of the Unitarian community. The respectability afforded to the community in adopting formulated worship was another defining feature of the nascent denomination. Moreover, Lindsey's *Book of Common Prayer Reformed* was central to his identity and legacy, doctrinally and theologically corroborating his disillusionment and resignation from the Church. Although Lindsey was not entirely original in his liturgiology, the context in which he presented it compels greater attribution of its historical significance. Lindsey's significance was certainly remembered by his biographer, Thomas Belsham, who was committed to perpetuating the work done by his great friends Lindsey and Priestley until the end of his life. The impact that Lindsey had on the successive generation was unquestionably large but the Biblical criticism and concerns about the adequacy and appropriateness of denominational and Biblical Unitarianism came to jeopardise Lindsey's place as a founding father of English Unitarianism.

¹⁷¹ Peaston, *The Prayer Book Reform Movement*, 91.

Chapter 2

Commemoration and the creation of Unitarian history

It is only in the last fifty years that Theophilus Lindsey's reputation has been revived as a Unitarian founder to a status that is somewhat comparable to that of Joseph Priestley.¹⁷² Although he was commemorated as a British Unitarianism founder on his death, the decline in his position in Unitarian history is indicative of a shift in theological and social attitudes amongst Unitarians. Whereas, for example, we find Joseph Priestley's contributions to Unitarianism extensively analysed, Lindsey's contributions are only of late the subject of extensive attention.¹⁷³ British Unitarianism's premier historical journal, *Transactions of the Unitarian Historical Society*, has in its 106-year history published bicentennial, sesquicentennial issues commemorating Priestley's birth, and a bicentennial issue commemorating his death.¹⁷⁴ Yet Lindsey, often written about in Unitarian contexts as an inseparable partner of Priestley's, was afforded an 'intellectual vignette' and stand alone articles in commemoration of significant dates but no extensive collaborative attention.¹⁷⁵ This is, of course, naturally the product of Lindsey having been undoubtedly a less prominent figure

¹⁷² G. M. Ditchfield's 'Introduction' to his *Letters of Lindsey* is the most complete account of Lindsey's life to date and doubles as an invaluable analysis of the emergence of Unitarianism as a denomination in the late-eighteenth century; Ditchfield, 'A Unitarian Saint? Theophilus Lindsey, 1728-1808', *TUHS* (2008), vol 24, no. 2, 81-99.

¹⁷³ Robert E. Schofield, *The Enlightened Joseph Priestley: A Study of His Life and Work from 1773 to 1804* (University Park, PA, 2004); Isabel Rivers & David L. Wykes (eds.), *Joseph Priestley, Scientist, Philosopher, and Theologian* (Oxford, 2008).

¹⁷⁴ Vol. 5, no. 3, *TUHS* (1933), vol. 18, no. 1, (1983), vol. 23, no. 2, (2004).

¹⁷⁵ Russell E. Richey, 'Theophilus Lindsey: some manuscript sermons and an intellectual vignette' *TUHS* (1968), vol. 14, no. 2, 134-146; H. John McLachlan, 'Theophilus and Hannah Lindsey two hundred years later' *TUHS* (1974), vol. 15, no. 4, 118-129; Ditchfield, 'A Unitarian Saint?'

in British history in comparison to Priestley, whose agitative, incisive, and polymath mind opens many more routes of analysis for historical exploration than his contemporary. Lindsey's greatest contemporary champion, Ditchfield has made an indispensable contribution to the revivification of interest in Lindsey, and claims that his importance should not be 'confined to the history of Unitarianism'. Yet

Formal canonisation within the Protestant tradition is hardly appropriate and Lindsey can be regarded as a saint in only the most figurative sense. 'Patriarch', too, is a term fraught with problems. Hence perhaps the most appropriate summary of modern Unitarian perceptions of Lindsey would be that of John McLachlan: 'We may not, cannot, think precisely as he did, but we can admire and revere his spirit.'¹⁷⁶

This is hardly a ringing endorsement of a figure who provided the ecclesiological infrastructure and impetus for the founding of a denomination whose influence has stretched from political to theological areas of British history. Nevertheless, alongside Ditchfield's indispensable contribution to elevating Lindsey's profile beyond the confines of religious history, reversion back to denominational tendencies to 'revere' great figures of Unitarianism's past reveal how there remains a tendency, however minor, to commemorate Lindsey as a Unitarian saint, analogous with Lindsey's nineteenth-century Unitarian biographer, Thomas Belsham. Even so, if there remains uncertainty about how to best situate Lindsey's contribution to British history more broadly, his place at the heart of the Unitarian foundation story has always been well-known. Yet precisely because his place in the denomination from his death onwards was not remembered as being central as it was to the denomination's establishment urges greater explanation.

¹⁷⁶ Ditchfield, 'A Unitarian Saint?', 95.

The shifting nature of commemorations of Lindsey reveals how the denomination was itself changing. Not only was this change quick but it was responsive to the demographic changes that constituted Unitarianism in the early-nineteenth century. As has been seen, liturgy formed a substantial part of Unitarians' efforts to imbue itself with the hallmarks of a denomination that was recognisable in the character and organisational shape of other denominations at the time. Part of the tension surrounding Lindsey's legacy was that his Unitarianism's Anglican origins sat next to the Dissenting origins of many of Unitarianism's adherents. It is not straightforward to position the more extroverted characterisations of Priestley alongside the respectable, structured nature of Lindsey's theological and ecclesiological outlooks for the fledgling denomination. He saw value in appealing to disillusioned Anglicans like himself: reform of the Church, for Lindsey, was not bound in a tacit belief that it should be disestablished. Priestley, the character to be claimed the heart of eighteenth-century Unitarianism well into the twentieth century by Unitarianism's adherents and adversaries, had a substantially different outlook for the future of the denomination. Priestley's theology reflected how his commitments lay in free inquiry and less a static ecclesiology and theology that serviced a community, emulating the Church of England that Lindsey had so agonisingly resigned from.

The claims of rational dissenters over converted Anglicans on Unitarianism prevailed in the nineteenth century. The decline in commemorations of Lindsey were part of this theological and social adjustment of the denomination, precipitated by the ascendance of transcendentalism and effectively anti-denominational principles (but not the victory) in Unitarian theology by the end of the nineteenth century. Martineau's 'lifelong campaign against the Unitarian name'¹⁷⁷ had been a chief influence in adjusting the theological outlook of the denomination,

¹⁷⁷ Webb, 'The Faith of Nineteenth-Century Unitarians', 142.

even if Biblical Unitarianism remained the most popular form of the faith throughout the period.¹⁷⁸ As the next chapter will discuss, this transformation impacted the removal of Manchester New College, London to Oxford in 1889. This event marked an effective division of the Unitarian community. On the one hand, Manchester College Oxford was emblematic of Unitarianism without denominational intent and on the other, Unitarians around Manchester itself, and most importantly the Unitarian Home Mission Board under the Principalship of Alexander Gordon, was indicative of denominational Unitarianism which sought to embrace the label and historicize its claims to a place in the nation's history.

The role of history in the building of Dissenting communities in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries has attracted the attention of historiography in recent years. John Seed's *Dissenting Histories* can be considered a prime example and one that emphasises the complications around the use of history in the context of contemporary events. Seed explains that historical writings in Dissent across the eighteenth century stood at the 'unstable boundaries of history and memory' but were not less productive in terms of reinforcing community values because of this.¹⁷⁹ For example, William Turner's 'History of Warrington Academy' published in the *Monthly Repository* was a text that had a dual function in that it commemorated the individuals and community involved in that institution in the eighteenth century but also 'mythologized' them.¹⁸⁰ In the act of commemoration, Turner was able to narrate a version of events for a wider community which, regardless if an accurate version of events, was still a sign of the ability of a community to support such a historicizing act. The consolidation of community relied on the connection of individuals of the past and present via recognisable values that bound them

¹⁷⁸ Larsen, *A People of One Book*, 138-140.

¹⁷⁹ John Seed, *Dissenting Histories: Religious Division and the Politics of Memory in Eighteenth-Century England* (Edinburgh, 2008), 1.

¹⁸⁰ Anne F. Janowitz, 'The Aikin family, retrospectively', in Felicity James & Ian Inkster (eds.), *Religious Dissent and the Aikin-Barbould Circle, 1740-1860* (New York, 2012), 205-229, 207.

together. Patrick Collinson saw this tendency as being especially prominent in Dissent, where high value was placed on the genealogical connections between generations which doubled as genealogical connections between value sets. This ‘vertical’ approach, as Collinson geometrically conceived it, was a powerful tool for communities that operated outside of society’s mainstream.¹⁸¹ History writing, as with life writing, had long been a method through which religious communities could invest themselves with authority, often in opposition to those who staked a claim to a common and thus contested past.¹⁸² As Seed demonstrated with other prominent Dissenting histories, this was important for the community’s representation of ‘itself to itself (and to others) as a *historical* community.’¹⁸³ If desired, history writing could mask divisions within communities and present coherent narratives of itself to itself and others. This was evident in William Turner’s *Lives of Eminent Unitarians* (1843). Whilst it was received as an example of Unitarian biography, verging on hagiography, Turner did not entirely conceal ‘different forms of Unitarianism’ that existed in the eighteenth century.¹⁸⁴ For Unitarians, who derived early adherents from the Church of England, complexities about denominational divisions within the community were distinct from other Dissenting churches. Given the nineteenth-century community under scrutiny here, Seed’s precedence is important but differs in that it is more concerned with the ways in which Unitarians of the early-nineteenth century constructed their eighteenth-century history. Undoubtedly, the importance of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was an influential and crucial component in the ways in which the community attempted to historicize its community,¹⁸⁵ but precedence is given to the

¹⁸¹ Patrick Collinson, ‘Towards a Broader Understanding of the Early Dissenting Tradition’, in C. Robert Cole & Michael E. Moody, *Essays for Leland H. Carlson: The Dissenting Tradition* (Athens, OH, 1975), 3-38.

¹⁸² Alexandra Walsham, ‘History and Memory’, in *Historical Journal* (2012), vol. 55, no. 4, 899-938.

¹⁸³ Seed, *Dissenting Histories*, 2.

¹⁸⁴ William Turner, *Lives of Eminent Unitarians* (2 vols., London, 1840-43), II, 1.

¹⁸⁵ Samuel Palmer’s *The Nonconformist’s Memorial* (2 vols., London, 1775) is an example of Unitarian claims to descent from the seventeenth century, it being a republished abridgement of Edmund Calamy’s *Account of the Ministers... Rejected* (1713) and the additional volumes of *Continuation* (1727) which memorialised the ejected ministers of St Bartholomew’s Day 1662.

denomination's histories of the eighteenth century given that the term 'Unitarian' was first used by individuals then.

As has been emphasised in the previous chapter, the Anglican origins of many Unitarians of the eighteenth century was vastly influential in shaping the identity of the denomination in its early years. It had inherited and reconstructed the formularies of the Church with a view of making it attractive to disillusioned Anglicans and Dissenters alike. It similarly inherited a portion of the Church's history too. As late as 1843, Turner was conscious of the denomination's connection with the Church and sought to lengthen the history of the denomination by drawing attention to the divisions within that communion about the Church's Establishment: 'It is notorious that there has always existed within the church itself a numerous body, comprising many persons of considerable note both among the clergy and the laity, who have doubted or rejected this leading tenet of the body to which they nominally belonged.'¹⁸⁶ In claiming historical links to dissenting bodies in the Church, Unitarianism was able to extend its history earlier and deeper into the eighteenth century, beyond the confines of the label that only came into use in the 1770s. For the biographer, establishing difference between those who held dissenting beliefs within the Church and those who dissented and became Unitarians was a key device that enabled the better definition of the historical community for nineteenth-century audiences. Furthermore, it was a device that enabled the author to also respond to competing claims from rival Dissenting communities in the nineteenth century, most prominently English Presbyterians, whose precipitous decline in the previous century gave rise to Unitarianism.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁶ Turner, *Lives of Eminent Unitarians*, II, 1.

¹⁸⁷ Richey, 'Did the English Presbyterians Become Unitarian?'; Alasdair Raffe, 'Presbyterians', in Andrew Thompson (ed.), *The Oxford History of Protestant Dissenting Traditions, Volume II: The Long Eighteenth Century c.1689-c.1828* (New York, 2018), 11-29, especially 12-14, 25-26; Michael Ledger-Lomas, 'Unitarians and Presbyterians' in Timothy Larsen & Ledger-Lomas (eds.), *The Oxford History of Protestant Dissenting Traditions, Volume III: The Nineteenth Century* (New York, 2017), 99-123.

As this suggests, the act of history and biography writing, in commemorating an individual or community for the author's present community and future community, was as important as what histories and biographies said.¹⁸⁸ The Unitarians – a 'large... proportion of them... brought up in literary habits'¹⁸⁹ – were disproportionately well-educated and affluent in comparison to other Dissenting denominations. Recent investigations of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literary culture have produced numerous studies whose pages are populated with the literary efforts of Unitarians in this period.¹⁹⁰ Unitarian literary culture and sources have retrospectively been made central to the pursuit of charting the connections between early modern versions of literary networks and communities such as those that existed in coffee houses, taverns, and salons.¹⁹¹ These studies have been the playground of historians wishing to elevate the profile of gender and collaborative projects which 'have made a significant contribution in moving the critical spotlight away from the lone male creator'.¹⁹² Yet that lone male creator is primarily the subject of this chapter. They are considered to be a part of a community, and to have collaborated in their commemoration of individuals insofar as literary texts of this era were necessarily 'composite' creations;¹⁹³ their use of published texts, and personal and private information from within, and without their community, positions them as part of a collaborative process. In demonstrating this, the chapter pursues a literary analysis of the ways in which these creators, historians, biographers, commemorators revealed subtle

¹⁸⁸ Peter France, 'From Eulogy to Biography: The French Academic *Eloge*', in France & William St. Clair (eds.), *Mapping Lives: The Uses of Biography* (New York, 2004), 83-101.

¹⁸⁹ [Robert Aspland], 'Preface', *Monthly Repository* (1817), vol. 12, iii.

¹⁹⁰ Gillian Russell & Clara Tuite (eds.), *Romantic Sociability: Social Networks and Literary Culture in Britain, 1770-1840* (New York, 2002); James & Inkster (eds.), *Religious Dissent and the Aikin-Barbauld Circle*; Felicity James, 'Charles Lamb, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and the Forging of the Romantic Literary Coterie', in William Bowers & Hannah Leah Crummé (eds.), *Re-evaluating the Literary Coterie, 1580-1830: From Sidney to Blackwood's* (London, 2016), 137-158;

¹⁹¹ Felicity James & Julian North, 'Writing Lives Together: Romantic and Victorian Auto/biography', in *Life Writing* (2017), vol. 14, no. 2, 133-138, 134.

¹⁹² *ibid.*, 134.

¹⁹³ Tessa Whitehouse, 'Structures and processes of English spiritual autobiography from Bunyan to Cowper', in Adam Smyth (ed.), *A History of English Autobiography* (New York, 2016), 103-118, 103.

machinations of how commemoration was an important act, and secondly in how those same creators connect themselves to a historical literary community and in turn reinforced the historical component of Unitarian community in the nineteenth century. It focusses on the commemoration of the marginal generation of individuals, primarily male and ministerial, that would go on to form the first generation of Unitarians in the late-eighteenth century and seeks to demonstrate that their commemoration by preceding generations perpetuated the tension between different sorts of Unitarianisms of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This did not, however, obscure the primacy of commemoration insofar as an individual's writings, mainly commemorative in character, were remembered for the way that they 'exercised a powerful influence not only over his contemporaries but over successive generations, and earned for himself a name which deserves, and is likely, to be remembered by distant ages.'¹⁹⁴

As liturgy was a powerful act of commemoration of faith, so too was biography writing. Each were historically significant for Unitarianism. Its literary culture was undoubtedly strong but was relatively young. As such, acts of historicization such as biography writing were crucial parts of illustrating the existence of generations within the community, authenticating its faith by demonstrating that their community had a recognisable past. In 1895, Alexander Gordon was able to divide Unitarian history into three periods. The first started in 1548 and was characterised by 'sporadic Antitrinitarianism, native and exotic'. The second involved a 'comprehensive School of Thought, taking the Unitarian name' from 1682 and was notable for Unitarianism becoming a defined theology. The third was the start of 'Unitarian Church Life' which started after Lindsey opened Essex Street Chapel in 1774 and was when 'Unitarian' started to denote 'a determining principle of associated Religion; namely, the limitation of

¹⁹⁴ Turner, *Lives of Eminent Unitarians*, I, vii.

divine worship to a single being, God the Father.’¹⁹⁵ Gordon’s book, published by The Lindsey Press, intended to shed light on the history of a community hitherto not well known: ‘Many of its passages being obscure, and the threads of its story being complicated, it has not presented itself as an easy study.’ The organising body of the denomination, the British and Foreign Unitarian Association, had expressly sanctioned the diffusion of theological and literary knowledge of Unitarianism. This was crucial but, as Gordon argued, ‘the history of the Unitarian movement is the key to its meaning.’¹⁹⁶ Theology and literature were subjected to the authority of history in revealing Unitarianism’s identity. Gordon’s periodization was, however, responsive to theology. The commemorative acts of liturgy creation and participation helped Gordon to chart the development of Unitarian history. He wrote of Lindsey’s confinement of the name Unitarian to ‘worship expressly limited to God the Father’ and noted how the minister was intent on retaining the Anglican nature of worship to inspire a secession from the Church but also noted that ‘He had no wish to amalgamate with existing Dissent’, drawing a distinction between Lindsey’s Unitarianism and that of Dissenting Unitarianism whose designs, Gordon emphasises, were not wholly compatible with Lindsey’s.¹⁹⁷ There was no simple genesis of denominational Unitarianism, as Gordon had noted in his introductory remarks, but the momentous, historical act perpetrated by Lindsey was enough to allow Gordon to demarcate a substantial historical development in the emergence of Unitarianism. Gordon’s historical work was, as will be discussed in the fourth chapter, compendious and Unitarianism’s history could not be said to be obscure anymore. His *Heads of English Unitarian History* was, however, not reflective of the historical works that had preceded his work of 1895. The way in which Gordon was able to periodize Unitarian history was reliant on the acts of historicization that were done by earlier generations who anticipated Gordon’s emphasis on history as a

¹⁹⁵ Alexander Gordon, *Heads of English Unitarian History: with appended lectures on Baxter and Priestley* (London, 1895), [13].

¹⁹⁶ *ibid.*, [3].

¹⁹⁷ *ibid.*, 42-43.

primary vessel for commemorating and conveying Unitarianism's history, identity, and meaning.

i.

William Smith was a Unitarian Member of Parliament who had attended the dissenting academy at Daventry and was a member of Essex Street Chapel in London. In his lifetime, Smith witnessed the failure of two campaigns to relieve non-Trinitarians from civic and religious restrictions: the first being the Feathers Tavern petition of 1773 and the second being in 1792.¹⁹⁸ In 1813, Smith successfully introduced to the House of Commons *An Act to relieve Persons who impugn the Doctrine of the Holy Trinity from certain Penalties* or the Unitarian Relief Act, granted greater civil and religious freedoms to Unitarians. It afforded non-Trinitarians the same protections granted to other Dissenters under the Toleration Act of 1689, alleviated those same persons from restrictions and penalties imposed on them under the Blasphemy Act of 1697, as well as relieved non-Trinitarians from punishment by death enacted by two acts passed by the Scottish Parliament in 1661 and 1695.¹⁹⁹ Many of the restrictions imposed on non-Trinitarians had been loosely applied, indicated by the establishment of Dissenting academies, Unitarian chapels, and Members of Parliament and other public officers being professed Unitarians. Although there were very real exclusions from society – notably the exclusion and continued exclusion from England's ancient universities – the repeal of largely unimposed restrictions on Unitarians is of smaller significance than a political act

¹⁹⁸ G. M. Ditchfield, "How Narrow will the limits of this Toleration appear?" Dissenting petitions to Parliament, 1772-1773', *Parliamentary History* (2005), 91-106; Ditchfield, 'Anti-Trinitarianism and Toleration in Late Eighteenth Century British Politics: The Unitarian Petition of 1792', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 42 (1991), 39-67.

¹⁹⁹ 53 Geo. 3. c. 160.

suggests. The extension of protections symbolically indicated a heightened tolerance towards Unitarians in the religious, political, and social spheres of the nation. However, discerning a sense of acceptance within the Unitarian community following the 1813 Act is not readily apparent when examining the community's literary sources.

The period is a critical one to focus on when charting the evolution of the Unitarian community in Britain. The Act was passed within the years that might be considered the end of the first generation of prominent Unitarians, led by Joseph Priestley and Theophilus Lindsey. Priestley had emigrated to America in 1794 and died ten years later in Northumberland, Pennsylvania. Lindsey, retired from his ministerial duties at Essex Street Chapel in 1805, died in 1808. Their contributions to Unitarianism's foundation and evolution into something more recognisable as a denomination in their most active years in the late-eighteenth century reached far beyond the contentions and refinements of a liturgy. Lindsey's spiritual journey from Anglicanism, through doubt to Christian truth in Unitarianism paved the way for an enshrinement of Unitarianism's commitment to truth and liberty in religious, social, and political terms. Priestley contributed to these same values, although his advancement beyond Unitarianism to Deism is often underplayed – an evolution which does not prevent him being claimed as a 'founding father' of the denomination.

The way in which Lindsey and Priestley were commemorated and memorialised reveals less about their work than it does about how their work was received by the next generation and what that generation wanted to say to future generations. Liturgical creation and refinement serviced to a desire to imbue Unitarianism with a distinct identity, defined against other denominations and churches. Biography and autobiography writing or commemoration of individuals' lives serviced a similar intention but with a greater emphasis on the social and

political character of the community and its constitutive individuals. There was a great emphasis on separating Unitarians from other religious groups in British society. This was achieved by highlighting an individual's commitment to distinctly Unitarian values, inherited from historical figures who were similarly committed and held in the face of wider societal and religious pressures to relinquish those beliefs. As had existed in the first generation of Unitarians and their chosen Dissenting ancestors from the seventeenth and eighteenth century, modern Unitarians emphasised individuals' religious and societal exceptionalism and made this clearer by contextualising those individuals' lives in difficult circumstances, inherently hostile to universal truths. Notably, veneration and adulation of individuals in biographies was not substantially affected by the 1813 Unitarian Relief Act and comparing biographies written either side of this date reveals how Unitarian literary culture came to harbour the denomination's disposition to embrace a narrative of being wronged by authority and being distinct from other churches and denominations.

In John Williams's biography of Thomas Belsham, the biographer of Theophilus Lindsey, the epigraph reads as such from Belsham's private correspondence:

It seems to me absurd, in writing accounts of persons deceased, never to hint at their failings. The best men have their failings, and they ought not to be concealed, though it is proper to touch them with tenderness and delicacy.²⁰⁰

If Belsham wrote a critical word about Lindsey, he did so with so much 'tenderness and delicacy' as to make Lindsey's failings undetectable. As Lindsey's biographer and successor of Lindsey's theological Unitarianism, characterised by its dogma and rejection of expression in

²⁰⁰ John Williams, *Memoirs of the late Reverend Thomas Belsham: including a brief notice of his published works, and copious extracts from his diary, together with letters to and from his friends and correspondents* (London, 1833), title page.

worship, Belsham's reputation amongst historians of Unitarianism and nonconformity is seen as closely related to Lindsey. As someone with a personal interest in validating Lindsey's Unitarianism for his own purposes, Belsham's *Lindsey* is as much an apologetic as it is a record of the foundation of the denomination. Seen from a time of hindsight beyond the 1790s when Unitarianism's adherents were almost unanimously cast as destructive republican radicals – most viscerally embodied by the Priestley riots in Birmingham in 1791²⁰¹ – Belsham positions the emergence of Unitarianism under the guidance and energy of Lindsey as a remarkable feat; the work of a martyr to the oppressed rational religion in the face of a cruel and unreformed established Church. Whilst Lindsey was extensively memorialised and commemorated in the years immediately after his death, an instructive comparison with memorialisations of Priestley reveal disagreements about the nature of Unitarianism in the early-nineteenth century.

John Towill Rutt, a London merchant, philanthropist, and Unitarian, produced the twenty-five volume *Theological and Philosophical Works of Joseph Priestley* (1817-32) by subscription over a number of years, the first two volumes of which were a biography of the polymath. Like Belsham with Lindsey, Rutt attempted to situate Priestley's remarkable achievements in an otherwise hostile age. Unlike Belsham, Rutt also wrote a poem about his Priestleyan perspective:

The man in hardy conflict tried,
 Though hireling tongues his gen'rous zeal defame,
 And venal Senates execrate his name,
 Eyes the bright goal and never turns aside, –
 Ev'n though his thankless country shall repay
 With insults rude his patriotic toil,
 With Omar's rage the stores of science spoil,
 And beggar ages in one guilty day!

²⁰¹ David L. Wykes, ““The Spirit of Persecutors exemplified”: The Priestley Riots and the victims of the Church and King mobs’, *TUHS* Vol. 20, No. 1, (Jan., 1991), 17-39.

PRIESTLEY! 'twas thine in polished times to feel
 The dire excesses of a barb'rous age;
 Yet though proud courtiers scorn and bigots rage,
 The sons of Freedom shall applaud thy zeal, –
 Her fadeless wreath shall grateful Science bind,
 And guide to happier shores the friend of human kind.²⁰²

The poem is one of a compilation in *Memorials of the late John Towill Rutt* (1845), the identity of whose compiler is unclear, although the intimacy with which its memoir is written suggests a close family member; Rutt and his wife, Rachel, had thirteen children. The poem's adoration of Priestley is consistent with the memoirists' description of Rutt's 'religious opinions, [which] after their early change from those of his parents, were consistently Unitarian, according to the interpretation given to that word by Dr. Priestley.'²⁰³ Yet even as a committed Priestleyan Unitarian, Rutt also co-authored an expanded autobiography of the chief adherent of uncompromisingly rational Unitarianism, Gilbert Wakefield.²⁰⁴ He was closely acquainted with both men and helped both in their time of need; Priestley after the Birmingham Riots in 1791 and Wakefield after his incarceration in Dorchester jail in 1799. Although there existed multiple iterations of Unitarianism by the early-nineteenth century, biographers of individuals affiliated with either type of Unitarianism did not need to comply with their subject's particular faith. The radical characterisation of Unitarianism and Unitarians in the 1790s remained dominant for some years after and recent scholarship has sometimes extended this homogenous view to the detriment of the complexities that existed within the community. Rutt's biographical work is indicative of how enduring principles were highlighted by biographers commemorating the lives of prominent Unitarians in this period. Yet it was not prudent, from a Unitarian perspective, to characterise one of their own as an individual who did not meet standards widely

²⁰² Rutt, 'To Joseph Priestley, LL.D.' in *Memorials of the late John Towill Rutt* (1845), 61.

²⁰³ 'Memoir of John Towill Rutt', *ibid.*, 12.

²⁰⁴ Rutt, *The Life and Correspondence of Joseph Priestley*; Rutt and Arnold Wainwright, *Memoirs of Gilbert Wakefield* (London, 1804).

expected of him. Literary expediency and self-editing were tools used to present an image of denominational homogeneity in theological and societal senses but biography writing still reveals how the commemoration of individuals was indicative of the existence of multiple Unitarianisms. Like at other points during the height of Unitarianism's religious and social impact on British society, to describe Unitarianism as a gathered church would be to ignore the varied forms of the faith that abounded in these years.

Rutt's poem encapsulates the venerable position in which he and many others in Unitarianism's second generation held Priestley. In the weeks after Priestley's death in February 1804, Thomas Belsham delivered a sermon of remembrance at the Gravel Pit Meeting House in Hackney. Like Rutt, Belsham characterised the eighteenth century as a hostile environment for Priestley's theological and philosophical ideas. The 'superstitions and errors of the times' in which he lived were no barrier for Priestley's conviction and commitment to free inquiry and primitive, true Christianity. His charitableness in seeing the worth in erroneous versions of Christianity, not least Calvinism, set him apart as an individual and perceptive thinker and theologian. Belsham regales how Priestley 'regarded the sincere professors of this pernicious system with compassion rather than contempt.' He 'knew their integrity; he revered their piety' and in a particularly backhanded phrase, Belsham recounted Priestley's 'early education in that rigid sect [to which] he had been indebted for some of his best principles, and his most valuable and permanent durable religious impressions.'²⁰⁵ Whatever charity Priestley extended to his Calvinist teachers and colleagues, Belsham failed to emulate in his remembrance sermon. The simultaneous elevation of values and undermining of those same values is executed as part of Belsham's attempts to ensure to his audience that Priestley encountered perilous forms of

²⁰⁵ Thomas Belsham, *Zeal and fortitude in the Christian ministry illustrated and exemplified: a discourse delivered at Hackney, April 8, 1804, on occasion of the death of the Rev. Joseph Priestley, LL.D. F.R.S. &c. published at the desire of the congregation to which is annexed, a brief memoir of Dr. Priestley's Life and Writings, and a letter from his son, Mr. Joseph Priestley, containing the particulars of his last sickness* (London, 1804), 26.

Christianity throughout his career, illustrating how he was consistently aligned with true Christianity in turn, regardless of acquired knowledge at those various points in his life: ‘For, though persecuted with uncommon rancour by the emissaries of bigotry and malice, even into his silent and remote retreat, he lived by the favour of divine providence to rise superior to them all.’²⁰⁶ Belsham’s veneration is reminiscent in Rutt’s poetic tribute: ‘though proud courtiers scorn and bigots rage, / The sons of Freedom shall applaud thy zeal.’²⁰⁷

One of those sons of Freedom that Rutt doubtless had in mind was the Rajah Ram Modun Roy, who visited Britain in 1830, the year before Rutt published his biography of Priestley. Rutt’s recognition of those men’s similarities was indicated in his dedication of his biography of Priestley to the Rajah. Both men, Rutt saw, exhibited a zeal for country, inquiry, and recovery of universal truths in spirituality. Not only were these truths universal in temporal terms but in recognising the Rajah’s commitment to improving India’s social institutions in principled ways, the truths were universal in spatial terms as well.²⁰⁸ Additionally, having been exposed to the Baptist missionary William Carey’s faith in the first decades of the nineteenth century, Roy had embraced Christianity but came to reject many of the Calvinist components of Carey’s Baptist faith. He turned to a variety of spiritualism that embraced the unity of god – notably inconsistent Hindu polytheism – which formed an important part of the principles of the Brahmo Samaj, a pivotal organisation founded by Roy and Dwarkanath Tagore in 1828 in Calcutta that contributed to the development of Bengali religious, societal, and educational practices in the nineteenth century.²⁰⁹ Rutt’s dedication of his biography of Priestley to Roy

²⁰⁶ *ibid.*, 33; 29, 32.

²⁰⁷ *op.cit.*

²⁰⁸ Rutt, *Life and correspondence*, I, iv.

²⁰⁹ Alan D. Hodder, ‘Emerson, Rammohan Roy, and the Unitarians’, *Studies in the American Renaissance* (1988), 133-148; Kenneth W. Jones, *The New Cambridge History of India, III, 1: Socio-religious reform movements in British India* (Cambridge, 1989), 30-34; there is curiously no references to Roy’s collaborations with Carey in Brian Stanley’s *The History of the Baptist Missionary Society, 1792-1992* (Edinburgh, 1992), 36-67

affirmed affinities that stretched the definitions of Unitarianism and its commitment to free inquiry and social improvement.

The international outlook of Rutt's dedication to Roy contrasts with Belsham's dedication of his biography of Theophilus Lindsey to the grandson of the Bishop of Lincoln, Richard Reynolds. Named after his grandfather, Reynolds attended Lindsey's alma mater, St. John's College, Cambridge, before embarking on a career in law whilst maintaining estates around Little Paxton in Huntingdonshire.²¹⁰ Belsham's dedication describes him as Lindsey's earliest pupil who, 'from calm inquiry, and deliberate judgement, [was] the approver of his principles, the admirer of his character, [and] the emulator of his virtues'.²¹¹ The dedication does not reveal that like Lindsey, Reynolds converted to Unitarianism from Anglicanism. Instead, Reynolds's similarities with Lindsey are grounded in his recognition of Lindsey's attributes. The effect is to emphasise Lindsey's character as much as it is to signal to the reader that Lindsey was properly recognised as a virtuous individual in his lifetime in addition to signalling that those values were imparted on successive generation of Unitarians. As biographer and commemorator, Belsham is concerned with presenting Unitarianism as a living faith that had a recognisable genesis and vessel for its transference to present and future generations.

Notably absent from both Rutt's and Belsham's dedications are references to the doctrines of Unitarianism. Whereas Belsham's dedication to Reynolds was confined to the drawing a comparison between him and Lindsey's principles, the congregation of Essex Street Chapel were additionally entrusted with carrying forward Lindsey's theological work too. Belsham

²¹⁰ W. M. Jacob, 'Richard Reynolds (1674-1744)', *ODNB* (2004); William Page, Granville Proby, & S. Inksip Ladds (eds.), *Victoria County History A History of the County of Huntingdon: Volume 2*. (London, 1932), 332-333; Venn, *Alumni Cantabrigienses, Vol. 1: From the Earliest Times to 1751, Part 3* (Cambridge, 1924), 446.

²¹¹ Belsham, *Memoirs of the Late Reverend Theophilus Lindsey, M.A. including a brief analysis of his works; together with anecdotes and letters of eminent persons, his friends and correspondents: also a general view of the progress of the Unitarian doctrine in England and America* (London, 1812), iii.

dedicated his funeral sermon for Lindsey to that congregation and implored them to remember their

revered founder, whose doctrine may they from conviction embrace! Whose virtues may they closely imitate! And in whose final reward may it be their happiness to partake!²¹²

These words invoke a form of collective responsibility to perpetuate Lindsey's work, character, and principles. Yet entrusting a group bound by a common experience, a common Christianity, and common values was a departure from Belsham's dedication of his remembrance sermon for Priestley to Lindsey whose works, alongside Priestley's, Belsham was 'indebted [to] for that happy revolution which had taken place in my theological system.' Despite Lindsey's infirmities, Belsham continued, the 'venerable survivor' was the best example of the virtues and principles that Priestley embodied:²¹³ 'a dignity, and worth of character, which can alone result from the happy combination of the liberal and comprehensive views of a sublime philosophy, with the moral principles and immortal hopes of rational christianity' were sure to produce 'that holy emulation which will lay a just foundation for the pleasing hope of a happy reunion for the pleasing hope of a happy reunion in another and a better state with those who were most loved and valued here'.²¹⁴ To Belsham, Lindsey was not only the individual embodiment of Priestleyan values, but also ones that were integral to the eternal existence of Unitarians far beyond the temporal world. Continuation of those divine values were noticeably not prescribed to the congregation of Essex Street Chapel in the dedication of Belsham's funeral sermon for Lindsey.

²¹² Belsham, *A Sermon, occasioned by the death of the Rev. Theophilus Lindsey, M. A., preached at the chapel in Essex Street, Strand, November 13th, 1808, to which is added a brief autobiographical memoir* (London, 1808), iii.

²¹³ *ibid.*, iv.

²¹⁴ *ibid.*, v.

Although Belsham held Lindsey in the highest esteem, his private correspondence revealed that there were important qualifications to be made in the wake of Lindsey's death. These were made in response to commemorations published by other authors of the time. Fellow Unitarian John Aikin published a brief memoir of Lindsey in his magazine, *The Athenaeum*, where he placed Lindsey as a successor of the Reformation spirit. Aikin painted a familiar context of erroneous Christianity, corrupted by the Catholic and even Reformed churches. The efforts of Luther and Calvin to enshrine the right to private judgment and restore a scriptural Christianity were clouded in England by the desire of the Church to draw up articles testing the belief of the faithful.²¹⁵ A familiar narrative might continue with most emphasis being placed upon the struggles and injustices of the seventeenth century. Yet Aikin focusses on its successor as the true inheritor of the Reformation spirit 'when many of [the Church's] opinions were called in question by some of its celebrated members; and as the century advanced still farther, many of the clergy seceded from the body, and published strong justifications of their conduct.' Even before he resigned his living in 1773, Lindsey 'began a reform of a very different, but far more important nature than that of either Luther and Calvin, which may in a few years change very materially the religious opinions of this island.'²¹⁶ Regardless of what the future held, and Aikin clearly felt that Lindsey's contributions to continued reform held great and imminent promise, the startling positioning of Lindsey as not just a successor but a figure of greater significance than Luther or Calvin surpassed even Belsham's estimations of his friend's life. Representing Lindsey as the 'Luther of modern times' was inaccurate but only on the grounds that such a comparison painted a false picture of Lindsey's 'character, [and] nor did he pretend to it.'²¹⁷

²¹⁵ John Aikin, 'Memoir of Theophilus Lindsey' in *The Athenaeum, a magazine of literary and miscellaneous information* (January, 1809), vol. v, no. xxv, 41-54, 41.

²¹⁶ *ibid.*, 42.

²¹⁷ Williams, *Memoirs of the late Reverend Thomas Belsham*, 583.

Lindsey was of inestimable character, as his own dedications and memoir demonstrated, but commemoration had to be restrained, even if it was only slight.

Belsham did however, agree with Lutheran characteristics of Lindsey insofar as he was committed to Reformation principles in an otherwise inhospitable atmosphere. In the period that he wrote and compiled his memoir of Lindsey, Belsham observed how ‘twenty or thirty years ago... a Unitarian or Socinian was a sort of monster, at which people gazed as an unusual phenomenon[, t]hey now abound everywhere and are multiplying daily.’²¹⁸ Belsham’s optimism was not quelled by the actions of Lord Sidmouth to more stringently enforce the Toleration Act, nor was it dampened by the High Church party’s efforts to prevent the extension of relief to Unitarians in 1810 to 1812.²¹⁹ But this context within which Belsham wrote Lindsey’s memoir – of an individual who faced many failures and obstacles in the course of founding the Essex Street Chapel – appeared to revive Belsham’s sense that Unitarians were being unjustly targeted by two factions of the Establishment, reminiscent of earlier decades when Lindsey was at his height. There are, then, muted inferences in Belsham’s *Lindsey* to any impending improvement in the extension of rights to Unitarians that Lindsey had spent much of his life fighting for. The correspondence received by Belsham praising his publication lingered on Lindsey’s ‘sacrifice’, his ‘character’ and ‘search for truth’²²⁰ but the same communications reveal the importance of a biographer in memorialising those values to maintain them for future generations. Dissenter, MP and agitator for the passage of the 1813 Doctrine of the Trinity Act Samuel Whitbread wrote that ‘Mr. Lindsey is fortunate in such a biographer’. Anna-Laetitia Barbauld, poet and essayist and prominent Unitarian laywoman, was glad to be reminded of Lindsey’s unflinching commitment to a cause shared by his

²¹⁸ *ibid.*, 609.

²¹⁹ *ibid.*, 616-18, 629-31.

²²⁰ *ibid.*, 634-636.

‘congenial fellow-labourers’ and reassured Belsham that he had ‘borne a testimony for which all good men will thank you’.²²¹ Barbauld’s admiration for the ‘Essex Street Apostate’ was closely related to her admiration for Priestley, the ‘Birmingham Apostle’, who she had come to know during her time in Warrington when her father taught at that town’s famous Dissenting Academy.²²² Whereas Barbauld was glad to read of Lindsey in such adulating tones, reviews from publications which were instinctively disapproving of Unitarians damned Belsham’s panegyric for its ‘soft and sickening style’ illustrated in such phrases as ‘venerable sufferer’ and ‘interesting confessor’.²²³ Such terms were not abandoned by Belsham’s biographer who paid tribute to his subject’s ‘revered Master’ and ‘venerable confessor’.²²⁴ Such veneration in the years immediately preceding Lindsey’s death would suggest that his memory was consistently paid tribute to over the course of the nineteenth century.

In 1904, Lindsey was honoured by the establishment of the Unitarianism’s press being named after him: The Lindsey Press continues to publish. This honour was, however, offset by Unitarianism’s steady movement away from characterising Lindsey as a central, if not *the* central, figure of the foundation of the denomination in England. Ditchfield explains that Lindsey’s reputation in Unitarian histories declined in the nineteenth century for three reasons. First, Lindsey’s non-Dissenting background was at odds with the Dissenting genealogies that made up the majority of Unitarians by the nineteenth century; Lindsey’s initial and never conceded attempts to reform the Church instead of seeking its disestablishment came to be seen as contradictory with this majoritarian Dissenting background. Second, Belsham’s death in

²²¹ *ibid.*

²²² Anna-Laetitia Barbauld, ‘The Apology of the Bishops, in Answer to “Bonner’s Ghost”’ in William McCarthy & Elizabeth Kraft (eds.), *The Poems of Anna Letitia Barbauld* (Athens, GA, 1994), 120; Grace A. Ellis, *Memoir; Letters and A Selection from the Poems and Prose Writings of Anna Laetitia Barbauld* (2 vols., Boston, MA, 1874), I, 5, 19, 36, 229.

²²³ [Anon], ‘Art. IX.’, *The Quarterly Review*, (Dec., 1812), vol. 8, no. 16, 422-437, 430.

²²⁴ Williams, *Memoirs of the late Reverend Thomas Belsham*, x.

1829, which beckoned ‘a gradual fundamental change in perception’ and decline in the theology of Lindsey, Priestley and Belsham, was hastened by the anti-sectarian theology of James Martineau, John Hamilton Thom and John James Tayler. Third was the merely national reach of Lindsey whose influence did not extend to other hotbeds of Unitarianism; America and Poland and Transylvania.²²⁵

These are persuasive explanations, but the neat distinctions are difficult to observe in the commemorative literature and texts on Lindsey produced by nineteenth-century Unitarianism. Robert Spears – the industrious ‘dynamo’ secretary of the British and Foreign Unitarian Association and Unitarian minister who had converted to the faith from Methodism – was undoubtedly a Lindseyan Unitarian.²²⁶ On the centenary of Lindsey’s resignation from the Church, Spears republished Belsham’s *Lindsey* with the intent on ensuring that Lindsey be honoured as a ‘pyramid for ever on the landscape of religious truth’.²²⁷ Yet his short biography of him in *Record of Unitarian Worthies* (1877) remembered him as the meagre ‘founder of Essex Street Chapel’ with little mention of the associated founding of the synonymous denomination. Where William Turner had commemorated Lindsey’s sacrifices at length in his *Lives of Eminent Unitarians*, Spears was less enthusiastic, reducing what often ran to scores of pages in early-nineteenth century commemorations to a few pages: ‘Mr. Lindsey had now renounced the doctrine of the Trinity; yet he remained in the Church, reluctant to leave a

²²⁵ Ditchfield, ‘A Unitarian Saint?’, 83-88; Alan Ruston, ‘Locked in Combat: James Martineau and the Unitarian Association’, *TUHS* (2002), vol. 22, no. 4, 371-383, 375-381. Ruston’s division between Spears and Martineau draws a stark picture of two Unitarianisms in the middle of the nineteenth century. See also, Ruston, ‘Robert Spears – the Nineteenth Century Unitarian Dynamo’, *TUHS* (1999), vol. 22, no. 1, 54-67; Alexander Gordon, ‘Memorial Sermon’ reprinted in *Memorials of Roberts Spears, 1823-1899* (Belfast, 1903), 50-57.

²²⁶ *ibid.*, 87; Ruston, ‘Robert Spears’, *TUHS*.

²²⁷ Spears, ‘Preface to the Centenary Volume’, in Belsham, *Memoirs of Theophilus Lindsey*, (London, 1873), republication, iii.

situation of usefulness.²²⁸ There is comparatively less emphasis on the sacrifice that Lindsey had been remembered for in early-nineteenth century commemorations.²²⁹

Furthermore, and in line with the commemoration of literary pursuits central to the concerns of this chapter, Lindsey as literary constructor of the Unitarian community is less prominent in comparison with earlier commemorations. In response to speculation about the reasons for Lindsey's resignation, Lindsey's *Apology* was merely 'the most elaborate of Mr. Lindsey's publications' and his *BCP Reformed* is omitted entirely.²³⁰ Spears was more concerned in conveying the respectability of the congregation that was drawn to Essex Street Chapel and Lindsey's efforts in establishing the Unitarian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge in 1791.²³¹ There was, then, no mention of Lindsey's other important historical works, most notably *An Historical View of the State of the Unitarian Doctrine and Worship from the Reformation to our own Times* (1783). To Turner, Lindsey's *Apology* was central to the spiritual transformation of Lindsey and in turn a central text of the emergence of Unitarianism in the eighteenth century.²³² Nor did Turner omit to mention the centrality of the development of the *BCP Reformed* as part of the same story.²³³ Lindsey's writings are exhaustively explicated and as a literary figure, Lindsey is remembered as an able but candid religious controversialist who was able to adopt a variety of literary forms when defending and advocating for the Unitarian cause.²³⁴ Turner's commemoration stands in stark contrast to Spears'. The most significant differences derive from the modulation of commemoration in the span of 34 years from 1843 to 1877. By the latter date, Lindsey's literary reputation – as was evident in copious apologia,

²²⁸ Robert Spears, *Memorable Unitarians: Being a Series of Brief Biographical Sketches* (London, 1906), 134. This is a reprint, slightly expanded by Spears's widow on the design of her late husband, of Spears's *Record of Unitarian Worthies* (1877).

²²⁹ *ibid.*, 134-135.

²³⁰ *ibid.*, 136.

²³¹ *ibid.*, 137.

²³² Turner, *Lives of Eminent Unitarians*, II, 38, 42-44.

²³³ *ibid.*, 40, 68.

²³⁴ *ibid.*, 46, 49-50, 58, 65-68.

histories, and religious disputations – was barely commemorated at all. In 1843, Turner was certain that ‘If a Unitarian were called on to vindicate, by examples, the claim of his faith to the character of vital and practical Christianity, among the first names to which he would point with confidence would certainly be that of *Lindsey*’.²³⁵ It is doubtful whether a Unitarian asked the same question after reading Spears’ *Record of Unitarian Worthies* would or could respond in the same way. That Lindsey’s literary reputation had been minimised by 1877 suggests a reduction in the value placed upon the act of the literary contributions made by Unitarianism’s historical community. It also worth bearing in mind Ditchfield’s argument that Spears, whilst an advocate of Lindsey, was writing within a climate of Unitarianism that was cautious of designs to construct a Christian communion leading to congregations and communities calling themselves Unitarian; a climate that was influenced by James Martineau’s vision for the denomination where it was permissible for individuals to identify as such, but communal identification risked sectarianism.²³⁶ A passage in Spears’ preface to the centenary edition of Belsham’s *Lindsey* becomes more barbed when read in this context: Lindsey

became a Dissenter when dissent was very much despised, and Dissenters generally shunned. He also openly avowed his Unitarian views when these sentiments were nearly everywhere abhorred.²³⁷

Beyond the importance of commemorating individuals to construct and sustain Unitarianism’s community and its place in the development of religion in England, the ways in which individuals of the historical community were commemorated were reflections of contemporary conflicts about the direction of Unitarianism. Lindsey’s commitment to denomination

²³⁵ *ibid.*, 81.

²³⁶ Alan Ruston, ‘Locked in Combat’, *TUHS*, 375; Ditchfield, ‘A Unitarian Saint?’, *TUHS*, 85.

²³⁷ Spears, ‘Preface to the Centenary Volume’, in Belsham, *Memoirs of Lindsey*, iii.

construction was revered by Spears and his commemoration of Lindsey served to advocate for a continuation of such processes in his late-nineteenth century context.

Whereas Turner concerned himself with demonstrating that eminent Unitarians could derive from a variety of religious backgrounds, Dissenting and Anglican, Spears omitted many figures whose careers had started in the Church. Lindsey was fortunate to be given six pages where other Anglican converts were not represented at all. The names and legacies of John Jebb, John Jortin, and John Disney, who were all commemorated as eminent Unitarians, were not amongst Spears's worthies who numbered amongst their ranks dubious Unitarians such as Charles Dickens, Richard Price, and Isaac Watts.²³⁸ For all of Spears' advocacy of old Unitarianism with its Biblical grounding, that he omitted key names from the church's worthies is to bear false witness to the community that was integral to the denomination's founding in the late-eighteenth century. Other dubious Unitarians such as Milton, Locke, Newton, Porson, and Paley were included explicitly to demonstrate that 'acute [Trinitarian] thinkers, even when originally prepossessed against Unitarianism' were powerless against the 'irresistible' arguments for supporting it.²³⁹

ii. John Disney

Where Lindsey was a venerable father of the Unitarian church, John Disney, Lindsey's successor and Belsham's predecessor as minister of Essex Street Chapel, was only a 'venerable

²³⁸ Spears, *Memorable Unitarians*, 434, 113, 70; Ruston, 'Robert Spears', *TUHS*, 55, 63. Ruston does not critically scrutinise Spears' worthies, instead presenting it as a valuable source of Unitarian hagiography and history.

²³⁹ Spears, *Memorable Unitarians*, iv.

father' to his family.²⁴⁰ Nevertheless, Thomas Jervis's sermon preached on Disney's death in Mill-Hill Chapel in Leeds, Priestley's old post, saw Disney as an admirable imitator of history's most virtuous figures. Chief of these figures was Christ, whose suffering acted as a blueprint never to be surpassed by the 'catalogue of confessors' who had staked their honour and often their lives for the defence of Christian truth.²⁴¹ Doubtless there is a deference that Jervis's sermon, like so many texts of commemoration in this period, appears to depict their subjects who were 'consistently eirenical, not theologically disputatious, left no ill will, and were universally kind, loved, and respected.'²⁴² It is doubtless that this was not the case, as Alan Ruston went to great lengths to demonstrate awareness of.²⁴³ There were of course grievances, disputes, and incongruities. Yet the existence of such a culture of deference and uncritical veneration urges a different explanation.

Disney's commemorations possess common components which aim to depict Disney as a central individual to a recognisable community. Disney's respectability is complemented by how he was respected by a respectable community in addition to 'all who were competent to judge of the purity of his principles, of the independence, the honour, and integrity of his actions.'²⁴⁴ Disney's memory is similarly the possession of 'every generous and enlightened mind'²⁴⁵ and in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, he was 'highly esteemed... by all who were competent to judge'.²⁴⁶ In order to commemorate Disney, one must possess a predetermined outlook on religion and society. This is consistent with the panegyric language that

²⁴⁰ Thomas Jervis, *The Memorial of the Just. A Sermon, preached in Mill-Hill Chapel, Leeds, on Sunday morning, XXVI January, MDCCCXVII, Occasioned by the Death of the late Reverend John Disney, D.D. F.S.A.* (London, 1817), v.

²⁴¹ *ibid.*, 17-18.

²⁴² Alan Ruston, 'Those Eighteenth-Century Divines: Writing for the New Dictionary of National Biography: Friends of Dr. Williams's Library Fifty-Fifth Lecture' (London, 2001), 5.

²⁴³ *ibid.*, 5-10.

²⁴⁴ Jervis, *The Memorial of the Just*, 38.

²⁴⁵ G. W. M., 'Obituary', *Monthly Repository* (1817), vol. 12, 55-56, 56.

²⁴⁶ *Gentleman's Magazine*, 1st Series (1816), vol. 86, no. 2, 627. See also 'The late Doctor Disney', *The Christian Reformer; or, new evangelical miscellany* (1817), vol. 3, 48.

contextualises such phrases in Disney's commemorations, and it also reveals that these texts are central to the creation of a community; one that positively asserts characteristics of the individual in line with other notables, and one that guards against the sully of the individual's memory by those who do not share in those same mores. There appear, then, to be tests for accessing this community as commemorated, commemorator, and the commemorating. Each party is bound together by adhering to a common set of values which are given authority by the individual's placement within a narrative of historic precedent. The historicizing effect of these machinations are core to the establishment of Unitarian community. In Jervis's case, Disney's Anglican roots did not impede the commemoration of his father-in-law's place in Unitarianism's historical and living community. Disney is described as having discharged his duties with 'exemplary zeal, activity, and usefulness' all while being a committed advocate of recognisably Unitarian values of 'free inquiry [and] the right to private judgment'.²⁴⁷ The shared values of Unitarian community that authorised the commemoration of individuals took precedence over their uncertain spiritual background.

In 1843, Unitarian minister William Turner of Newcastle, son of Unitarian minister William Turner of Wakefield, published *Lives of Eminent Unitarians* in two volumes. In the course of delivering short biographies of a list of eighteenth-century Unitarians – from Anglican or Dissenting backgrounds who 'deserve to be had in lasting remembrance'²⁴⁸ – he established how there were limits in expectation for those who exhibited Unitarian values in the Church (from theological to socio-political aspects) to commit to their conscience and leave their preferment. He explained how Edmund Law, Bishop of Carlisle, Master of Peterhouse College Cambridge and Knightbridge Professor of Moral Philosophy, was an ally of what would

²⁴⁷ Jervis, *The Memorial of the Just*, 39.

²⁴⁸ Turner, *Lives of Eminent Unitarians*, 4.

become Unitarian theological positions as he, like other Unitarians, would not ‘suspend his enquiries or shut his eyes against evidence, on the pretence that his mind was made up’²⁴⁹. But, Turner felt, ‘We may be allowed to regret that he did not emancipate himself from the trammels imposed by his rank and station in a Trinitarian establishment, and that on several trying occasions did not display the fearless and manly independence, as a public man, which might perhaps have been hoped for.’²⁵⁰ For all of Turner’s disappointment to have not claimed a man of such a high station for the emerging denomination, it was and ‘is too much to expect that a bishop should lay aside his mitre, and follow the steps of a Lindsey, a Jebb, a Robertson, or a Disney.’²⁵¹ Such was the sacrifice that these men made, that they are honoured with an indefinite article and, in turn, their name elevated to a hallowing noun. However influential a man like Edmund Law was in contributing to a change in the theological atmosphere of the eighteenth century, for however much this paved the way for men like Robertson, Lindsey, Jebb, and Disney to follow their consciences, Law remained outside of Turner’s canon Unitarians. Turner’s exasperation with those conformed in the Church despite their convictions saying otherwise were not only incomprehensibly dishonest but ignorant of the ‘imperative duty’ they had to sacrifice their livings and follow their conscience.²⁵² For however empathetic or unempathetic Turner’s understanding of Anglicans not having become Unitarians appears, the textual juxtaposition of men like Law who failed to sacrifice their worldly comforts and respectable reputations with men of firm Unitarian identity has the effect of elevating the reputations of those who were commemorated alongside each other in Turner’s pantheon of Unitarian greats.

²⁴⁹ *ibid.*, 179.

²⁵⁰ *ibid.*, 180.

²⁵¹ *ibid.*

²⁵² *ibid.*, 4.

Whilst narratives of sacrifice were not the sole domain of Anglicans turned Unitarians, by the early-nineteenth century Unitarian commemorative literature that focussed on the sacrifice of individuals was increasingly confined to individuals who were once Anglicans. That is to ask, for instance, what did Priestley have to sacrifice by migrating to Unitarianism from a Dissenting position? Indeed, Priestley, with Lindsey's father-in-law Francis Blackburne, had counselled Lindsey against resigning his living to pursue the foundation of a Unitarian society of Christians.²⁵³ Like Lindsey, Disney had been a minister in the Church of England. As a result, Jervis was able to construct an additional narrative on top of the usual tropes of conviction to free enquiry in the face of corrupt Christianity. To Jervis he was amongst the 'heroic band of confessors, who sacrificed upon the altar of truth, the honours and endowments of the world; who renounced its alluring prospects, for the rights of conscience, for the honour of God, for the faith of the gospel, and for the hope of a better resurrection.'²⁵⁴ In the *Monthly Repository* he resigned 'notwithstanding the claims of an infant family, the regard of his parishioners, and many personal and local attachments'²⁵⁵ and in Turner's *Lives of Eminent Unitarians*, gave up higher preferments for uncertainty, the responsibility of provision for his young family, and disapprobation of his father-in-law who Turner lambasts in being 'inconsistently annoyed when any of his friends shewed a disposition to act on the principles he had given them', referring to the vast influence of Blackburne's *Confessional*.²⁵⁶ Disney's historic Anglicanism could not compromise his respectability as conversion to Unitarianism was testament to his having recognised the inherent errors that riddled the Christianity of the Church. Sacrificial narratives had often been employed in tandem with an individual's commitment to Christian truth and freedom of conscience in religion. Bartholomew's Day of

²⁵³ D. O. Thomas, 'Preface and Introduction to John Disney's Diary', *Enlightenment and Dissent* (2002), no. 21, 1-41, 10, 17.

²⁵⁴ *ibid.*, 43.

²⁵⁵ G. W. M., 'Obituary', 55.

²⁵⁶ Turner, *Lives of Eminent Unitarians*, 189-190.

1662 was the most famous case of such a sacrifice and was one that had been emulated by the likes of William Robertson and Theophilus Lindsey in the eighteenth century. Yet Disney's sacrifice, like Robertson's and Lindsey's before him, was of a different nature. These men became Church of England ministers within a society where Dissent had been long established, albeit not as an equally viable alternative to the economic and social prospects that the Church could offer. In the context of a relatively young denomination attempting to establish a recognisable historical community, the sacrificial narrative of historical Anglicans was used as a compounding device for that individual's commemorator, rather than a point of particular focus that was central to their identity. There was a hierarchy of narrative importance and the sacrificial story of Disney's spiritual and theological journey remained secondary to fundamental Reformed Christianity principles that could transcend the spiritual origins of all Unitarians at the start of the nineteenth century.

The Unitarian community was unusually literary in character. Connectedly within commemorative material of individuals, the act of textual commemoration is highly valued. As part of the effort to create a community via commemoration, creating textual genealogies establish and reinforce common values that bind individuals together. Beyond the regularly published collection of sermons and tracts, Disney is remembered as having been the biographer of latitudinarians Arthur Ashley Sykes, John Jebb, and John Jortin.²⁵⁷ Turner praised Disney's representation of Sykes's contradictory latitudinarianism due to that group's desire to gain greater theological liberties from the Articles which were designed "to prevent diversity of opinion;" [whereby] the practical difficulty of applying this principle, and of defining the extent to which the latitude pleased for may be carried, is sufficient to shew that it is quite

²⁵⁷ *ibid.*, 56; Jervis, *The Memorial of the Just*, 44.

inadmissible.²⁵⁸ To Turner, Disney had demonstrated his literary worth in providing an accurate commemoration of Sykes, whose influence was important, but whose latitudinarianism demanded qualification to ensure that he avoided conflation with men of real Christian principle and conviction who were solely avowed Unitarians. Like Sykes, John Jortin had found it permissible to occasionally conform to the Articles whenever it may have been prudent to do so. Both men, like Law, Samuel Clarke, Hoadly, Clayton, Ben Mordecai and others were ‘held in estimation’ but did not have “‘a distinct place in the Unitarian biography,” because they continued in communion with a Trinitarian Church.’²⁵⁹ In recognition of Disney’s misgivings about Jortin’s occasional conformity, Turner praised Disney’s ‘candid turn of mind in a very favourable point of view, especially when we consider the sacrifices which he himself offered at the shrine of religious principle and sincerity.’²⁶⁰ A large part of Turner’s biography of Disney was assessing his subject’s perspectives on figures closely associated with religious Dissent and latitudinarianism in the eighteenth century. Disney’s worth as an ‘eminent’ Unitarian was partly found in the accuracy of his historical perspectives expressed in acceptable biographical forms.

A different genealogy was constructed in Turner’s examination of Disney’s biography of John Jebb. Turner had used Disney’s biography and edition of collected works of Jebb as the backbone of Turner’s own biography of Jebb in his ‘constellation of worthies’.²⁶¹ Not only had Disney proved a vital conduit of information for a later biographer, but his focus on Jebb’s excellent character and outstanding works at the University of Cambridge and in public life

²⁵⁸ Turner, *Lives of Eminent Unitarians*, 194.

²⁵⁹ W. J., ‘Art. I. – Turner’s Lives of Eminent Unitarians’, in *The Christian Reformer; or, new evangelical miscellany* (1843) vol. 10, 425-430, 427. The author is likely to be William Johns, a Welsh-born who after a year-long stint as classical tutor at Manchester Academy from 1799, afterwards was minister of Cheshire Unitarian congregations until his death in 1845. He had written extensively for the *Monthly Repository* and was a close friend of John Rely Beard with whom he edited the *Christian Teacher* from 1832 to 1843. See R. K. Webb, ‘Johns, Williams (1771-1843), Unitarian minister and author’ *ODNB* (2004).

²⁶⁰ Turner, *Lives of Eminent Unitarians*, 201

²⁶¹ *ibid.*, 82; 103, 116.

more generally ‘sufficiently [proved] the cordial interest which [Disney] himself took in these great and important objects, and the decided opinion which he formed and avowed on the leading questions which at that period occupied the attention of the public mind.’²⁶² Turner’s endorsement of Disney’s perspective on the generation that preceded him historicized the nineteenth-century Unitarian community by reinforcing the idea that the first generation of Unitarians adhered to principles that were recognisable and valid for nineteenth-century Unitarians wishing to accurately identify their community’s past members.

However approving Turner was of Disney’s biographical writings in the way that they accurately discerned between first and second rank individuals, his exclusion of Disney’s *Short Memoir of Bishop Edmund Law* (1800) appears to be omitted as Disney’s praise for his friend and mentor was not discerning enough. This was in fact a republication of William Paley’s memoir of Law that was originally printed in Hutchinson’s *History of Cumberland*, vol. II. Disney had republished Paley’s work with extensive notes that largely pertained to Law’s theological disputes whilst at Cambridge but for the most part the republication is an embellishment of the text indicating Disney’s endorsement of Paley’s version of Law’s life.²⁶³ The memoir explained that Law maintained there was ‘nothing in his elevation to his bishopric which he spoke of with more pleasure, than its being a proof that decent freedom of inquiry was not discouraged.’²⁶⁴ Yet the following critique was meek and Disney did not offer any further qualification of Paley’s biographical account: ‘His fault (for we are not writing a panegyric) was the general fault of retired and studious characters, too great a degree of inaction and facility in his public station.’²⁶⁵ This was not opprobrium to the level that Turner had

²⁶² *ibid.*, 197.

²⁶³ Disney inserted a further section from Paley’s dedication of his *Moral and Political Philosophy* (1785) which ‘does equal honour to both parties’. 15-16.

²⁶⁴ [Disney, ed.], *A Short Memoir of the Life of Edmund Law, D. D., Bishop of Carlisle. By William Paley, D. D.* (London, 1800), 13.

²⁶⁵ *ibid.*, 14.

endorsed in his own qualifying remarks about Law.²⁶⁶ Despite the selective use of sources, Turner finds Disney to be a source of ‘several important contributions to the literary and theological history of the last age.’²⁶⁷ Disney’s commemoration as an eminent Unitarian relied on the verification and endorsement of his literary-historical efforts. As he was a contributor to the creation of history that analysed figures and society on the basis of Unitarian values, Disney was a vital part of the historical community and historicizing community that used commemoration to reinforce Unitarianism’s community through time.

The reviewer of the second volume of *Lives of Eminent Unitarians* in *The Christian Reformer* – the most prominent Unitarian periodical after the *Monthly Repository* had ceased publication in 1838 – was impressed by Turner’s work. It served as a connecting publication ‘To us, who have been more or less acquainted with the course and progress of Unitarianism for more than half a century, and who joined its ranks when it was in a manner struggling for existence’ to ‘the faithful and interesting records of those eminent persons, most of them our contemporaries’.²⁶⁸ Yet Turner’s work was limited in that it did not incorporate the lives of ‘Unitarians’ that did not leave the Church or any other church for the fledgling denomination: ‘these narratives are not to be considered as the history of Unitarians in general, but only of such as were *consistent*, as well as “*eminent*”.’²⁶⁹ Turner’s selection method was explained in his introduction and the reviewer was anxious that men who were unorthodox and sympathetic to Unitarian beliefs in the Church in the eighteenth century – ‘men of considerable worth and usefulness, if not of *eminence*’ – should be included in any future volumes of the work.²⁷⁰ This was less a suggestion, rather an imperative in the reviewer’s opinion: ‘For many names yet

²⁶⁶ op. cit. fns. 43 & 44.

²⁶⁷ Turner, *Lives of Eminent Unitarians*, 212.

²⁶⁸ *Christian Reformer*, 425.

²⁶⁹ *ibid.*, 425.

²⁷⁰ *ibid.*, 429.

remain... if not of *eminent*, at least of very *consistent* and *tried* Unitarians, whose memory is worthy of record and ought not to be forgotten – indeed, they will not be forgotten; for *though dead, they yet speak*.²⁷¹ The reviewer's critique of Turner's work is significant in that it reveals the importance of commemoration to Unitarians broadly. Whilst there may not have been agreement about the boundaries of commemoration, that it was a significant, historical, and historicizing act that was central to the reinforcement of Unitarian community is overt.

Disney was remembered by Gordon in *Heads of English Unitarian History* as the singular example of Anglicans who seceded from the Church to Unitarianism and became a minister: Jebb, Wakefield, Friend, and Evanson all left the Church but none made a lasting contribution in service of the denomination. Only Thomas Fyshe Palmer exited the Church to become a minister to a congregation he founded at Dundee.²⁷² Gordon's work, like Turner's and Spears' before him, acknowledged the contribution of Disney but in no great depth. Their Anglicanism was significant but only in that it validated the Unitarian cause and restricted the use of the Unitarian name to a defined set of theological beliefs; beliefs that were closer to true Christianity than that which was to be found in the Church of England. The Anglican contribution to Unitarianism was remembered as being slight in comparison to the impact made by those who came over from Dissenting churches: 'The Unitarian ministry has never been without important recruits from the Trinitarian churches; but they have rarely come from the Establishment.'²⁷³ Disney was the last Anglican seceder to be the minister of a prominent London Unitarian pulpit. A Dissenter, Belsham, succeeded him. The appointment was a 'yielding to the inevitable; it marked in a signal manner the reversal of Lindsey's hopes of an

²⁷¹ *ibid.*, 430.

²⁷² Gordon, *Heads of English Unitarianism*, 43.

²⁷³ *ibid.*, 44.

increasing stream of Anglican coadjutors; and by a section of his friends it was ill received, and treated as a new departure, at variance with the original purpose of his chapel.’²⁷⁴

Like Turner and Spears, Gordon’s collective biography sought to simplify English Unitarian history. The emphasis is, however, about the ascendancy of Unitarianism as a movement, something that did not belong to any one or group of individuals.²⁷⁵ Although theology and literature were integral parts that served to historicize the community, identifying its intellectual origins as being in the sixteenth century, Gordon placed most emphasis on the importance of history as the vector through which individuals could learn about Unitarianism. Where Christian time had been a decisive part in how Lindsey, Priestley, and Belsham were remembered by their biographers, history was now seen as something that held power more independently of religion. Gordon’s title suggests that Unitarianism was a cohesive church and corresponding theological system and while his book does not ignore the splintering of the church and its messy origins, it still reads as a history that is desirous for Unitarianism to retain unity in order to be easily understandable to late-nineteenth century minds.

iii. Conclusion

If, as Tessa Whitehouse has suggested, Unitarianism and Catholicism are the denominations ‘least readily associated with spiritual autobiography’, this suggests that they may be more closely associated with biography writing.²⁷⁶ That is certainly apparent with Unitarianism: memoirs, collected works, obituaries, and commemorations abound and vastly outnumber

²⁷⁴ Gordon, *Addresses, biographical and historical* (London, 1922), 270.

²⁷⁵ *ibid.*, [3].

²⁷⁶ Whitehouse, ‘Structures and processes of English spiritual autobiography’, 107.

literary publications that might be considered autobiography or even conversion narratives such as Lindsey's *The Apology of Theophilus Lindsey* (1774) or Disney's *Reasons for... quitting the Church of England* (1782).²⁷⁷ Yet what Whitehouse's claim also leads to is a suggestion that Unitarianism was a denomination that placed great value on the act of commemoration; not of one's own life, but of another's. The chapter has argued in favour of this being the case. The commemorator or biographer is regarded highly for having contributed to the establishment and reinforcement of Unitarianism's history. The act of historicization served to construct community across and through time; Unitarian biographers were forever connected with their subjects, just as their subjects were forever connected with them.

To consider nineteenth-century Unitarianism as a gathered church, it is essential to highlight the commonalities of processes in community construction and development, rather than the differences that commemorative writing might reveal. Those differences are an integral part of the Unitarian story; they indicate that the denomination was not, as has sometimes been presented, a gathered church in that it acted homogeneously, that it had an agreed upon past and well-defined community structure and outlook for its future. Two key points have been unearthed from analysis on this basis. First, that literary commemoration was an integral part of the development of Unitarian community. It historicized Unitarian values, connecting contemporary Unitarians to the past via endorsement or selective rejection of literary commemorative works. Second, nineteenth-century Unitarians continued to struggle to incorporate the complexities of the Anglican origins of its eighteenth-century establishment and first generation into its literary community. Although Lindsey's place in Unitarian history was unignorable, his representation of Anglican concepts of community that valued

²⁷⁷ D. Bruce Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative: Spiritual Autobiography in Early Modern England* (New York, 2005).

denominationalist tendencies – effectively exclusionary of theological divergence – were challenged. Even for defenders of Lindsey’s reputation such as Robert Spears, caution around Unitarianism’s Anglican past was circumvented. More minor figures, who were celebrated in the early-nineteenth century, were slowly marginalised in Unitarian histories and commemorations. The forgetting of John Disney was indicative of this movement which, furthermore, severed ties to Disney’s literary commemoration of the generation that preceded him; Jebb, Law, and Jortin who, whilst never avowed Unitarians, were acknowledged as vital to the emergence of the denomination in earlier nineteenth-century generations.

Biblical Unitarianism as articulated and practiced by Lindsey, Priestley, and their followers came to be seen as antiquated in light of theological and religious developments that transpired in the nineteenth century. Whilst these individuals were still being historicized, their theology was challenged by Biblical criticism. Although Biblical Unitarianism was kept alive by Robert Spears, John Rely Beard, founder of the Unitarian Home Missionary Board (1854), and Alexander Gordon, the more prominent and nationally influential Unitarianism was that shaped by James Martineau. By the middle of the nineteenth century roughly two Unitarianisms existed and correspondingly, there existed roughly two Unitarian histories. Historicization of Unitarianism and its community was affected by these developments in the late-nineteenth century. The anti-denominationalism of Martineau was, Gordon saw in 1895, at the heart of the ‘enlightened traditions’ that Manchester College’s removal brought to Oxford in 1889.²⁷⁸ Despite an increase in the tolerance of nonconformity at Oxford and elsewhere, Manchester College’s removal was viewed with suspicion by those who remembered the exclusivity of Biblical Unitarianism in the early-nineteenth century.

²⁷⁸ Gordon, *Heads of English Unitarian History*, 54.

Chapter 3

Manchester College, Unitarianism, and the University of Oxford

In 1889, Manchester New College resolved to remove to Oxford. The institution, first designed to accommodate dissenters who could not access education at England's ancient universities, had been established as the Warrington Academy (1756), before moving to Manchester (1786), York (1803), back to Manchester (1840), and finally London (1853).²⁷⁹ In moving around the country, it correspondingly, and necessarily, changed its identity, whether consciously or not. Manchester, York, and London were places with notably different intellectual, economic, social, and ultimately religious characteristics. The men who passed through its doors as students would have found professors and teachers with notably different outlooks: pedagogical approach, religious duties, denominational allegiance, intellectual prowess. Removing the College to Oxford had been an idea long before it became a reality. The College's close attachment to University Hall of University College, London, had substantially complicated the trustees' perspective on the best option for the future of the College. Issues of financial stability, questions about whether the College was best placed to fulfil the needs of its affiliated denomination, and changes in religious outlook proved to be divisive for many

²⁷⁹ Irene Parker, *Dissenting Academies in England: their rise and progress and their place among the educational systems of the country* (Cambridge, 1914); Herbert McLachlan, *English Education Under the Test Acts, Being the History of the Nonconformist Academies, 1662-1820* (Manchester, 1931); David L. Wykes, 'The Contribution of the Dissenting Academy to the Emergence of Rational Dissent', in Haakonssen (ed.), *Enlightenment and Religion*, 99-139.

years.²⁸⁰ The College's removal did not symbolise a gathered, religiously and theologically coherent church or movement to Oxford, rather the removal of 'the enlightened traditions' of its past principals and tutors, namely Charles Wellbeloved, John Kenrick, Robert Wallace, John James Tayler, and James Martineau, whose commitment to Biblical criticism in the face of Biblical Unitarianism was to influence perception of the denomination from Anglican quarters and be the source of minor yet important divisions amongst interested parties involved in the foundation of the college.²⁸¹

In line with its long history of geographical change, as well as contending with and implementing ideological changes over one hundred years since removing to Manchester from Warrington, Manchester New College's removal to Oxford was a challenge that was at least partly familiar to those who had dealt with the decisions and tasks of assimilation into a new community before: to what extent was assimilation a priority given the unique religious contexts of Oxford? Amid substantial religious changes in Oxford itself, would the arrival of another theological college be an event facing great opposition? Furthermore, how would the removal to Oxford effect the designs of the College as a servant for Unitarian congregations and communities around the country? With denominationalism in apparent decline, what exactly was the cause for concern amongst Unitarians for their church and how would Oxford's apparently more accommodating (yet still predominantly Anglican) religious atmosphere affect the College's ability to keep sight of its historic duties? This chapter's central concerns are approached in two ways. First, the context of nonconformists in Oxford, the development of their outlook in the years leading up to 1889, and the ways in which some members of the University attempted to retain influence in key areas, notably in the teaching of theology.

²⁸⁰ V. D. Davis, *A History of Manchester College: From its Foundation in Manchester to its Establishment in Oxford* (London, 1932).

²⁸¹ Gordon, *Heads of English Unitarianism*, 54.

Second, the decisions taken to establish the College in Oxford by influential figures who had long connections with the institution, the steps taken to integrate into Oxford, and the continuities of Unitarian identities that remained an integral part of the College's presentation in Oxford, predominantly expressed through its architecture. In all, it characterises the institutionalisation of Manchester College at Oxford as an act of historicization that that was yet another indication of the tensions that existed within the Unitarian church.

i. Contexts in Oxford

Unlike other colleges in the University of Oxford, Harris Manchester College (as it has been known since 1996) does not have a recent institutional historical monograph.²⁸² Most other colleges in Oxford were founded in the city and only a few were founded elsewhere and then removed to Oxford. Of those that removed to Oxford; Mansfield College and Regent's Park, Mansfield and Harris Manchester are the only ones to have been granted full college status. Regent's Park remains a Private Permanent Hall yet all three of these institutions are similar in that they were founded as theological institutions, serving three denominations: Unitarianism (Manchester), Congregationalists (Mansfield), and Baptists (Regent's Park). Furthermore, all these institutions had a long history to draw on before coming to Oxford. Manchester College's history has already been mentioned and will be further elucidated on. Mansfield was previously Spring Hill College, Birmingham (founded 1838), before removing to Oxford in 1886. Regent's Park was founded in London in 1752 and moved around the capital until settling in

²⁸² L. W. B. Brockliss, *The University of Oxford: A History* (New York, 2016). 'Further Reading' section has a nearly comprehensive list of college histories; Harris Manchester College is absent. Histories of Manchester College from its inception in 1786 have been produced twice in Davis, *A History of Manchester College* and Barbara Smith (ed.), *Truth, liberty, religion: essays celebrating two hundred years of Manchester College* (Oxford, 1986).

Regent's Park as a constituent college of the University of London in 1855. It relocated to Oxford at a much later date in 1927. Alongside the Protestant nonconformist institutions being established in Oxford in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, there were many religious halls founded in the proximity of Oxford, each representing theological outlooks different from that which was integral to established Oxford colleges:²⁸³ Keble College (1870; Anglo-Catholic), Hertford College (1874; Anglican),²⁸⁴ St. Stephen's House (1876; Anglo-Catholic), Wycliffe Hall (1877; Evangelical Anglican), Pusey House (1884; Anglo-Catholic), Campion Hall (1896; Jesuit), St Benet's Hall (1897; Benedictine), Greyfriars (1910; Franciscan), Blackfriars (re-founded in 1921 after its 1221 foundation; Dominican), and St Peter's Hall (1929; High Anglican). There was, then, a vast influx to Oxford of theological diversity in organised form, yet this chapter is concerned with the nonconformist foundations, particularly that of Manchester College, and secondarily with Mansfield. In each institution's case, there was a recognisable tradition of learning which was affiliated and influenced by an interested denominational community. Like Oxford's affiliation with the Church of England, these institutions were responsible for supplying ministers for the continuation of a Christian communion. As such, the removal of these institutions represents complex confluence of ideas, experiences, and expectations, characterised by religious interest.

Increases in religious toleration and the steady rise of democratic principles across the course of the nineteenth century directly affected the universities of Oxford and Cambridge. Each institution slowly opened their doors to sections of religious society previously excluded from their buildings. Despite these being experienced in similar ways, Oxford and Cambridge dealt with accommodation of new sections of society in notably different ways. The Oxford

²⁸³ *ibid.*, 369-370, 376-377.

²⁸⁴ M. C. Curthoys, 'The Colleges in the New Era', in Brock & Curthoys (eds.), *The History of the University of Oxford: Vol. VII, Part 2* (New York, 2000), 115-158, 117-118.

Movement cast a long shadow over the university's outlook and was influential in the way that its administrators dealt with the onslaught of government commissions in the middle of the nineteenth century.²⁸⁵ Notable was the increased centralisation of the university's administrative structure that in effect strangled the colleges' ability to act as nearly independent institutions, decreasing diversity in teaching approaches. Alongside criticism from liberal quarters in the university and excluded voices without, dissatisfaction with the provision and structure of university teaching was prevalent in the nineteenth century. The University Reform Act of 1854 was responsive to wider societal concerns about university reform, rather than interested parties within the universities. Prominent debates about the religiosity or secularity of future British society continued anxieties from earlier generations about the establishment's exclusivity when it came to unorthodox Trinitarians, non-Trinitarians, Catholics, and Jews.²⁸⁶ At the core of the established class's concerns was the question: 'was it possible both to preserve Anglican hegemony and to remain "National"?'²⁸⁷ Decoupling the university from the Church risked jeopardising the preference of the university in the nation.

The collegiate structure of Oxford necessitates those institutions being scrutinised in microcosm alongside broader works that consider the University at large, such as the indispensable *History of the University of Oxford* series.²⁸⁸ Throughout the nineteenth century, the already unusual relationship between College and University changed profoundly, not least because of the huge demographic changes in its teaching and undergraduate bodies. The sons

²⁸⁵ Peter B. Nockles, 'Conflicts in Oxford: Subscription and Admission of Dissenters, Hampden Controversy, University Reform', in Steward J. Brown, Peter B. Nockles, James Pereiro (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Oxford Movement* (New York, 2017), 123-136; H. C. G. Matthew, 'Noetics, Tractarians and the Reform of the University of Oxford in the Nineteenth Century', in *History of Universities* (1990), vol. 9, 196-225; Simon Skinner, *Tractarians and the Condition of England: The Social and Political Thought of the Oxford Movement* (Oxford, 2004).

²⁸⁶ Lawrence Goldman, 'Oxford and the Idea of a University in Nineteenth-Century Britain', in *Oxford Review of Education* (2004), vol. 30, 757-592.

²⁸⁷ Matthew, 'Noetics, Tractarians and Reform of the University of Oxford', 195.

²⁸⁸ *The History of the University of Oxford* (8 vols., Oxford, 1984-2000).

of poorer families were being admitted with greater frequency, as were sons of mercantile and professional families.²⁸⁹ Although it would be 1920 by the time women were first awarded university degrees, the private ventures of Lady Margaret Hall (1878) and Somerville College (1878) led the charge to provide education along the same model as traditional Oxford colleges and were soon followed by St. Hugh's Hall (1886) and St. Hilda's Hall (1893). These foundations did not escape debates around the religiosity of education, but they were not a replica of the dichotomous struggle about whether to reform; the women's education movement was first a struggle to provide education for woman at all.²⁹⁰ Whilst there were commonalities between the two original foundations, Lady Margaret Hall was founded as an Anglican institution encouraged by Edward Talbot, the first Warden of Keble College, and his wife, Lavinia; Somerville was supported by influential liberals with strong connections to Balliol such as James Legge, T. H. Green and his wife, Charlotte, and Mary Augusta Ward.²⁹¹ The religious inflection of debates around admission were, then, still important long past the passing of the University Reform Act of 1854 which prohibited religious tests for those taking BA degrees.

Although another liberty had been won by nonconformists in the nineteenth century, there was still a fight to be fought, and liberal factions in Oxford were prominent in winning the debate that secured the passing of the Universities Tests Acts of 1871 which abolished tests for more positions within the universities: professorships, fellowships, studentships were now (largely) free for nonconformists, Catholics, and non-Christians to hold.²⁹² The nexus of liberals at

²⁸⁹ M. C. Curthoys & Janet Howarth, 'Origins and Destinations: The Social Mobility of Oxford Men and Women', in Brock & Curthoys (eds.), *The History of the University of Oxford: Vol. VII*, 570-595; Lawrence Stone, 'The Size and Composition of the Oxford Student Body, 1580-1910', in Stone (ed.), *The University in Society* (Princeton, NJ, 1974), 3-110;

²⁹⁰ Howarth, 'In Oxford but... not of Oxford': The Women's Colleges', in *The History of the University of Oxford: Vol. VII*, 327-308, 251.

²⁹¹ Pauline Adams, *Somerville for Women: An Oxford College, 1879-1993* (Oxford, 1996).

²⁹² Christopher Harvie, 'Reform and Expansion, 1854-1871', in Brock & Curthoys (eds.), *The History of the University of Oxford: Vol. VI: Part 1* (Oxford, 1997),

Oxford who were sympathetic to the nonconformist cause, would also help in securing the removal to nonconformist institutions in the city at the end of the 1880s. Parallel with their work to make the University more hospitable to nonconformist undergraduates who went up to colleges after 1871, they were deeply involved in attempts to transform the curricula, examinations, and nascent faculties.²⁹³ Despite their efforts to accommodate minority groups of nonconformists in the University, there was a substantial fear in nonconformist communities that those who went up to Oxford or Cambridge would go down an Anglican and, still worse, would go down an unbeliever. T. H. Green wrote to R. W. Dale, warning that ‘The opening of the national universities to Nonconformists has been, in my judgment, an injury rather than a help to Nonconformity.’²⁹⁴ Quelling this anxiety inspired divergent solutions, ranging from simply discouraging attendance of Oxford to an alternative, parallel faculty of theology. In this sense, the word removal is perhaps not the most adequate term to describe the movement of Mansfield and Manchester Colleges to Oxford. Where it accentuates the process of actively moving away from its current location, it does not adequately represent the process of being pulled to the next location. Uncertainty about how nonconformist institutions would be accommodated was central to debate in both liberal and conservative camps.²⁹⁵ The Congregationalists at Mansfield ‘saw themselves as the heirs of the puritans thrown out of the University in 1662.’²⁹⁶ Similarly for Unitarians, being in Oxford meant being back at the heart of the establishment; the University was representative of the nexus of Church and State that the community had been battling, long before it had formed as a religiously and theologically

²⁹³ Harvie, *The Lights of Liberalism: University liberals and the challenge of democracy 1860-1886* (London, 1976); Peter Hinchliff, ‘Religious issues, 1870-1914’, in *The History of the University of Oxford: Vol. VII*, 97-113, 103-104.

²⁹⁴ T. H. Green quoted in A. W. W. Dale, *The Life of R. W. Dale of Birmingham* (London, 1899), 496.

²⁹⁵ Hinchliff, ‘Religious issues, 1870-1914’; *idem.*, *Benjamin Jowett and the Christian Religion* (New York, 1987), 121-151; Elaine Kaye, *Mansfield College, Oxford: Its Origin, History, and Significance* (Oxford, 1996), 43-58.

²⁹⁶ Brockliss, *The University of Oxford*, 376.

coherent denomination from 1774: as important as their return was their acceptance, for both notions implied a victory for freedom of conscience in religion.

Nevertheless, there was an apprehension that characterised the return and, in response, there was a very conscious effort to assimilate in Oxford as much as possible. Scepticism about denominationalism had been a pressing issue for Unitarians since James Martineau rose to prominence but not all supporters of the College were convinced of the anti-denominational thought that implied a challenge of its theological heritage. In many ways, Martineau's outlook was responsive to wider crises of belief²⁹⁷ – and crises in belief's relationship with society – that was challenged by, amongst other things, Comtean Positivism, secularism, and a prevalence of agnosticism in men of science and literature.²⁹⁸ The temptation to default to extreme, yet comfortable positions in Epicureanism or Roman Catholicism proved unsatisfactory to Victorian thinkers who were anxious to recover their faith in progress and perpetual improvement and to recalibrate Christian faith for a new generation.²⁹⁹ As such, attempts to find alternative solutions that satisfactorily reconciled these moral challenges were influential in formulating Martineau's scepticism of denominationalism.

Martineau is sometimes situated apart from the developments within the denomination. His attempts to articulate a solution to crisis in belief was also seen in the short-lived Free Christian Union (1867-70). This reconfirmed that 'Unitarianism had always been a vat in which attempts to reconcile Christianity with modern intellectual culture could be brewed up before being

²⁹⁷ Ralph Waller, 'James Martineau: the development of his thought'.

²⁹⁸ Jeffrey Paul Von Arx, *Progress and Pessimism: Religion, Politics, and History in later 19th Century Britain* (Cambridge, Mass. & London, 1985), 1-5; J. R. Moore, 'Theodicy and society: the crisis of the intelligentsia', in R. J. Helmstadter and B. V. Lightman (eds.), *Victorian Faith in Crisis: Essays on Continuity and Change in 19th-Century Belief* (Basingstoke, 1990), 153-186; T. R. Wright, *The Religion of Humanity: the Impact of Comtean Positivism on Victorian Britain* (Cambridge, 1986), 149-157; Susan Budd, *Varieties of Unbelief: Atheists and Agnostics in English Society 1850-1960* (London, 1977).

²⁹⁹ Von Arx, *Progress and Pessimism.*, 9-10; T. Larsen, *Crisis of Doubt: Honest Faith in Nineteenth-Century England* (Oxford, 2006), 248-251, 253.

sampled by mainstream Protestants.’³⁰⁰ Yet this suggests that there were no Unitarians who were more comfortable in identifying as ‘mainstream Protestants’ whereas concerns about the dogmatic implications of denominationalism were not universally shared amongst Unitarians. Martineau was widely respected amongst all Unitarians, yet when it came to institutionalising his philosophy and theology, as was attempted at Manchester College from 1889, the coherence of Unitarianism was called into question. As such, the attempts to articulate Manchester College’s identity in Oxford was a confluence of desires to retain elements of the college’s Unitarian heritage, its commitment to progress and Christian truth that was thought by some not to be found in denominationalism, and a desire to assimilate into a historically hostile city and University whose own approach to theology and the Church was in flux throughout the late-nineteenth century.³⁰¹

Dissenting academies have received a lot of attention from historians in recent years. Protestant dissenting traditions and nonconformity have recently been at the centre of a multi-volume Oxford history and dissenting academies more specifically are at the heart of the long-anticipated Dissenting Academies project coordinated from Queen Mary University, London. Within these studies, Mansfield and Manchester Colleges have received attention, notably Elaine Kaye’s history of Mansfield and a collection of essays edited by Barbara Smith on Manchester College. This chapter seeks to connect the nonconformist attitudes and contexts in Oxford before the arrival of these two nonconformist institutions in the late 1880s. Whilst focus is largely on Manchester’s establishment and reception, the precedent of Mansfield’s own experiences demands a comparative analysis, which reveals that negative prejudices towards

³⁰⁰ Michael Ledger-Lomas, ‘Unitarians and the contradictions of liberal Protestantism in Victorian Britain: the Free Christian Union, 1867-70’, in *Historical Research* (Aug., 2010), vol. 83, no. 221, 486-505, 490.

³⁰¹ Daniel Inman, *The Making of Modern English Theology: God and the Academy at Oxford, 1833-1945* (Minneapolis, MN, 2014); Mark D. Chapman, *Theology and Society in Three Cities: Berlin, Oxford and Chicago, 1800-1914* (Cambridge, 2014), chapter 4.

Unitarians were alive and well. But beyond the comparative approach, the chapter reveals that nonconformists within Oxford before 1886 were not demanding that nonconformist institutions should remove themselves to the city. That Mansfield and Manchester were postgraduate-only theological seminaries somewhat reduced the risk from the perspective of Churchmen, wary of the deteriorative effect the colleges would have on the unique relationship between University, Church and State. Despite this, nonconformist activities within the University before 1886, centred on the Oxford University Nonconformists' Union led by Robert F. Horton, were desirous to reduce the 'feeling of isolation' amongst nonconformists in the Anglican institution, and, secondarily, were keen to retain nonconformist undergraduates' allegiance to their faith in the face of temptation in the form of Anglo-Catholicism, Anglicanism, and agnosticism. Moreover, the chapter establishes how the reception of Manchester College was contemporaneously and historically rationalised by Unitarians, University (Anglican) sympathisers, and adversaries. The fast-paced changes being made to the teaching of Theology at the University were emblematic of an atmosphere of vulnerability and anxiety from the perspective of the Board of the Theology Faculty. The arrival of Mansfield and Manchester Colleges, embodying to different degrees a commitment to historical criticism as advocated for by German theologians, was but another challenge to the University's place as an effective Anglican seminary for the Church of England. Despite this, organisations such as the Society for Historical Theology proved that such challenges were not opposed by everyone in the University as the Society brought together prominent Anglicans and nonconformists to pursue what was becoming increasingly an accepted part of the study of Theology more broadly. The chapter also examines how Unitarian identities changed within these contexts: assimilation of Manchester College within Oxford was ultimately an exercise in diminishing the perceived negative aspects of the denomination but in doing so also served to disconnect Unitarianism's premier theological college with its denomination, and notably its ancestral home in North

West England, where such feelings of anti-denominationalism and anti-dogmatism, as were pursued in Manchester College, were not attractive to those seeking greater clarity in their spiritual needs.

ii. Theological and historical outlooks

There were a series of ceremonies to commemorate the removal of Manchester New College to Oxford. First in 1889 when teaching commenced in the city, second in 1891 to commemorate the laying of the foundation stone at the new buildings in Holywell, and lastly the public opening of the buildings in October 1893. Analysis of these events reveals that Unitarianism was almost unrecognisable from what it was a generation before. Although connected in its history and name to its major British base in Manchester, the community of Unitarians who steered the college to Oxford, assimilating it to its new surroundings, were men with substantially different outlooks from their predecessors and counterparts in Manchester and elsewhere. This is not to say that there was a fundamental or definitive division between Manchester and Manchester College Unitarians; names from familiar families were integral to the college's founding in 1889 to 1893 and some Manchester Unitarians were keenly interested in its activities and life in Oxford. Yet it is clear from the nature of the three commemorations that there was a significant departure from what Unitarianism was in the past and what it was in Manchester and beyond. Analysis of these events here examines not just how commemoration took place but what was being commemorated, especially when the community continued to be divided about the project. Returning to historical critiques of the Established Church was a risk, Unitarianism with a dogmatic foundation was a risk also. Yet

to lose both main forms of inherited identity risked irrevocable departure from the denominationalism that was still desired by many Unitarians in Britain.

Reflecting on Oxford in the late-nineteenth century, the Warden of Merton, George Charles Brodrick wrote in 1900 that the Home Rule question – ‘this supreme test’ – did not seriously disturb the ‘even tenor of Oxford society’. With little generosity he went on to say that he found that only Liberal Unionists or Conservatives were the only men who did know something about the issue. Home Rulers possessed but ‘child’s knowledge’ on the subject with Gladstone, their leader, naturally enduring most of his ire: “‘He seems to conceive some divine inspiration for his misguided policy, but to my mind it has its origins in a completely opposite sphere.’”³⁰² The obliviousness of Brodrick to the political ruptures that certainly did penetrate Oxford is partly paralleled by a limited perspective on questions of religion in the University. All Church parties in the middle of the century, he wrote, had reacted to the malignant ‘Neo-Catholic’ revival with ‘intolerant dogmatism’ contributing to a general ‘*odium theologicum*’ that had marred previous generations. Yet by the end of the nineteenth century, ‘philosophical toleration of opinion’ had superseded with but glints of past disagreements rearing their head.³⁰³

During his reflections on Oxford and British society more broadly, Brodrick’s failure to mention the foundations of either Mansfield (1886) or Manchester (1889) Colleges is a curious omission, if not one consistent with his serene characterisations of Oxford in these otherwise transformative years. It might be prudent to read this as indicative of the relative ease with which both of those institutions assimilated into the University and city in a relatively short timeframe. And having lived through years of religious and administrative tumult in the city,

³⁰² G. C. Brodrick, *Memories and impressions 1831-1900* (London, 1900), 361, Merton College Records D.1.35.7, John A Stevenson, ‘Reminiscences of the Hon. George Brodrick, Warden of Merton College – 1882-1902’, 13.

³⁰³ Brodrick, *Memories and impressions*, 361.

Brodrick might have also seen the arrival of Mansfield and Manchester as a natural continuation of the ideas that could be brought to Oxford without violent reaction because of the reforms from the 1850s onwards. Brodrick's involvement in these foundations was far from peripheral, as his reminiscences suggest. As Warden of Merton between 1881 and 1903, he presided over the sales of land to each fledgling nonconformist institution: Merton College received £3,000 for the Mansfield site and £8,000 for the Manchester site as part of a broader period of selling off its Holywell manor possessions after the agricultural hardships of the 1870s. In total, Merton had made £120,000 by 1900, more than making up for lost revenues earlier in the century.³⁰⁴ His involvement was not confined to financial decisions for his college: Brodrick attended both colleges' foundation ceremonies commemorating their commencement of teaching in the city and the opening of their buildings.

The peripheral role Brodrick gave to the colleges in his brief recent religious history of Oxford in the nineteenth century is starkly contrasted by the central role that each institution gave to the University in their foundation histories and narratives. The story of the removal of the Congregationalists' and Unitarians' premier educational institutions to Oxford is one of triumph against the odds:³⁰⁵ the most Anglican place in the country, the seat of highest learning and centre of exclusivity for centuries had been penetrated not just with insidious, unorthodox, anti-dogmatic ideas but with the physical, legal presence of nonconformist theological colleges who were committed to teaching their students those same destructive ideas.

Yet what this represented was not agreed upon. Speaking at the opening of the Manchester College buildings on October 18th, 1893, Principal James Drummond explained how the

³⁰⁴ G. H. Martin & J. R. L. Highfield, *A History of Merton College, Oxford* (New York, 1997), 323.

³⁰⁵ Davis, *A History of Manchester College*, particularly 160-202.

college's removal to Oxford was yet another step in the story of the Protestant Reformation. Drummond's address put the University at the centre of England and Britain's religious intolerance that had had to be slowly eroded to get to a vaguely tolerant outlook in the present day: the Reformation had admirably shunned one erroneous communion but the new Church still 'wished to confine the changes of thought and of ceremonial within the narrowest possible limits.' Wycliffe had done good work in an effort to expand Scriptural knowledge but was 'premature' to Oxford's eyes, Colet's designs had met a similar fate, as did those of Tyndal: 'It is well to remember these old times, when the most generous minds could snatch only stolen glimpses of the higher reaches of thought and emotion; for by the suffering and the blood of that age of strife and martyrdom our liberty has been purchased.'³⁰⁶ Naturally to Drummond, the seventeenth century was one of stark contrasts. The phrase ('Truth, Liberty, and Religion') that adorned and still adorns the entrance to Manchester College being echoed in this passage on Puritanism:

Never has religion been more real. Never has the heart been more completely prostrated in adoring love before the majesty of God. Never, as Milton has testified, has the love of virtue been implanted more deeply in the human breast. Never have men gone with more confidence and courage to encounter danger and death for truth and freedom.³⁰⁷

The acts passed to limit tolerance in the 1660s were enacted with familiar disdain for nonconformists, even if methods to eradicate nonconformity had moved on from being 'cauterised by the stake'.³⁰⁸ The University of Oxford was complicit in these acts, adopting and doubling down on their own system of exclusion, embodied most completely by the 'vulgar

³⁰⁶ *Manchester College, Oxford. Proceedings and Addresses on the occasion of the Opening of the College Buildings and Dedication of the Chapel, October 18-19, 1893.* (London, 1894), 36-7.

³⁰⁷ *ibid.*, 38.

³⁰⁸ *ibid.*, 43.

and abusive bigot... Dr. Sacheverell': 'It will hardly be doubted at the present day', Drummond continued,

that this narrow policy was disastrous to the University itself. It cut it off from the living stream of national sentiment and movement; and a true reflection of the manifold forms of English life and thought was no longer to be found in its Colleges and Halls.³⁰⁹

Here, then, Drummond deviates from his linear narrative. On one hand, excluded nonconformists had no choice but to provide education for their communities and far from struggling to meet the ministerial and lay demands for such institutions, instead thrived, going one step further than England's ancient universities in not demanding any test of denominational or sectarian allegiance to receive an education. At the same time, not altogether separately but separately nonetheless, Drummond also pointed out how universities were being set up in England – the University of London and Owen's College in Manchester – where the absence of religious tests enabled the sons of nonconformists to receive high quality educations in non-sectarian environments. The Reformation had resumed its course in places of higher education, but the universities of Oxford and Cambridge remained hostile to its principles. As the institution most synonymous with intolerance in the sixteenth century and the Royalist cause in the Civil War, Oxford's alliance with conservative Anglicanism was of note to Drummond. It would be many years before Oxford and Cambridge could be free from its characterisation to non-Anglicans as an 'Protestant substitutes for Ecclesiastical Seminaries'³¹⁰ but it was in that university also that commitment to freedom of inquiry would mean most to those who still felt themselves as outsiders to its colleges and faculties.

³⁰⁹ *ibid.*, 45-6.

³¹⁰ Maisie Ward, *The Wilfrid Wards and the Transition: I. The Nineteenth Century* (London, 1934), 264.

Speaking at the same event on behalf of the University, Brodrick argued that it was not a continuation of Reformation Oxford that he identified in the nonconformists' return to the University, more a restoration of the Medieval University: the nonconformist return was 'really no innovation; it is a revival under modern conditions of Scholastic Theology in the Middle Ages.' As a result, Manchester College would be welcomed because it was full of 'earnest and learned men outside the pale of the National Church ... anxious to share in the higher culture and the congenial atmosphere which a great intellectual centre provides, and, at the same time, to co-operate with us, as fellow-workers, in clearing up questions which must ever profoundly interest not only every Christian, but every man who takes a serious view of life and of death.'³¹¹ Brodrick's optimism was a similar tone to that of Drummond; nonconformists would constructively contribute to a more congenial theological atmosphere in the University in pursuit of goals that both communities had long held dear. Yet Brodrick and Drummond's diverging historical contextualisation of Manchester College's foundation suggests a continuing concern about the destructive tendencies of Reformation, especially in the light of recent Oxford history which had witnessed the foundations of numerous colleges, the alterations of statutes, and theological upheaval – the like of which had not been seen since the Reformation itself.

Four years earlier in 1889, William Sanday, Dean Ireland Professor of Exegesis, wrote that the 'movement of the nineteenth century is strictly continuous with that of the sixteenth.'³¹² He was riposting to Mrs Humphry Ward's claim that there was a 'New Reformation' afoot that Britain's ancient universities, particularly Oxford, was not alive to.³¹³ Yet Sanday contended that 'Really and truly we have not yet come to an end of the Old Reformation': echoed by

³¹¹ *Proceedings and Addresses...* 1893, 64.

³¹² William Sanday, 'The Future of English Theology', *The Contemporary Review* (Jul., 1889), vol. 56, 41-56, 43.

³¹³ Mrs Humphry Ward, 'The New Reformation: A Dialogue', *The Nineteenth Century* (1889), vol. 25, 454-80.

Brodrick's 1893 phrase that nonconformity in Oxford was 'really no innovation'. Sanday was defensive of Oxford's record in recent years. It may not have been seen to be producing 'novelties' like their counterparts in German universities but historical criticism had penetrated Oxford and was widely taught, not least by Sanday himself: an example of how 'one who has imbibed the spirit of historical criticism [could] take English orders or retain what is commonly known as Christianity.'³¹⁴ Ward had taken to the extreme what Drummond and other Manchester College professors were careful not to do. Whilst Sanday was receptive to the merits of historical criticism led by German theologians, this was not a view wholly shared by Oxford theologians who still represented a wide spectrum of theological positions. Yet it was prudent, Sanday implored, to place greater trust in the 'quiet-going people, the main body of Church and nation' whose 'old-fashioned English determination to see fair play' had, as with the Tractarian movement earlier in the century, 'prevented it from throwing itself in with either extreme': 'It was too staunch and loyal to its past to surrender at once to the new ideas, and yet too essentially fair-minded not to see that there was something in them.'³¹⁵ Amongst that 'something' in historical criticism was to Sanday the pursuit of theological inquiry 'undistracted by questions of orthodoxy or heterodoxy': 'While [the student] is engaged upon it the greater generalizations are held in suspense, and opinion ripens upon them gradually and naturally, without any forcing ... a far more healthy process.'³¹⁶ Waiting for others to realise the advantages of historical criticism would take time for there was 'no "New Reformation" in our pockets' evocative of the tumults of previous centuries' disruptions.³¹⁷ Instead, the 'main body of Church and nation' was 'assimilating slowly what it can assimilate': 'it would be

³¹⁴ Sanday, 'The Future of English Theology', 43.

³¹⁵ *ibid.*, 55-6.

³¹⁶ *ibid.*, 54.

³¹⁷ *ibid.*, 55.

impossible to have quicker progress which should be also sure.³¹⁸ Attention to the pace of progress was as important as what change was being initiated.

With a view of constructivism, Manchester College had arrived in Oxford in 1889 as a non-sectarian theological foundation, as Brodrick would point out four years later. It had been for some years an institution with extremely vague denominational tendencies but made a concerted effort in its removal to Oxford to present a wholly anti-dogmatic outlook. James Martineau's long association with and influence on the College had largely made the man and the institution synonymous with each other in the eyes of supporters and acquaintances and to this extent, it was from his great influence that ministers and professors at Manchester New College (as it was called whilst in London) became reluctant to use the term 'Unitarian' on the grounds that Unitarians were often transient in their theological belief, or that they had come to that designation via a variety of different routes.³¹⁹ Martineau's rejection of dogmatic Unitarianism had coincided with greater recognition by his contemporaries outside of Unitarian and nonconformist circles. The recently established Board of the Theology Faculty at Oxford had placed Martineau's *Types of Ethical Theory* (1885) and *A Study of Religion* (1888) on the list for the 'Evidences of Religion' course from 1892.³²⁰ The latter publication, published in four volumes by the Clarendon Press, was to F. W. Newman a way for 'All England [to] learn how impartially [Oxford] recognises Theological merit.'³²¹ It was Jowett, a long-time friend and admirer of Martineau, who initiated the process for Oxford to award Martineau an honorary

³¹⁸ *ibid.*, 56.

³¹⁹ James Drummond, *The Life and Letters of James Martineau* (2 vols., New York, 1902), ii 69-70.

³²⁰ Oxford University Archives, Theology Faculty Board Minutes 1883-1900, June 12th 1889 OR OUA FA 4/19/1/1, 135.

³²¹ Worcester College Archives, MS Daniel 9/82.

D.C.L. in 1888.³²² Yet it was also Jowett who pressed Drummond and Darbishire to confer a greater honour on the old principal:

I have tried to get them to call [it] ‘Martineau College’, like Keble + Selwyn Colleges. But they have refused to do so – saying that it would be contrary to their principles – what seems to me a [poor] answer.³²³

Unlike the Anglo-Catholic Keble and Selwyn Colleges, recently founded at Oxford and Cambridge respectively, Manchester College was arriving in Oxford with a history of its own, as Drummond went to lengths to point out in his opening speech. To name the institution after one man’s philosophy would be, as Martineau noted himself about Unitarianism, more constraining. Malleability was integral to the institution’s identity. In its commitment to principles rather than a single creed, Manchester College could more easily position itself as being at the forefront of free theological inquiry. To have rejected Jowett’s proposition was perhaps also to reject the old liberalism in the University too. In Jowett’s ‘pupil room, thirty, forty & fifty years ago, were disciplined many of the minds which are now exercising a wide influence over the nation’:³²⁴ he was a central force to the reform of the University in the latter decades of the nineteenth century, helping to create an atmosphere where nonconformists could benefit from Oxford as Oxford could benefit from them, but with their entrance into the University came a substantial history of ideas and traditions that were, as this incident suggests, occasionally at odds with the old Master’s outlook. As Oxford advanced through the nineteenth century, Christopher Harvie’s characterisation of the University as a polis only becomes more valid through increased numbers of institutions and variations of theological positions.³²⁵

³²² Oxford University Archives, Hebdomadal Council Register 1879-1896, May 7th 1888, 280-82: OUA/HC/1/2/3 280-82. Balliol College Archives (BCA), Jowett-Nightingale Letters, vol. VIII 1887-1893, May 22nd 1888, 4. OR Jowett N624. Jowett described Martineau as ‘greatly delighted’ by this news, 4v.

³²³ BCA, Jowett-Nightingale Letters, vol. VIII 1887-1893, October 6th 1889, 6.

³²⁴ BCA, Jowett IE 22/3, G C Brodrick’s reminiscences about Jowett, 6.

³²⁵ Christopher Harvie, ‘Reform and Expansion, 1854-71’ in Brock and Curthoys (eds.), *The History of the University of Oxford: Vol. VI*, 702.

Despite his rejection of much of Mrs Ward's damning appraisal of theology in Oxford as too constraining and conservative, William Sanday felt that he could not attend the opening ceremony of Manchester College's buildings in October 1893. William Ince, the Regius Professor of Divinity, had been anxious that Sanday decline Drummond's invitation to the ceremony, arguing that Sanday's presence in his capacity as one of the theological professors of the University and 'custodian of many candidates for orders in the Ch. of England', would legitimise an 'institution which professedly allows such fundamental Christian truths as the Holy Trinity and the Incarnation to be treated as open questions'. To do so would risk the 'severance of the friendly relation subsisting between the University & the Church.' Beyond the damage that Sanday's attendance would affect, Ince feared that Manchester College 'will attract to itself every form of scepticism + denial of the supernatural elements in Xianity + foster a negative + destructive criticism both of the Bible and of Theology.'³²⁶ Sanday was persuaded to decline Drummond's invitation who wrote back on the same day as Ince, reassuring Sanday that his presence would have elicited no 'misunderstanding' as guests were being asked to attend 'quite without regard to their theological or ecclesiastical position' and whose acceptance was viewed as 'simply as an expression of neighbourly good-will, & perhaps a recognition of our right to exist.' Clearly affected by Sanday's rejection, Drummond felt obliged to emphasise the college's undenominational principle over its 'prevalent Unitarianism' that marked it out as an accepting institution and one that was not possessing of views much different from Sanday's own:

As you have alluded to the "main point on which we differ," I cannot forbear saying that here too I think we are somewhat misunderstood. The grounds of controversy are greatly changed, & I suppose I am almost as far from Priestley's theology as you are yourself. That there is an important difference on the point

³²⁶ Ince to Sanday, 13 October 1893, Sanday MSS, Bodl. Oxf. Eng. misc. d. 124 (i), 15-16v.

referred to I would not deny; but often, in reading books from your side of the question (I may include all Gore's Bampton Lectures), it seems to me the difference is far more intellectual than religious, & that even intellectually the line of division is becoming very narrow.³²⁷

Ince saw an insidious intent in the theology of Manchester College that he did not in Mansfield's, demonstrated by his initiating the University's conferring of an honorary MA on Mansfield's Principal Andrew Fairbairn, in 1887.³²⁸ Ince's hostility may not have been an issue for the likes of Drummond and Carpenter given that he could be counterbalanced by the more amenable temperament of those like Sanday who were committed to free theological inquiry. Yet Ince was chair of the Board of the Faculty of Theology from its inception until 1903. In his inaugural lectures as Regius Professor of Divinity in 1878, Ince outlined what he felt were the key responsibilities of the Chairs of Theology: duties were '1. Towards the candidates in the Honour School of Theology; 2. Towards the candidates for Ordination, who are required by the Bishops of the Church to attend our lectures; 3. Towards the Church at large, more particularly its ministers, in reference to the controversies of our own day; 4. Towards the world of literature and culture, who are confronted with mighty theological problems raised by science and criticism.'³²⁹ Where theological education was concerned Oxford was, then, a fundamentally Anglican institution and the Chairs of Theology were an integral part of maintaining its identity. These duties had to be maintained whilst adopting new methods of theological study. Five years later, although Ince warned against the destructive tendencies of a figure like Luther, he advocated a 'revival of the positive principles of the Reformation [which would be the] remedy alike of dead orthodoxy and undogmatic liberalism.' The Church of England was uniquely positioned to reach out to the Roman Church's unity and the divided Reformed Protestant

³²⁷ Drummond to Sanday, 13 October 1893, Sanday MSS, Bodl. Oxf. Eng. misc. d. 123 (j), 149-150.

³²⁸ OUA/HC/1/2/3, Hebdomadal Council Register 1879-96, entry from April 25th 1887, 245.

³²⁹ Ince, *The past history and present duties of the faculty of theology in Oxford: two inaugural lectures read in the Divinity School, Oxford, in Michaelmas term, 1878* (Oxford, 1878), 41.

Churches to reaffirm Christianity's independence from new truths revealed by modern scientific enquiry.³³⁰ Yet by 1882, Ince admitted that 'So far as endowment is concerned, the Church of England is, with very few exceptions, disestablished in the university.'³³¹

iii. The Oxford University Nonconformists' Union and Theology reform

Prior to the arrival of Mansfield and Manchester Colleges in Oxford in the 1880s, nonconformity in Oxford existed in two often separate groupings in addition to the natural denominational divisions. Nonconformist chapels, churches and meeting houses were attended by moderately sized congregations and communities who had been present in the city since the seventeenth century, but no denomination had ever amounted to anything like a vibrant community that it was common to find in other regions and cities of the country. The University had a similarly long history with nonconformists, but it was not until the nineteenth century that avowed nonconformists were admitted to its colleges and halls. Abolition of religious tests in 1871 initiated a steady increase in the number of nonconformists attending the University, being freely admitted to colleges and halls. But legal admission did not always translate to a hospitable atmosphere for nonconformists surrounded by Anglicans of varying theological positions.

The Oxford University Nonconformists' Union was founded by a collection of undergraduates and fellows in 1881. Robert Horton, history tutor and fellow of New College was the instigator of the Union's foundation. Horton had attended Tettenhall College, a Congregational school

³³⁰ Ince, *The Luther commemoration and the Church of England: a sermon preached before the University of Oxford on Sunday, November 11, 1883* (Oxford, 1883), 27.

³³¹ Ince, *The education of the clergy at the universities: a sermon preached before the University of Oxford on Sunday, June 11, 1882* (Oxford, 1882), 4.

established in 1863 before moving to the Anglican Shrewsbury School, much to the ire of the denomination's community in South Staffordshire where his father was the minister of Queen Street Congregational Church in Wolverhampton. His move to Shrewsbury was in anticipation that better preparation was required to obtain a scholarship to an Oxford college. He duly won an open scholarship at New College where he obtained a double first in classical moderations and Greats before his election as fellow and tutor in modern and ancient history in 1879.³³² Horton never lost sight of his Congregationalism and was concerned, like many, that nonconformist undergraduates at Oxford were losing their way, either losing their faith or going over to the Church of England. Horton had been 'received without any prejudice on the ground of my Nonconformity' when he first went up to New College in 1874, although, like all young nonconformists was 'constrained to breathe' the predominant air of Anglicanism in Oxford.³³³ Although clearly against his own tastes, Horton's own spiritual needs were partly sated by attending New College chapel services, but supplemented by regularly attending nonconformist chapel services in the city and via the Oxford Christian Students' Union (founded in 1879 and shortly after renamed the Oxford Inter-Collegiate Christian Union) which grew uneasily out of "The Daily Prayer Meeting" for evangelicals in the University, first organised by Henry Bazely of Brasenose and Francis J. Chavasse of Corpus Christi, later Rector of St Peter-le-Bailey in New Inn Hall Street, Principal of Wycliffe Hall, and Bishop of Liverpool.³³⁴

Even if he felt that 'the evangelical atmosphere in the university [sic] was stifling and unattractive' and 'seemed to present religion as the negation, or the crucifixion, of the intellect',

³³² Elaine Kaye, 'Robert Forman Horton (1855-1934)', *ODNB* (2004).

³³³ R. F. Horton, *An Autobiography* (London, 1917), 59; Albert Peel & J. A. R. Marriott, *Robert Forman Horton* (London, 1937), 66.

³³⁴ F. D. Coggan, *Christ and the Colleges: A History of the Inter-Varsity Fellowship of Evangelical Unions* (London, 1934), 58-61.

because ‘Nonconformity had no recognised place in the university... [Horton] could only get Christian work to do by joining with the Evangelical Churchmen.’³³⁵ These were measures to guard against the increase in agnosticism, not Anglicanism. He lamented that the “‘true religious leaders of the day,” [were] the men of science’ like Tyndall and Huxley who were at least partly responsible for a ‘whole trend of thought [that] was against faith, not only against Christianity, but against Theism.’³³⁶ Horton was undoubtedly disillusioned by his experiences of irreligion in Oxford, particularly amongst the activity of societies that engaged with Oxford’s local population, and this prompted serious consideration in leaving Oxford for the ministry in Hampstead. Although by the early 1880s he resolved that ‘Oxford seemed only the elect instrument for social reform and the salvation of the country’, he spent considerable time every year preaching at Lyndhurst Road Chapel in Hampstead.³³⁷ His dilemma about how best to prevent an increase in agnosticism in Oxford was to bring nonconformists together in a closer society. The resulting Oxford University Nonconformists’ Union, founded in 1881, was active from its first meeting and although Horton felt that it had a lack of support from some quarters, his claims that a meeting that included a talk by Dr Fairbairn was the origin of the idea of Mansfield College sit uneasily next to Horton’s lack of attention given to the Union in his autobiography.³³⁸ The work of the Union was the foremost society of nonconformists in Oxford and was in some ways, though perhaps not as Horton claims, the basis for Mansfield and Manchester Colleges coming to the city.

In 1881 Horton had identified at least two hundred nonconformist undergraduates in the University and resolved to establish the Union with Joseph King of Trinity College acting as secretary and Professor James Bryce of Oriel as president. Jowett gave his encouragement and

³³⁵ Horton, *An Autobiography*, 34-5.

³³⁶ *ibid.*, 32.

³³⁷ *ibid.*, 53.

³³⁸ *ibid.*, 54.

the use of a room in the new Examination Schools on the High Street. The serene picture that Horton gives of the activities of the Union are punctuated by his recollections of lukewarm support from some members who were ‘not always... congruous’, had ‘tepid interest’ or ‘lent... doubtful support.’³³⁹ ‘I tried’, Horton continued,

to win the trust and friendship of these undergraduates. I encouraged them to remain true, through their Oxford days, to the Church in which they had been brought up, and I sought to show them the part that Nonconformity has played, and has yet to play, in English religion.³⁴⁰

The struggle to retain nonconformists as nonconformists in Oxford was a hard one: a city where there were many vibrant religious communities, albeit erroneous ones, attractive to the nonconformist undergraduate:

Nonconformity neither got much good nor did much good in Oxford, + that when men who were Nonconformists went down, they made no better show, because they had been brought up in one form of fault and had come up to be confronted by another very different one, and so they went right into the extreme High Churchism reaction or else they presented a pitiful spectacle of a chronic suspension of judgment on most vital Matters.³⁴¹

The only remedy to stem such a raft of doubts and errors was to bring nonconformists together in the University, so that ‘they might at least understand their own position’: ‘if there was any meaning in Free Church Principles, such a movement as this was needed.’³⁴² It was not, then, merely to prevent the nonconformist’s feeling of isolation in a predominantly Anglican University and city, but to ensure that these men, on the cusp of promising academic careers, would not lose their familial faith. Horton’s resolution as to the broad aims of the Union were

³³⁹ *ibid.*, 53-4.

³⁴⁰ *ibid.*, 54.

³⁴¹ Minute Book of The Oxford University Nonconformists’ Union, Mansfield College Archives, 2.

³⁴² *ibid.*, 2-3

eventually carried but not without disagreement. James Findlay, a Wesleyan from Wadham College, saw that Horton's broadly ecumenical aims were 'impracticable, as Dissenters could have no positive bond of Union, but only the bond of Antagonism to the Church of England.' W. J. Ashley, a Baptist from Balliol, desired greater clarity as to the political intentions of the Union, specifically on the question of disestablishment, provoking Horton to outline that the Union 'would not bind itself to any special propaganda, religious or political',³⁴³ characterising any association with the cause for disestablishment as one that merely spoke to the 'aggressive and negative aspects of Nonconformity'.³⁴⁴ Although Horton thought that disestablishment of the Church would 'better affect Society... this should be the deduction from that individual-regarding aspect of religion which Nonconformity assented.'³⁴⁵ Ashley would end up as a member of the Union, but Findlay appears not to have joined until the end of 1882 at the earliest. The Union resolved to have a president, a secretary, and a committee that would have at least one representative of each denomination, who would steer the organisation based on five core objectives:

- (i) To remove the feeling of isolation amongst Undergraduates coming up
- (ii) By means of discussions, lectures, meetings and literature to investigate the principles and 'raison d'etre' [sic] of English Nonconformity:
- (iii) To present the free and simple doctrines of Christianity to members of the Union and others in such a way as to help those who are in perplexity or doubt as to the fundamentals of religion:
- (iv) To establish if possible and desired a Sunday Talk, Testament or Bible class, which may assist the religious life of all, especially of those who intend to enter the ministry:
- (v) To present to members of the established Church the true meaning and aim of Nonconformity.³⁴⁶

³⁴³ *ibid.*, 3.

³⁴⁴ *ibid.*, 7.

³⁴⁵ *ibid.*, 11.

³⁴⁶ *ibid.*, 5.

Despite Horton managing to attract members to the Union on such broad and relatively positive principles in the early months of its existence, some members persisted with questions about the organisation's political and religious aims. After the initial meeting of the Union, 25 men had joined: eleven Independents, five Wesleyans, four Calvinistic Methodists, two from the Methodist New Connexion, two Baptists, and one from the Church of England.³⁴⁷

Whilst Horton desired there to be a broad basis of the Union in political terms, and although he had a similarly open approach to its religious designs, he did not seek to welcome those committed to unbelief. He spoke about a visit made to a meeting of the Cambridge University Society for Promotion of Religious Equality, admiring the large size (around 400 in 1881) of the Society though thought that it laboured 'under the disadvantage of having no religious bond of union', 'embracing Agnostics and others',³⁴⁸ even though the Nonconformists' Union was advertised as one that was 'open without restriction, to members of the University: and all Nonconformists, and others sympathising with, or interested in Nonconformity'.³⁴⁹ Yet by the time of the next meeting, a month later, the advertisement had altered, instead signalling its intent to be to bring together Nonconformists of the University 'for the purpose of discussing and defining the principles which are held by the several denominations of the Free Church in England', to acquaint the members with each other's views, 'so realizing and shaping their own', in addition to be a 'social rallying-point for Nonconformists, who, in Oxford, are apt either to stand in isolation, or to be merged with the mass and become reticent about their religious position.'³⁵⁰ Although the Union was not explicitly advertised to those who were not nonconformists, sympathetic or interested Churchmen continued to attend.

³⁴⁷ *ibid.*, 5.

³⁴⁸ *ibid.*, 8, 9.

³⁴⁹ The Oxford University Nonconformists' Union circular, January of Lent term 1882, 3. Mansfield College Archives.

³⁵⁰ The Oxford University Nonconformists' Union circular, February of Lent term 1882, 2.

Yet the issue of the Union's purpose was far from being a settled question. To what extent the Union should be a group that would agitate for political ends remained in contention throughout its existence: disestablishment was discussed in nearly every term of the Union's existence. The religious outlook was, to many, inseparable from the political outlook. An active minister of the Lyndhurst Road Congregational Chapel in London, Horton's emphasis on the spiritual needs of undergraduates prevented a dominant political spirit from shaping the Union's character in its first couple of years of existence to the end of 1883 when Horton left Oxford. The term card of the Union for Michaelmas 1882 advertised papers to be given at weekly Sunday evening meetings, devoted to themes of a purely Scriptural and spiritual nature: "What is meant by the religious life?", "The place of the Bible among the sacred books of the world", "The bearing of the future on the present life", "Creed and character". "The character of Jesus", "The dependence of Christianity on miracles", "Revelation and inspiration", "Prayer".³⁵¹ Prayer opened meetings almost from the outset, despite being contended on at least one occasion in a formal vote about the continuation of that practice.³⁵² It was also under Horton's chairmanship of the committee that the Union adopted the practice of holding occasional services in Oxford's various nonconformist chapels. Despite these overtly religious practices, a lack of definite purpose appears to have hampered the Union's ability to present itself for something more definite than a set of loose principles. The President of the Union, Professor James Bryce, addressed a meeting on 25th February 1882 about his opinion on the Union's purpose. There was no objection to any of the religious components or practices of the Union but clarity about its social and political mission was lacking. Nonconformity was not a 'purely negative principle', instead it 'embodied the truth of the need of having free and unconstrained

³⁵¹ The Oxford University Nonconformists' Union circular, February of Michaelmas term 1882, 3.

³⁵² Minute Book, 25, 27.

spiritual life'. But this principle was 'not yet fully worked out'. One of the Union's tasks, along with banishing the nonconformists' sense of isolation in the University, was to probe relevant subjects and themes that would elicit clearer perspectives on the principle from philosophical and historical angles. In doing such work the Union would 'bear a valuable testimony in favour of the principle of unconstrained freedom in the spiritual life.' Such commitments in spiritual realms of inquiry were reflected in Bryce's position on the political outlook for the Union: there should be no 'fixed political creed', only an undertaking to seek truth.³⁵³

A commitment, then, revealed religion as much as social and political mission. Bryce's advocacy of the methodical discovery of truth to fulfil Nonconformity's seemingly allusive positive principle was reflected by Horton when he addressed the Union in George Street Congregational Church in central Oxford on "The Courage of Conviction". Here, Horton's concern was not in nonconformists' sense of isolation in Oxford, rather how Oxford was a place where nonconformists would be tempted by the age's tendency where, 'Certainty in religious questions is not only unattained, it is hardly even sought.'³⁵⁴ For nonconformists in 1880s Oxford, Horton thought it was necessary to encapsulate some of the spirit of historic Christian reformers who were resolute in the face of majoritarian opinion contrary to their own. Yet it was not the Church of England that posed the greatest threat to the maintenance of nonconformists' faith. Danger primarily lay in the religious and spiritual atmosphere that prioritised, even preferred the 'Suspense of Judgment' over antiquated 'certainty' and conviction:

the enervation of culture is so impressed with the complexity of the conditions of certainty, that it cannot but esteem the profession of certainty a mark either of

³⁵³ Minute Book, 14-15.

³⁵⁴ Horton, "*The Courage of Conviction.*" *An Address delivered before the Oxford University Nonconformists' Union, on Sunday morning, November 26, 1882.* (Oxford, 1882), 3.

arrogance or ignorance. Thus the praise which is due to Conviction gets diverted to Suspense of Judgment. At last we reach, in "Natural Religion," the Apotheosis of Agnosticism, where the knowledge that we do not know is to be "full persuasion;" where the exclusion of faith is to be called Faith, and all that is unreligious, everything, anything, or nothing, is to be scraped into a heap and called God, while as a corollary, all the misguided persons who retain a persuasion, a Faith, a God, of the old type must be quietly censured and suppressed for disturbing the harmony just on the point of being so happily accomplished.³⁵⁵

Exasperated in the face of rising spiritual indifference, Horton sought to offer his audience the means to avoid sliding into a 'pernicious and soul destroying' Suspense of Judgment which could lead to spiritual, mental and moral 'paralysis'.³⁵⁶ It was not good enough merely to adopt spiritual certainty in matters of faith: he saw the advantages to be gained from 'Criticism.' A middle ground was 'certitude'. It was a pursuit of a more perfect spiritual understanding, a common notion in late-nineteenth-century Britain, but Horton positioned it as a pursuit that existed beyond the confines of any non-spiritual pursuits of knowledge spurred on by scientific impulse. He claimed that the impulse had yet 'only assayed the lower things': it had inspired the historian to enliven the 'barest scraps of actual fact with a charm, a fascination'; it had transformed the understanding of physical phenomena and had reconstructed physiological and biological sciences. But it had yet to 'act in a higher and more important Sphere': was there a 'Guiding Spirit in History'? Was there 'an immortal Soul [that lay] behind the brain'? And if it had established the slow movements of evolution, 'will it not be more a duty to find out Him who ordered them all'?³⁵⁷ That the understanding of the world had been revolutionised in almost all quarters of knowledge did not mean that a denial of the spiritual or the Christian world was necessitated, rather the posing of new questions. As old nonconformity's principles had been so uprooted in the middle of the nineteenth century, not least in the opening of the

³⁵⁵ *ibid.*, 5.

³⁵⁶ *ibid.*, 6.

³⁵⁷ *ibid.*, 8.

Ancient Universities to its sons, so too a new principle – as Bryce had argued a principle ‘not yet fully worked out’ – had yet to be fully worked out in spiritual matters too. Horton’s ‘certitude’ invested his faith where Carlyle had had a ‘large capital of Faith uninvested’ and in so doing was in pursuit of an education of a higher significance than that which any university could provide: ‘Believe me there is no subject of study in this University which intrinsically can compare with this pursuit of Certitude: “Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.”’³⁵⁸ To Horton’s mind, Cardinal Newman’s spiritual journey had been conducted with certitude. Convinced that there was ‘an external Authority in the earth to which he could unwaveringly bow’, Newman’s historical studies and ‘logical exigencies’ led him to find that authority in the Roman Catholic Church.³⁵⁹ Horton was drawing on Newman’s process, not his conclusions. Here was a man who, despite Anglican supremacy in Oxford, had used his faculties methodically in search of what was more convincing to him. Naturally, Horton was dismissive of any idea of ‘external Authority’: the nonconformist was to harbour the strength of conviction in otherwise hostile and tempting spiritual contexts, and through scientific investigation or philosophical inquiry ‘establish certainty in religion, which is attainable only by *the Way, the Truth, and the Life*’: certitude via the individual’s relationship with Christ, not via a Church.³⁶⁰

If Horton had offered nonconformists a way to steer clear of agnosticism whilst in Oxford, the Union did less than might be expected in offering a development for the growth of nonconformist institutions in the city. That the Union’s meetings were often consumed by questions as to the purpose of Union is reflective of the opinion of Balliol philosopher T. H.

³⁵⁸ *ibid.*, 8. Romans 14:5 KJV

³⁵⁹ *ibid.*, 8-9.

³⁶⁰ *ibid.*, 12.

Green who wrote about his concerns to R. W. Dale, Congregationalist minister and Chairman of Spring Hill College, Birmingham:

The opening of the national universities to Nonconformists has been, in my judgment, an injury rather than a help to Nonconformity. You are sending up here, year after year, the sons of some of your best and wealthiest families; they are often altogether uninfluenced by the services of the Church which they find here, and they not only drift away from Nonconformity – they drift away and lose all faith; and you are bound, as soon as you have secured the opening of the universities for your sons, to follow them when you send them here, in order to defend and maintain their religious life and faith.³⁶¹

Green was long a nonconformist ally and James Bryce claimed that he had also considered becoming a Unitarian minister before finding purpose in teaching at Balliol.³⁶² Green's own religious doubts were indicative of what Horton was concerned with guarding against for nonconformists at the University. Whilst studying Greats, Horton met Green whose lectures on Kant he found stimulating and recounted Green's jealousy of Horton's faith:

Never can I forget his expression when one day he found that I had a real and vivid faith in Christ. His own faith was philosophical and ethical; but Christ, as a Person, had been dissolved by criticism. "You are very fortunate" was his brief, intense comment.³⁶³

The relationship between Horton and Green was limited in the contexts of the Nonconformists' Union. Green served as one of its Vice-Presidents in 1881 alongside the Professor of Chinese, James Legge of Corpus Christi College, before his health quickly deteriorated the following

³⁶¹ T. H. Green, quoted in A. W. W. Dale, *The Life of R. W. Dale of Birmingham* (London, 1899), 496. There is no date given for the letter but Green died in 1882. The letter was not publicised until after Mansfield College's opening in 1886.

³⁶² James Bryce, *Studies in Contemporary Biography* (New York, 1903), 92.

³⁶³ Horton, *An Autobiography*, 43

year.³⁶⁴ While the Union came about too late for him to affect its character and position in Oxford, his influence crucially encompassed jostling Dale from his unwillingness to accept that many nonconformists who went up to Oxford were being lost to their familial faith: ‘Nonconformity at the universities kept as a rule all the men who were worth keeping’,³⁶⁵ but many were lost to other churches or none at all.

Horton’s action in founding the Union certainly answered much of what Green had concerns about. But Horton’s marginal involvement in the agitation of Congregationalism’s leaders to research the removal of one of its theological colleges to Oxford reveals the difficulties in establishing the best course of action to solve a widely agreed upon problem. To assume that nonconformists in Oxford were uniformly desirous for the establishment of nonconformist educational institutions in the city obscures the lack of certainty that was prevalent in the Nonconformists’ Union’s early years.³⁶⁶ Yet that is not to say that the Union was wholly uninvolved or uninterested in the possibility of bringing a nonconformist institution to the city. It sought to invite prominent nonconformists to Oxford to deliver lectures before it: Unitarian philosopher and Principal of Manchester New College London, Dr James Martineau, a prominent Baptist minister, Joseph Angus, a Presbyterian, Oswald Dykes, who would become the first principal of Westminster College, Cambridge in 1888, and a prominent Welsh Congregationalist, Henry Richard MP, were all invited, without any agenda, at the end of 1882. Amongst the first to speak was Rev. Dr Andrew Fairbairn, Principal of Airedale Congregational

³⁶⁴ Minute Book, 17. Unlike Green, Legge had come to Oxford later in life. Born a Scots Congregationalist, he undertook many years of missionary work in China before taking up the newly created Professorship in Chinese in 1874. Although he felt like an outsider in Oxford society, his sons, James and Thomas Legge were students at the University and members of the Nonconformists’ Union. For instances of Legge’s troubles in integrating into Oxford despite connections with Oxford’s elites such as Max Müller and a particularly unsavoury incident concerning the burial of his wife in 1881, see Nicholas J. Girardot, *The Victorian Translation of China: James Legge’s Oriental Pilgrimage* (Berkeley, CA, 2002), 163-71; and David Jasper, ‘Legge in Oxford’ in Alexander Chow (ed.), *Scottish Missions to China: Commemorating the Legacy of James Legge (1815-1897)* (Leiden, 2022), 66-78, especially 75-76.

³⁶⁵ Dale, *The Life of R. W. Dale*, 495.

³⁶⁶ Kaye, *Mansfield College*, chapter 3.

College, Bradford and Chairman of the Congregational Union who addressed the Union on the study of Theology and the training for the ministry and preached a sermon in George Street Congregational Church on the weekend of May 12th-13th 1883. It was in a reply to Fairbairn's paper that the possibility that a nonconformist college might one day be established in Oxford was discussed.³⁶⁷ Yet the Union's involvement was from that point on limited in its activity towards fulfilling the respondent's suggestion. There was also difference of opinion as to the best course of action amongst those who were more active, chiefly between Bryce and Fairbairn. Bryce was committed to the resolving the absence in Oxford of an 'unconstrained spiritual life' by founding a nonconformist theological faculty, governed by a committee of representatives of the 'leading denominations'; Congregationalists, Baptists, Presbyterians, and Wesleyans.³⁶⁸

Bryce was forthright in this conviction and denominational colleges or halls modelled after the recent foundations of Keble or Selwyn Colleges 'are', he wrote, 'indeed to be deprecated.' It was not only free for nonconformists to enter any college – all now being undenominational – but that denominational colleges had and would, 'By being gathered into one group there', 'isolated from other students', 'lose many of the advantages of the University.'³⁶⁹ A concurrent faculty of theology would boast at least seven professors, mirroring the University's chairs and adding a professor in Christian Ethics, then not catered for by Oxford. Yet such denominational collaboration was foreseen as impracticable: theological differences were too wide and perhaps too hostile to accommodate satisfactorily, and as such, financial contributions would likely not follow.³⁷⁰ Though an inferior scheme, the prospect of a denomination's theological college

³⁶⁷ W. B. Selbie, *The Life of Andrew Martin Fairbairn* (London, 1914), 164. The reply is quoted in full in Kaye, *Mansfield College*, 53-54.

³⁶⁸ Bryce and Fairbairn, 'Article VII: Nonconformity and the Universities. The Free Churches and a Theological Faculty', *The British Quarterly Review*, (Apr., 1884), vol. 74, no. 158, 372-98, 395.

³⁶⁹ *ibid.*, 394.

³⁷⁰ *ibid.*, 396.

removing to Oxford was an acceptable alternative. To rival the University in any way other than provide for theological education after men had obtained their literary education elsewhere was to be avoided; effectively charting the way in which both Mansfield and Manchester colleges removed to Oxford with their respective denomination retaining control but operating on a test-free basis. What was essential, Bryce thought, was not so much the structure of any future nonconformist presence (besides being an entirely new college) but that the men who were involved ‘must be the very best men whom the Free Churches can persuade to undertake the task; not merely men of deep learning and polished scholarship, but of a philosophic and catholic spirit, temperate and persuasive, gifted with the power of attracting and influencing the young.’³⁷¹

Whilst the Nonconformists’ Union had the potential to do good in advancing the position of nonconformity in the University, Bryce believed that combatting Oxford’s Anglican school of theology, ‘their views fraught with danger’, required a more significant nonconformist presence in the city: ‘No better remedy against the extending dominion of such a school can be suggested than the appearance, in the place where its influence is most potent in moulding the mind of the next generation, of another type of religious teaching, which shall unite independence and a critical method with reverence for the past, and be deeply pervaded by a sense of the power of Christianity as a spiritual influence.’³⁷² Although the Test Act of 1871 made headway in providing access to nonconformists to the ancient universities, to those concerned with the teaching of theology at the university key components of Oxford’s structure remained inaccessible to nonconformists. The Regius Professor of Divinity, the Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity, and the Regius Professor of Moral and Pastoral Theology were posts

³⁷¹ *ibid.*, 397.

³⁷² *ibid.*, 398.

attached to canonries at Christ Church Cathedral, conditions that served to prevent nonconformists rising to these positions. Furthermore, these positions allowed great influence on the teaching of Theology at Oxford and when the Faculty of Theology was formed in 1882, posts were reserved for Regius Professors, ensuring their outlook be preserved when it came to matters of teaching, curricula, approving texts for teaching, and examination.³⁷³

As the Regius Professor of Civil Law, Bryce occupied a post at Oriel College which did not stipulate that the holder meet any religious standards. Bryce saw that nonconformists' theological education would not be adequately provided for whilst religious statutes remained for key posts in the University. Bryce's Ulster Scots Presbyterianism laid the foundations for a lifelong belief in independency, particularly in matters of Church and State, which he felt were never matters to be tangled. His time at the University of Glasgow exposed him to the common-sense philosophy of Thomas Reid, further bolstering his conviction that artificial regulation in social, political, or religious matters were undesirable. He then graduated BA from Trinity College, Oxford in 1862 but his nonconformity prevented him from going on to an MA. Unlike many liberals in Oxford in the 1860s, Bryce was not taken by Jowett as a private tutor. He instead befriended legal scholar Albert Venn Dicey, with whom he would be involved in numerous liberal societies: the Oxford Essay Society, which included Matthew Arnold, George Goschen, and Arthur Hugh Clough; the radical Old Mortality Society, which included Algernon Charles Swinburne, T. H. Green, Courtenay Ilbert, Aeneas Mackay, and T. E. Holland. Later in life, Bryce and Dicey would be involved in the Synthetic Society which was far more concerned with the possibility of religious ecumenism and was far more diverse in its membership: assorted members included Asquith, Liddell, and Martineau.

³⁷³ Daniel Inman, *The Making of Modern English Theology*, chapter 2-3.

Despite the sweeping reforms that Bryce witnessed first-hand at Oxford, the remaining religious and social injustices stood in stark contrast to his experience of America to which he first travelled in the 1870s:

Many of the things which least appealed to him in English society were here absent, the intricacies and affectations of rank, the prominence of dogma and Church establishment, the wide powers and social prestige of the sporting landlord. Some things, on the contrary, which spoke to him, were plainly present. Bryce was a democrat and here was a democracy, the only great exemplar of democratic rule in the modern world; an educationalist and here was public education carried out on a mammoth scale.³⁷⁴

Not only was the contrast with British society becoming clearer to Bryce, but the injustices of Oxford particularly were thrown into sharp light in his frequent visits to Cambridge, Massachusetts and Harvard University where Bryce and Dicey struck up a lifelong friendship with Charles William Eliot (President of Harvard, 1869-1909).

Although it was unofficially affiliated with Unitarianism, the Harvard Divinity School was founded in 1816 as America's first non-denominational divinity school, tacitly rejecting the sectarian foundations of the Presbyterian Princeton Theological Seminary in 1812 and the Calvinist Andover Theological Seminary in 1807, the latter itself a foundation borne out of a rejection of Harvard's increasingly liberal theology represented by the appointment of the Unitarian Henry Ware as the Hollis Professor of Divinity in 1805. The Unitarian reputation of early-nineteenth-century Harvard was attacked from many quarters. A young Ralph Waldo Emerson, who had recently resigned as Unitarian minister of the Second Church, Boston, rejected the tenets of traditional Unitarian theological positions in front of the Divinity School in 1838, instead advocating Transcendentalism as a better basis for theological instruction and

³⁷⁴ H. A. L. Fisher, *James Bryce, Viscount Bryce of Dechmont, O. M* (2 vols., London, 1927), vol. I, 136-37.

spiritual life.³⁷⁵ Trinitarian Christians deeply resented Harvard's tacit endorsement of Unitarian theology, prompting President Josiah Quincy III (1829-45) to reduce the provision of religious and theological instruction to its students for many years before his eventual successors James Walker and Charles Eliot moved to reposition theology as part of a broader liberal education, unaffected by any denominational affiliation. Although Eliot faced considerable opposition, he persevered in his policy to bring the teaching of theology in line with the scientific, methodological principles upon which other subjects were taught.³⁷⁶

Bryce's friendship with Eliot exposed him to the advantages of teaching theology on strictly unsectarian lines. Yet even in the context of America, ostensibly a more religiously tolerant society than Britain, the extensive problems that came with attempts to teach Unitarian theology in an esteemed institution served as a warning for British counterparts who had to contend with greater hostility, not least in the form of an established Church. Over the course of the nineteenth century, theology at Harvard was pushed out of the heart of its educational offering. Political expediency pressed presidents gradually to give the Divinity School responsibility for teaching theology over the course of the century, serving to effectively confine any theological controversy to a separate institution, and thereby insulating the main university from potentially significant reputational damage. Advocating for undenominational theological instruction remained unpopular under Charles Eliot's tenure but his commitment to anything less than the 'scientific approach' in theology, as was accepted in all other subjects, would eventually, if painfully prevail.

³⁷⁵ Ralph Waldo Emerson, *An Address delivered before the senior class in Divinity College, Cambridge, Sunday evening, 15 July 1838* (Boston, 1838).

³⁷⁶ Stephen Shoemaker, 'The Emerging Distinction between Theology and Religion at Nineteenth-Century Harvard University', *Harvard Theological Review*, (2008), vol. 101, nos. 3-4, 417-30. On Eliot's approach to liberal education in particular, Henry James, *Charles William Eliot: President of Harvard University 1869-1909* (2 vols., Boston, Mass., 1930) I, chapter X.

iv. Manchester in Oxford

For all the concerns about the theological provision for nonconformists in Oxford, the strength of Unitarianism's community did not debate about the physical appearance of the college in the city. Thomas Worthington's buildings for Manchester College have been described unfavourably by many authorities. Sherwood and Pevsner described its 'conventional architecture [as] neither as forceful as that of Keble nor as sophisticated as that of Mansfield' and Peter Howell, echoing the comparison to nearby Mansfield, determined that Worthington was 'overawed by Oxford, and his buildings, although in the same basic style as Champneys's, entirely lack the latter's refinement and originality.'³⁷⁷ Howell's damnation might, however incidentally, have been imbued with some truth given the more audacious styles that Worthington often produced in the Manchester region, where the dynamism of the city's vast industrial growth was complemented by an explosion of public building work, often with modern designs, in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

Most of Worthington's work had been in Manchester and Liverpool where he designed a range of civic and religious buildings. Notably, Worthington was the architect of Memorial Hall, Albert Square, Manchester (1866), built to commemorate the bicentennial anniversary of the Act of Uniformity in 1662 and financed by the surplus in subscriptions to Worthington's Albert Memorial (1866), the first such memorial in Britain to be built commemorating the Prince Consort's death in 1861.³⁷⁸ Housing Matthew Noble's statue of Albert, a likeness personally

³⁷⁷ Jennifer Sherwood & Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: Oxfordshire* (London, 1974), 233; Peter Howell, 'Oxford Architecture, 1800-1914' in Brock & Curthoys (eds.), *The History of the University of Oxford: Vol. VII*, 728-77, 756.

³⁷⁸ Worthington's Memorial Hall was one of two buildings to commemorate the bicentenary. The other – Congregational Memorial Hall, Farringdon Street, London (1875) – was designed by 'the Gilbert Scott of the

approved of by Queen Victoria, Worthington's Neo-gothic/Medieval-style ciborium greatly contrasts his Memorial Hall which came to house a range of Victorian societies, including the Statistical, of which Worthington was an active member, and the Positivist society. Significantly, the building was also the home of the Unitarian Home Mission Board between 1865 and 1904, which, with great financial difficulty, could only afford to rent rooms.³⁷⁹ Unlike Worthington's relatively austere designs for Manchester College, Oxford, the Memorial Hall is Venetian Gothic revival, a style Worthington had become interested in after two tours to Italy in his earlier years, and a style that fitted in with the explosion in Italianate and Ruskinian Gothic designs of many new public buildings in Manchester built in the 1860s and 1870s:³⁸⁰ referring to the city's economic significance as much as its striking architectural style, Worthington reflected that Manchester was the 'Florence of the North'.³⁸¹ Its intricate tracery on its windows and the use of coloured brickwork contrast Alfred Waterhouse's dominating Neo-gothic Manchester Town Hall that would be completed in 1877 after nine years of work. In many ways, Memorial Hall is symbolic of the surging interest in changing architectural tastes, public buildings, economic prosperity in the region, and the ascension of nonconformity in society. It is the latter interest that greatly interested those concerned with Manchester New College's removal from London and how it would best present and adapt itself to Oxford.

Worthington was the son of Thomas Worthington, a prosperous Manchester cotton merchant from Salford and member of the Unitarian Cross Street Chapel in Manchester. The faith and

Dissenters', the London-based John Tarring who designed churches for Presbyterians, Methodists, Congregationalists, and Baptists. Helene Furjań, 'John Tarring (bap. 1805?, d. 1875), architect' *ODNB* (2015).

³⁷⁹ David L. Wykes, 'Unitarian Home Missionary Board, (1854 to present)', *Dissenting Academies Online: Database and Encyclopaedia*, Dr Williams's Centre for Dissenting Studies, October 2013.

³⁸⁰ Peter N. Lindfield, 'High Victorian Gothic: Thomas Worthington's Venetian Hall at the heart of Manchester' https://www.visitmanchester.com/ideas-and-inspiration/blog/read/2020/01/high-victorian-gothic-thomas-worthingtons-venetian-hall-at-the-heart-of-manchester-b1073#_ftnref2 (accessed: 26/08/23); Clare Hartwell, Matthew Hyde & Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: Lancashire: Manchester and the South-East* (New Haven, CT & London, 2004), 58-59.

³⁸¹ Worthington, *Presidential Address to the Manchester Society of Architects, 1875*, quoted in Anthony J. Pass, *Thomas Worthington: Victorian Architecture and Social Purpose* (Manchester, 1988).

the community that Worthington was brought up in was a decisive factor in many of his early commissions when he formed his own practice in 1849. Worthington quickly gained a reputation as an architect guided by concerns for social welfare and providing solutions to alleviate the side effects of industrial Manchester's problems. Along with other Unitarians of the Manchester area, he was a member (if not a prominent one) of the Manchester Philosophical and Literary Society, the Statistical Society, the Portico Library Society, and the Royal Manchester Institution. All three societies reflected Worthington's own commitment to social causes and civic pride and much of his architectural works further embody these principles: Greengate (1856) and Mayfield Baths (1857), the City Police Courts (1873), Chorlton Union Workhouse (1865), Prestwich Union Infirmary (1870), Garlands Hospital, Carlisle (1870), Royal Albert Edward Infirmary (1873) and the Ellen Wilkinson High School (1880). His designs were often critically appraised and rarely lost sight of Italianate influences which Worthington had absorbed after two tours to Italy with his close friend Henry Darbishire, who would also go on to become an architect concerned with social housing, being the chief architect for the Peabody Trust's Estates in London between 1857 and 1885.³⁸² Much like his pioneering friend and rival Alfred Waterhouse, whose early career had been guided by his Quaker roots, Worthington's faith played a decisive factor in his being commissioned to design many Unitarian churches. Liberal MP Richard Peacock commissioned Worthington for the Brookfield Unitarian Church in Gorton (1870), and the architect was in demand again for the Dunham Road Unitarian Chapel in Altrincham (1872), the Unitarian Free Church in Pendleton, Salford (1874), the Monton Green Unitarian Church near Eccles (1875), the Unitarian Chapel in Buxton, Derbyshire (1875), the Flowery Field Unitarian Church in Hyde (1878), and the substantial expansion of Rosslyn Hill Unitarian Chapel in Hampstead (1885), the latter being

³⁸² John H. G. Archer, 'Worthington family (per. 1849-1963)' *ODNB* (2007). Adolf K. Placzek, *Macmillan Encyclopaedia of Architects* (4 vols., London, 1982), vol. 1, 502.

one of only a handful of works Worthington undertook outside the Northwest of England.³⁸³ With his son, Percy, he would later design the Ullet Road Unitarian Church in Liverpool (1899), whose Gothic Revival and partly Art Nouveau design is accentuated by the use of striking red Ruabon brick, and whose layout – a chapel, meeting rooms, and a library, centred on a small court – is reminiscent of the Worthingtons’ recently completed buildings for Manchester College in Oxford. Worthington’s civic architecture is not without note either.

As Manchester Unitarianism’s unofficial architect, and with the removal of Manchester New College to Oxford involving many Unitarians with strong Manchester connections, Worthington was a straightforward choice as architect for the planned buildings in Oxford. Yet, like many Manchester Unitarians, Worthington was not a stranger to Oxford. His son, Percy, had graduated BA from Corpus Christi College in 1887 before entering his father’s practice as a partner in 1893.³⁸⁴ Yet neither Worthington had expected to know Oxford in the way they had: ‘when I used to take my little boy, now my partner, to the old house in Monk Gate, York, we little thought we should have to build Manchester College in this seat of learning.’³⁸⁵ The college’s needs had developed considerably since its time in York which had ended in 1840. Its move to Oxford was the first time the college had commissioned new buildings and Worthington’s designs were, as he himself noted, closely guided by the President of the Building Committee, Henry Russell Greg, who was from a family of cotton mill owners in Quarry Bank Mill, South of Manchester. So too was Worthington’s connection bolstered by his friendship with the Darbishire family.

³⁸³ <https://manchestervictorianarchitects.org.uk/architects/thomas-worthington> (accessed 26/08/23): the list is not exhaustive of Worthington’s works.

³⁸⁴ Foster, *Alumni Oxoniensis*, (Oxford & London, 1888), vol. IV, 1611.

³⁸⁵ *Proceedings and Addresses... 1893*, 90.

Just as the Worthingtons were well acquainted with Oxford, so too were many other Manchester Unitarians which serves to dispel any notion that Unitarians were unfamiliar with their surroundings when it was decided to remove Manchester New College there in 1889. Thomas Ashton (1818-1898), who was a major benefactor of Owens College, an enlightened mill owner and close friend of Gladstone, had nine children with Elizabeth Gair (1831-1914), daughter of Samuel Stillman Gair of Rhode Island and Liverpool. One of their sons, Thomas Gair Ashton (1855-1933) went to Rugby School before entering University College, Oxford in 1874, graduating BA (1878) and MA (1882). He continued his father's philanthropy, being a governor of Manchester University and the Whitworth Institute and was Liberal MP for Hyde (1885-86) then Luton (1895-1911), before being raised to the peerage in 1911 as Baron Ashton of Hyde, a title that was earlier rejected by his father. One of his younger sisters, Elizabeth Marion Ashton (c. 1858-1939) married James Bryce, who was twenty years her senior; the two having met whilst Bryce was lecturer and then professor of Law at Owens College.³⁸⁶ Edward Hyde Greg (1827-1910), of another mill owning Manchester family, sent his son, Thomas Tylston Greg (1858-1920) to Rugby School and then to Oriel College, where he graduated BA (1881) and MA (1886) either side of being called to the bar at the Inner Temple (1882).³⁸⁷ Edward's industrialist cousin, Henry Philips Greg (1865-1936), had attended Rugby School then Trinity College, Cambridge, and became treasurer of Manchester College, Oxford as well as a trustee of the *Hibbert Journal*.

Thomas Worthington's travelling companion and fellow architect, Henry Astley Darbishire, sent his son, Frederick Astley Darbishire, to Christ Church (matriculated 1877), before he was

³⁸⁶ Jane Bedford 'Thomas Ashton, 1818-1898', *ODNB* (2004). Bedford, 'The Thomas Ashtons of Hyde: three generations of influence, 1800-1900', unpublished BA (Hons) thesis (1993), Manchester Metropolitan University, 57, 61. Christopher Harvie, 'James Bryce, Viscount Bryce, 1838-1922', *ODNB* (2011). *Alumni Oxoniensis*, I, 35.

³⁸⁷ *Alumni Oxoniensis*, II, 560. Mary B. Rose, 'The Gregs of Styal 1750-1914: The Emergence and Development of a Family Business', unpublished PhD thesis (1977), University of Manchester, Appendix A.

called to the bar at the Inner Temple in 1886. Henry Astley's father, James (1792-1836), was a well-connected Lancashire merchant, trustee of Manchester New College during its time in York, a member of the Cross Street Chapel,³⁸⁸ and a close friend of Samuel Dukinfield Darbishire (1796-1870), himself a solicitor for the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway, a trustee of Cross Street Chapel, the Manchester Athenaeum, and Manchester New College, and father to thirteen children with his wife, Mary Blackmore (1804-1880). Their eldest son, Robert Dukinfield Darbishire (1826-1908), was an ex-student, then lay secretary of Manchester New College during and beyond its removal to Oxford and was an otherwise notable philanthropist, being a founder of the Manchester High School for Girls and the Whitworth Gallery, in addition to being a trustee and benefactor of Owens College from 1864.³⁸⁹ Robert Dukinfield's son, Godfrey, attended Rugby School before matriculating at Balliol College in 1872. Godfrey's paternal cousin, Bernhard Vernon Darbishire, son of Vernon Darbishire, matriculated as a non-Collegiate student at Oxford in 1885. Robert Dukinfield's youngest brother, Samuel Dukinfield Darbishire (1846-1888), had the strongest attachment to the University: he attended University College School before matriculating at Balliol in 1865, obtaining BA (1871), MA (1872), proceeding BMed (1877), and DMed (1883).³⁹⁰ In addition to rowing stroke for the University, Samuel Dukinfield became the Physician at the Radcliffe Infirmary, the Lichfield Lecturer in Medicine and the University Coroner before his early death at the age of 43.³⁹¹ He left one son and two daughters, the younger of whom was Helen Darbishire (1881-1961), the celebrated Wordsworth scholar and Principal of Somerville College (1930-45).

³⁸⁸ Will of James Darbishire, Merchant of Manchester, Lancashire, The National Archives, PROB 11/1865/268, 30 August 1836.

³⁸⁹ 'Mr R. D. Darbishire' *The Manchester Guardian*, November 9, 1908, 9.

³⁹⁰ Foster, *Alumni Oxoniensis*, vol. I, 337.

³⁹¹ 'Samuel Dukinfield Darbishire, M.A., M.D. Oxford.' *British Medical Journal*, (1892), vol. 2, no. 1456.

Just as the Darbishes were an embodiment of the links between liberal Manchester and Oxford, they were also a link between Manchester liberal dissent and liberal individuals of a national standing: Vernon Darbshire and his sisters were tutored by James Martineau then by F. W. Newman, but only after J. A. Froude, fresh from his *The Nemesis of Faith* (1849) being burned in Exeter College, had found employment in the home where the family became fascinated with him, albeit largely comically so, and went far beyond the gifting of a puppy named 'James Anthony' to their new tutor.³⁹²

If anyone under the sun has a magical, magnetic, glamour-like influence, that man has. He's "*aut Mephistopheles aut nihil*", that's what he is. The D[unkinfield].D[arbshire].s [sic] all bend and bow to his will, like reeds before the wind, blow whichever way it listeth. He smokes cigars constantly, Père, Robert, Arthur, Vernon (nay, once even little Francis), smoke constantly. He disbelieves, they disbelieve; he wears shabby garments, they wear shabby garments; in short it's the most complete taking away their own wills and informing them with his own that ever was. I stand without the circle of his influence; resisting with all my might, but feeling and seeing the attraction. It's queer!³⁹³

When not imitating his children's tutor, Samuel Dukinfield Darbshire Sr. became a familiar acquaintance and correspondent of W. E. Gladstone, who visited the former at his house, Pendyffryn, in Penmaenmawr.³⁹⁴ For Gladstone, who was separated from Unitarianism 'by an interval that must be called a gulf', exposure to the acceptable face of Unitarianism through the Darbishes was the beginning of an increased religious tolerance towards nonconformists.³⁹⁵ In all, the Darbishes were deeply ingrained in the University of Oxford before Manchester College removed there in 1889; at once indicative of the aspirations

³⁹² Waldo Hilary Dunn, *James Anthony Froude, A Biography* (Oxford, 1961), 154.

³⁹³ J. A. V. Chapple & Arthur Pollard (eds.), *The Letters of Mrs Gaskell* (Manchester, 1966), 83-84.

³⁹⁴ Basil Willey, 'Helen Darbshire, 1881-1961', *Proceedings of the British Academy* (1961), 401-15, 404. Richard Wade, *The Rise of Nonconformity in Manchester; with a brief sketch of Cross Street Chapel* (1880), 59; Bishop Colenso also visited Pendyffryn.

³⁹⁵ John Morley, *The Life of William Ewart Gladstone* (3 vols., London, 1903), II, 136, 137.

amongst Unitarians to take advantage of the opening of the ancient universities to nonconformists and symbolic of the pressures that Manchester New College was under to cater for Unitarians already at Oxford.

Whilst the Darbishires were inextricably tied – via marriage, business, or faith – to Manchester’s affluent Unitarian community, they were not at the economic pinnacle of that society. Cross Street Chapel boasted a congregation of unusual political, economic, social, and cultural influence. It was ‘where the bourgeoisie of Manchester worshipped God’: in addition to its fifteen MPs and innumerable magistrates and mayors, amongst Cross Street’s Trustees of the nineteenth century were the Ashtons, Fieldens, Gregs, and Strutts: four fifths of the core of Manchester’s ‘Liberal-bourgeois-Dissenting millocracy’.³⁹⁶ The other fifth, the Owens, were Congregationalists although the lack of denominational affiliation did not prevent philanthropic collaboration. The Darbishires were undoubtedly interested in the promotion of cultural and social foundations in Manchester, but their leadership in the development of Manchester New College, the leading Unitarian institution outside of Manchester, necessitates that they be seen as the foremost influence of Manchester Unitarianism in shaping that institution’s life upon its removal to Oxford. Theirs was not a ministerial influence, or at that point a scholarly one. Theirs was a social and lay religious influence, shaped by generations of involvement in the exceptionally affluent and close-knit world of Manchester Unitarianism. The design of Robert Dukinfield Darbishire, lay secretary of the College, was to connect the institution to its roots and the community that it had helped nourish just as that community had

³⁹⁶ Valentine Cunningham, *Everywhere Spoken Against: Dissent in the Victorian Novel* (Oxford, 1975), 131, 134; Wade, *op. cit.*, 53-65, an extensive prosopography of the trustees of Cross Street Chapel from the start of the nineteenth century to the 1870s reveals a tangled web of familial and business connections as well as connections outside of the Chapel’s community through philanthropy that mainly involved civic and social projects in Manchester.

helped sustain and patronise it. Darbshire, then, recognised the historical significance in being able to represent his wide and avowedly Unitarian Manchester community in Oxford:

It is with no mere love of change that we have come to Oxford. We have sought here a wider learning, a larger intercourse with studious and pious men in this national seat of Learning and Religion; coming back to claim again our share, as Englishmen, in the traditions and honour of Oxford, conscious of our littleness and weakness, but conscious, also, of an equal earnestness and as true a faith. We come, and we are unfeignedly glad to think of this – we who have been ejected and persecuted, who have been refused the opportunities of learning here, and been prevented from teaching anywhere, - to seize our first opportunity once more to take our stand, humble as our effort is, with the Church of England itself – I may say with the Churches of England – amongst those who shall mould the highest life of our country.³⁹⁷

Worthington's buildings were erected in this context. Their simple design contrasted Worthington's more modern works in Manchester. Furthermore, their style also contrasted much of the recently erected buildings in Oxford, not least Champneys's nearby Mansfield College. In extrapolating these contrasts, the diverging and unique problems faced by Manchester College in removing to Oxford is exposed: how they wanted to represent themselves, physically, in Oxford; how they determined what was the best way to assimilate within that community, at least partly still seen as hostile to Unitarianism; and how those strategies in the effort to assimilate were representative of an already widening split in the denomination.

Worthington's biographer, Arthur Pass, noted how the buildings at Oxford exhibited elements of Manchester and Oxford architectural styles, but not a synthesis of them. Oxford was represented by the layout of the College: the 'College Perpendicular', popular with Thomas

³⁹⁷ [Darbshire], *Manchester New College, Oxford: Revised Report of Proceedings and Addresses on the occasion of Firing and Unveiling the Stone of Dedication of the College Buildings, "To Truth, To Liberty, To Religion," 20th October, 1891* (London, 1891), 9.

Graham Jackson's recent Oxford designs, seen at the Examination Schools (1882), as well as in extensive parts of Somerville (1882), Lincoln (1883), Hertford (1888), Brasenose (1886 and 1889), and Trinity (1885 and 1887) Colleges.³⁹⁸ Yet this is largely the extent of the Oxford-inspired designs. Pass somewhat tolerates the Chapel's 'correct but rather unadventurous Decorated style' but is far more complimentary of the 'distinctive' Henry Tate-funded Library across the modestly sized quadrangle: 'a combination of the religious and domestic architecture of late fifteenth century.' There is a vague Tudor feel to the design; the large oriel window protruding into Mansfield Road, attracting attention amidst an otherwise plain frontage containing a gatehouse that, to Pass, was the part of the college that bore its greatest Manchester parentage: the close resemblance of the tower to Worthington's Flowery Field at Hyde, the stepped stairs into the courtyard, the bracketed dormers not dissimilar to those at Owens College in addition to the 'Waterhousian flavour' in the main staircase that leads up to the library entrance.³⁹⁹ The buildings are undoubtedly an expression of Manchester styles in Oxford form, resulting in a pragmatic tone: the legacy of an architect whose career was angled towards public and civic buildings, adapted to a city where buildings were almost without exception on a much smaller scale. They were consistent with Worthington's ecclesiastical architecture which adopted a style 'largely free of personal experimentation and with few foreign undertones.' This was owed, Pass explains, to the influence of medieval styles endorsed by Pugin and his followers had on Worthington in his youth but also to his 'Unitarian patrons, the sober patrician heirs of the earliest Protestant dissenters [who] preferred the homely, practical traditions of the parish church, suitably adapted for modern worship.'⁴⁰⁰ Indeed,

³⁹⁸ Howell, 'Appendix Principal Architectural Works at Oxford University 1800-1914', Brock & Curthoys (eds.), *The History of the University of Oxford: Vol. VII*, 763-77.

³⁹⁹ Pass, 143-44.

⁴⁰⁰ *ibid.*, 136.

detected sobriety – neither forceful or sophisticated, refined or original⁴⁰¹ – was commensurate with Worthington’s faith as understood and practised in its Manchester environs.

But Pass’s assessment does not connect Worthington’s slightly antiquated ecclesiastical style with the sort of Unitarianism that it evoked. Manchester College was far from the spires and ornate details adopted by nonconformist denominations who, over the nineteenth century, had substantially moved on from the plain, box-like chapels and meeting houses whose sparse interiors and plain glass symbolised their concern with a Scriptural faith. Instead, Worthington’s designs were a reversion to an older faith whose outlook was defined in antithesis to the lavish ecclesiastic architecture of the Church of England.

vi. Assimilation

The ecclesiastic outlook evoked by the architecture appears, then, to be at odds with the theology endorsed by the college’s professors. Although officers of the College provided consistent support of the professor’s needs and tended to defer to their expertise on matters of foundation and strategies for assimilation in Oxford in the early years, there were some differences in outlook and policy. Although these are slight differences, they reveal the difficulties in founding a Unitarian institution in Oxford and, furthermore, the differences that existed with the denomination in the late-nineteenth century. The college was advertised in the *Oxford University Gazette* as offering ‘Free Teaching and Free Learning in Theology and Piety Free’, and further that, ‘The College adheres to its original principle of freely imparting

⁴⁰¹ op. cit.

Theological knowledge without insisting on the adoption of particularly Theological doctrines.’⁴⁰²

A writer in *The Oxford Magazine*, aware of some Unitarians’ apprehensions in removing to Oxford, wrote that the ‘forward policy has triumphed, and it is an interesting sign of the times that it has done so.’ It was not long ago that ‘the position would have been wholly impossible: the Unitarians would not have wished for it, and “the stronghold of undying prejudice” would have rocked to its foundations.’ It was only natural that the Unitarians – ‘remarkable for [their] culture’ – should, amidst the ancient universities, ‘take a place among the increasing number [of theological colleges] which are gathering’ in Oxford, ‘with results to themselves and to Oxford which it is hard to predict.’ An author in the next issue left little time to ponder that parting line too deeply, questioning the need for the college to advertise piety as free: ‘We must assure Dr. Drummond that no charge is made in College Battels for the Christian graces or moral excellences.’⁴⁰³ This was bait enough for someone from the college to retort that piety had to be advertised as free as ‘piety is [only] effectual when exercised by a soul free from the embarrassments of the formulated beliefs or theories about believing of past generations.’ In reply, as ‘the spokesman of a rapidly declining sect’, Drummond was criticised for his ‘condescending toleration’ of the Church of England (i.e., the University of Oxford) and of Mansfield College. These establishments were tolerant but made no pretence to favour one theological position over another. On the other hand, Drummond concealed this mode of pragmatic toleration – a toleration with declared interest. But his hypocrisy lay in claiming that Manchester New College was an adherent of Unitarian principles whilst posturing that it was a ““free faculty of theology” above any sect’.⁴⁰⁴ If the author was concerned about the prospect

⁴⁰² *Oxford University Gazette*. No. 655, vol. XX, (Oct., 15, 1889), 50; *ibid.*, No. 656, vol. XX, (Oct., 22, 1889), 67.

⁴⁰³ *The Oxford Magazine*, vol. VIII, no. 1, Wednesday, October 16, 1889, 4.

⁴⁰⁴ *The Oxford Magazine*, vol. VIII, no. 3, Wednesday, October 30, 1889, 45.

of Unitarians making a home in Oxford, the concern was only that they were a wolf in a poorly made sheep's clothing, and that free theology, as with free piety, did not require 'a special cult of so narrow an interest for the modern religious world that there is no demand for it in a not wholly uncultivated city of fifty thousand inhabitants.' The Unitarian sect, like the Church of England and Congregationalists, rested 'upon as indispensable a basis of dogma, even if it be only of negation, as do the churches to whom with a magnificent air [Drummond] extends his "sympathy": to pretend otherwise was a dishonest and certainly non-ecumenical outlook:

At Balliol they revel in knowledge;
 At Keble they've high moral tone:
 But remember that Manchester College
 Has merits entirely its own.
 Just open last Tuesday's *Gazette*
 And scrutinise page fifty-three,
 And you'll find that you'll meet with [at 90 High Street]
 A place that gives PIETY FREE!

Stern Mansfield excludes from its wall
 All Anabaptistical views,
 They discourage within Wycliffe Hall
 Turks, Infidels, Papists and Jews:
 But at Manchester liberty reigns,
 Of its students no two need agree,
 For of course there's no need for the trammels of creed
 In a place where there's PIETY FREE!

Our fathers were wont to defend
 "The faith one delivered of old";
 But that sort of thing's at an end,
 And we never believe what we're told.
 Then dogma we'll fling to the dogs,
 No grim Mediaevalists we:
 Our bold young Socinians shall mix their opinions –
 Who cares, when they've PIETY FREE?⁴⁰⁵

⁴⁰⁵ *ibid.*, 'Piety Free', 46.

The poem was, like the ‘student of theology’, conscious of the need for an institution to be so overtly committed to a widely held belief as free piety. From the College’s perspective, free piety, as with free theology and faith, was an integral part of the inheritance of Warrington Academy’s ethos; an ethos that was perceived as still needing to be fought for despite the increased religious liberality and extension of tolerance in the intervening century since the college had been re-founded in Manchester. In his inaugural address at the opening of the college’s session on 25th October 1889, Drummond assured his audience that theological teaching, conducted on an impartial basis, would be beneficial to the subject as a whole, stretching far beyond the confines of any sect whilst explaining the ills of theological inquiry in its present state: dogmatic subscription was the ‘nursery of unbelief’ and an aversion to doubt was to ignore the concerns of those who had to contend with the rise of convincing challenges to long-held beliefs.⁴⁰⁶ In all, theology was inadequately equipped to deal with the challenges that had slowly but surely crept into the minds of a new generation of Christians. In contributing to an improvement in theology’s reputation by hastening its transformation into a science, the college would help ‘realise the underlying unity ... of our belief’ and in gaining ‘catholicity of mind [...all would] come nearer to the unity of truth.’⁴⁰⁷ It is not surprising that Drummond did not once use the word Unitarian or even tangentially refer to its corresponding doctrines. His concern to be a wholly constructive addition to theological study in Oxford dominated his address.

No doubt with sceptics in mind, in explaining the college’s position on several of its apparently paradoxical theological positions, Drummond sought refuge in fundamentals: ‘our faith is not so much in our doctrine about God as in God himself; not in our doctrine of divine grace, but

⁴⁰⁶ Drummond, ‘Old Principles, New Hopes’ in [Robert Dukinfield Darbishire], *Theology and Piety: Alike Free: From the point of view of Manchester New College, Oxford. A Contribution to its Effort, Offered by an Old Student* (London, 1890), 374-95, 377, 385-86.

⁴⁰⁷ *ibid.*, 385, 387, 388.

in the grace itself which has comforted our hearts and uplifted them in prayer; not in our doctrine about Christ's person, but in the spirit of Christ; nor in our doctrine of a future life, but in the eternal life itself, of which we have the earnest within.'⁴⁰⁸ Commitment to the process of discovery and the principles of scientific theological inquiry was complimented by a non-dogmatic faith, open to accommodate all beliefs, as had been the commitment of the College throughout its 103-year history.

Anxious to ensure the continuation of these principles, theological and intellectual, Darbishire, lay secretary of Manchester College, had situated Drummond's opening address amongst eleven other addresses given by past principals of the institution to validate the approaches of the institution's new iteration in Oxford. *Theology and Piety: Alike Free* took a far more superior tone than Drummond's more careful address, professing Manchester College's past and continuing excellence, its historic advocacy of advanced theological modes of inquiry and positions well before Orthodox theologians adopted them, and provision of men of excellent character to the progress of national society, despite legal restrictions and societal prejudices.⁴⁰⁹ Despite this slight deviation in tone, the collection of essays is a strong iteration of the legacy of Manchester College's historic work – something that Drummond's address was reluctant to fully embrace due to the historic ties to avowed Unitarianism.

Whilst Manchester College's principal purpose within Unitarianism was to train ministers for service to Unitarian congregations, the loose theological principles adopted from its outset in Oxford appear contradictory. Drummond was aware of the perils of this approach to teaching: although the 'breadth of method may be very beautiful in theory; will it suit the practical

⁴⁰⁸ *ibid.*, 393.

⁴⁰⁹ [Darbishire], 'Preface', *ibid.*, v, and 'Introductory Note', *ibid.*, xiii-xx

necessities of life?’⁴¹⁰ Theological inquiry on the College’s lines would complicate ministerial training for minds that were impressionable and not always able to contend with the complexities thrown up by such a critical course. Yet, Drummond contended, it was not possible to forbid those susceptible to doubt to train as a minister, ‘for they possess some of the most valuable qualities that the ministry demands.’ The expertise of their teacher would, ‘with delicate sympathy ... lead the soul across its Slough of Despond, and place it at last where it will find the old devoutness as clear and sweet as in the days of childhood, but enriched with larger thoughts and a wiser faith.’⁴¹¹ Ultimately, the student was free to wander in their theological position. Their ministerial training was based on the belief that a commitment to an education grounded in free piety and theology would bolster a student’s faith. But the point, made from a feeling to demonstrate the superiority of free inquiry over dogmatic instruction, was one that would come to a head just over two years after Manchester College had removed to Oxford.

Drummond had great concerns about theological restraints in the terms of scholarships which supported students during their time at the College. He wrote on 29th January, 1892 to Darbishire, a trustee of the Hibbert Trust between 1874 and 1902.⁴¹² Drummond, as a past recipient of a scholarship from the Hibbert Trust, was most likely aware of the imminent revision of the Scheme of the Trust that was sanctioned to be conducted at least every twenty-five years and which was to fall in 1893.⁴¹³ Founded on a bequest from Robert Hibbert in 1855, the Hibbert Trust was designed to support schemes that the trustees deemed ‘most conducive to the spread of Christianity in its most simple and intelligible form, and to the unfettered

⁴¹⁰ Drummond, ‘Old Principles, New Hopes’, 388.

⁴¹¹ *ibid.*, 389.

⁴¹² ‘List of Trustees’, *The Book of the Hibbert Trust* (London, 1933), 149-51.

⁴¹³ ‘Declaration of Trust’, *idem.*, 114.

exercise of private judgment in matters of religion'.⁴¹⁴ There were many mitigating terms but amongst the more significant were stipulations that no trustee was to be a minister of religion, and that the recipients of scholarships and fellowships from the Trust were to declare, in writing, that 'he deliberately intends thereafter to undertake, or (if he shall have already undertaken) that he deliberately intends thereafter to exercise the office of a minister of religion among those who shall profess themselves to be Christians; but shall not profess any belief in the doctrine of the Trinity in any sense of that doctrine now commonly considered Orthodox'.⁴¹⁵ Additionally, scholarships were to be awarded only to students who were graduates of universities in London, England, Scotland, Ireland, or the Colonies, 'where degrees shall be for the time being granted without requiring subscription or assent to any articles of religious belief or submission to any test of religious doctrine.'⁴¹⁶ That the scheme of the Trust was drawn up in 1847 reveals the intent effectively to exclude alumni of Oxford and Cambridge where religious tests were still required at some point in the course of taking degrees. The Hibbert Lectures, delivered from 1878, were initiated with a similar design that committed the lecturer to subjects addressing comparative theology; they were delivered by such eminent figures as Max Müller, Ernest Renan, Charles Beard, A. H. Sayce, and Edwin Hatch. The Trust expanded its horizons again in 1894, funding the Hibbert Lectureship in Ecclesiastical History, with the recipient holding the post at Manchester College.⁴¹⁷ As Hibbert Scholars took their degrees at Manchester College from 1889, the anti-Trinitarian foundations of the Trust came to be at odds with the developing principles of the college.

⁴¹⁴ *ibid.*, 113.

⁴¹⁵ *ibid.*, 115; 'The Schedule', *idem.*, 119.

⁴¹⁶ *ibid.*, 119.

⁴¹⁷ 'A list of Hibbert Lectures and their subjects', *idem.*, 157-58; W. H. Drummond, 'The Hibbert Trust: 1874-1932', *idem.*, 106.

It was unconscionable, Drummond thought, that any scholarships connected to an exhibition at Manchester College, would enact a religious test on a prospective student or measure the faith of a current student as he progressed through his course of study. It would be inconsistent with ‘our forefathers [who] intended to found their Academy on the broad and comprehensive principles on which they conceived a national institution ought to rest, and were determined not to imitate the exclusiveness from which they themselves had suffered.’⁴¹⁸ Restriction of bursaries on the basis of a student’s theological position at any point in their course would ‘practically [oblige] to range [i.e. limit] himself if he hoped to fulfil a useful ministry, and there can be no doubt that men may be induced to leave us through the pressure of theological change’:⁴¹⁹

Our Church army is not shut up within an immovable camp, surrounded by theological ramparts, but may move forward as a whole, and occupy fresh positions; nevertheless, stragglers cannot in presence of the enemy, go too far from the enclosure without danger of losing their efficiency, and finding themselves captured. At the present time, accordingly, to require a man to prepare himself for our ministry is to require him to be, at least in some loose sense, a Unitarian; and therefore, if his bursary were given only on condition of preparation for this particular ministry, the principle which it has been our glory to reject, of imposing theological tests, would be introduced.⁴²⁰

Imposition of tests would tarnish the college’s commitment to ‘Truth, Liberty, and Religion’ and allow its opponents, who had long held that there had in fact long been an ‘unwritten creed’, to undermine its self-perceived reputation that it was at the forefront of theological inquiry in England:

What can be nobler than to forget all our artificial distinctions in pursuit of truth, and to offer our best freely to the public, even though it may cost us something?

⁴¹⁸ Drummond, letter to Darbishire 29th January, 1892, Harris Manchester College, Oxford, 1.

⁴¹⁹ *ibid.*, 2.

⁴²⁰ *ibid.*, 2-3.

If we are to win any sympathy at Oxford, we must stand upon this basis, and make it clear that in the search for truth, and in the preparation for a divine service, we recognise no distinction of sects, but give our honours and emoluments with an impartial hand. We must be able to say: We are already trying to exemplify what we wish the University to become.⁴²¹

Even before Manchester College's buildings had been completed, the balancing act of being denominational whilst un-denominational had proved difficult; a task made more difficult by the perceived hostility of the environs of Oxford and the adoption of theological positions that fundamentally contradicted the denominational faith of the majority of the college's alumni, professors, and supporters. Drummond ended on a rather ominous note:

[The] College would naturally remain the home of students for the Unitarian ministry, at least till Unitarians have finally lost their enthusiasm of liberty.⁴²²

vii. Conclusion:

Until the issue of scholarships highlighted it, the tension that existed between even slight references to Unitarianism in a doctrinal sense and the anti-denominationalism that had grown to be influential since the early-nineteenth century had been muted in the institutionalization of Manchester College at Oxford. Biblical Unitarianism remained the most popular form of Unitarianism around the country and Manchester College was therefore largely at odds with the church from which it had originated.⁴²³ Instead of making a point of accommodating Biblical Unitarianism, Manchester College under Drummond sought to emphasise the community's

⁴²¹ *ibid.*, 4.

⁴²² *ibid.*

⁴²³ Larsen, *A People of One Book*, 138-140.

historical commitment to true Christianity and freedom of conscience in religion, leaving the denominational aspects behind.

There was not a homogenous Unitarian church to locate in the late-nineteenth century, as there had seldom been since Lindsey's congregation gathered in Essex Street in 1774. The erosion of Lindsey in Unitarianism's nineteenth-century literary acts of historicization was paralleled by the erosion of denominationalism, as committed to by Lindsey, in Unitarianism's late-nineteenth century institutional acts of historicization. The issue of assimilation into Oxford was a crucial factor in urging this trend to a circumstance which was largely devoid of denominational tendencies. Where there were attempts to cling on to Church influence in the University of Oxford's theological courses, there were active attempts to dispel association with any church from Manchester College's theological courses. Despite this, a network of Unitarians connected to the college in governing and financial capacities still appreciated the significance that a nominally Unitarian institution was tolerated in Oxford. The bastion of Anglican conservative thought and power had been penetrated. Yet the arrival in Oxford also signalled another erosion of the Unitarian church in the name of truth, liberty, and religion.

Chapter 4

The *Dictionary of National Biography* and denominational history societies

The removal of Manchester College to Oxford had merely confirmed what was already happening within Unitarianism in the late-nineteenth century. It was an undoubtedly significant event for the denomination, whose ancestors had been barred from the ancient universities for centuries. Yet its aptitude to function as a theological college devoted to supplying an educated ministry to congregations was less assured. In his inaugural address as Principal to the Unitarian Home Missionary College in Manchester in 1889, Alexander Gordon reiterated that its intent was “to build the old waste places, and to open fresh grounds... to stimulate and direct the spirit of revival, and of new enterprise.”⁴²⁴ That its name embraced a firm religious stance positions it differently from that of its cousin institution in Oxford. The high intellectual tone of Manchester College, its commitment to free theological positions and teaching, and its tacit rejection of exclusive adherence to Unitarianism made commemoration of Unitarians or Unitarianism more difficult. Yet the tradition of commemoration within the community had not waned. Biographies were still published; martyrologies, now less charged since the abolition of tests for nonconformists in almost all areas of British society, were published too. And while

⁴²⁴ Alexander Gordon, Principal of Unitarian Home Missionary College, from his inaugural address, 1889. Quoted in Herbert McLachlan, *The Unitarian Home Missionary College, 1854-1914: its foundation and development with some account of the missionary activities of its members* (Manchester, 1915), 77-78.

access to British society was almost wholly unimpeded, questions about where Unitarians fitted into the present and future were as pressing as where Unitarians belonged in the past.

The present chapter is divided into two parts. Each examines an aspect of Unitarian history writing that emerged at the end of the nineteenth and start of the twentieth century. At least two of these aspects have endured, one more healthily than the other, into the present day. The other has received a revival, owing not to the instigations of Unitarians, rather publishers and academic historians. Regardless of the enduring nature of each of these aspects, each illustrates how Unitarians were writing about the past, how they were using it and, additionally, how Unitarianism was in turn written about by authors who would not consider themselves Unitarian – however vociferously. Some of the themes that were addressed in the preceding chapter – the evolution of Unitarian biography writing, commemoration, memorialising – are reprised in some places here. Part of what is intended in the present chapter is to identify some lineages and continuities in history writing and the uses of history writing. Equally significantly is the intent to demonstrate how there were substantial changes to these processes too. Furthermore, the changes that are highlighted are suggested as being additions to the diversity of Unitarian history writing, rather than wholesale alterations of the processes of that act.

Recent studies by Michael Bentley and Stefan Collini have come in the wake of John Burrow's instructive *A Liberal Descent*, and this chapter has benefitted immensely from all three of these works of intellectual history.⁴²⁵ Each of these monographs have outlined the importance of the whig interpretation of history that ascended in the Victorian era and, in Bentley's case, held notable sway deep into the middle of the twentieth century. The whig interpretation's hegemony

⁴²⁵ Bentley, *Modernizing England's Past*; Stefan Collini, *English Pasts: Essays in History and Culture* (New York, 1999), idem., *The Nostalgic Imagination*; John Burrow, *A Liberal Descent: Victorian historians and the English past* (New York, 1981).

is characterised as being slowly, if tentatively, then more confidently, eroded by the rise of Modernism, the Namierite school, social and economic history, and professionalization, stretching from Victoria University, then Manchester University and to the IHR in the University of London, under the domineering eyes of T. F. Tout and A. F. Pollard.⁴²⁶ Focus on the history of historiography has become a powerful force in contemporary history faculties and a desire to chart the whig interpretation and its subsequent demise has captivated the attention of many historians. It is, then, within this dual context that this chapter is situated. The *Dictionary of National Biography* has always attracted the interests of historians of Victorian Britain, and this was notably revived after the start of the project to completely revise and modernise the *DNB* in 1992, as steered by editor Colin Matthew, the outcome of which was the publication of the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, published in 2004 in print and online.⁴²⁷

Gillian Fenwick's meticulous analysis of the contributors to the *DNB* exposes many fault lines in what is an otherwise smooth monument of Victorian knowledge and learning.⁴²⁸ Yet what is noticeably absent in Fenwick's analysis, as in other examinations of the development of national biography writing in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, is the role of religion in the execution of national biographical ventures. Collective biographies of professions, just as collective biographies of denominations, set a rich precedent for the emergence of national

⁴²⁶ John Kenyon, *The History Men: The Historical Profession in England since the Renaissance* (London, 1983), 181-82, 196-9.

⁴²⁷ H. C. G. Matthew, 'Dictionaries of National Biography', in Iain McCalman (ed.), *National Biographies and National Identity. A Critical Approach to Theory and Editorial Practice* (Canberra, 1996), 1-18; Brian Harrison, 'Comparative biography and the DNB' in, *Comparative Criticism* (2004), vol. 25, 3-26; Stefan Collini, 'Our Island Story' in *London Review of Books* (2005), vol. 27, no. 2, 3-8; Lawrence Goldman, 'A Monument to the Victorian Age? Continuity and Discontinuity in the Dictionaries of National Biography 1882-2004', in *Journal of Victorian Culture* (2006), vol. 11, no. 1, 111-132; James Raven, 'The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography: Dictionary or Encyclopaedia?' in *The Historical Journal* (2007), vol. 50, no. 4, 991-1006; Karen Fox (ed.), *True Biographies of Nations? The cultural journeys of dictionaries of national biography* (Acton, ACT, 2019).

⁴²⁸ Gillian Fenwick, *The Contributors' Index to the Dictionary of National Biography, 1885-1901* (Detroit, MI, 1989).

biographies in the eighteenth century, the blueprint of which was, as Isabel Rivers has shown, the strong tradition of European biographical dictionaries.⁴²⁹ The rise of nationalism in the nineteenth century gave new impetus to national biographical projects and by 1885, the publication year of the first volume of the *DNB*, Sweden, Netherlands, Austria, Belgium, Germany, Denmark, Italy, and the United States of America all had a national biography of some description.⁴³⁰ These projects were often state-sponsored enterprises yet Britain's version was privately funded by George Murray Smith's publishing firm, Smith, Elder, & Co.. The editor employed to execute the task was Leslie Stephen, whose prominence in the Victorian literary world could hardly have been higher. For all of the high, literary, and aristocratic connections Stephen embodied – related to the Clapham Sect, Cambridge liberals, the Thackerays⁴³¹ – he was conscious that a national biography was not merely a national biography of the circles that he moved in, but that it should 'have as many thousands of obscure names as possible',⁴³² even if this still meant that the *DNB* would end up admitting many individuals to whom he was linked, either by blood, marital blood, or literarily.⁴³³ Yet Stephen had, as Annan found, 'no use for the two- or three-decker life and letters', nor biography that prioritised the private over the public literary life.⁴³⁴ Brevity was essential, but this was also an implicit attack on the panegyric biography, whose popularity remained high within religious society. Nevertheless, Stephen was a man who learned of historical figures, major or minor, via their literary works.⁴³⁵ In this sense, the prioritisation of literary biography was a prominent

⁴²⁹ Donald A. Stauffer, *The Art of Biography in Eighteenth Century England: Bibliographical Supplement* (Princeton, NJ, 1941); Isabel Rivers, 'Biographical Dictionaries and their Uses from Bayle to Chalmers', in Rivers (ed.), *Books and their Readers in Eighteenth-Century England: New Essays* (London & New York, 2001), 135-170.

⁴³⁰ Matthew, 'Dictionaries of National Biography', 3-4; Elizabeth Baigent, 'Nationality and Dictionaries of National Biography', in McCalman (ed.), *National Biographies*, 63-73.

⁴³¹ Noel Annan, *Leslie Stephen: The Godless Victorian* (New York, 1984); Annan, 'The Intellectual Aristocracy', in J. H. Plumb (ed.), *Studies in Social History: A Tribute to G. M. Trevelyan* (London, 1955), 256-283.

⁴³² Stephen, 'The New Biographical Dictionary', *The Athenaeum* (13 Jan. 1883), no. 2881, 54.

⁴³³ David Amigoni, 'Distinctively queer little morsels: Imagining distinction, groups, and difference in the *DNB* and the *ODNB*', in *Journal of Victorian Culture* (2005), vol. 10, no. 2, 279-288.

⁴³⁴ Annan, *Leslie Stephen*, 303.

⁴³⁵ B. W. Young, *The Victorian Eighteenth Century: An Intellectual History* (New York, 2007), 107.

feature of his national biographical design. It follows, then, that individuals who were literary and, by extension, communities that were literary, were ripe for inclusion in Stephen's *DNB*.

As a central figure to the genesis and execution of the *DNB*, Stephen has rightly been well represented and scrutinised. In contrast to the more jingoistic national biographies from other European nations, Stephen's *DNB* was 'tinged more with cultural pessimism than cultural superiority', and this is reflected in the ambiguities around there being no mention of geographic boundaries in its title.⁴³⁶ If Stephen's geographic, national agnosticism was prevalent, so too was his religious agnosticism; the *DNB* was not the possession of the establishment class – political or religious – and it is because of this that divergent religious groups came to be well represented. Certainly, Stephen's *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century* indicated an interest in the theological controversies, developments, and heresies of previous generations, and if Dissenters were not orthodox in theology, they claimed an equal amount of Stephen's attention as their established counterparts.⁴³⁷ As Lawrence Goldman argued, the eclecticism of the *DNB* validates claims that it remains a monument to the Victorian mind, and not, as Amigoni contended, a 'monument of official discourse, which resisted forms of fugitive or subversive discourse believed to carry the potential to undermine established institutions[:] a sophisticated bid for cultural power'.⁴³⁸ Goldman also endorsed F. W. Maitland's view that the *DNB*'s eclecticism was essentially a reflection of 'the confusion of the national mind', as much as it was a reflection of the confusion of Stephen's mind.⁴³⁹

⁴³⁶ Matthew, *Leslie Stephen and the New Dictionary of National Biography, Leslie Stephen Lecture, 1995* (Cambridge, 1995), 36; Matthew, 'Dictionaries of National Biography', 17.

⁴³⁷ Stephen, *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century*, I, 433-439 on the dispute between Samuel Horsley and Joseph Priestley is an example of Stephen's even-handedness; B. W. Young, 'History', in Mark Bevir (ed.), *Historicism and the Human Sciences in Victorian Britain* (Cambridge, 2017), 154-186, 182-183.

⁴³⁸ Amigoni, 'Life histories and the cultural politics of historical knowing: the *Dictionary of national Biography* and the late nineteenth century political field', in Shirley Dex (ed.), *Life and Work History Analyses: Qualitative and Quantitative Developments* (London, 1991), 144-166, 146, 163 in Lawrence Goldman, 'A Monument to the Victorian age?', 118.

⁴³⁹ F. W. Maitland, *The Life and Letters of Leslie Stephen 1906* (London, 1907) 2nd edn., 368 quoted in Goldman, 'A Monument to the Victorian Age?', 118. Stephen's life, pocked with familial crises, was as much a contributing

However much agnosticism or confusion prevailed in Stephen's mind, Unitarian contributors to the *DNB* did not share it. Where there has been much excavation about the editorial process of the *DNB*, the search for understanding its aims, motivations, and definitions, there has been less research about the continuities and discontinuities of literary and history writing traditions whose historical communities came to be represented in the *DNB*.

Furthermore, the prevalence of research that has focussed on the professionalization and modernisation of history writing more broadly, especially those studies concerned with the emergence of history periodicals in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, has yet to consider the tradition of history writing that was corralled into the religious denominational historical societies' transactions in the same period.⁴⁴⁰ Where studies have focussed more broadly on historical writing, historical societies are similarly ignored, and this is in large part to do with the concern with the development of history within universities, whose dominance in the period is undoubtedly large.⁴⁴¹ At the same time that history was emerging as a distinct and scientific subject at universities, periodicals were being established – *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* (1872) and *English Historical Review* (1886), for instance – in imitation of prominent continental publications such as *Historische Zeitschrift* and the *Revue historique*.⁴⁴² Within the amateur history world of Britain, and on a more local level, older

factor to any of his confusion about society: Jeffrey Paul von Arx, *Progress and Pessimism: Religion, Politics, and History in late-nineteenth century Britain* (Cambridge, Mass. & London, 1985), 49-51.

⁴⁴⁰ Bentley, *Modernizing England's Past*; Jane Garnett, 'Protestant histories: James Anthony Froude, partisanship and national identity', in Peter Ghosh & Lawrence Goldman (eds.), *Politics and Culture in Victorian Britain: Essays in Memory of Colin Matthew* (Oxford, 2006), 171-191; Kenyon, *The history men*; Peter R. H. Slee, *Learning and a liberal education: the study of modern history in the universities of Oxford, Cambridge and Manchester, 1800-1914* (Manchester, 1986); Reba Soffer, *Discipline and Power: The University, History, and the Making of an English Elite, 1870-1930* (Stanford, CA, 1994).

⁴⁴¹ D. S. Goldstein, 'The professionalisation in history in Britain in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries', *Storia della storiografia* (1983), vol. 3, 3-27; Gabriele Lingelbach, 'The Institutionalization and Professionalization of History in Europe and the United States' & Bentley, 'Shape and Pattern in British Historical Writing, 1815-1945', 204-224, in Stuart Macintyre, Juan Maignuashca, Attila Pók (eds.), *The Oxford History of Historical Writing: Volume 4: 1800-1945* (New York, 2011), 78-96.

⁴⁴² Goldstein, 'The Origins and Early Years of the English Historical Review', in *The English Historical Review* (Jan., 1986), vol. 101, no. 398, 6-19.

societies ostensibly preoccupied with historical documents and history such as the Surtees Society, the Camden Society and the Chetham Society were one of several organisations which harnessed an explosion in historical interest in the nineteenth century.⁴⁴³ These were variously named archaeological or historical societies with the latter becoming more fashionable as history became a more definite area of scholarly exploration. Where the *DNB* satisfied interest in the sculpting of a national monument, however imperfectly, the *Victoria County History* (1899-) was the monument for village greens, county towns, flood plains, and local escarpments. It was established as an ambitious blend of the antiquarian, historical, and natural sciences that characterised the Victorian insatiability for knowledge.⁴⁴⁴ Whereas the project's eponymous monarch died two years after its establishment, the work continues to be expanded today. The proliferation of distinct knowledge areas, the increased accessibility of knowledge, and the desire to organise that knowledge was felt in all areas of Victorian society and continued into the Edwardian period.⁴⁴⁵ The *Victoria County History* was attentive to elements of Church history; it was effectively forced to, given the division of counties into parishes (although the prominence of diocese is more muted). But where it was illuminating about the role of Church and chapel in local contexts, it required a large amount of assumed historical knowledge when it came to references to national histories of religion.⁴⁴⁶

Three history writing traditions are visible: the national, the professional and institutional, and the local. The denominational historical societies do not neatly fit into any of these traditions

⁴⁴³ Philippa Levine, *The Amateur and the Professional: Antiquarians, Historians, and Archaeologists in Victorian England, 1838-1886* (Cambridge, 1986); R. J. Morris, 'Clubs, Societies and Associations', in F. M. L. Thompson (ed.), *The Cambridge Social History of Britain, 1750-1950: Volume 3: Social agencies and institutions* (Cambridge, 1990), 395-444.

⁴⁴⁴ John Beckett and Charles Watkins, 'Natural History and Local History in Late Victorian and Edwardian England: The Contribution of the Victoria County History', in *Rural History* (2011), vol. 22, no. 1, 59-87; John Beckett, Matthew Bristow, Elizabeth Williamson, *The Victoria County History, 1899-2012: a diamond jubilee celebration* (London, 2011).

⁴⁴⁵ Martin Daunt (ed.), *The Organisation of Knowledge in Victorian Britain* (Oxford, 2005).

⁴⁴⁶ Christopher Elrington, 'The Victoria County History', in *The Local Historian* (Aug., 1992), vol. 22, no. 3, 128-137, 132.

but they undoubtedly borrow from all. The organisational principle of these societies was centred around an interest in the history of a church, but membership was not, unlike the church in question itself, conditional on confession of faith. Unlike other societies affiliated to the churches to which they were loosely attached, they were well-subscribed.⁴⁴⁷ The Wesleyan, Presbyterian, Congregationalist, Quaker, and Unitarian historical societies adopted a distinct tradition of historical writing from other ‘nonconformist’ religious historical societies: the Jewish and Catholic. In total, they are perhaps the last remaining area of historical publications in the era that have not attracted the attention of intellectual or literary historians. An attempt to fit them into the historical writing tradition at the start of the twentieth century is made here with particular reference to the background of the individuals who made up these societies in the context of their denomination. It is further suggested that there was a strong sense of denominational, Christian duty in historical research, cataloguing, surveying, and preservation of archival information in addition to the conveying of findings for a wider, often invested, and well-connected audience. These were not just considered acts of historical research rather as acts of Christian duty and it is argued that this was a perpetuation of previous literary acts that were highly valued in denominations, particularly Unitarianism.

i. *Dictionary of National Biography* and Alexander Gordon:

The *DNB* was and is a national monument. It does not have the same physical public presence as other monuments might – although its vastness often commands much gravitas in libraries who still carry the print version – but it has had a more enduring impact as a monument of

⁴⁴⁷ Stephen Yeo, *Religion and Voluntary Organisations in Crisis* (London, 1976). Yeo’s intricate study of Reading illuminates the drop off in membership to a whole host of religiously affiliated voluntary organisations and voluntary organisations more broadly due to the rise of leisure and crisis of religion in the 1900s.

history than most of its physical counterparts. Yet what exactly should it be considered a monument to? The options are multitudinous but two key options transpire; a monument of individuals who made a significant contribution to British history (with all of the complications that that phrase implies) or, a monument to the Victorian version of British history.⁴⁴⁸ Very often, as has been the case with the use of ‘*ODNB*’ throughout the references of this thesis, the *DNB* was used as an authoritative source of biography and history in the pages of histories that have been published since its completion in the early-twentieth century. There appear to be few instances of criticism of its biographies. It is used for references and sources and there is, perhaps, no other more influential history in the twentieth century. It makes historical research that bit easier for students and professionals alike and its recent modernization has only served to ensure that it can act as such for the next generation too. As Leslie Stephen reflected, it is at the very least ‘an indispensable guide to persons who would otherwise feel that they were hopelessly hewing their way through a hopelessly intricate jungle.’⁴⁴⁹ For all of its potential and accessibility, the original *DNB* (and the new version, the *ODNB*, will undoubtedly be treated in the same way by future historical research) was a Victorian enterprise that had enormous reach, retaining influence well into the twentieth century, perhaps in a manner that is wholly unprecedented given the depth of change that was sweeping historical research in that time period.⁴⁵⁰

With the help of Unitarian minister of Newington Green Unitarian Church, Joseph Towers, Andrew Kippis published *Biographia Britannica* (1778-93).⁴⁵¹ For someone like Leslie Stephen, whose interest in the eighteenth century was exceptionally deep, even obsessive, the dictionary was an influential precedent when George Murray Smith of Smith, Elder & Co..

⁴⁴⁸ Annan, *Leslie Stephen*, 87-89. Annan is certain that it is ‘a monument to the Victorian age.’

⁴⁴⁹ Leslie Stephen, *Studies of a Biographer* (3 vols., London, 1929), I, 11.

⁴⁵⁰ Bentley, *Modernizing England's Past*; Reba Soffer, *Discipline and Power*.

⁴⁵¹ Isabel Rivers, ‘Biographical Dictionaries’.

Smith had approached Stephen, then editor of Smith's *The Cornhill Magazine*, to become editor of a universal dictionary, on the design of the recently published *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie* (1875), which would encompass biographies of individuals from world history. Stephen tempered Smith's ambitions and agreed to become editor of a project whose scope was national instead, along the design of *Biographia Britannica*, even adopting that name during the infancy of the project.⁴⁵² Stephen was later joined by Sidney Lee, first as an assistant and then as Stephen's successor when the first editor resigned on the grounds of ill health in 1891. Lee shepherded the *DNB* to its concluding volume in 1900 and although he was responsible for some of the corrective volumes, when the venture was sold to Oxford University Press in 1917, Lee was moved on.⁴⁵³

Lee wrote that 'Pyramids and mausoleums, statues and columns... all fail to satisfy one or other of the conditions of permanence, publicity, and perspicuity.' Instead, it was 'to the prosaic, yet more accessible and more adaptable, machinery of biography that a nation must turn if her distinguished sons and daughters are to be accorded rational and efficient monuments.' Whilst 'Biography is of its essence public and perspicuous; it is not less certainly permanent' than a statue or monument made of marble or brass.⁴⁵⁴ The social and cultural value of commemoration was, regardless of its permanence, central to the project; that biography offered a more adaptable and representative way of commemorating the plurality of interested communities who had a place in British history was the attraction and advantage of the literary

⁴⁵² Ian Donaldson, 'National Biography and the Arts of Memory: From Thomas Fuller to Colin Matthew', in Peter France & William St. Clair (eds.), *Mapping Lives: The Uses of Biography* (New York, 2004), 66-82, 79.

⁴⁵³ David Cannadine, 'Inexhaustible Vicissitudes: The *DNB*, OUP, and the *ODNB*, from Sir Leslie Stephen to Sir Brian Harrison', in Bruce Kinzer, Molly Baer Kramer & Richard Trainor (eds.), *Reform and Its Complexities in Modern Britain: Essays Inspired by Sir Brian Harrison* (New York, 2022), 118-139, 119-127; Brian Harrison, 'Comparative Biography and the *DNB*'; Gillian Fenwick, *The Contributors' Index*; Keith Thomas, *Changing Conceptions of National Biography: The Oxford *DNB* in Historical Perspective: Leslie Stephen Special Lecture Delivered in the Senate House, Cambridge, 1 October 2004* (Cambridge, 2004).

⁴⁵⁴ Sidney Lee, *National Biography: A Lecture Delivered at the Royal Institution, 31 January 1896* (London, 1896), 13, 14-15.

form of commemoration. But that did not mean that there were not pitfalls and Lee's optimism contrasted with Stephen's wariness, being especially conscious of the role of the biographer in the transaction between subject and monument: 'The writer must often make the sacrifice of keeping his most important reflections to himself' and in doing so must limit himself to giving 'the significant facts [and be content with leaving] the discovery of their significance to the reader.'⁴⁵⁵ The suitability of biography for the construction of a historical, national monument, put an enormous amount of trust in the writer understanding the responsibilities involved. Stephen emphasised the importance of biographer in 'satisfying' the reader's 'commemorative instinct'.⁴⁵⁶ There had been, he explained, groups throughout the past whose commemorative instinct had borne fruit: the records of graduates of the University of Oxford by Anthony à Wood in *Athenæ Oxoniensis*, compilations of the lives of the two thousand ejected ministers in 1662, lives of Jesuits under the penal laws, and Quakers under duress and greater tolerance 'who have always been conspicuous for preserving the records of their brethren.' There was, then, an acknowledgement that certain communities were more historicized than others and that some of these communities made a conscious effort to do so. These historicized, well commemorated communities had not only produced prototypes of biographical dictionaries, but ensured their inclusion in the event of a national version because their past efforts had been consciously exhaustive. Although these efforts were not collected in the way that a dictionary might be, they sat on the margins of the forms of biographical dictionaries which made an effort to chart a broader class of individuals, often bound by profession instead of institutional or religious affiliation:

An ideal dictionary would be a complete codification or summary of all the previously existing collections. It must aim at such an approximation to that result as human frailty will permit; in other words, it is bound first to include all

⁴⁵⁵ Stephen, *Studies of a Biographer*, I, 24-25.

⁴⁵⁶ *ibid.*, 12, 21, 24.

the names which have appeared in any respectable collection of lives, and, in the next place, to supplement this by including a great many names which, for one reason or another, have dropped out, but which appear to be approximately of the same rank. The rule, it is obvious, must be in part the venerable 'rule of thumb,' but it gives a kind of test which is a sufficient guide in discreet hands.⁴⁵⁷

Who then, were those entrusted with possessing this discretion to determine not just who might be a fresh entrant to national biography but also form the basis from the multitudinous selection of collections of lives? Furthermore, is a question concerned with what constituted a 'respectable collection of lives'. No doubt the machinery of the *DNB* under Stephen, Lee, and their team of sub-editors, was scrupulous in its role as gatekeepers of national biography, but there was clearly an acknowledgment that those communities who had the foresight to chart the history of their communities via a range of literary commemorations, were already on an advantageous footing in the quest to be represented in the largest biographical dictionary produced in nineteenth-century Europe. Indeed, Lee believed that 'national biography will not fulfil its purpose unless it adopt a principle of inclusion that is generous':

National biography must be prepared to satisfy the commemorative instinct of all sections of a nation. Every great religious or political crisis generates, in large numbers of persons, distinctive achievements of the smaller magnitudes which specially excited the commemorative instinct of certain sections of the population.⁴⁵⁸

Those with a particularly strong commemorative instinct – the Unitarians, for instance – were well placed to seize such an opportunity.

⁴⁵⁷ *ibid.*, 17.

⁴⁵⁸ Lee, 'National Biography', in *The Cornhill Magazine* (Mar., 1896), vol. 26, no. 153, 258-277, 270.

There were a total of 653 contributors to the *DNB* to 1901. Of these, a meagre 34 were accountable for over half of the published articles.⁴⁵⁹ The most prolific contributor, Thompson Cooper, who was also responsible for compiling the lists of proposed entries in *The Athenaeum* magazine every six months, wrote a staggering 1,423 entries. In addition, Cooper had compiled a new *Athenae Cantabrigiensis* with his father in 1858, was a parliamentary reporter, journalist with *The Telegraph*, a specialist in the history of shorthand, and published his own *Biographical Dictionary* in 1873. This industriousness was commonplace amongst those who contributed the most entries to the *DNB*. Often, their contributions drew on specialist knowledge or interest and as such coalesced around a historical community, even though the connections between the constitutive members were not often drawn out. Many of Cooper's entries were Roman Catholics, Cambridge graduates, modern journalists, and shorthand writers.⁴⁶⁰ The transfer of real-life pursuits and interests into the pages of the *DNB* suggests that the monument was made of very different stones as each contributor brought with them a different interest and agenda. These interests could be found to be themed by geography, career, religious identity, and educational institutions, amongst other interests. John Knox Laughton, whose career in the Royal Navy started in Crimea and ended in the teaching college at Portsmouth, wrote almost exclusively on naval lives.⁴⁶¹ Lionel Henry Cust's career in art history, chiefly as director of the National Portrait Gallery, was biographer of hundreds of artists.⁴⁶² Proud Cornishman George Clement Boase's contributions reflected his regional connection, having published the *Bibliotheca Cornubiensis* (1874-82) with fellow Cornishman and *DNB* contributor William Prideaux Courtney. Eventual university historians A. F. Pollard, T. F. Tout, C. H. Firth, and James Tait all spent a substantial amount of time with the *DNB*, honing their research skills

⁴⁵⁹ Fenwick, *The Contributors' Index*, xx.

⁴⁶⁰ A. A. Brodribb & G. Murphy, 'Cooper, Thompson (1837-1904), biographer and journalist' *ODNB* (2004).

⁴⁶¹ G. A. R. Callender & A. Lambert, 'Laughton, Sir John Knox (1830-1915), naval educator and historian' *ODNB* (2007).

⁴⁶² L. Binyon & C. Lloyd, 'Cust, Sir Lionel Henry (1859-1929), art historian' *ODNB* (2006).

before moving on to permanent teaching positions in regional, London, and ancient universities. Their contributions were largely defined by historical period, rather than profession or regional geography, in contrast to the majority of the contributors whose narrower interests and specialisms were reflected by a similar narrowness in contribution.

Amongst the most prolific of these contributors whose interests were centred around a particular demographic or community was Alexander Gordon, who had 699 articles published, one of only seven contributors whose work appeared in all 63 volumes from 1885 to 1901.⁴⁶³ Nuttall calculated that his contributions stretched to around 750 pages or one and a half of the original volumes.⁴⁶⁴ Gordon was a Unitarian minister, son of Unitarian minister John Gordon, whose major literary works before his prolific work with the *DNB* were four publications in the *Proceedings* of the Liverpool Literary and Philosophical Society: ‘A Pythagorean of the Seventeenth Century’; ‘The Fortunes of a Flemish Mystic’; ‘The Origin of the Muggletonians’; and ‘Ancient and Modern Muggletonians’. The seventeenth-century theme is no surprise for a man who would dedicate the vast majority of his historical scholarship to examining the origins of English Dissent. His publications on the Muggletonians had taken him to the sect’s archive in London, the custodian of which was a Muggletonian, and later earned himself an invite to their secretive meetings in the capital, and by 1905 was close enough to call them ‘my good friends the Muggletonians’.⁴⁶⁵ He was the only non-Muggletonian to be invited to witness this event;⁴⁶⁶ a remarkable feat given the lengths that E. P. Thompson went to track down the last

⁴⁶³ Fenwick, *The Contributors’ Index*, xxx. Alan Ruston and Herbert McLachlan, biographers of Gordon, count 778 and 720 contributions respectively: Ruston, ‘Gordon, Alexander (1841-1931), Unitarian minister and historian’ *ODNB*; McLachlan, *Alexander Gordon (9 June 1841-21 February 1931): A Biography with a bibliography* (Manchester, 1932), 66. See also, A. D. G. Steers, ‘Alexander Gordon: ‘An Irishman and, at heart, a citizen of Belfast’, in Leonard Smith, *Unitarian to the Core: Unitarian College Manchester, 1854-2004* (Manchester, 2004), copy from author.

⁴⁶⁴ Geoffrey F. Nuttall, ‘Alexander Gordon’s “Obiter Dicta”’, in *TUHS* (1943), vol. 8, 85-88, 85.

⁴⁶⁵ Gordon, ‘The Biographical Method in Theology’, in A. S. Peake (ed.), *Inaugural Lectures Delivered by Members of the Faculty of Theology During its First Session, 1904-5* (Manchester, 1905), 177-192, 178.

⁴⁶⁶ Gordon, ‘Ancient and Modern Muggletonians’, in *Proceedings of the Literary and Philosophical Society of Liverpool* (Liverpool, 1870), no. 24, 186-244, 186, 241-242.

Mugletonian, Philip Noakes in Kent, before he died in 1979.⁴⁶⁷ Gordon's interest was not confined to his familial faith, and neither were his contributions to the *DNB*. He wrote articles on a vast array of nonconformists, deriving from the commonwealth sects of the seventeenth century to New Dissent in the nineteenth century. Gordon's meticulousness could easily be construed as obsessive but is better explained as part of his literary inheritance, derived from Unitarianism's emphasis on history writing and commemoration. It might be considered fortuitous that Unitarianism had produced such a prolific and accurate historian of religious history: "as an authority on Church History in general it is questionable whether Alexander Gordon is surpassed by any living man".⁴⁶⁸ Moreover, it was fortuitous that such an authority was one of the most prolific contributors to the first completed large scale national biography of Britain.

Gordon recognised the power of the biographer: 'If you think a man to be a devil and want to make him out to be an angel, sit down and write his biography', and, of course, the reverse can be true.⁴⁶⁹ McLachlan was convinced that Gordon had avoided the pitfalls that previous biographers had succumbed to, never being 'guilty of the shining but slipshod unscrupulousness which distinguishes the popular biographies of a certain modern romantic school of writers more conspicuous for high colouring in expression than for factual exactitude or judicial rectitude.'⁴⁷⁰ If the tendency to venerate individuals had changed over the course of the nineteenth century, McLachlan had revived such a practice with his biography of Gordon. There is more serious suggestion in McLachlan's assessment that Gordon's biographies, as with the

⁴⁶⁷ McLachlan, *Alexander Gordon*, 56-57. E. P. Thompson, *Witness Against the Beast: William Blake and the Moral Law* (Cambridge, 1993), 115-119; William Lamont, *Last witness: the Mugletonian history, 1652-1979* (Aldershot, 2006); Lamont, 'The Mugletonians 1652-1979: A "Vertical" Approach', in *Past & Present* (May, 1983), no. 99, 20-40.

⁴⁶⁸ Fred W. Lewis in *Methodist Recorder*, reviewing Gordon's *DNB* biography of John Wesley, cited in McLachlan, *Alexander Gordon*, 67.

⁴⁶⁹ Quoted in *ibid.*, 69.

⁴⁷⁰ *ibid.*

rest of his historical writing, was nearly unchallengeable. Of course, there were critics from other groups whose past communities had been written about by Gordon for the *DNB*, some of whom were anxious to know why so much of Gordon's energy had been expended on obscure, 'second-rate' Nonconformist ministers.⁴⁷¹ When he published *Heads of English Unitarian History* in 1895, neither the scruples about the fallibility and potential for malicious influence of the biographer, nor the need for reasoning why the biographer had chosen his subjects was required. Here, writing for a friendly audience, and divided into three broad time periods to demonstrate 'some continuity', Gordon was able to connect the lives of individual biographies with the verticality that was commonplace within the Unitarian literary tradition.⁴⁷² The structure of the *DNB*, alphabetical rather than chronological, national rather than denominational, was inhospitable to the narrative control vital to conveying such stories within a national historical monument. Yet, as with contributors whose interest was dictated by region, profession, or class, contributors like Gordon whose knowledge specialism lay in the history of Dissent, the *DNB* was a receptacle of community interest groups.

Gordon's involvement with the *DNB* represented a confluence of historical traditions. The denominational tendency to historicize via commemorative biography, often hagiographically, had to assimilate into the vastness of a national biography whose aim was to be at least vaguely representative of historical communities. There was understandably not a suggestion from Stephen or Lee that declaration of interest was needed from the contributors. Gordon, head of the Unitarian College, Manchester, Unitarian minister, from a Unitarian family, who married into a Unitarian family, was entrusted with many Unitarian biographies for a national biography. Even after securing the place of hundreds of Unitarians into the *DNB*, Gordon said that the

⁴⁷¹ *ibid.*

⁴⁷² Gordon, *Heads of English Unitarian History*, 13.

‘history of English Unitarianism is less known than it deserves to be.’⁴⁷³ Yet his representation of Unitarians in the *DNB* had ensured Unitarianism of greater awareness for generations of historians, casual and professional, to come. He furthermore continued the Unitarian tradition of commemoration of an individual’s literary contribution to the community.

Gordon’s biography of John Disney is divided into two sections: one biographical about Disney’s life, relations, fortunes, and one about his literary contribution. A relatively junior character in the development of Unitarianism in England, Gordon commemorated his ‘valuable collection of controversial literature occasioned by the ‘Confessional’ but juxtaposed this praised with the obiter dicta that he was ‘a careful and exact writer, but not a man of much intellectual force.’⁴⁷⁴ Thomas Belsham was a man of undoubted significance, whose development of Unitarianism in the early-nineteenth century was remembered as an important continuation of the Unitarianism of Lindsey and Priestley. Whereas Gordon wrote of Belsham’s ‘massive powers and commanding style’,⁴⁷⁵ Jennett Humphreys – Belsham’s *DNB* biographer, writer on cooking and composer children’s verse⁴⁷⁶ – offered a blander assessment and remembered his literary contributions as ‘very numerous’ with only minor notice of their importance, largely when the minister was in public disagreement with Unitarianism’s enemies.⁴⁷⁷ Humphreys was a peculiar choice for writing Belsham’s biography. There are no tangible links between her and Unitarianism, nor religion more generally. Yet she was the biographer of some prominent Unitarians: minister and editor Robert Aspland, his son, Robert Brooke Aspland, and minister John Prior Estlin. The decisions to assign biographies to certain

⁴⁷³ *ibid.*, ‘Preface’.

⁴⁷⁴ Gordon, ‘Disney, John, D.D. (1746-1816)’ *ODNB* (1888)
<https://doi.org/10.1093/odnb/9780192683120.013.7685>

⁴⁷⁵ Gordon, *Heads of Unitarian History*, 45.

⁴⁷⁶ Jennett Humphreys, *Laugh and Learn*, (London, 1890).

⁴⁷⁷ Humphreys, ‘Belsham, Thomas (1750-1829)’, *ODNB* (1885)
<https://doi.org/10.1093/odnb/9780192683120.013.2066>

individuals remains an opaque process. There is an indication that Gordon wanted to write at least Robert Aspland's life. He had annotated the sheet of potential names for inclusion in the *DNB* and these are largely consistent with the individuals that he ended up writing biographies for.⁴⁷⁸ Yet what the authorship of the articles on Unitarians published does demonstrate is that whilst Gordon the highest profile Unitarian amongst the regular contributors and whilst he was considered amongst the best historians of religion of his time, this did not automatically mean that he was assigned the most prominent names that came from his faith's historical community.

Yet not all prominent Unitarians whose lives were commemorated in the *DNB* were written by non-Unitarians like Humphreys. In a continuation of Unitarian tradition of commemoration of close friends or family members, *The Times* parliamentary reporter Arthur Aikin Brodribb (he appeared as A. A. Brodribb in the *DNB*), wrote the *DNB* entries for many of his ancestors and ancestors' acquaintances:⁴⁷⁹ John Aikin (1713-1780), John Aikin (1747-1822), Lucy Aikin, Anna Laetitia Barbauld, and Gilbert Wakefield. Indeed, this confirms the thesis steered by Felicity James and Ian Inkster that there existed a strong tradition in 'furthering ideas from one generation to the next' that was particularly prevalent in the family unit.⁴⁸⁰ Familial ties were not impactful with Theophilus Lindsey's biographer, Albert Nicholson, who was part of a prominent mercantile and Unitarian family of Manchester. He was sometime president of the Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society and would become president of the Unitarian Historical Society from 1919 to 1921.⁴⁸¹ Nicholson contributed a total of 40 biographies to the *DNB*, the majority of which are of individuals connected to Northwest England. Lindsey did

⁴⁷⁸ Nearly all the sheets, annotated by Gordon, can be found in the rich collection of his *DNB* research materials and notes in JRUL, Manchester.

⁴⁷⁹ 'Obituary. Mr A. A. Brodribb', *The Times* (April 16, 1927), iss. 44557, 12.

⁴⁸⁰ James, 'Religious Dissent and the Aikin-Barbauld circle, 1740-1860: an introduction', in James and Inkster (eds.), *Religious Dissent and the Aikin-Barbauld Circle*, 5.

⁴⁸¹ 'Obituary', *TUHS* (1927), vol. 4, no. 1, 90. His older brother, Francis Nicholson, had served as vice-president of the Unitarian Historical Society; see 'Francis Nicholson', *TUHS* (1923), vol. 3, no. 3, 293-294; see also Ernest Axon (ed.), *Memorials of the family of Nicholson of Blackshaw, Dumfriesshire, Liverpool and Manchester* (Printed for private circulation, 1928), 1-12 & 147-153.

not fit this mould. As with Gordon's literary prioritisations of Disney's life, Nicholson devotes a large portion of his biography to Lindsey's literary contributions to the extent that there is little room for assessing Lindsey's significance in the emergence of the Unitarian movement otherwise. Unitarianism's tendency to commemorate Lindsey's sacrifice upon resignation is limited to a sentence: 'Lindsey had lavishly bestowed his income on his poor parishioners, and he was obliged to sell his plate and part of his library to maintain himself after leaving his rectory.' After Disney's arrival at Essex Street Chapel to share the ministerial duties in 1783, focus shifts solely on to Lindsey's literary life but almost exclusively on those publications that came to the defence of Priestley.⁴⁸² Gordon's own copy of the published *DNB*, filled with memorabilia, inserts, annotations, and corrections, suggests that Nicholson was felt not to have given enough space to Lindsey's literary exploits, nor had he given appropriate attention to commemorations of Lindsey. Chief amongst Nicholson's deficiencies was any mention of the importance of his wife, Hannah. Nicholson had not consulted 'Mrs Cath. Cappe's *Life*. 1823. 2 ed' nor 'The Christian Character exemplified. a Discourse occasioned by the death of Mrs Hannah Lindsey'.⁴⁸³ But what might have had interest to Unitarian audiences, might not have had the same interest to the general public, as McLachlan wrote in an intricate article on Gordon's copy of the *DNB*.⁴⁸⁴ As with the copy itself, it indicates a man frustrated by the restrictive nature of national biography yet whose industriousness, curatorial tendencies, and encyclopaedic mind was content to contribute as many lives of nonconformist individuals as the editors would allow.

⁴⁸² Albert Nicholson, 'Lindsey, Theophilus (1722-1808)', *ODNB* (1892) <https://doi.org/10.1093/odnb/9780192683120.013.16722>

⁴⁸³ Handwritten insert in Gordon's copy of the *DNB*, JRUL, Manchester.

⁴⁸⁴ McLachlan, 'Alexander Gordon and his copy of the *Dictionary of National Biography*', in *Essays and Addresses* (Manchester, 1950), 311-336.

Biography writing for the *DNB* was most certainly not on the mind of Gordon when he delivered a lecture in the academic year 1904-1905 at the newly formed Faculty of Theology at the University of Manchester. Dogmatic, systemic, and historical theology were essential components of a Theology student's studies, but Gordon advocated the study of biographical theology; a term he never used but explained at greater length. 'Biography is the best interpreter of Theology; it brings us to admire the significance of doctrines': the significance of the doctrine of the Trinity, for instance, was better understood when reading Thomas Scott's autobiography than Horsley's *Tracts*, although the latter work had intrinsic value in other respects.⁴⁸⁵ Moreover, the Calvinist system of theology was more ably understood via the biography of William III, rather than studying the Westminster Confession, the *Institutio* of Calvin, or Turretine's publications: 'in him, and his ancestry, you see what Calvinism, as a personal and moral force, could and did do, for the securing of the independence, nay, in some cases, even the existence, of the Northern nations of Europe.'⁴⁸⁶ However tendentious this claim, the primacy Gordon gave to a biographical method indicated his preoccupation with the depth of religious experience. This did not come at the sacrifice of other methods of theological study: he thought that the recent trend towards historical theology had 'given stimulus to theological pursuits [and] has given life to Theology itself.'⁴⁸⁷ Yet the difference between a history of a dogma and a history of doctrines was analogous with Gordon's conception of the difference between biography and history:

In the former of these we treat of a career that is closed, we work up to a known termination; in the latter we are dealing with an unexhausted line of life. Fix what bound we may, a great even or a given year, it is arbitrary. The stream of events is not checked, the progress of the years rolls on. It is just the same with the History of Doctrines; we may pause, but development does not cease. On the other hand, the History of a Dogma is a species of Biography. While it is often

⁴⁸⁵ Gordon, 'The Biographical Method in Theology', 186.

⁴⁸⁶ *ibid.*, 187.

⁴⁸⁷ *ibid.*, 181.

as difficult to fix the natal moment of a Dogma as of a man, yet in either case our task has its goal. We arrive at a conclusion, an apotheosis – *causa finite est* – even though we may think it well, in appendices, to trace the fate of bequests, off offspring, or of followers.⁴⁸⁸

Yet the history of dogma, as with the history of doctrines was not to study ideas without human contact. Precisely because these studies were studies of a ‘procession of persons’ – ‘the pressure of human circumstances and the action of human characters’ – biographical theology was a crucial method of study.⁴⁸⁹ Such was the potential for the method but also the restrictions of the literary pursuit that it derived its approach from. Biography, especially of the sort of that was necessary for the *DNB* – loosely ‘the history of the mind as well as the complex of action’⁴⁹⁰ – was not adequate for revealing the life of doctrines, dogma, or systems in those individuals who had inherited and developed. In order to study theology appropriately, an appreciation of the potential of personal (individual) contribution was of paramount importance, ‘God having dealt to every man a measure, and only a measure – of the faith.’⁴⁹¹ Fuller biographical accounts were necessary for excavating the history of doctrines, dogma, and systems of theology, but the *DNB* relied on a conformity to a more concise style that had much less room for distinguishing between the sorts of significances that Gordon had in mind.

Sidney Lee’s excoriations of the sentimental biography was a guardian of ‘conciseness carried to the furthest limits consistent with the due performance of his commemorative functions’.⁴⁹² He was wary of ‘domestic partiality’ in choosing a theme of sentiment to the biographer which nearly always resulted in a biographer who would ‘emphasise the immaterial and... ignore the

⁴⁸⁸ *ibid.*, 182.

⁴⁸⁹ *ibid.*

⁴⁹⁰ *ibid.*, 184.

⁴⁹¹ *ibid.*, 190.

⁴⁹² Lee, ‘National Biography’, 265.

material.’⁴⁹³ There was little room for Gordon’s biographical method that ruminated on the experiential aspects of theological positions, and naturally no room for the verticality in approach that biographical theology was reminiscent of. These tendencies and styles had to be adapted to the antiquarian ‘national biography’ writing required for the *DNB*. Passing judgment, foregrounding an individual’s social approval by his peers, or emphasising social opprobrium disabled national biography from function as a comparative aid: ‘Rival politicians, rival theologians, rival artists, and rival inventors – men who have spent their lives in struggling on the same platform for the same position of prominence – each receives at the national biographer’s hands an equal measure of consideration.’ Whereas individual biography permitted authorial interjections – moralising, ethical – national biography was distinguished ‘in its severely judicial temper; in its comparative principle.’⁴⁹⁴

Unitarians such as Gordon and Nicholson, whose literary experiences were nurtured in antiquarian and literary and philosophical societies, were well positioned to take advantage of the fact that the *DNB* was a private venture. It did not rely on public funding, nor did it have a pool of expertise to tap into, such as might exist at a university – something it had from 1917 when Oxford University Press bought the venture from Smith, Elder, & Co.. Just as Brian Harrison emphasised the positives of this characteristic of the *DNB* in that it was flexible and adaptable and able to draw on a ‘relatively integrated and powerful metropolitan literary world’,⁴⁹⁵ it is also significant that groups who would otherwise have been less represented by a coterie of university writers – where nonconformist representation was only just creeping in at the end of the nineteenth century – could better represent themselves because such institutions

⁴⁹³ Lee, *Principles of Biography: The Leslie Stephen Lecture. Delivered in the Senate House, Cambridge on 13 May 1921* (Cambridge, 1911), 37.

⁴⁹⁴ Lee, ‘National Biography’, 267-268.

⁴⁹⁵ Brian Harrison, ‘“A Slice of Their Lives”: Editing the *DNB*, 1882-1999’, in *English Historical Review*, (Nov., 2004), vol. 119, no. 484, 1179-1201, 1185.

were not available to Stephen or Lee. But the disadvantage of having to coordinate contributors from all corners of literary society whilst keeping up with the demandingly fast-paced publishing schedule took its toll on Stephen who resigned the editorship completely in 1891 after overseeing the completion of 26 volumes. Stephen had complained of the difficulties in attempting to “pacify the susceptibilities of a most fretful and unreasonable race of men, the antiquaries’.”⁴⁹⁶ Gordon, for instance, did not always take kindly to editorial intervention: ‘In his article on Cornelius Burgess, an ejected minister, opposite a suspected reason given for “the bitterness of writers who opposed him”, he writes simply “Not by A.G.”’. Another amendment was branded “a foolish editorial addition” and there was extensive disagreement with Sidney Lee on the biography of clergyman and separatist theologian John Robinson (1576-1625).⁴⁹⁷ Gordon could not help but intervene in the work of other contributors too, sending prominent Church historian J. H. Overton reference suggestions so that a future revised article on Archbishop Secker could be more accurate. McLachlan shared in Gordon’s dismissiveness of Church historians when their research imposed on nonconformist history: ‘It is not quite an accident that [Gordon’s interventions] are [all] concerned with Secker’s early relations with nonconformity, for dissenting history was almost *terra incognita* to nineteenth-century episcopalian historians, and into it they rarely ventured without mishap.’⁴⁹⁸ This is an important intervention. Even after increased assimilation and appreciation of a shared history, a prominent Unitarian historian (and a prominent historian of Unitarianism) felt that nonconformist history was best written by the descendants of that community.

Whilst Unitarians were happy to take advantage of elevating themselves into the national biography, their history remained their history to write. It remained so in the foundation of the

⁴⁹⁶ Stephen quoted in *ibid.*, 1189.

⁴⁹⁷ McLachlan, ‘Alexander Gordon’, 330-331.

⁴⁹⁸ *ibid.*, 331.

Unitarian Historical Society in 1916. In the midst of the creation of the largest literary national monument, Unitarianism retained a distinctive sense of possession over its history. Their biography writing, as Gordon expressed, placed value in the significance of theological and religious experience at a time when biography writing was being corralled into a premeditated formulary. Of course, there was an appreciation of different audiences and function. The *DNB* was representative of an opportunity to elevate Unitarianism's historical community alongside nationally acclaimed figures from within and without the establishment; political, social, and religious. Yet the reliance on contributors from variable literary, social, and religious backgrounds meant that the *DNB* was the receptacle of multiple historical and contemporary British communities, whose 'commemorative instincts' – as Stephen referred to – were balanced alongside each other. Next to the growth of universities and the concurrent professionalization of history, distinctive, non-establishment communities maintained a distinctive tradition of history writing.

ii. Denominational historical societies' publications and the *Transactions of the Unitarian Historical Society*:

The previous section examined Unitarians within a national monument with great reach from 1870 onwards. This section is intent on excavating aspects of Unitarian history writing that did not have the same reach. The three strands of historical writing that were prevalent in Britain in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries have been identified as national, professional and institutional, and local. Whilst Unitarian and, more broadly, nonconformist historical societies were profoundly influenced by developments in history writing, historical research, and developments in historicism in the period, the history that these societies

produced was unlike other more prominent traditions. This is mainly because these historical societies were evolutions of distinct historical traditions that were closely associated with the church or religion that they were affiliated to. Community creation had previously been done via literary acts and processes such as liturgy creation, biography writing, and commemoration. Historical societies were no different. They too were organisations that placed high value in the historicization of their community for a new generation. Their commitment to the creation of archives; preservation, cataloguing, and surveying of historical evidence and the conveyance of those findings for a wider audience was a communal, religious duty. These literary efforts were a vital part of community creation and perpetuation. The publications of these literary efforts reveal how contemporary developments in history writing, research, and outlook were influential for these societies. Yet the same publications also reveal how historicizing traditions that emphasised their community's uniqueness – separate and distinct from the rest of society – struggled to integrate historical methods that placed great value on impartiality.

The publications of the Wesleyan, Presbyterian, Congregationalist, Quaker, and Unitarian historical societies reveal slightly different historicizing processes, but they are distinct from the publications of the Jewish and Catholic historical societies. Narratives of distinction and particularity are commonplace in this comparative approach that considers 'nonconformist' in its broadest definition, reaching beyond the Protestant implications that that term usually holds. Yet this is done to demonstrate that history writing in 'nonconformist' historical societies was responsive to contemporary events that affected any society's community. History was used to advance distinction, but it was also used as an assimilative process, much like it had been used in integration of 'nonconformist' communities into the *DNB*. In this sense, the publications examined here were nimble accessories that were able to regularly manipulate a community's history for contemporary purposes.

In 1913, C. H. Firth, then president of the Royal Historical Society, wrote about the evolution of historical study on the seventeenth century. In keeping with his views on historical research as being ideally devoid of prejudice, he examined the methodologies and the sources available to historians of that century. To Firth, those writing in the seventeenth century itself struggled to 'go below the surface' in order to 'explain either the causes of events or the motives of the actors.' The struggles of men like Laud, Temple, Fox, Baxter and Fairfax were trapped by the lack of access to sources that would inevitably reveal an 'accuracy either [of] the development of a policy, or the progress of a negotiation, or the influence of a particular man.'⁴⁹⁹ The eighteenth century witnessed the unlocking of collections of papers, closely guarded by the government or the Crown, and the use of foreign sources circumnavigated the domestic restraints the historian of the seventeenth century found himself searching for a way round. With increased access came sources of a 'far more trustworthy character'⁵⁰⁰ – more akin to Firth's sort of sources and essential for his sort of history. The founding of the British Museum, the evolution of the Public Record Office and the bequeathing of the Cottonian, Harleian and Sloane collections to the public were essential tools but ones that the eighteenth-century historian could seldom make use of for their lack of organisation. Until comprehensive catalogues were made, the greatest advance in seventeenth-century history was, to Firth, to be found in the elimination of prejudice. Suddenly, 'Intelligent men', not least of all David Hume, 'had come to the conclusion that there was much to be said on both sides [the Royalist and the Parliamentarians], and that it was not necessary to lose your temper in saying it.' The 'detached and critical spirit' was coupled with an 'air of certainty and authority' that acted 'like a superior

⁴⁹⁹ C. H. Firth, 'The Development of the Study of Seventeenth-Century History' *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, (1913), vol. 7, 25-48, 29. Firth had been Regius Professor of Modern History at Oxford since 1904 and would remain in that post, having survived the ire of the History Faculty provoked by his inaugural 1904 lecture on the teaching of history, until 1925.

⁵⁰⁰ *ibid.*, 30, 32-3.

intelligence reviewing the follies and errors or pygmies.’⁵⁰¹ Those pygmies were little more than ‘open and unblushing partisans’ and there were few exceptions amongst the nineteenth-century historians.⁵⁰² It was up to Carlyle to resurrect the seventeenth century in the nineteenth. In the wake of the French Revolution, Firth thought that Carlyle’s Cromwell – ‘with his time roughly sketched in as a background to the figure’ – was an impressive feat because of its ‘elimination of party prejudices and political formulas’ which ‘made it a step towards scientific history’ even if there was ‘nothing scientific either in the spirit or the method of his treatment’ of the man or his century.⁵⁰³ The step towards a more scientific history of the seventeenth century, perhaps surprisingly advanced by Carlyle, was upgraded into strides by S. R. Gardiner’s monumental, nineteen-volume history of the century. Despite Firth’s admission that it was he himself who completed what Gardiner could not manage before his death in 1902, with two volumes on the Protectorate published in 1909, Firth revered Gardiner’s expert use of the methodologies pioneered by von Ranke. Gardiner had got closest to perfecting the science of history in that he had ‘examined and sifted the evidence’,⁵⁰⁴ which was starting to pour forth at alarming rates, fundamentally complicating and elongating the historians’ task, especially when pursued in the meticulous Rankean vein.⁵⁰⁵ Firth and some of his colleagues were properly equipped with the tools to sift and discover new, good evidence to avoid the mistakes of uninitiated historians of years gone by when ‘Successive waves of fresh evidence submerged and swept away the sand castles the historians had laboriously raised.’⁵⁰⁶

It would seem, then, that Firth was entirely dismissive of his forebears. Their methodology had been lacking and when they had sources available to them, the historian’s political allegiance

⁵⁰¹ *ibid.*, 38.

⁵⁰² *ibid.*, 45.

⁵⁰³ *ibid.*, 40.

⁵⁰⁴ *ibid.*, 45.

⁵⁰⁵ Bentley, *Modernizing England's Past*, 97,101.

⁵⁰⁶ ‘The Development of the Study of Seventeenth-Century History’, 47.

interfered with their proper treatment. Yet inaccessibility to sources excused the histories of these men from being dismissed into complete irrelevance – the ‘alms for oblivion’:⁵⁰⁷ they ‘helped to dissipate the darkness and to increase the light’ and, furthermore, ‘contributed their share to the progress of the study and to the production of better histories.’⁵⁰⁸ By virtue of not having the chance to do so, they revealed to Firth the value of having an abundance of sources: far better to be a ‘sources man’ than a rhetorician.⁵⁰⁹ The historian’s task to ‘weigh and sift the materials he is collecting, to separate the true evidence from the false, and the trivial from the essential’ was to be conducted in the same ‘spirit’ as the scientist, before attributing appropriate importance to the facts – of which all were not made equal – in order to ‘state the truth as it appears to him’: ‘to embody in some material form a conception of the past which is floating in his head’; a ‘re-creation ... essentially artistic rather than scientific in its nature’⁵¹⁰ – far from an original sentiment and in fact echoing G. W. Prothero’s presidential address to the same society in 1902.⁵¹¹ Moreover, Firth revealed himself as committed to history as an almost unshifting ideal; one that was readily accessible if given the right resources – methodologically and philosophically. Partisanship was an easy-enough notion to explain the corruptions of, but the obtaining of sources for a particular period and knowing how to discern between good and poor evidence was a more complex notion. Good history required a more in-depth training of historians at universities.

By the time Firth had become president of the Royal Historical Society in 1913, the most influential historical journal in Britain, the *English Historical Review*, had emerged from its uncertain origins (its first volume was published in 1886) amongst the dominant literary

⁵⁰⁷ C. H. Firth, *A Plea for the Historical Teaching of History: An inaugural lecture delivered on November 9, 1904* (Oxford, 1904), 10.

⁵⁰⁸ ‘The Development of the Study of Seventeenth-Century History’, 47, 48.

⁵⁰⁹ A. L. Rowse, *Historians I Have Known* (London, 1995), 13.

⁵¹⁰ Firth, *A Plea*, 7, 8.

⁵¹¹ Prothero, ‘Presidential Address’, *TRHS*, New Series, (1902), vol. 16, vii-xxv, xvii-xix.

reviews of the nineteenth century and settled into publishing more consciously historical articles of a shorter length that strove to present novel interpretations on relatively specialised areas of research.⁵¹² Until 1912, the *Review* and its Scottish counterpart (first published in 1903 as a new series of *The Scottish Antiquary*, 1886), were the only ‘periodical organ[s] dedicated to the study of history.’⁵¹³ The *EHR*’s aim was to be a periodical concerned with history in general, and one that ‘appeals to an audience of the whole [English] race’, looking far beyond the borders of any state on Great Britain. It also intended to coalesce a community of historians into one association to ‘promote their common object’ which

Shall bring to a focus the light now scattered through many minor publications, none of them devoted to this special purpose, which shall present a full critical record of what is being accomplished in the field of history, and become the organ through which those who desire to make known the progress of their researches will address their fellow labourers.⁵¹⁴

Similar forces drove the foundation of *History* in 1912 by the Historical Association (1906) amongst which was a desire not to be outdone by German historical research: as motivating a factor in 1912 as it had been in 1886. But *History* aimed to cater to a different readership beyond the ‘scholar of ripe erudition’ who read the *EHR* and instead be ‘an organ for the student and the teacher’.⁵¹⁵ Reaching a broader audience was as vital as promoting current research projects and trends; the lack of awareness of which could only end in a study of ‘dismal failure’ and risked propagating untruth, tantamount to a ‘crime’. The co-operative spirit endorsed by *History* was seldom a new trend, however. The novelty of such an effort was that it appealed

⁵¹² Kenyon, *The History Men*, 193-94. Even though Kenyon sees the Royal Historical Society’s *Transactions* professionalizing more concerted from 1918, Firth’s involvement and the quality of the articles that engage with historiography and original research would move that date back to somewhere around 1914-15.

⁵¹³ ‘Prefatory Note’, *The English Historical Review*, (1886), vol. 1, no. 1, 1-6, 1.

⁵¹⁴ *ibid.*, 1, 2.

⁵¹⁵ ‘Foreword’, *History*, (1912), vol. 1, no. 1, 1-2, 1.

to a decidedly national audience, irrespective of profession, ability, or area of knowledge, perhaps less seeking overt collaboration but certainly an increased awareness of each other's efforts to 'throw light' on the past. In doing so, *History* claimed to be independent of allegiance, representing 'no school, and is the organ of no cult' and instead endeavoured to champion 'representative of every historical creed and belief.'⁵¹⁶ The strikingly religious language hinted towards an existence and the potency of entrenched systems of historical thought and method, as if there were competing churches within whatever Christendom of History endured. In 1916, when *History* ceased to be a private enterprise and had been taken over by the Historical Association due to financial strains occasioned by First World War, the first editorial of the new series reiterated its intent to 'not ... impose a doctrine, but rather to provoke criticism and suggestions from others'.⁵¹⁷ And the war had emboldened *History*'s cause with pressing political undertones: 'One may perish, but one cannot live, by war alone, and war itself would become more irrational but for the lessons which history draws therefrom, as Samson took honey from the carcase of the lion.' Even more explicitly, 'This war is creating problems which can only be solved in the light of history'. Historians had an obligation to speak up and make their views known 'if they – and the nation – are not to suffer' in the aftermath of war.⁵¹⁸ Therefore, reaching a broad audience was as integral as transforming the way in which history was done. As of 1916, it had acquired greater explanative value in light of disruptive and destructive events, and the carcass of Europe should be searched for any historical honey found within.

The contexts that have been surveyed have been threefold. First, the prevalence of history in its narrative, sometimes prejudiced, form. Second, an increasing preference for history as a

⁵¹⁶ *ibid.*, 1, 2.

⁵¹⁷ 'Editorial', *History* (1916), new series, vol. 1, no. 1, 1-4, 4.

⁵¹⁸ *ibid.*, 2.

science with a strong emphasis on sources and the pursuit of new insights via new evidence; connected to which was a professionalization of the subject. Third, the impact of political and social upheavals on historical thought in the early decades of the twentieth century. These trends were influential and being influenced by history writing whose concern was of a national character. At a local level, the trends were far from being irrelevant but their combination with idiosyncrasies derived from smaller groups of narrower interest is far less defined by current historiography.⁵¹⁹ Those whose historical interests were local were satiated by the prevalence of county archaeological or historical societies. Historical research organised by county was pursued from 1899 by the *Victoria County History* and more locally, history organised by parish remained a popular device in serving niche audiences,⁵²⁰ and this is something that has been serviced by improved accessibility of county record offices, more comprehensive archival cataloguing, and the professionalization of regional history journals in the mid-twentieth century.⁵²¹ For nonconformists, chapel histories were a popular form of history writing, often produced by local enthusiasts, and modern studies have come to organise broader histories of nonconformist chapels by region and county, not church.⁵²² Focus on the local has been vastly important for the development of religious history across the twentieth century, and the history of the churches have benefitted from the exposition of local archives and sustenance of local history societies.⁵²³ Being mindful of particular regional strengths of churches, all churches

⁵¹⁹ Levine, *The Amateur and the Professional*.

⁵²⁰ Elrington, 'The Victoria County History'; N. J. G. Pounds, *A History of the English Parish: The Culture of Religion from Augustine to Victoria* (Cambridge, 2000). Pounds details the parochial system's evolution but the enormous range of local and regional historical societies whose journals he uses are an indication of how prolific the local history industry was throughout the twentieth century.

⁵²¹ J. A. Raftis, 'British Historiography Decentralizes', in *Journal of British Studies* (Nov., 1969), vol. 9, no. 1, 143-151. *Northern History* (1966), *Midland History* (1971).

⁵²² C. Stell, *An Inventory of Nonconformist Chapels and Meeting Houses*, 4 vols.: *Central England* (London, 1986), *South-West England* (London, 1991), *North of England* (London, 1994), *Eastern England* (London, 2001); Chris Skidmore & Kate Tiller (eds.), *Communities of Dissent, 1850-1914* (London, 2023).

⁵²³ Peter Laslett, *The World We Have Lost: English Society before the Coming of Industry* (London, 1965); John Dunn & Tony Wrigley, 'Thomas Peter Ruffell Laslett 1915-2001', in *Proceedings of the British Academy* (2005), vol. 130, 109-129, 124-126. Laslett, with E. A. Wrigley, pioneered the connection of the local to national narratives via multi-disciplinary methods, not dissimilar to the Archaeological societies that preceded them, albeit with more advanced techniques.

had a national outlook, both in terms of their contemporary organisation and historical community, which precluded their historical societies from retaining overtly local allegiances.

From the 1890s, history societies started to be formulated around denominational interests. Protestant dissent and other nonconformist groups established historical societies, publishing transactions often based on lectures given at annual meetings of the society, as well as more occasional monographs. Denominational history writing was a curious blend of the national and local writing traditions that were coming to prominence in the same period. Their scope was national yet theological and ecclesiastical implications, most notably the case with Presbyterianism which necessitated a local scope, dictated an amalgamative approach. The origins of many denominations' history drew more attention to one period than others. The prevalence of sources determined some historical societies' stance on collecting source or prioritising valuable over more common ones. There are important differences between each denominational historical society's approach to history, but one thing was common for all: the question of how to adopt a scientific or modern approach to history whilst dealing with an essentially narrated version of their community's past.

In his biography of Alexander Gordon, Herbert McLachlan wrote that 'From about the end of the last century, a remarkable increase of interest in Nonconformist history led to the formation of seven denominational historical societies'.⁵²⁴ McLachlan implied that nonconformist history had suffered a drought in the earlier decades of the nineteenth century. This was substantively not true: there existed a strong tradition of nonconformist or dissenting history in that period. This tradition was the progenitor of the denominational historical societies that were founded in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. McLachlan's description of this period is,

⁵²⁴ McLachlan, *Alexander Gordon*, 75-76.

however, telling. History, as he understood it, had only existed in its proper, modern form since the birth of these historical societies. As has been noted, such an outlook was common, as the emergence and championing of scientific history was popularized in nascent university History faculties. The professionalization of the subject or pursuit was having transformative effects on the quality, breadth, and depth of historical research. Professionalization was substantively noticeable in the histories being produced by historical journals and in the monographs and essays of university historians. McLachlan's implication is that these transformations were influential in the emergence of denominational historical societies, which further suggests that there was a clash of historical traditions. The historicizing tradition that has been shown to have existed in the Unitarian community had blended with the professional historical research methods that had been steadily developing since university reform took hold.

Nonconformist historical societies were set up with largely similar goals. Akin to local and national historical societies, their constitutions or aims focussed on disseminating information about historical research ongoing in relation to their denomination. Yet the readerships of nonconformist historical societies' publications were, by definition, relatively well-defined communities centred around a shared faith. Furthermore, the editorial boards or committees who were often the main contributors and correspondents, were often ministerial. Some of those who were not were often academics involved in nonconformist schools or fledgling Oxford colleges. From the shared religious interests that bound editors, authors, and readers together, historical research was not merely historical research in the ways that were being pursued in local or national historical publications. Those publications and societies pursued history for the sake of interest, for the sake of intellectual curiosity whereas nonconformist historical societies often thought of their efforts as acts of faith and of duty. In this sense, there is a strong parallel between the aims of denominational historical societies and the improved

civil and political place of nonconformity in society: ‘The political aggression of the Nonconformists during the last half of the [nineteenth] century represents the final Nonconformist assault against the remnants of a privileged society, but it was also a manifestation of their attempts to retain a sense of purpose and distinct identity under the pressure of rapid social and political change.’⁵²⁵

With far less aggression, nonconformist or denominational historical societies pursued similar tactics, reinforcing their sense of identity by making their history theirs: ‘Nonconformist churches were jealous of their independence and kept their own congregational records.’⁵²⁶ Yet the processes that denominational historical societies advocated for was far more accommodating of modern historical methods than some popular histories of the Free Churches – such as Congregationalist minister and Liberal MP Silvester Horne’s *A Popular History of the Free Churches* (1903) – which were far more reminiscent of the aggression noticed by Johnson and were furthermore emboldened by a belief that the Free Churches were deserving of a place at the heart of a national history due to their demographic dominance in the British Empire as a whole.⁵²⁷ The societies valued preserving and locating archival material, determining its value, cataloguing, highlighting the acts of past worthies, advocating for their faith’s role in the nation’s religious history, identifying gaps in research and suggesting how willing students might most profitably contribute their efforts, and above all, telling their communities and others about their work. Whilst some denominations had closely intertwined histories, others were more distinct, and the subjects focussed on in early volumes of nonconformist historical societies’ publications often gravitated towards community-defining historical periods where denominations originated and developed, often weaving in themes of

⁵²⁵ Mark D. Johnson, *The Dissolution of Dissent, 1850-1918* (London & New York, 1987), 297.

⁵²⁶ W. G. Hoskins, *Local History in England* (London & New York, 1984), 3rd edn., 90.

⁵²⁷ Cornick, ‘Twentieth-Century Historians of England Protestant Nonconformity’, 64-66, 76.

persecution, martyrdom, survival, revival, and courage. The dominance of narrative is a primary focus of the publications. Their history, dominated by powerful themes, retold by and to a new generation reveals how engagement with denominational history narratives had changed since the nineteenth century, and how narrative as a dominant historical method was difficult for historical societies to escape from, even though there were clear and determined efforts to adopt more 'modern' or scientific techniques, akin to those advocated by Firth, Tout, and Pollard.

Alongside the Wesleyan, Presbyterian, Congregationalist, Quaker, and Unitarian historical societies, other religious-oriented historical societies were established and evolved in the same period. Most prominent amongst these was the Jewish Historical Society and the Catholic Record Society. Like Protestant Dissenting historical societies, the Jewish and Catholic had an identifiably different approach to history to three major strands of history writing that have been identified: the national, the professional and institutional, and the local. The Jewish and Catholic societies could claim a history that was deeply entwined with the nation's history and both faiths boasted prominent or substantial communities in late-nineteenth-century Britain. Like Protestant Dissenting churches, they too were nonconformists in a very broad sense of that term and familiar narratives prevail in all historical societies; the focus on injustice at the hands of an oppressive state is most prominent. Yet whereas persecution and 'otherness' were increasingly distant experiences for the majority of these nonconformist communities, the Jewish experience was at a critical juncture in its relationship with Britain. Todd Endelman has noted how British Jewish historians of this period tackled the unfamiliar problem in that there was a lack of persecution of Jews in Britain, in comparison to the histories of Jews in other

European countries.⁵²⁸ Yet the late-nineteenth-century rise in violent, deadly antisemitism in Eastern Europe meant that historical narratives between familiar tropes of persecution and a relatively hospitable Britain were negotiated via its historical society's publication. As a result, the form of historical writing adopted by this society is far more conscious of contemporary events than other societies, whose main experience of these decades was one of increased ecumenicism and the relaxation of civic and social barriers in society.⁵²⁹

In the first number of the *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society*, published in 1895, the editor and one of the founders, Lucien Wolf argued that the value to be gained from examining Anglo-Jewish history was not to be found in the study of great men, but in the study of the communities and context in which Jewish communities lived in England. 'Biography', Wolf argued,

does not cover the whole domain of history. The true function of the historian is to reconstruct the lives, not of the personalities but of communities and nations out of the largest possible accumulation of social facts and individual experiences.⁵³⁰

The 'antiquated great-man-theory of history' would only yield a 'very inadequate, if not very misleading, clue to the general development of the social organism.' Further, if great men were not to be found standing above the rest, 'it does not follow that there is no history worth enquiring into.' Wolf's reasoning had historical precedent in that post-Biblical history rendered 'the biographic test ... the less valuable because of the absence of a governing centre of national

⁵²⁸ Todd M. Endelman, 'Writing English Jewish History', in *Albion* (Winter, 1995), vol. 27, no. 4, 623-636, 624, 627-628.

⁵²⁹ S. J. D. Green, *The Passing of Protestant England: Secularisation and Social Change, c. 1920-1960* (Cambridge, 2010).

⁵³⁰ Lucien Wolf, 'A Plea for Anglo-Jewish History, Inaugural address delivered at the first meeting of the Society, November 11th, 1893', *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England*, (1895), vol. 1, no. 1, 1-7, 1.

life.’ The dispersed, diasporic nature of the Jewish community ‘render[ed] the sociological method absolutely indispensable.’ Assimilation with national spirit (not limited to England), migratory movement, impact on indigenous communities and their culture were fundamental to Wolf’s ‘formula of the Jewish historical process ... which, besides rendering us independent of the great-man-theory, vindicates the necessity of Societies such as this.’ Despite advocating for a sociological approach to historical research into Jewish history, themes of persecution, ethnic violence, readmission, and tolerance dominate Wolf’s survey.⁵³¹ Yet the liminal nature of the Anglo-Jewish community and by extension its historical society highlights how groups that considered themselves to be outside of Britain’s established community in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries advocated different approaches towards historical research for a new generation. In Wolf’s case, the biographical form of history, venerated in the *DNB* and elsewhere,⁵³² was not sufficient as a means of capturing an accurate picture of the past in certain cases, often determined by inadequacies of sources relating the Anglo-Jewish community.

Whatever Wolf’s understanding of the Anglo-Jewish history’s relation to any national history may have been, his rejection of biography as an adequate form of history writing had contemporary political undercurrents. The Anglo-Jewish community was split on the increasingly hot topic of Zionism in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Up to and beyond the Balfour Declaration in 1917, Wolf’s conviction was resolutely anti-Zionist and his attempts to endorse an appropriate form of history writing for England’s Jewish community must be considered in this light. To Wolf, England had provided safety and protection for Jews

⁵³¹ *ibid.*, 2, 2-6.

⁵³² Sidney Lee, born Solomon Lazarus, was the *DNB*’s second editor, and whilst he moved away from practicing his family’s faith, he retained an interest in Jewish history, writing on Jews in Elizabethan drama and taking an interest in Wolf’s Anglo-Jewish Historical Society. See Lee ‘Elizabethan England and the Jews’ in *The New Shakspeare Society’s Transactions* (1887-1892), nos. 9-14, 141-66.

when other European nations had not: they were brutally expelled by Edward I in 1290, but Oliver Cromwell's decision to readmit them in 1655/6 was a sign of the fundamentally hospitable nature of the English towards Jews since then. Wolf considered this story and 'its mysteries' as among the 'highest regions of historical romance', a 'real acquisition' not just to the British Empire's history but that of the Jews too.⁵³³ Keen to impress the appeal of a history of Jews in England to both the nation and the diaspora, Wolf attempted to demonstrate how contemporary Jews were as English as they were Jewish. And further, they were similar to other marginalised religious groups in English society; perhaps possessing a more ancient and international past than most English nonconformists, but still nonconformists in political if not comparably religious ways: 'Since the re-admission they have been one among various bodies of Dissenters from the National Church, and as such their political history has been closely connected with that of Dissent in general.'⁵³⁴ Such was the narrative adopted by elements of the Anglo-Jewish Historical Exhibition held at the Albert Hall between April and June, 1887. Its board represented influential sections of the Anglo-Jewish community: F. D. Mocatta as Chairman with Isidore Spielmann and historian Joseph Jacobs amongst the rest of the editorial committee members. Less involved but perhaps no less significantly affiliated were those who sat on the General Committee: Chief Rabbi Adler, Goldsmids, Sebag-Montefiores, Rothschilds, Sassoons, Sir Philip Magnus, Professor Meldola, Lucien Wolf, alongside notable gentiles such as Rev. Canon Cheyne, Professor Mandell Creighton, Francis Galton, President of the Anthropological Institute, R. S. Poole of the British Museum, Archdeacon Henry Watkins and the Dean of Westminster, George Bradley. The exhibition was a physical representation of

⁵³³ Lucien Wolf, *Menasseh ben Israel's Mission to Oliver Cromwell: Being a reprint of the Pamphlets published by Menasseh ben Israel to promote the Re-admission of the Jews to England 1649-1656*, (London, 1901) preface, vii.

⁵³⁴ *Catalogue of Anglo-Jewish Historical Exhibition, 1887. Royal Albert Hall. And of Supplementary Exhibitions held at the Public Record Office, British Museum, South Kensington Museum* (London, 1887), 1. This somewhat refutes Endelman's claim that Anglo-Jewish history treated its subject 'in isolation from English social and religious history – and from other Jewish histories as well – rarely exploring its comparative dimensions in either context.' Endelman, 'Writing English Jewish History', 627.

what Wolf's Historical Society was to further investigate on a more regular basis six years later: 'To promote a knowledge of Anglo-Jewish History; to create a deeper interest in its records and relics, and to aid in their preservation' and 'To determine the extent of the materials which exist for the compilation of a History of the Jews in England.'⁵³⁵ But it was the eminent German historian and theologian Heinrich Graetz, author of the monumental 11-volume *Geschichte der Juden* (1853-75), who noticed the deeper aims of the exhibition. Rather than tell a story of Jewish triumph to combat the dangerous 'Wandering Jew' trope, dominant in European culture, Graetz saw that the exhibitors 'desired rather to give evidence of your true Jewish convictions':

You wished to display the inner connection of your Past and your Present. You wished to show that while you, as English patriots, are attached to this happy isle with every beat of your hearts, you wished to preserve your connection and continuity with the long series of generations of Israel. And without exactly wishing it, you have thereby raised a practical protest on the one side against thoughtless indifference, and on the other against unprincipled apostasy, two hateful types within the ranks of Judaism which – to honour be it said – are rarer here than on the Continent.⁵³⁶

In the wake of pogroms and persecution waged by Alexander III in Russia in the 1880s, the Exhibition's aim, as Jamie Bronstein has elucidated, was one of assimilation, answering the Jewish question that had been posed more forthrightly in the late 1880s after Alexander III had started persecuting Jews and Nonconformists in the Russian Empire.⁵³⁷ The political and social position of Jews had significantly improved in the decades that preceded the Exhibition; a period of 'communal construction'.⁵³⁸ The community boasted three newspapers – the *Voice of*

⁵³⁵ *ibid.*, vii.

⁵³⁶ Heinrich Graetz, 'Historical Parallels' in *Papers read at the Anglo-Jewish Historical Exhibition, Royal Albert Hall, London, 1887*. (London, 1888), 1-19, 7.

⁵³⁷ Jamie Bronstein, 'Rethinking the "Readmission": Anglo-Jewish History and the Immigration Crisis' in George K. Behlmer & Fred M. Leventhal (eds.), *Singular continuities: tradition, nostalgia, and identity in modern British culture* (Stanford, CA, 2000), 28-42.

⁵³⁸ Ephraim Levin, 'Sir Isidore Spielmann, 1854-1925', in *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England* (1924-27), vol. 11, 233-38, 234.

Jacob (1841) and two *Jewish Chronicles* (1841) (one of which survives)⁵³⁹ – in addition to its litany of prominent journalists and bankers. Its new rabbinical training institution, Jews' College, was founded albeit with great financial difficulty in 1855 in London's Finsbury Square, and from 1881 moved to premises in Tavistock Square to provide its students with access to degree level courses at University College London. It was also a period where synagogues were being built at a great pace in urban centres, large and small.⁵⁴⁰ History research and papers which dealt with the issues of assimilation and particularity had a recognisable outlet in the latest iteration of community construction in the form of the Jewish Historical Society. But minority groups, albeit rapidly growing ones, did not share in Wolf's rejection of biography as an adequate form of history writing.

The Catholic Record Society – the closest thing to a historical society in the Catholic community in this period – endorsed biography writing wholeheartedly. It positioned itself as a source of historical sources that would 'furnish material to the future historian.'⁵⁴¹ In the introduction to its first issue, published in 1905, 'Miscellanea. I.', Dom F. A. Gasquet was most concerned with the distribution of sources relevant to the Society's members; sources which had largely been unprinted, having been recently located in the Public Record Office and the British Museum as well as private collections. Recently published 'veritable storehouses of information' in Henry Foley's *Records of the English Province of the Society of Jesus* (1875-1878, 8 vols.) and Joseph Gillow's *Biographical Dictionary of the English Catholics* (1885-1902, 5 vols.) were leaders in the field of Catholic historical research yet were separate enterprises, contributing to the field in different but no less important ways. In preserving

⁵³⁹ Geoffrey Cantor, 'Anglo-Jewish periodicals of the 1840s: The *Voice of Jacob* and two *Jewish Chronicles*', in *Jewish Historical Studies* (2017), vol. 47, no. 1, 12-35.

⁵⁴⁰ Synagogues were built in West London (1842 & 1879), Manchester (1858, 1872 & 1874), Rochester (1867), Belfast (1870), Merthyr Tydfil (1872), Liverpool (1874), and Glasgow (1881), Grimsby (1889).

⁵⁴¹ F. A. Gasquet, 'Introduction', *Miscellanea. I, Catholic Record Society* (1905), viii.

sources, collating them and making them accessible, Gasquet saw the Society as directing historians to presently underexamined places in the Catholic past but was also certain that the story was not to be revised.⁵⁴² Biography could most adequately highlight the ““brave days of old,” when English Catholics took their lives in their hands and kept the faith in spite of the rack and the gibbet’. Any contribution to preserving that story ‘should surely be welcomed by all who have any love for the religion they have received, in part, at least, through their sufferings.’ Gasquet balances on the fine line between contemporaneous ecumenism of the early-twentieth century and historic divisions in claiming that it was not out of any ‘spirit of hostility’ that these historical researches were necessary, rather the power of an inherited history connected present day Catholics to ‘record and to proclaim the trials and troubles of [the perpetrators’] victims.’ Although temporal distance had ‘softened’ grievances ‘it [had] not altogether wiped out the tears and sorrows of those days’, even if it had banished ‘the bitterness from our hearts and memories.’ Even in the pointing towards documents, preserving them, making them accessible, as well as Gasquet’s insistence that ‘it has been wisely determined to do as little [editing of archival material] as possible’,⁵⁴³ dominant themes of suppression and persecution, much like that in the mode of Anglo-Jewish historical processes, prevailed, although persecutions of Catholics were by then historic. The contribution that the Society was making to ‘Catholics generally, and... historians and genealogists in particular’ was so great that it required the support of ‘Catholics who are proud of the sufferings and trials of their forefathers for the sake of religion and in vindication of the rights of conscience’.⁵⁴⁴

It seems, then, that the availability of sources determined method of research even if different approaches did not impinge on the inherited narrative of that community. Wolf’s concern with

⁵⁴² *ibid.*, vii-xv, vii.

⁵⁴³ *ibid.*, viii.

⁵⁴⁴ *ibid.*, xv.

favouring biographical writing was based on the belief that there were not enough sources to elicit well-rounded, representative histories of his community. Gasquet's endorsement of biography writing and endeavours to provide sources to for further historical research did not tacitly reject Wolf's sociological approach, rather claimed a larger role for it amongst his community's historical research. In both cases, narrative themes of persecution, exile, and suffering were powerful determinants of contributions and historical thought. Protestant nonconformist historical societies assumed similar positions. Unlike the Jewish Historical Society of England, most, if not all, nonconformist historical societies' transactions were concerned with theological and doctrinal history and methodologically, biography writing played a central role in the process of telling the stories of the denomination for a new generation. Thus, similarities with the Catholic Record Society's *Miscellanea* are apparent yet differ insofar as they routinely venture beyond the reproduction of texts for the use of future historians, even if they also functioned in this way too. But importantly, nonconformist historical society journals did not prioritise the same objectives in equal measure, even if they used similar techniques, continued inherited narratives handed down to them from previous generations, and explored how new historical research could benefit their cause. Additionally, there are striking variants between the nonconformist historical societies in how they consider historical research an act of denominational witness, encouraging members to get involved out of a duty to their community, less for the sake of historical interest. In all, at the start of the twentieth century a culture of history writing that might not be considered either local or national sits uneasily amongst the historical journals and projects emanating from universities, commercial national history projects, and local historical societies.

Amongst the chief concerns of nonconformist historical societies was the perils of documents being lost forever and with them, records that could colour the story of denominational

histories. The Baptist Historical Society would gather documents to be ‘cheerfully contributed to the common stock, and will be so ensured against oblivion’. Once again, the ‘future historian’, a spectre on the horizon, would be the ultimate benefactor, finding ‘valuable material’, ‘wider and more exact’ than before, in the pages of the *Transactions* and in places that it pointed towards.⁵⁴⁵ In the *Journal of the Presbyterian Historical Society of England*, Rev. A. H. Drysdale echoed that idea but was more concerned with the quality of the sources being collected: the executive of the Society had warned that it ‘would guard against the danger of storing other people’s ‘lumber’; their “historical remains.”’⁵⁴⁶ In the first number of the *Transactions of the Congregational Historical Society*, in 1901, J. D. McClure and G. Currie Martin were as anxious to obtain sources of ‘very great interest and value’ to ‘throw light on the story of Congregationalism’ but were most mindful of the ‘unsifted tradition’ that was coming into the Society’s possession.⁵⁴⁷ Unverified and uncited sources were viewed as interfering with more advantageous historical research that seemed to largely derive from pre-1750. Five years earlier in 1896, the first number of the *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* declared that the Society had been instituted to ‘accumulate exact knowledge’.⁵⁴⁸ And in the first number of the *Journal of the Friends Historical Society* in 1903, John S. Rowntree suggested that knowledge was either ‘curious’ or valuable’, deeming only some historical ‘data relating to the Society of Friends ... suitable for publication.’⁵⁴⁹ The latest nonconformist historical society to be founded was the Unitarian version in 1916. It, like other societies, was aware how sources could throw light on underexamined periods of the denomination’s past but was alone in not highlighting an objective to locate and collate sources for further historical study. The editor of the *Transactions of the Unitarian Historical Society*, Walter H. Burgess

⁵⁴⁵ George P. Gould, ‘Prefatory Note’, in *TBHS* (1908), vol. 1, no. 1, (2).

⁵⁴⁶ A. H. Drysdale, ‘Introductory’, in *JPHSE* (1914), vol. 1, no. 1, 12.

⁵⁴⁷ J. D. McClure & G. Currie Martin, ‘Editorial’, in *TCHS* (1901), vol. 1, no. 1, 1, 2.

⁵⁴⁸ [Anon], ‘Editorial’, in *PWHS* (1896), vol. 1, no. 1, not paginated.

⁵⁴⁹ John S. Rowntree, ‘Foreword’, in *JFHS* (1903), vol. 1, no. 1, 1-2.

outlined previous ‘Work in the Field of Unitarian History’ and declared that the work to be done in the field was less accumulation and sifting, rather the ‘publication of documents and special historical works’ whilst simultaneously providing ‘a medium for focussing attention upon matters of historic interest in relation to the Unitarian movement both at home and abroad.’⁵⁵⁰

With the exception of the Unitarian Historical Society, objectives to gather sources were widely considered to be of great importance. Yet the relationship with sources and by extension historical inquiry was not a universal idea seamlessly repeated by each Society. The Presbyterian Society’s concerns with being landed with “historical remains” was echoed by the Congregational Society’s Firthian principle of the need for the historian to be able to sift the sources: the valuable and the not so valuable. McClure and Currie Martin were clear about this research skill, even if they were less certain about *how* value was to be determined, only going so far as to suggest that ‘unverified’ and ‘uncited’ sources might not be caught in the historian’s sieve. They did not dress this role up, explaining how the ‘work of the redacter [sic] may not seem attractive or romantic, but it is requisite.’⁵⁵¹ It was also necessary for ‘some one sufficiently competent and interested’ to determine the value of local records, who would then make an account of ‘all that is of historical value in them, and that throws light on the story of Congregationalism.’⁵⁵² Inspired by the Congregationalist Historical Society and other archaeological and record societies, a similar position was maintained by Rowntree in the *JFHS* who thought documents of value to Quaker history would be ‘apt to gather dust and become forgotten, unless they are under the eye of custodians possessing some antiquarian taste.’ The ‘competent librarian’ at Devonshire House was such a custodian and the archival documents

⁵⁵⁰ W. H. Burgess, ‘Work in the Field of Unitarian History’, in *TUHS* (1916), vol. 1, no. 1, 1-10, 9.

⁵⁵¹ McClure & Currie Martin, ‘Editorial’, in *TCHS* (1901), vol. 1, no. 1, 2.

⁵⁵² *ibid.*

relating to Quaker history there would be spared from oblivion.⁵⁵³ The concern over “historical remains” or “rubbish” acquired by the Presbyterian Historical Society would perhaps have benefitted from the custodian role Rowntree, McClure and Currie Martin saw as essential to their denomination’s history. Nevertheless, having too many resources was better than none at all, as had occurred with the loss of sources in the previous generation. With the formation of the Society, whose ‘specific purpose of preserving, classifying and cataloguing’, there was no excuse for a repetition of losses. Furthermore, ‘It is the duty of all who love the Church, and desire that a record of the lives of her faithful confessors and workers should be preserved for the benefit of coming generations, to hand over to the custody of the Society any materials in their possession that would tend to this most desirable result.’⁵⁵⁴ To execute this task, and thereby fulfilling a duty to their Church, the Society benefitted from a team of ‘helpers’ who were largely committee members. Materials were ‘gathered in’ and classified, so much so that a policy to “hasten slowly” material had to be adopted even at the time of the first journal in 1912. The Society’s helpers were constituted of one minister, a Record Office employee, a member of the Royal Historical Society, a member of the Royal Society, his son, and a layman.⁵⁵⁵ University training was in scant supply yet experience in historical research and archival familiarity was not considered a lesser quality.

However, the need for an interested and competent expert to judge a source’s value was not the focus of G. P. Gould of the Baptist Historical Society. He felt that helping the Society did not require special skills although when it came to specific interactions with sources, the emphasis remained largely on preservation, not interpretation. The accumulation of material was not just important for ensuring its survival but that it would be a ‘mine of wealth to the future historian

⁵⁵³ Rowntree, ‘Foreword’, in *JFHS* (1903), vol. 1, no. 1, 3, 2.

⁵⁵⁴ [Anon], ‘First Annual Report of the Society’, in *JPHSE* (1914), vol. 1, no. 1, 6.

⁵⁵⁵ [Anon], ‘Notes on Some of the Society’s Helpers’, *JPHSE* (1914), vol. 1, no. 1, 9-10.

of our denomination' who would write a much needed history at a time in the denomination's existence where it was 'freeing itself from the bonds of an excessive individualism, and is rejoicing as never before in a sense of fellowship with brethren of like faith and practice the world over.' Gould, principal of Regent's Park College between 1896 and 1920, was sure that 'Such a widened outlook cannot be restricted to the present; it will inevitably turn to the past and seek to scan it also.' So critical was the work of members of the Baptist Historical Society that it was able to make amends to previous generations' failings who in 'Reaping in joy we have been too heedless of those who sowed in tears.'⁵⁵⁶ The Society was, then, a historicizing tonic.

Where Gould was hoping for a recovery of a historicizing tradition, the Presbyterian Historical Society was more concerned with revision; in the 'fresh light' that would be shone on 'events needing elucidation' because of the accumulation of archival contributions.⁵⁵⁷ Yet this allusion to discovery and revision was not a common opinion. Editor of the *Transactions of the Unitarian Historical Society* Walter H. Burgess was more confident of the history writing that had so far been done in denomination's community. Unitarian George Eyre Evans' *Vestiges of Protestant Dissent* (1897) loomed large in that it was an intricate historical survey of the material possessions of Unitarian and allied dissenting congregations in Britain and Ireland.⁵⁵⁸ Yet for all the interest in plates, pewter, and chapel histories more broadly, Burgess believed that the 'history of our churches is for the most part the history of the thoughts and lives of their ministers and members.' Biography writing was, then, a proper mode of historical writing for there was 'no better way of arriving at a good understanding of the Unitarian movement and the religious ideals for which our churches have striven than that of reading the lives and

⁵⁵⁶ Gould, 'Prefatory Note', in *TBHS*, 2.

⁵⁵⁷ [Anon], 'Origins and Formation of the Society', in *JPSHE* (1914), vol. 1, no. 1, 4.

⁵⁵⁸ Burgess, 'Work in the Field', in *TUHS*, 5.

letters of those who have been leaders amongst us.’⁵⁵⁹ Burgess drew a clear lineage of biography writing from the *Reliquae Baxterianae* (1696), to the memoirs of Lindsey (1812), Priestley (1831-32), Spears (1877), and Martineau (1902), ending up at Gordon’s ‘treasury of biographical lore’ contributed to the *DNB*.⁵⁶⁰ It was no accident that Gordon was the apotheosis of biography writing in the Unitarian tradition; Burgess had attended the Unitarian Home Missionary Board from 1888 and studied theology under Gordon who remained an influential figure throughout his life.⁵⁶¹

Burgess acknowledged the contributions of Unitarian historians to other denominations’ histories, as much as he acknowledged the contributions of non-Unitarian historians to Unitarian histories: in 1911, Burgess had written a book on Baptists John Smith and Thomas Helwys and in 1920 would write one on the Baptist John Robinson – an exploration of his General Baptist roots; Alexander Gordon demonstrated wide interest in figures across Dissent and was a member of all of the nonconformist historical societies although, curiously, not the Unitarian version, even though he contributed articles.⁵⁶² He believed that there was a very definite Unitarian history writing tradition and that there was not a pronounced sense of protectionism or overt possession that was prevalent in the language of ‘ingathering’ and recovery as was prominent in other denominational historical societies.⁵⁶³ Increased ecumenicism had had a twofold effect in that it had diminished the amount of acrimonious theological disputes between the nonconformists which, in turn, had enabled the ‘growth of the historic spirit’.⁵⁶⁴ Caution against more sectarian use of history was at the heart of such an

⁵⁵⁹ *ibid.*, 5.

⁵⁶⁰ *ibid.*, 6.

⁵⁶¹ Herbert McLachlan, ‘Walter Herbert Burgess (5 May, 1867-7 September, 1943).’, *TUHS*, vol. 8, no. 1 (1943), 1-4, 2.

⁵⁶² *ibid.*, 3; McLachlan, *Alexander Gordon*, 76.

⁵⁶³ *op. cit.* fn 101.

⁵⁶⁴ Burgess, ‘Work in the Field’, 8.

approach, however mutual this may or may not have been with historians of other denominations: there existed the ‘necessity of construing our history according to the facts and not according to our fancy’ so as to not read ‘back into a remote past the principles held dear in the present.’⁵⁶⁵ Now no longer weaponised, Burgess presented history as a form of community construction between denominations and this ecumenical tendency was strengthened by acknowledging that the ‘earlier history of many of our churches has much in common with that of the older Independent and Baptist societies and some Presbyterian congregations now in fellowship with the Presbyterian Church of England.’⁵⁶⁶ In a later volume of the *TUHS*, J. Lionel Tayler, great-nephew of Unitarian historian and minister John James Tayler,⁵⁶⁷ argued that the common history shared by all of England’s churches rendered the regular divisions of nonconformity and conformity of less use in the early-twentieth century where the ecumenicism had given rise to new calls for comprehension. Recognising a shared past, thought Tayler, would support a ‘common-conformity’ whilst recognising the particular characteristics of nonconformist churches.⁵⁶⁸ A different future was advocated for by Earl Morse Wilbur in 1923 who saw Unitarian history as a whiggish procession of ‘*complete spiritual freedom*’. Unitarianism had evolved substantially through its history and the doctrinal elements could be explained as but another evolution towards spiritual freedom that was the underlying motive of all who struggled in the Unitarian movement.⁵⁶⁹ Wilbur’s paper was far more ministerial than other articles that usually appeared in the *TUHS* but it also encouraged examination of history with a design, not impartiality, as Burgess had advocated for. However much impact Tayler and Wilbur’s argument had, *TUHS*’s early volumes were overwhelmingly populated with chapel and congregation histories, representing a continuity of the possessive

⁵⁶⁵ *ibid.*

⁵⁶⁶ *ibid.*

⁵⁶⁷ Derek McAuley, ‘Papers Relating to Rev Dr John Lionel Tayler’, in *TUHS* (2018), vol. 26, no. 4, 407-411.

⁵⁶⁸ J. Lionel Tayler, ‘The Common History of Our Churches’, in *TUHS* (1919), vol. 2, no. 1, 61-89, 84.

⁵⁶⁹ Earl Morse Wilbur, ‘The Meaning and Lesson of Unitarian History’, in *TUHS* (1923), vol. 3, no. 3, 350-360.

strand of history writing that was prominent in the nineteenth century. A similar trend was pronounced in the Presbyterian Historical Society of England, and both denominations undoubtedly had in mind the open trust debates that had enraptured the communities in the nineteenth century.⁵⁷⁰ The Unitarian Historical Society was, then, a balancing act between multiple traditions. Although history was a vessel whereby deeper affinities could be forged between other denominations in the present, it was still an important way of highlighting community identity, significance, and difference.

Nevertheless, the processes of historical writing, research, and collaboration reveal a general understanding within the nonconformist historical societies. Within the Unitarian literary tradition, there was evidence of history becoming a collaborative task which demanded the involvement of those connected with the denomination in order to advance historical knowledge. Unitarian periodicals such as the *Universal Theological Magazine*, the *Monthly Repository*, the *Christian Reformer*, and *The Christian Life* were now a ‘mine of information upon the affairs of our churches’, ‘full of intelligence’. The latter publication pioneered a ‘Notes and Queries’ section in its pages alongside the promulgation of lectures delivered by Unitarian historians, notably Alexander Gordon. George Eyre Evans, another notable Unitarian historian, was the supplier of ‘historical notes’ in *The Inquirer*, further exemplifying the thirst for explicitly historical writing in publications which had frequent and wide reach in the community.⁵⁷¹ This was a familiar trend across all denominational publications and historical societies adopted a similar format in the structure of their transactions or proceedings. A notes and queries section in the *Journal of the Friends’ Historical Society* was designed to be a place

⁵⁷⁰ ‘First Annual Report of the Society’, in *JPHS*, 6-8; Two articles across two volumes of the *TUHS* exemplify the difficulty that the open trust problem posed for historical research: William Whitaker, ‘The Open Trust Myth’, in *TUHS* (1918), vol. 1, no. 3, 303-314 and R. Mortimer Montgomery, ‘The Open Trust’, in *TUHS* (1919), vol. 2, no. 1, 54-60.

⁵⁷¹ *ibid.*, 7.

where ‘correspondents will be able to ask and answer historical questions’ and the *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* had adopted an identical section in its pages.⁵⁷² The *Transactions of the Baptist Historical Society* envisaged itself the entire society and its publications as a ‘denominational “Notes and Queries,” in which those who are keenly interested in the same historical study may seek and give help’.⁵⁷³

The model of community involvement via literary correspondence was uniquely imbued with a sense of duty – to denomination and to pursuit of historical truth. Folklorist W. J. Thoms founded the original *Notes and Queries* in 1849 to counter the prevalence of false information in literary, antiquarian, and genealogical circles: ‘Half the lies that are current in the world owe their origin to a misplaced confidence in memory, rather than to intentional falsehood.’ The publication relied on interested parties who were able to ‘communicate knowledge and to confess ignorance’ out of a form of duty to the value of work that improved the accuracy and prevalence of knowledge: ‘if it is to be well done they must help to do it.’⁵⁷⁴ The model and ethos of Thoms’ publication was emulated by antiquarian and county historical societies in the late-nineteenth century, indicating that smaller publications could fruitfully draw on an atmosphere to improve knowledge whilst increasing the involvement of their literary community.⁵⁷⁵ Whilst not necessarily possessing of the same introspection that was required to counter falsity prominent in *Notes and Queries*, Burgess was conscious of inheriting a tradition of community collaboration in literary publications that served to advance and disseminate more accurate Unitarian history: ‘The ‘Unitarian Historical Society’ hopes to provide a centre

⁵⁷² Rowntree, ‘Foreword’, 3; for instance, ‘Notes and Queries’, *PWHS* (1897), vol. 2, 63-64.

⁵⁷³ Gould, ‘Prefatory Note’, 2.

⁵⁷⁴ ‘[Editorial]’, in *Notes and Queries: A Medium of Inter-Communication for Literary Men, Artists, Antiquaries, Genealogists, Etc.* (1850), vol. 1, Nov., 1849-May, 1850, 1-3, 1, 2.

⁵⁷⁵ Elrington, ‘100 years of Somerset & Dorset Notes & Queries, 1888-1988’, in *Notes & Queries for Somerset and Dorset* (Mar., 1988), vol. 32, 641-643.

for the recording and interchange of historical information relating to the Unitarian movement and the congregations connected therewith.’⁵⁷⁶

Given the wide range of participants in the Unitarian Historical Society, it is striking that there was no one involved from Manchester College, Oxford, such as John Estlin Carpenter or J. Edwin Odgers, acclaimed historians of religion. The Society, in large part, was more the domain of the Unitarianism that was affiliated with Manchester and the Unitarian Home Missionary College situated there. Besides Alexander Gordon’s looser connections with the Society than might be expected from such an industrious man, his influence over Burgess was clear. His biographer, Herbert McLachlan, editor of the Society’s *Transactions* from 1946-1956, was another principal of the Unitarian Home Missionary College, and his son, H. J. McLachlan, was editor between 1973-1987. This was a rich tradition of literary involvement in the process of Unitarian history writing in the early twentieth century, but the articles that were produced in the early volumes are awkward evidence if A. D. G. Steers’ claims are correct that ‘Traditional hagiography had turned into martyrology then biography and then a belief that history was a valuable study in its own right.’⁵⁷⁷ As has been examined, there was a continuation of many of the history writing traditions that had been honed in the previous century – chief amongst these was the chapel or congregation history – but these, as with articles addressing other themes, were very firmly explorations of the denomination’s history for historicizing purposes, far from being history researched and written for its own sake.

The pages of the *TUHS* do not reveal another iteration of the narrative suffering and martyrology that had characterised the pages of nineteenth-century Unitarian histories. The

⁵⁷⁶ Burgess, ‘Work in the Field’, 9.

⁵⁷⁷ A. D. G. Steers, ‘The Centenary of the Unitarian Historical Society’, in *TUHS* (2017), vol. 26, no. 3, 312-328, 312.

form that had most enabled those narratives, biography, was now enshrined in the pages of the *DNB*, the country's national monument. What is in the *TUHS* is a synthesis of local with national history. With other denominational historical societies, the Unitarian Historical Society was intent on improving the accuracy of historical knowledge as well as providing an improved way of disseminating it. The value placed on the contributor to a community's history was defined by duty in religious and intellectual ways. Yet the type of history practised was more reminiscent of the wider developments that are now seen to be synonymous with the professionalization and modernisation of the subject in universities and national periodicals: the role of the historical society member was multiple in this sense: he was to be preserver, collator, cataloguer, surveyor, synthesiser, and writer. All societies valued wide involvement: those who could contribute were not just advancing historical knowledge but ensuring the community's commemoration for future historians. The historicizing aspect of biographer and historical society member was reminiscent of previous generations' conceptions of commemorators, but the contexts they operated in and the processes that they used had once again evolved.

iii. Conclusion

As with other denominational historical societies, the Unitarian Historical Society continues to regularly publish its *Transactions*, which remains a valuable source of Unitarian and Dissenting history. The *Transactions*' editor, A. D. G. Steers is, like four of the six editors before him, a Unitarian minister. He is minister at First Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Dunmurry Church on the outskirts of Belfast, where Alexander Gordon was laid to rest in 1931.⁵⁷⁸ In recent years,

⁵⁷⁸ Burgess, 'Obituary', in *TUHS* (1931), vol. 5, no. 1, 103-104, 104.

its most prominent contributor and industrious writer has been Alan Ruston, a lay preacher and editor of the *Transactions* between 1987-2012, whose research has been extremely helpful for students of Unitarian history in the past decade and more. His contributions to the *DNB* are explored at greater length in the next chapter. When a Festschrift was produced to honour his contribution to Unitarian history, he was venerated in a similar way to those Unitarian historians who went before him.⁵⁷⁹ The community is much reduced though still as literary and as historicized as before, even if it lacks the same social and theological vibrancy that the historical community it continues to research. The peak of this came in the nineteenth century and it is a period that the Ruston's Festschrift and much of the articles in recent *TUHS* volumes have focussed on, often to the detriment of its history in the last century. Yet what the continuing concern with the nineteenth century demonstrates is the effectiveness of that period's historicizing efforts. In history writing, in biographies, in commemorations, in liturgy, in social and political and economic and cultural studies and works, the community was incredibly industrious. Beyond the sheer size of the output, the intent with which individuals in that decade set about historicizing their community is significant in that their intent remains effective.

⁵⁷⁹ Martin Fitzpatrick, 'Review Article – *Essays in Honour of Alan Ruston*', in *Faith and Freedom* (Spring and Summer, 2016), vol. 69, part 1, no. 182, no page numbers.

Chapter 5

A Gathered Church?

Unitarianism and Dissent in the poetry and literary criticism of Donald Davie

This chapter is concerned with the interaction of literary criticism and Unitarianism in the mid-twentieth century. At its core, the criticisms of Unitarianism and Unitarians by Donald Davie, literary critic and poet, are investigated in historical terms. It starts from a presumption that Davie's literary criticism, as with all literary criticism, can reveal much about the place that Unitarianism and Unitarians occupied amongst historical and literary debate in the early-twentieth century. To this end, Stefan Collini's 2019 Ford Lectures yield an influential intellectual precedent. As he explains, 'Each age imagines various pasts in response to changed circumstances and preoccupations in the present.'⁵⁸⁰ Further, as the particular imaginations of various pasts are sensitive to '*changed* circumstances and preoccupations in the present', they are also influenced by the *changing* contexts and modes for thinking about the past and the modes for making intellectual investigations. As a result, the historian of literature, of literary criticism – of history in general – is encouraged to be attentive to 'the commerce between literary criticism and a range of historical assumptions, frameworks, and claims' that informed literary critics, historians, and commentators.⁵⁸¹ Inattention risks being only partly engaged

⁵⁸⁰ Stefan Collini, *The Nostalgic Imagination: History in English Criticism, The Ford Lectures 2017* (Oxford, 2019), 209.

⁵⁸¹ *ibid.*, 208, my emphasis.

with the experiences and intellectual engagements of producers of history and criticism. Collini's attention to these changing intellectual paradigms is discovered in an incredibly holistic approach to the literary critic's world. From their respective pens, he is able to coordinate a bewilderingly wide range of influences stretching from their nationality, regionality, their religious outlook, and their intellectual affiliations and influences. This chapter does not propose to examine Davie in a similarly holistic fashion, rather it focusses on Davie's imagined history of religion in England via his more historical writings. It investigates how Unitarianism was calibrated in his historical and religious presumptions and investigates how it occupied such an insidious part of his outlook. To this end, the chapter is a development of the previous explanation of how Unitarians were numerous represented in the *Dictionary of National Biography*. It examines Davie's response to this representation; his recognition of this a fundamental misrepresentation (i.e., overstatement) of the influence of Unitarians in the religious history of the country which, crucially, acted as a metaphor for a broader mischaracterisation of Dissent's contribution to English religious life. As a prolific poet-critic who engaged in debates about religion in both literary forms, Davie personal spiritual journey is as well, if sometimes beguilingly, documented as his academic developments are. Combining analysis of Davie's poetic and literary output reveals an intellectual who was equally attentive to his contemporary world as he was his inherited world. The influence of Unitarians and Unitarianism on Davie's thinking is wide in this regard. Given Collini's emphasis on the 'commerce' between literary criticism and historical assumptions, this chapter attempts to explain how Unitarians and Unitarianism was an influential component; how it was received, how it was informative, how Davie's critiques were received and what, if anything, this is indicative of. Although Davie's criticism has not had an enduring impact on religious history, the chapter suggests that greater attention to literary critics in the twentieth century is a profitable way of gaining improved perspectives on that century's historical assumptions in

regards to religion. It further suggests that greater attention to the religious journeys of literary critics and historians are possible avenues for better understanding the evolution of British secularization debates but not as historical example, rather as explanation of why crises of faith were heightened from the middle decades of the twentieth century.

Collini's work engages with a selection of literary critics roughly between the years 1920 and 1960. Donald Davie started publishing critical works in 1950s with *Purity of Diction in English Verse* (1952) and *Articulate Energy* (1955) yet his career extended well into the 1990s. Many of the literary critics who feature prominently in Collini's study were influential on Davie, not least due to the unusually strong connection to the University of Cambridge, Davie's alma mater and place of work from 1958 to 1964.⁵⁸² Yet it was the impact of two of Collini's protagonists that were highly significant in Davie's development as a critic and as a poet. F. R. Leavis occupied a mould for the literary critic engaged in much more than novels as text, but in the moral, cultural, and social themes that they spoke to, in the past and the present. '[S]tood behind him ... was a figure of even greater authority' in T. S. Eliot, whose poet-critic profile was influential on Davie, but it was Eliot's critical output that 'dominated our horizon'.⁵⁸³ That Davie existed amongst Collini's milieu is not significant in itself. Rather, the ways that critics imagined and engaged with versions of the past to elevate arguments that were relevant to contemporary debates is identifiable in Davie's work too. Just as his religious inheritance featured prominently in his poetry and criticism, much like it did for Eliot, his intellectual inheritance from the generation that he was effectively attached to in the mid-twentieth century requires Davie to be treated as a source of religious history, as primary and secondary source. Davie has long been treated in terms that modern intellectual historians would be familiar with.

⁵⁸² *ibid.*, 23.

⁵⁸³ Donald Davie, *These the Companions: Reminiscences* (Cambridge, 1982), 78-79.

His self-confessed habit of ‘running off at the mouth’⁵⁸⁴ sometimes reads as an impenetrable thorniness but the quarrelsome tone, particularly regarding religious concerns, is because Davie cares, as many of his contemporaries did, about the direction of British society in the mid-twentieth century. He is an interlocutor of history and personal faith whose writings over the span of a fifty-year career bear witness to a ‘thorny, restless, dissatisfied, and seeking self’, which is a ‘testimony to Davie’s exploratory, stern, and ceaselessly revised art of the self-portrait.’⁵⁸⁵ In these self-portraits, religion, literary culture, and history are coordinated to reflect changing conceptions of country too with its religion, literary culture, and history. His gathered church evolves over the course of his life.

In a study of Davie’s politics, Robert von Hallberg explained that nostalgia played a minor role in Davie’s poetry. When it did feature, it was manufactured to merely play an antagonistic part for the poet to dialogue with.⁵⁸⁶ Yet Davie does use a nostalgic version of the past to dialogue with and this technique penetrates much of his religious poetry, as well as his poetry that is concerned with social and political aspects of England’s past, as William Davies has recently investigated.⁵⁸⁷ Davie’s English pasts are multiple and are not always employed at once but, more importantly, they are not accepted as narratives of England’s history. England is at various points presented as Protestant – Calvinist and Anglican – as well as maritime and civil.⁵⁸⁸ These conceptions have concrete grounding in Davie’s own experiences before he came to write criticism or poetry in substantial forms. His Baptist roots informing his Protestant England, his time in the Royal Navy in World War Two emphasising England’s maritime past, his time at

⁵⁸⁴ Nicolas Tredell, *Conversations with Critics* (Manchester, 1994), 282.

⁵⁸⁵ Helen Vendler, ‘Donald Davie: Self-Portraits in Verse’, in Vereen M. Bell & Laurence Lerner (eds.), *On Modern Poetry: Essays Presented to Donald Davie* (Nashville, TN, 1988), 233-53, 253.

⁵⁸⁶ Robert von Hallberg, ‘Donald Davie and ‘The Moral Shape of Politics’ in George Dekker (ed.), *Donald Davie and the Responsibilities of Literature* (Manchester, 1983), 74-94, 90-91.

⁵⁸⁷ William Davies, ‘Donald Davie and Englishness’, in *The Review of English Studies*, New Series, (Apr., 2019) vol. 70, no. 294, 332-353.

⁵⁸⁸ Howard Erskine-Hill, ‘Two Hundred Years Since: Davie, the Eighteenth Century and the Image of England’, in Dekker (ed.), *Donald Davie*, 112-28, 115-16 & 119-21.

the University of Cambridge reinforcing England's civil character.⁵⁸⁹ All such English pasts were rooted in a fervour for the eighteenth century, his adulation for which led to his self-anointment as a 'pasticheur of Augustan style' in an early poem, 'Homage to William Cowper'.⁵⁹⁰ There was a seriousness in reviving such poetic styles, but Davie came to recognise the wistfulness of such youthful endeavours in 1968: in the early part of his poetic career before the 1960s:

it seems to me now that the 18th-century enthusiasms in which I started and the 18th-century effects which I tried to reproduce... are in fact motivated very romantically; that is to say, for a 20th-century person to yearn towards the rigidity of the couplet and the rigidity of the Johnsonian vocabulary and the rigidity of those steady civilisations which they held in mind, is very different from an 18th-century man wanting it. It seems to me now that nothing is so romantic and so nostalgic and so wistful really in that early poetry as my wish and attempt to keep out any explicit statement of just that. That is to say, my enthusiasm for the 18th century was the most romantic thing about me, and this is the way in which I have come to suspect it.⁵⁹¹

Regardless of which version of the imagined past Davie uses, the use of history – eighteenth-century in particular – in his poetry and literary criticism is devised to move closer to a more complete understanding of his own identity and faith. Collini's focus on the imagined loss of something amongst literary critics of the early- and mid-twentieth century is relevant to the analysis that this chapter has attempted to follow. More often than not, Davie's imagined pasts are pasts that, regardless of whether they were shared amongst his peers or generations before him, are lost to him. The intermingling of personal experience with scholarly pursuit is what

⁵⁸⁹ Davie, *These the Champions*; Neil Powell, 'Donald Davie, (1922-1995)', *ODNB* (2009); Seamus Heaney, "'Or, Solitude": A Reading', in Vereen M. Bell & Laurence Lerner (eds.), *On Modern Poetry: Essays Presented to Donald Davie* (Nashville, TN, 1988), 81-87, 83.

⁵⁹⁰ Clive Wilmer, 'In and Out of the Movement: Donald Davie and Thom Gunn' in Leader (ed.), *The Movement Reconsidered*, 204-27, 213-214.

⁵⁹¹ 'Transcript of an Interview, which took place in April 1968 at the University of Essex, a few months before Donald Davie's departure for Stanford. (John Barrell [the interviewer] is Assistant Lecturer in the Department of Literature at the University of Essex', 5, Envelope 4, Donald Davie Papers, The Albert Sloman Library at the University of Essex.

all scholars, all intellectuals, consciously or unconsciously navigate, yet Davie's navigations are uncommonly bared to the world for all to see; or rather, for all who wish to look. Even in this act, Davie's pursuit of intellectual honesty and transparency – ideas that are certainly present in his religious thinking and are often expressed in strikingly polemic academic writing – is a targeting of those who he sees, either amongst his contemporaries, predecessors, or historical dialoguers, as being dishonest. Davie as Christian witness – as an aggrieved Christian witness – is highlighted by his imagined, historical, and religious adversaries, the Unitarians. Their 'christianity' – really, he always means heresy – is as much theologically wrong as it is religiously, socially, economically, and politically so. His concern to demonstrate these differences culturally appears to be his attempt to illustrate his difference – as a man drenched in culture (literarily at least) – to them, and, through him, their differences to true, Old Dissent and the Church of England. They are incommensurate with his imagined pasts: religious, cultural, societal, political.

i. Aggrieved Old Dissent: Bernard Lord Manning

In his memoirs, Davie claimed that his concern with the eighteenth century was derived from what he saw as F. R. Leavis's inattention to that period of English history, even though it informed the critic's writings throughout his life. In Leavis's 'criticism and teaching, [there was...] a vast and unargued nostalgia – for a supposed identity of purpose and concern, of cultural assumptions, between the eighteenth-century poet and his readers, a common body of assumptions and information which ... was conspicuous by its damaging absence from all literary generations since 1800.' Having comfortably continued – inherited – with the indefinite spectre of Leavis's eighteenth century, Davie increasingly saw it as a lacuna demanding greater

attention.⁵⁹² Leavis's generation, Davie saw, had not been preoccupied with the eighteenth century in the ways that it should have been and in their oversight, there was the origins of explaining why theological energies had dissipated into the literary energies of the mid-twentieth century. Yet the movements towards rectifying the deficits were turning out narratives that were not commensurate with Davie's. The Enlightenment took centre stage in these accounts in which 'secular scepticism punctured the obscurantist prejudices of the Christian churches', but the same scholars who delighted in these versions balked at the versions that emphasised the 'feeling primitivism of Rousseau': Davie remained close enough to 'relish their discomfiture in the 1960s' when this narrative shift took place.⁵⁹³ But Davie had a greater cause for reaction than his 'Voltairean' contemporaries when accounts of eighteenth-century enthusiasm emerged from historians' pens. They sat neatly alongside twentieth-century experiences where 'enthusiasts' had inspired an instance of mass-suicide in Guyana in 1978. Enthusiasm was far more than a historiographical problem:

I cannot be patient with the historical scholarship that annotates 'enthusiast' and 'enthusiasm' in eighteenth-century texts, in a spirit of urbane antiquarianism, as amusing or intriguing instances of the vagaries of semantic change. If we no longer fear 'enthusiasm' as the eighteenth century did, so much the worse for us; and yet the commentators, now as in the last century, invite us to congratulate ourselves on our emancipation from that prejudice.⁵⁹⁴

Never confined to religion, the false energy of enthusiasm finds expression in politics and culture too, where its nebulous character acts as a destructive force:

Ours is an age of mish-mash, when no school of poetry can attract attention unless it can claim also to be a religion and a political programme; when no political party can succeed unless it offers its adherents the fervours and

⁵⁹² Davie, *These the Companions*, 164.

⁵⁹³ *ibid.*, 164-65.

⁵⁹⁴ *ibid.*, 165.

consolations of religion, and the audience-participation of the theatre; when no religious persuasion can afford not to centre itself upon 'social work'. ... dangerous irrationality is [not] peculiar to religious life. Stamp it out there, by abolishing or persecuting or emasculating the churches; and it will only crop up somewhere else – in what will look like politics or art, though it cannot seriously be either.⁵⁹⁵

This aside reveals Davie's cause most plainly. Enthusiasm is corrosive because it does not adhere to a recognisable doctrine and in doing so, there is an intellectual gap left in its wake. The literary critic, insofar as critics were bound to find order and principles in language and culture, had come to fill the intellectual space that had been at least partially vacated since the nineteenth century. Davie reluctantly agreed with P. N. Furbank: "the intellectual activity that, a hundred years ago, went into theological discussion, now finds its most natural outlet in the critical essay'.⁵⁹⁶ Some critics – F. R. Leavis, Yvor Winters, and to a lesser extent Lionel Trilling – had come to use 'literary criticism to advance judgments and arguments which go far beyond the judicious assessment of works of literature.'⁵⁹⁶ These men were examples of 'puritanical' – in Trilling's case, 'rabbinical' – qualities in that they, unusually for their generation, recognised that 'not all moral and intellectual judgments were ... *relative*.'

Literary puritanism provided some protection for an impressionable Davie against the spiritual chasms left in the wake of twentieth-century enthusiasms in his own youthful spiritual uncertainties. That 'such crepuscular uncertainty about First and Last Things disperses itself, like a miasma, through the crevices of thought about apparently quite other things, accustoming us to approximations merely, and twilight zones in our thinking, about such entirely secular

⁵⁹⁵ *ibid.*, 165.

⁵⁹⁶ *ibid.*, 169.

matters as the proper language for poetry.’⁵⁹⁷ The way out of such spiritual and literary suspense was ‘the physical act of worship, not the mental act of belief or assent.’⁵⁹⁸

The spiritual uncertainties that encompassed all aspects of his being could have, Davie believed, found resolution had he encountered Bernard Lord Manning at Jesus College, Cambridge whilst he was an undergraduate at St Catharine’s before the war and crucially before Manning’s death in 1941.⁵⁹⁹ Nevertheless, Manning’s influence can be detected across Davie’s writings on religion, especially on nonconformity and Dissent. Manning’s career was a remarkable one insofar as he had a reach far beyond Cambridge where he rose to Bursar then Senior Tutor of his alma mater. C. N. L. Brooke has drawn attention to the still remarkable sight of a Dissenter as a committed College man and don, so soon after the sweeping changes of the 1870s made such careers possible.⁶⁰⁰ In Manning was the synthesis of what, before 1871, was impossible in that one could be an unapologetically loyal Dissenter within the establishment. He did not see the difficulties in frequently attending College chapel whilst being a prominent member of Cambridge’s Emmanuel Congregational Church and was lovingly described by his biographer as a ‘Congregational High Churchman.’⁶⁰¹ Davie’s admiration of twentieth-century puritans could easily have encompassed Manning whose reputation as being an unabashed adherent of ecumenism requires a great deal of revision. Manning revelled in the Calvinism of his faith and saw this as entirely inconsistent, even incompatible, with the Erastianism of the Church of England whose Episcopalianism was, to him, a flagrant misinterpretation of Apostolic Christianity. For all his ecclesiological differences with the Church, his resistance to what he saw as nonconformity’s increasing desire for comprehension provided the subject for his earlier

⁵⁹⁷ *ibid.*, 169.

⁵⁹⁸ *ibid.*, 170.

⁵⁹⁹ *ibid.*, 76.

⁶⁰⁰ C. N. L. Brooke, *A History of the University of Cambridge: Vol. 4, 1870-1990* (Cambridge, 1993), 388-400.

⁶⁰¹ F. Brittain, *Bernard Lord Manning: A Memoir* (Cambridge, 1943), iv.

thoughts on contemporary religion. He was blunt in a 1916 address to the University Congregational Society:

I hope I am wrong, but I do not think that the word “Nonconformity” moves any great enthusiasm even in the members of the Society. I do not think your blood tingles as I pronounce the word I like so much better – the good historic word, “Dissenters.” Nor do I believe that you are likely to be fixed by our fashionable modern name, “Free Churchmen” – the genteel synonym for “Dissenters.”

For Manning, as early as 1916 when he was 24, we detect a sense of loss or at least of the gradual secession of historic identity to something that deteriorated stronger characters of the past. This extrapolated, as problematically, to deterioration of past doctrines:

Denominational concerns seem to appeal to an ever-narrowing circle. Your average subscriber likes a broader cause, a wider interest. He suspects a fund which will help benefit only the elect: he likes some institutions with a scope as wide as humanity, even if its function be as shallow as his own convictions.⁶⁰²

There was already precedent for the diluting of convictions that Manning despised – something that Maurice Cowling delighted in when writing approvingly about Manning years later. It was embodied by the effectively bastardised *English Hymnal* (1906) in *Songs of Praise* (1925) which, Manning thought, was indicative of a Christianity with less theological substance.⁶⁰³ First and foremost, theological convictions had to be maintained and respected before any talk of ecumenism could be entered in to: ‘It would be so “nice” if we could all receive the sacrament together, so “nice.” Well, “niceness” is not a main object of the Christian Religion; and all this preaching in one another’s pulpits and occasional illicit inter-communions if it whets our appetites for the sweets of reunion *at any cost*, may betray that hold churchmanship which we

⁶⁰² Bernard Lord Manning, ‘A Dissenter’s Apologia’, cited in Brittain, *Bernard Lord Manning*, 21.

⁶⁰³ Maurice Cowling, *Religion and Public Doctrine in Modern England* (3 vols., Cambridge, 1980), I, 201.

received from our fathers.’⁶⁰⁴ Furthermore, seceding to the ‘episcopacy at this stage of things, however “nice” a reunion we may get at the price, means that we unchurch the whole of the holy tradition which bred us’. As such, rushing into reunion would only serve to exacerbate problems for Dissenters of future generations who would be left spiritually unfulfilled by the emptiness with which reunion was constructed.⁶⁰⁵

For all of Manning’s spikiness about the perils of ecumenism and the deterioration of Dissenters’ convictions, Brittain’s memoir relayed a sympathetic character whose generosity of spirit found its way into appreciating the merits of denominations and Christian movements that were not his own, especially the Church of England whose liturgy he ‘reverenced’.⁶⁰⁶ Manning’s historical studies lead him to recognise that many churches in the twentieth century retained the embers of the medieval church. Manning found that Calvin’s doctrine of original sin had in fact had precedent before the Reformation, further legitimising the Dissenter’s position as an inheritor of true Christianity in the twentieth century.⁶⁰⁷

Manning’s veneration for Watts no doubt confirmed Davie’s already burgeoning appreciation; both men agreed on how Watts’s simplicity of style and language – ‘pure and transparent’⁶⁰⁸ – reflected commendable Christian virtues, catholic and evangelical. There are few detectable differences between Manning and Davie’s outlook on Watts and the development of religion since the seventeenth century in general and the most significant commonality lies in their shared disdain for Unitarianism and ecumenicism based on a reduction of respect for long-held

⁶⁰⁴ Manning, *Essays in Orthodox Dissent* (London, 1939), 134.

⁶⁰⁵ *ibid.*, 135, see also Brittain, *Bernard Lord Manning*, 74-75.

⁶⁰⁶ For a more modern iteration of Manning’s sympathetic outlook, see Brooke, *A History of the University of Cambridge, Vol. 4*, 400. See also, Brittain, *Bernard Lord Manning*, 18-19 & 87.

⁶⁰⁷ A. G. Matthews, ‘B. L. Manning the Historian’, *Transactions of the Congregational Historical Society* (April, 1943), 136-42.

⁶⁰⁸ Manning, *The Hymns of Wesley and Watts* (London, 1942), 88.

religious values. The two points are often related. The insidious doctrines of Unitarianism which manifested themselves in Arianism and Socinianism before the late-eighteenth century, gave rise to a false Christian tradition whose overly political character – elite – and overly social character – elite and insincere – obscured the achievements of orthodox (Manning) or Old (Davie) Dissent in the eighteenth century amongst historians of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries who had often given unwarranted precedence to the socio-political achievements of that denomination. We are subsequently left in the dark about the true achievement of Dissent from the eighteenth century, namely the preservation, despite the odds, of the Christian emphasis on Grace.

Both Manning and Davie sought to elevate the significance of religion in the eighteenth century. It is through this temporal prism that their contemporaries and future generations can learn about the most valuable aspects of English religion and Reformed Christianity more broadly, free from the strikingly political and social character of religion in the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. As such, the Church of England was the natural and necessarily comparative body whose history had a leading part in defining the social and political fate of Dissenters, less their theological character. For Manning, the Church played a more antagonistic role in the eighteenth century which he wrote about and the twentieth century from which he wrote from and to. He criticised the Church's fundamentally anti-Calvinist Erastianism and because it failed to adequately deal with the destructive influences of Arian, Socinian, Latitudinarian, and rationalist Deism of the eighteenth century, it 'did not leave the impression of being in a position to resist the 'amiable generalizations' of 'natural religion' in the twentieth century.'⁶⁰⁹

⁶⁰⁹ *ibid.*, 27; Maurice Cowling, *Religion and Public Doctrine in Modern England*, I, 201.

ii. Donald Davie and The Movement

As if in counterpoint to his remonstrances with his spiritual explorations, personal, poetical, and academic, was Davie's relationship with The Movement group of poets in the 1950s. The term had been coined by the literary editor of the *Spectator*, J. D. Scott, to refer to a group of poets who were seemingly bound by a cohesive doctrine that was distinct from pre-war Modernism, Bloomsbury, and New Romanticism.⁶¹⁰ The Movement referred to a vague nationalism or little Englandism, regionalism, anti-obscurantism, and plain-spokenness in the likes of Philip Larkin, Kingsley Amis, Elizabeth Jennings, Robert Conquest, Thom Gunn, John Wain, D. J. Enright, and Donald Davie. Ever since the Movement was declared defunct it has been progressively mythologised as its members moved on to different pastures.⁶¹¹ Blake Morrison charted the mythology of the group as long ago as 1980 and efforts to define its agendas and doctrines have been most recently examined in Zachary Leader's edited collection of essays of 2009.⁶¹² Davie's own objection to being allied with this group was not that he came to be closely associated with those whose views he saw as increasingly limited to the confines of whatever narrow form of Englishness they expounded in the 1950s, rather his dislike of the Movement's position as being antithetical, or at least oppositional, to the literary progenitors the Movement clearly owed so much to and that Davie, after the 1950s, came to see closer associations with.⁶¹³ Yet Morrison's analysis of Davie's drifting to the Right, as Amis and Larkin also did, cuts a near comic figure of a grumbling old man, fed up with the cultural and political changes that came about quickly in the 1960s.⁶¹⁴ Davie's ire with the New Left was

⁶¹⁰ Morrison, *The Movement: English Poetry and Fiction of the 1950s*, 3; Tredell, *Conversations with Critics*, 280.

⁶¹¹ Collini, *Common Writing: Essays on Literary Culture and Public Debate* (Oxford, 2016), 123-53.

⁶¹² Morrison, *The Movement*, 238-42, 249-5; Leader (ed.), *The Movement Reconsidered*.

⁶¹³ Wilmer, 'In and Out of the Movement', 205-06; William H. Pritchard, 'Donald Davie, The Movement, and Modernism', in Leader, *idem.*, 228-46.

⁶¹⁴ Morrison, *The Movement.*, 258-60.

hardened by his experience as Pro-Vice Chancellor at the University of Essex between 1965-68 when what he viewed as uninformed student action heightened a sense that something in England's society had been lost. Reaction against new politics coincided with a reaction against the characterisation of the Movement as a rejection of Modernism, best embodied by T. S. Eliot's poetry. The Movement was not a reaction against Modernism, rather 'Modernism by other means, a second *rappel à l'ordre*.' Achieving this required, to Davie, the 'rediscovery of a native English tradition' and could be best expressed in a revival of eighteenth-century poetry whose style was, unlike Eliot and the Modernists', simple and accessible to readers; the 'pasticheur of Augustan styles'⁶¹⁵ was not confined to poetry but penetrated Davie's literary criticism too.

Davie's advocacy for a revival of simplicity in language and verse found in late-eighteenth-century poetry did not ignore the emotion and confessional aspect that poets of that era sometimes evoked. Unlike other Movement poets, Davie's exploration of lyric poetry of the eighteenth century confirmed his intent to expand the boundaries of his conception of how poetry could have religious and emotional implications. It was not limited to the

therapeutic and social... [I]n the history of poetry down the centuries... the grounds for poetry have frequently been religious... It does seem to me increasingly – though it's embarrassing for me to admit it because of my own agnosticism – we may be selling the pass on poetry from the start when we don't allow that it may have metaphysical or religious sanctions.⁶¹⁶

Davie's embarrassment to admit his (current) agnosticism tempers Morrison's categorisation of Davie as a committed conservative. His own crisis in faith was compounded by contemporary political upheaval – the extension of the permissive society, student riots, the

⁶¹⁵ op. cit. fn. 9.

⁶¹⁶ Quoted in *ibid.*, 223.

recalibration of the Church in the nation – and was being actively explored in his scholarly and poetical work.⁶¹⁷ The calm, sincere religiosity of eighteenth-century poetry juxtaposed the instability and uncertainty of the 1960s for Davie personally and for England, societally.

Davie came to loath that lack of conviction. The Movement was flawed from the outset because it was deprecating to its audiences in using phrases such as “no doubt”, ‘I suppose’, ‘of course’, ‘almost’, [and] ‘perhaps’.⁶¹⁸ The tentativeness of language was reflected by a tentativeness of ideas. The affiliated poets who repudiated self-expression were instead practitioners of ‘self-adjustment, a getting on the right terms with our reader (that is, with our society)’.⁶¹⁹ What more, it was a deprecation to the wrong audience; a middle-brow audience to readers of *Essays in Criticism* and *Scrutiny*, not the non-academized audience who shared the accessible language and experiences of the Movement’s poetry.⁶²⁰ As such, the most striking absence in Movement poetry is ‘poetry of outward and non-human things apprehended crisply for their own sakes’:

the poet is never so surrendered to his experience, never so far gone out of himself in his response, as not to be aware of the attitudes he is taking up. It is as if experience, as if the world, could be permitted to impinge on the poet only if he had first defined the terms in which it may present itself; as if the world never imposes its own conditions, but must wait cap-in-hand until the writer is prepared to entertain it (with the lighting and the angles previously arranged). This imperiousness towards the non-human goes along with the excessive humility towards the human, represented by the reader⁶²¹

⁶¹⁷ Sam Brewitt-Taylor, ‘The Invention of a “Secular Society”? Christianity and the Sudden Appearance of Secularization Discourses in the British National Media, 1961-4’, *Twentieth Century British History*, vol. 4, no. 3 (2013), 327-50; Grimley, ‘Law, Morality and Secularisation: The Church of England and the Wolfenden Report, 1954-67’.

⁶¹⁸ Davie, ‘Remembering the Movement’ in Davie, *The Poet in the Imaginary Museum: essays of two decades* (ed. Barry Alpert) (Manchester, 1977), 72.

⁶¹⁹ *ibid.*, 74.

⁶²⁰ Pritchard, ‘Donald Davie, The Movement, and Modernism’, 231.

⁶²¹ *ibid.*, 74-75.

Whilst poetry of the Movement was not insincere, it could not lose sight of the intangible for fear that its audience would not or could not relate. Its inability to engage with ‘non-human’ aspects of human experience precluded it from making a serious contribution to what Davie came to see as a vital part of English and culture and society that needed to be treated on the same terms as the ‘human’ aspects. Analogous to the non-human was the religious; to the human, secular.

In an eclectic survey of British poetry between 1960 and 1988, *Under Briggflatts*, Davie impressed the importance of religion as a core topic of poetry and literature that, far from being a marginal issue to twentieth-century audiences, still retained interest and importance to many in England. England’s literary relationship with religious poetry was different to that found in Scotland, Ireland, and Wales where religion had never ceded a central position in the consciousness of the populations. In at least two of those countries, religion remained relevant via its involvement in sectarian politics. England had had no such experience in the twentieth century but that common claim led to an erroneous belief that the English were indifferent towards religion by the middle of the twentieth century, not because people were not religious or vehemently secular, but because there was an ‘unspoken compact of mutually contemptuous tolerance by which Believer and Unbeliever had long ago agreed to lie down together.’ Davie saw this compact challenged by William Empson’s *Milton’s God* (1961) which argued that it was ‘intellectually disgraceful: the issue as between Christian Belief and Unbelief was too important to be smuggled away under the facile though civilly serviceable formula, ‘Live and let live’.’⁶²² Not only did Empson help initiate a change in literary criticism’s approach to religion as a serious, meaningful topic, but it correspondingly beckoned a new era for British poetry. David Jones, John Betjeman, R. S. Thomas, Geoffrey Hill, and C. H. Sisson had already

⁶²² Davie, *Under Briggflatts: A History of Poetry in Great Britain 1960-1988* (Chicago, 1989), 11-14, 11.

been preoccupied with the antagonisms between Christian Belief and Unbelief and the Christian church from believing and unbelieving perspectives and in doing so *recreated* a climate where a ‘religious experience of some kind was what British people of whatever colour had a right to get heated about, for or against.’⁶²³ Davie’s survey in *Under Briggflatts* is underpinned by the way in which the antagonism between Belief and Unbelief unfurled in literary criticism and poetry of the decades in which he himself was an actor. There is not, however, any concern about an endemic secularization of British society. Davie is primarily concerned with the loss of seriousness about religion’s role in British culture which had been ‘muffled by the amiability of English social life’.⁶²⁴ Whatever nostalgia Davie exhibits for the past, it is not that he yearns for a Believing society where believers lock horns with believers of different perspectives, rather a society that takes such matters seriously.

Whilst Davie is not considered as a confessional poet in the way that one might consider C. H. Sisson to be, his consistent engagement with religious themes suggests that his religious outlook in poetry and criticism should play a larger part in the way that scholarly work considers his role as a commentator on religious affairs and as a Christian witness. Across a long career he converted from his Baptist allegiance to Anglicanism, although he retained a ‘considerable affection for and loyalty towards [the Baptist] tradition.’⁶²⁵ His academic and poetic work must be read within the context of this conversion and the contemporary evolution of religion in the mid-twentieth century which was increasingly one fraught with debates about the place of faith in society. Yet at the core of his social and cultural criticism was the contention that ‘community’ was, erroneously, the purpose of cultural, social and political institutions:

⁶²³ *ibid.*, 12.

⁶²⁴ *ibid.*, 11.

⁶²⁵ Tredell, *Conversations with Critics*, 255.

‘community’ is an ignoble end to aim at, not just in religion but even in politics. Even if we did not know what it means in practice – that is to say, a central and swollen bureaucracy trying to impose at the level of the lowest common denominator – and even if we did not know from experience that it is inherently inefficient and cannot compass the ends it aims at, what sort of an ideal is it anyway, for private and public life to be bent towards? An indiscriminating and unrestricted ‘togetherness’, as of cows huddled together in a byre to keep one another warm, one cosy and hearty *steam* enveloping the entire citizenry, a vocabulary in which ‘ordinary’ and ‘common’ are the terms of highest praise and greatest warmth, in which ‘human’ and ‘social’ are interchangeable⁶²⁶

This was as much a critique of ‘community’ as it existed in political terms as it was a critique of ‘community’ as it existed in religious terms. Within this passage, Davie’s concern about the detrimental, unprincipled aims of the Movement whose deference to audience underemphasized the ‘non-human’ experience is combined with his imagined England, whose religious temperament in prior centuries had produced, alongside community, believers and unbelievers of all varieties who were agitated and moved by religion. It was something that they had a right to ‘get heated about, for or against’ and the absence of that environment and culture was visible in the deterioration of the Dissenting churches since the nineteenth century and whose decline was detectable in an examination of the literary culture of Dissent since the eighteenth century, whose standard all subsequent literature and verse would be measured. Community had come to be valued too much at the expense of a faith of conviction and of principle and the modern valuation of community had obscured the once esteemed position of Dissent as a principled community:

‘Synecdoche’, says the dictionary: ‘a figure’ (that is to say, in rhetoric) ‘by which a more comprehensive term is used for a less comprehensive [term] or vice versa; as whole for part or part for whole, genus for species or species for genus, etc.’⁶²⁷

⁶²⁶ Davie, ‘Dissent and Individualism’, *Essays in Dissent: Church, Chapel, and the Unitarian Conspiracy* (Manchester, 1995), 226-233, 232.

⁶²⁷ *ibid.*, 227.

Davie agreed with Manning: Dissent could not afford to yield to a broader community. It required tension with the establishment and within the Free Churches to retain a sense of identity and, therefore, meaningful community. The frustration with Dissent, once such a noble, principled cause, is expressed most concisely in his poem, 'The Nonconformist':

X, whom society's most mild command,
 For instance evening dress, infuriates,
 In art is seen confusingly to stand
 For disciplined conformity, with Yeats.

Taxed to explain what this resentment is
 He feels for small proprieties, it comes,
 He likes to think, from old enormities
 And keeps the faith with famous martyrdoms.

Yet it is likely, if indeed the crimes
 His fathers suffered rankle in his blood,
 That he finds least excusable the times
 When they acceded, not when they withstood.

How else explain this bloody-minded bent
 To kick against the prickings of the norm;
 When to conform is easy, to dissent;
 And when it is most difficult, conform?⁶²⁸

Furthermore, Dissent had already come to refer to a broader community than was historically accurate. Davie was far less concerned with the theological side of this than Manning and instead investigated these instinctual claims via literary culture. He sought an explanation for the modern synecdoche of Dissent and found that Unitarianism's emphases on social and political community had eroded the simplicity, sobriety, and measure of Old Dissent as it had most fervently existed in the eighteenth century.

⁶²⁸ Davie, *Collected Poems 1950-1970* (London, 1972), 64-65.

iii. Donald Davie's poetry

In an interview about his forthcoming *The New Oxford Book of Christian Verse*, Donald Davie, then professor of English Literature at Vanderbilt University, was asked to explain what criteria he was using to decide which poems would be included and which would not. He said that 'every poem must have either a strong scriptural center [sic] or a strong doctrinal one' but that beyond that, each poem must exhibit an 'imaginative, concentrated, energetic use of the English language [...and] be able to hold their own with any other poem however secular the subject': 'We lose out from the start if we suppose that for religious poetry we have lower standards in craft than we do for poetry in general.'⁶²⁹ The intentionality of the poetry was central to his consideration. Not only did he agree with David Cecil, the author of the 1940 *Oxford Book of Christian Verse*, that the best poetry was that written on themes closest the poet's heart, but that their choice of language and style was, uniquely with Christian poetry, indicative of the poet's relation with God: 'what sort of language is most appropriate when I would speak of, or to, my God?'⁶³⁰ Davie's preference of 'the plain style' most commonly found in the Augustan hymnologists of the eighteenth century departed from Cecil's preference for the romantic expressions that emanated from pre-Restoration England's High Anglican and puritan poets.⁶³¹ The plain style was 'language stripped of fripperies and seductive indulgences, the most distinct and unswerving English': to speak to God with 'any sort of prevarications or ambiguity is unseemly, indeed unthinkable.'⁶³²

⁶²⁹ Edward E. Ericson, John H. Timmerman, Clarence Walhout, and Donald Davie, 'An Interview with Dr. Donald Davie', in *Christianity and Literature*, vol. 28, no. 4 (Summer, 1979), 13-18, 13.

⁶³⁰ Davie, *The New Oxford Book of Christian Verse*, xxviii-xxix; David Cecil, *The Oxford Book of Christian Verse* (Oxford, 1940), xi.

⁶³¹ Davie, *New Oxford Book*, xix-xx; Cecil, *Oxford Book*, xvii-xxii.

⁶³² Davie, *New Oxford Book*, xxix.

Whilst Cecil's introduction to his earlier anthology was attentive to the poets' particular faith, he refrained from exploring the social and cultural implications of their affiliations. Davie's closer attention to style and language imbued a sense that the poet's choice of communication was indicative of an attention to the makeup of their audience. Watts, Wesley and Cowper 'speak plainly to plain men and women, to the unlettered but devout worshippers in the pews.'⁶³³ The same could not be said for George Herbert and John Milton; championed and preferred by Cecil. Of course, Davie greatly admired the predecessors to his eighteenth-century standard-bearers but the ability to relate such towering feelings of belief through simple language and style was more deserving of praise. For however much Davie distanced himself from the Movement of the 1950s, one of the group's central tenets – that poetry should be accessible and relatable in language and theme – was reprised in his selection of Christian verse that he felt best represented the religious literary tradition in England across nearly a thousand years.

Just as limits were needed to retain a genuine sense of community, Davie reasoned that what constituted Christian verse deserved the same treatment. This literary community, that bound generations together over many centuries needed to be protected from poetry that lingered on the fringes. The Incarnation 'pre-eminently', Redemption, Judgement, the Holy Trinity, and the Fall formed the core doctrinal criterion for qualifying Christian verse and as a result agnostic poetry could not suffice.⁶³⁴ Equally inadequate was the prospect of including poetry that could be described as 'religiose' or 'by embracing any poetry that acknowledges and apprehends the numinous or spiritual' which in many instances were 'the expression of indefinitely oceanic feelings for a something 'beyond', yeasty yearnings towards 'the transcendent'.'⁶³⁵ The

⁶³³ *ibid.*, xix.

⁶³⁴ *ibid.*, xx-xxi.

⁶³⁵ *ibid.*, xx.

distinctions that Davie felt were absent from Christian communities in the twentieth century could be defined more thoroughly when it came to compiling an anthology of Christian literary culture. As such, to avert the risk of transforming the community into a synecdoche, similar to how Dissent had ended up in the twentieth century, it was essential to Davie to avoid the inclusion of substandard and loosely qualifying poetry which could be nothing less than ‘fatal in the long run’.⁶³⁶ Furthermore, the sense of loss of community and nostalgia for a bygone community spurred Davie on to guard the Christian literary community which contained the most ardent expressions of piety.

In 1979, Davie’s own poetry would not have met the criteria to be included in his anthology. Although his earlier poems were informed by doctrine and scripture, they were expressions of Davie’s anxiety about his Baptist upbringing which he had drifted away from since leaving his native Barnsley for Cambridge. His familial Christianity had not weathered the assault of encountering men of different faiths and although he does not talk about it explicitly, his career in the Royal Navy in World War Two was another momentous event that demarcated Davie’s childhood from his adulthood. We first learn of his newfound disdain for an evangelical approach to religion in ‘The Evangelist’ from *Brides of Reason* (1955), the first stanza of which takes aim at the false foundations of the church:

‘My brethren...’ And a bland, elastic smile
 Basks on the mobile features of Dissent.
 No hypocrite, you understand. The style
 Befits a church that’s based on sentiment.

Long before Davie’s forays into eighteenth-century religious and literary history at the end of the 1970s, his idea that Dissent is now a synecdoche (‘the mobile features of Dissent’), is

⁶³⁶ idem.

related seamlessly to his concerns over the lack of conviction that pervades Dissent as he experiences it. The worshipper is spared blame in the encounter and his ire is preserved for the minister, whose ‘Solicitations of a swirling gown’ are dramatized further by ‘The sudden vox humana, and the pause, / The expert orchestration of a frown’. Yet it is in the third stanza where Davie reveals how tormenting this sort of performance and the corresponding worship is for him, regardless of how disingenuous he wants to find it:

The tides of feeling round me rise and sink;
 Bunyan, however, found a place for wit.
 Yes, I am more persuaded than I think;
 Which is, perhaps, why I disparage it.

And whilst he admits to being tempted by the performance, he regains comes to his senses: ‘The man, you say, is patently sincere. / Because he is so eloquent, you mean?’ The rhetorical question is answered, somewhat condescendingly: ‘That test was never patented, my dear.’ The poem ends in admitting that there is ‘credit’ to be gained from attending such services, there is value in being ‘inspired’ by the performance, but Davie remains suspicious of the minister who ‘plays upon our sympathies’.⁶³⁷ There is a sense from the poem that Davie is tolerating the service but that he is having to force himself to do so. The poem could not be said to have satisfied the Scriptural or doctrinal criteria that he would come to define in 1979, but it is revealing of Davie’s central concerns about religion and poetry at this point in his career. The poem’s theme is less devotion than about worship and ritual and, for Davie, this concern was inseparable from his literary concerns about aesthetics and the character of verse.

‘The Evangelist’ is the earliest poetic expression of Davie’s desire to explain how a Christian tradition as established as Dissent had deteriorated into what he saw as a lesser devotional

⁶³⁷ Davie, *Collected Poems*, 22.

vessel by the mid-twentieth century. Its historic position as a ‘rich counter-current’⁶³⁸ to the England’s mainstream culture had been lost, and whilst Davie acknowledged that this happened within a general loss of intense Christian belief, he hypothesised that its decline could be charted and explained more accurately by examining its changing cultural output since its pinnacle in the early-eighteenth century. To blame were a series of religious-cultural developments – enthusiasm, evangelicalism, agnosticism – which had displaced early-eighteenth-century Dissent’s valuable cultural significance, leaving it deprived of its core cultural contribution which Davie sees as being its literary output. This argument is the main achievement of Davie’s 1976 Clark Lectures, published two years later as *A Gathered Church: The Literature of the English Dissenting Interest, 1700-1930*.

These lectures were largely received independently of Davie’s poetic output which necessarily left Davie’s personal religious experiences unengaged with too. The title of the lectures, *A Gathered Church*, was taken from part of Davie’s 1957 poem ‘Dissentient Voice’ and was noticed by a reviewer to refer to a phrase commonly used by Baptist and Independent congregations, ‘formed of the ‘elect’’, to distinguish themselves from their Anglican counterparts in the seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries.⁶³⁹ The dual theological and personal meanings of the title did not, however, inspire further investigation. Although it was to be another fifteen years before Davie was received into the Anglican communion in 1972, a time when he was professor of English at Stanford University, the ‘Dissentient Voice’ reads as an agonising farewell to his familial faith. It is divided into four parts: ‘A Baptist Childhood’, ‘Dissent. A Fable’, ‘Portrait of the Artist as a Farmyard Fowl’, and ‘A Gathered Church’.⁶⁴⁰ The first, a moderately fond recollection of hazy doctrine and ministerial praise, is followed by

⁶³⁸ William L. Sachs, ‘Review’, *Church History*, vol. 48, no. 2, (1979), 225.

⁶³⁹ Roy Foster, ‘The Dissenting Spirit’, *The Times Literary Supplement*, April 28 1978, no. 3969, 469; Lionel Adey, ‘Dissent’, *Essays in Criticism*, vol. 4, (1978), 321-29, 321.

⁶⁴⁰ Davie, *Collected Poems*, 46-50.

Davie's consciously mythologised version of Old Dissent, as it developed from the seventeenth century. Isaac Watts's 'How doth the little busy bee' is juxtaposed with Dissenting minister Thomas Bradbury's endorsement of the patriotic and establishment sentiments in 'The Roast Beef of Old England'. Watts, 'the fox', speaks thus:

Your red meat is uncouth.
 We'll keep the bleeding purchase out of sight.
 Arminian honey for the age's tooth!
 With so much sweetness, who will ask for light?

Not just a tempering force, but a cultural counter-current of substance, Watts advocates for a softer, measured approach to advancing religious interests over Bradbury who 'mauled the synod'. Watts's theology is that which will invigorate Dissent fastest: 'And honey greased, where blood would rust, the locks / That clicked when Calvin trapped the open mind.' Although there were instances where Dissenters collaborated too closely with the Church, Watts, still depicted as a wily visionary of Dissent's fortunes, 'knew that tastes were growing nice / And unction kept the hinge of dogma oiled.' Yet, Davie turns the tale against fox Watts who, in extending theological generosity, conceded too much ground:

Foxes however are their own worst foes;
 And now their chapel door stands open wide,
 Its hinge so clogged with wax it cannot close,
 No fish so queer but he can swim inside.

The reprisal of the bee-honey-wax trope connects Davie's conceptions of Watts's Dissent. It was innocent and attractive, yet ultimately naïve to the theological risks that were beyond its church. Davie's lifelong adulation of Watts's hymns as a form of lyrical poetry, forgotten because of their posturing as devotional verses, suggests that he was thinking of 'The Church a Garden', whose lines indicate their composer's awareness of the dangers that existed beyond:

Christ hath a garden walled around,
 A Paradise of fruitful ground,
 Chosen by love and fenced by grace
 From out the world's wide wilderness.

But Watts, Davie's 'Dissentient Voice' tells us, did not heed his own warnings and, with catastrophic results, the 'garden walled around' was penetrated by insidious theological forces from without:

The queerest fishes hunger for the trap
 And wish the door would close on them, the rough
 Jaws of Geneva and Old England snap:
 They think their church not barbarous enough.

Watts's prescience slips into naivety over the course of this 'fable', a term which implies that its story was a warning for future generations of religious tradition, and one which is focussed around taking greater care to guard one's inheritance better than Dissent in its early-eighteenth century form did. The figure of a beaten Watts, outmanoeuvred by larger forces, is the protagonist of Davie's poem here, and is the fabled figure that Davie was to return to in his Clark Lectures, amending the wrongs that Watts has endured at the hands of unappreciative historians and students of literature.

To this point in 'Dissentient Voice', Davie has charted a version of his spiritual journey, the increasing uncertainty of which is reflected in the poem's growing complexity. 'A Baptist Childhood' and 'Dissent. A Fable' are delivered with relatively simple metrical forms and rhyming schemes, there being slightly more intricacies in the latter section as the topic shifts from more simple observations of the power of worship to the historical complexities of Dissent's contested past. The shift in complexity in the third part, 'Portrait of the Artist as a

Farmyard Fowl’, is found in it being composed in six-line stanzas but is still connected with the simplicity of the poem’s preceding sections through its use of simple meter and rhyme. Here, the crisis of Davie’s spiritual journey becomes apparent as Davie, ‘Pluming himself upon a sense of sin’ contends with the difficulties of coming to terms with being attracted by ‘Old zealots’: ‘He felt their gooseflesh crawl upon his skin / And hoped to feel their zeal besides.’ Far from being the coward or ‘chicken’ in this scenario, the ‘Artist’ is a cockerel, in control of the situation who, despite agonising over the decision to convert, has found confidence in doing so. Yet the cockerel has not taken complete departure of his familial faith, retaining particularities that he deems compatible with his new church:

Dark plumes, though puritanical in cut,
 Still clothe the cock of the studied walk;
 A conscious carriage must become a strut;
 Fastidiousness can only stalk
 And seem at last not even tasteful but
 A ruffled hen too apt to squawk.

Davie’s attention then turns to the real struggle he faced in his moving away from his Baptist roots in ‘A Gathered Church’: severing ties with his inheritance conceived as a familial connection is also the point where poetic criticism yields to poetic vulnerability. The reader is confronted with two apparently contrasting portraits of Davie, but which expose greater complexity behind the firm denunciations displayed in his literary criticism and poetic criticism which, in ‘Dissentient Voice’ are confined to the first three parts of the poem. Helen Vendler conceived of this as a juxtaposition between his literary criticism and his poetry but the same ‘disarming paradox... the strongest guarantee of Davie’s believability as a poet’ can be detected within his poetry too which is not immune to his ‘fondness for quarrelsome apodictic statement[s]’.⁶⁴¹

⁶⁴¹ Vendler, ‘Donald Davie: Self-Portraits in Verse’, in Bell & Lerner (eds.), *On Modern Poetry*, 234-36.

The last section, 'A Gathered Church', is addressed to 'Deacon', or Davie's father who served as a Baptist deacon at the Sheffield Road Baptist Chapel in Barnsley. The personal is combined with the historical and rhetorical as Davie likens his father's eloquent, matured oratory to Watts's: 'I heard / Such from your bee-mouth once.' Yet, just as the pure theological honey in 'Dissent. A Fable' soured, so too does Davie's father's faith, this time mixing with soot, spices and dust, polluting theology and inheritance at once: 'The grains of dust or pollen from our past, / Our common stock in family and church, / Asking articulation.' This last line, placed separately, emphasises Davie's literary concerns with articulation, and is reminiscent of Watts's confidence in the refined energy of early-eighteenth-century Dissent. Davie is suggesting that the purer, simpler ways of communicating are lost. Although not an elegy in a strict sense, its elegiac qualities are harnessed by the use of a dramatic monologue, and the absence of a rhyming scheme that is present in the previous sections of the poem accentuates the author's disjointed, uncomfortable topic. Yet all of these devices are consciously chosen; at no point does the reader feel like Davie is out of control and, indeed, he admits as much in the first stanza: he consoles his deacon father by saying that his words are 'choice and well matured' and that on as sensitive an issue as religion, 'I will be eloquent / And on these topics, having little choice.'

Davie's autobiographical reflections *These the Companions*, explains that his care over words – an occupational 'hazard' – is to be understood in context of his Baptist past. He sees himself as a prig in its early-eighteenth-century definition: "A precisian in speech or manners; on who cultivates or affects a propriety of culture, learning, or morals, which offends or bores others; a conceited or didactic person.":

though I sympathize very promptly and warmly with the angry dislike that the prig provokes, I cannot for long trust or respect the heartily permissive common sense that is proposed as an alternative. In politics I can deal with the prig, that is to say, the doctrinaire; I can oppose him and rule him out of court angrily, consistently, and with a good conscience. But this is because I take politics to be in any case a realm of more or less soiled accommodations and approximations, in which the coarse-grained principle of ‘live and let live’ seems on the whole to do less harm than any other. But in the areas of personal morality and the arts, realms where I expect principles more rigorous and absolute, I cannot see, much as I should like to, how to rule the prig, the precisian, out of court.⁶⁴²

Davie is, then, concerned with the sanctity of principles, of tradition, of preservation, at least in the person. He owes this to his Baptist inheritance; to his deacon father and lay-preacher grandfather. But he also owed this to the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century personification of a prig who, was not just a ‘precisian in religion, [but] *especially a nonconformist minister*’, which Davie recognised as a term not limited to a person, or a minister, but a congregation and church, in firm opposition to the society around them. Dissenters conceived themselves as “a gathered church’, gathered *from* the world and in tension with it’.⁶⁴³ But, as ‘Dissentient Voice’ explained, this conception is confined to Davie’s father’s understanding of the church: ‘A rallying cry of our communions once / For you perhaps still stirring’. For Davie, however, it is a mere ‘picturesque locution, nothing more / Except for what it promises, a tang.’ At this point, Davie turns back to the tight rhyming scheme that was synonymous with the poem’s previous sections that evoked the simpler spiritual understanding of his early years. His attention shifts to Watts, who, much like the caricatured nonconformist minister-prig of the early-eighteenth century, practiced a careful, measured faith. Davie’s poetry harnesses the theological stringency and fortitude that Bernard Lord Manning saw in Watts’s hymns, and by extension, Old Dissent of the eighteenth century.⁶⁴⁴ Davie’s gathered church, ‘That posy, the elect, / was gathered in,

⁶⁴² Davie, *These the Companions*, 75

⁶⁴³ *ibid.*, 76.

⁶⁴⁴ Manning, ‘Congregationalism in the Eighteenth Century’, *Essays in Orthodox Dissent* (London, 1939).

not into, garden-walls': 'Watts thought his church, though scant of privilege, / Walled in its own communion.' The minister was not reliant on social or political determinants to define who belonged to the communion, rather he was a part of a church that was made up of men who were enthusiastically attracted to its creed. Davie, again, receives this idea from Manning who saw early-eighteenth-century Congregationalism's superiority in its adherence to a catholic and evangelical doctrine, essential for twentieth-century Christianity. Congregationalism, in 'maintaining the ministry of the Word and Sacraments, won a victory more illustrious than the victories of Naseby and Marston Moore and Worcester, more enduring than the victories in the nineteenth-century ballot boxes.'⁶⁴⁵

Indeed, those men endured the greatest spiritual challenges because they did not adhere to committed yet accommodating principles:

It was the rooted flower could be hurt:
The plucked that lived in living water felt
No more the stress of time, the tug of dirt.
Time lost for good the fragrance of Heaven smelt.

The innocence of youth, embodied by the flower in its natural state, rooted to the ground, is plucked and the clock ticks away before its spiritual energy runs out and its colour and vibrancy cannot be saved. The process of salvation is then expounded on in an extended metaphor of flowers being put into a glass vase. Those picked flowers, now collected into bouquets, struggle to fit through the vase's neck:

Now all the churches gathered from the world
Through that most crucial bottleneck of Grace,

⁶⁴⁵ Manning, *ibid.*, 195.

Davie's deference towards his grandfather's conception of the Baptist faith is reprised as the process of fitting the flowers through the narrow neck of the vase is made more difficult due to theological restraints and exclusions, as well as the narrow social parameters of 'any partial loyalties - all these / In you, dear sir, are justified', embodying Barnsley's 'provincial nonconformity [which] was the cultural milieu'.⁶⁴⁶ The church was, then, gathered in theological and social terms, the double exclusion and protection from infecting forces made this an insular community and able to select its participants in multiple ways. Those flowers not able to fit into the vase were either not committed enough or not congruous.

iv. Dissent's degradation

Throughout 'Dissenting Voice', Davie's narration of Dissent's decline across hundreds of years is portrayed wholly in personal experiences. The inherited faith that he knew in his childhood slowly gave way to the uncertainty of agnosticism in later life. It was written just before Davie's confrontation of secularization bolstered his critique of the Movement. Yet it was to be nearly twenty years before Davie articulated literary criticism based on religious culture and literature in his Clark Lectures of 1976, whose title reprised a section of 'Dissenting Voice': *A Gathered Church: The Literature of the English Dissenting Interest, 1700-1930*. Davie conceives Dissent as a gathered church insofar as one can be detected in its literary genealogy. Yet this strong genealogy connecting Dissent was routinely obscured by the insidious effects of enthusiasm, evangelicalism, and Unitarianism. Later collected into *Essays in Dissent: Church, chapel, and the Unitarian Conspiracy* (itself a title reminiscent of Manning's *Essays in Orthodox Dissent*),

⁶⁴⁶ Tredell, *Conversations with Critics*, 255.

the *A Gathered Church* lectures were researched and written in a period of extensive investigation into why Dissent occupied the social and historical position it did within England. Whilst Davie presents a far more historical account of Dissent's decline, his arguments are imbued with personal experiences drawn from contemporaneous political, literary, and cultural instances, and are often indistinguishable from personal grievances and religious identity, faith, and community.

With customary argumentative tone and habitual attraction to controversy Davie grappled with biases against the dissenting tradition, which were rooted in misconceptions that it promoted an insidious philistinism via theological extremism in addition to a lust for creating wealth. Yet Davie's protagonist, Isaac Watts, the subject of his poem 'Dissentient Voice', was lauded as Dissent's saviour who nobly emphasized the positive aspects of restraint, embodied in a commitment to simplicity, sobriety, and measure. These respectable values of true Dissent are embodied most expansively by Watts' hymns which were the authentic expressions of a close-knit community within the Dissent. Those who do not belong to such a heavenly communion are those who do not share in the commitment to simplicity and authenticity in literary culture. The quiet and assured innocence of Watts could not contain the dawn of religious enthusiasm and increased toleration of theological heresies not only neglected the sacraments but sullied Dissent's once energetic cultural output. Chief among these malicious parties were the Unitarians, whose rise at the end of the eighteenth century eroded the foundations of Dissent enough that its collapse by the start of the twentieth century rendered it not only impotent but, perhaps more egregiously to Davie, misunderstood.

The lectures were received in a variety of ways. Patricia Beer in *The Listener* ridiculed the existence of a Calvinist aesthetic on the grounds that literature is affected by religion as much as any other metric of identity does:

Neither religious belief nor gender has much to do with the ability to write. Obesity, say, or exceptionally bright red hair might have more.⁶⁴⁷

Roy Foster gave the thesis a lot of respect, appreciating Davie's emphasis on Dissenting hymnody, criticism of Matthew Arnold, acknowledgment of Mark Rutherford's novels, and insights into Charles Wesley's hymns. Whilst there criticism is reserved for the 'intuitive hypothesis' that Davie relies on, as Halévy did in his thesis on Methodism's role in the prevention of an English revolution, there is no doubt for Foster that Davie's arguments were important, if at times polemically articulated, contributions to the historiography of Dissent, religion, and England's social history more generally.⁶⁴⁸

Outside of the walls of literary publications with great reach, Geoffrey Nuttall expressed delight at Davie's recognition of Dissent's culture and the need to maintain its independent tradition. This did not prevent scathing criticism of Davie's inaccuracies and ignorance of existing scholarship, particularly regarding the figure and hymns of Isaac Watts.⁶⁴⁹ Yet Davie's attempt to draw attention to the lack of scholarship on Watts also garnered Nuttall's support. This is made more understandable when it is acknowledged that Nuttall was a Congregationalist minister. He was a high-profile historian of dissent in his generation who also had ministerial

⁶⁴⁷ Patricia Beer, 'Dissenters divided', *The Listener* 6th April 1978, 449-450, 449. Beer's review is laced with bile for her own roots: 'To be the child of Dissent is as chic nowadays as to be of working-class origins, and of course historically the two situations are frequently connected.' Beer was brought up by Plymouth Brethren and then lost her faith, much like Davie, but the passage quoted demonstrates either inattentiveness to Davie's argument or wilfully clinging on to old narratives about Dissent's socio-economic character.

⁶⁴⁸ Roy Foster, 'The Dissenting spirit', *TLS*, 28th April, 1978, no. 3969, 469.

⁶⁴⁹ Geoffrey F. Nuttall, 'Review', *The Journal of the United Reformed History Society* (1978), vol. 2, no. 2, 55-58, 55-56.

duties. Furthermore, his reluctance to join the Congregationalists in their 1972 union with English Presbyterians to create the United Reformed Church⁶⁵⁰ is reflected in Davie's insistence that Dissent's degradation was precipitated by infiltration of pietistical and religious movements that were not its own: enthusiasm, evangelicalism, and Unitarianism, for example. The contention that there was a Calvinist or Protestant aesthetic that was expressed via a unique literary culture was expanded on by Nuttall, despite his numerous criticisms. But Davie's exorcism of Unitarians from Dissent is not wholly taken up by Nuttall who sees them as much a part of Dissent as their Calvinist forebears had been. That said, their corrosive influence on Dissent in the nineteenth century is warmly endorsed.⁶⁵¹

Nuttall's review merely confirmed what he already knew: that Isaac Watts's hymns were indicative of a distinct Old Dissent literary culture. Daniel T. Jenkins, minister-in-charge at Paddington Chapel, London and Weyehaeuser Professor of Systematic Theology at Princeton Theological Seminary between 1981 and 1984, sought to bolster Davie's contention about the existence of a Protestant aesthetic in order to repel 'Giggling London critics[']... routine sneers' about such a phenomenon. Whilst Davie produced strong literary evidence in favour of Dissenting culture's simplicity, sobriety, and measure, his arguments lacked theological development and maturity; a detrimental factor when Dissenters in the 1980s were trying to recoup the most effective and admirable parts of their cultural heritage.⁶⁵² To avoid 'Simplicity, sobriety and measure [becoming] smoothness, safeness and predictability' Dissent had to ensure that its literary culture was underpinned by a

⁶⁵⁰ David L. Wykes, 'Geoffrey Fillingham Nuttall', *ODNB* (2011).

⁶⁵¹ Nuttall, 'Review', 55-56.

⁶⁵² Daniel T. Jenkins, 'A Protestant Aesthetic? A Conversation with Donald Davie', *The Journal of the United Reformed History Society* (1986), vol. 3, no. 9, 368-376, 368, 375-76; Jenkins unconvincingly connects John Knox's Calvinism with the success of the Edinburgh Festival to illustrate the achievement of the Protestant aesthetic.

living faith, which is enlivened and disciplined by living theology... [because] When it is not, the tension relaxes. The artist no longer has to struggle, as Watts did, to confine his inspiration within the bounds of his intention.

Protestant art would become ‘tamely respectable’ and ‘merely sentimental’.⁶⁵³ Davie was somewhat preaching to the converted. From its nineteenth-century power, Dissent had been reduced to a ‘role in [twentieth-century] British society that may well have been secondary... on a par with the public schools or the Liberal Party’.⁶⁵⁴ For whatever agreement there was with Davie in Jenkins’s exposition, he felt that Davie’s cultural and societal explanations of Watts’s temperament did not adequately appreciate the crucial theological foundations upon which his character and his art was built:

Living faith in its Protestant mode is born out of a fresh awareness of the sovereign holiness of God, which awakens the conscience, and a realisation of the exceeding sinfulness of sin and of the judgement which this involves. It is this situation of crisis, in which a knowledge of the atoning and redeeming work of Christ is born, which lifts the burden of sin from our shoulders. We are justified, set right, with God not through any meritorious achievement of our own but only in the act of commitment we call faith, in which our own selves are transcended. Traditionally this has been seen and analysed only in moral terms. This is understandable, the moral dimension is primary, but it is helpful to see that it has an aesthetic dimension as well. The roots of creativity lie in the awakened imagination, born of wonder and of doubt, which sees possibilities of new creation together with the threat of failure.⁶⁵⁵

The literary culture of Reformed Christianity was grounded in the fundamental commitment to faith, differentiating itself from the Catholic and Erastian conceptions of the faith. As long as this theological grounding and force was impactful on the Protestant, there would be a corresponding literary culture and aesthetic. In this sense, Old Dissent was very much a

⁶⁵³ *ibid.*, 371.

⁶⁵⁴ Cornick, ‘Twentieth-Century Historians of England Protestant Nonconformity’, 77.

⁶⁵⁵ Jenkins, ‘A Protestant Aesthetic?’, 371-72.

community, a gathered church, that required commitment to theological traditions for members to be admitted to and retain membership of. Tacitly, the church was exclusive of those who were, like Unitarians, theologically divergent. It was not enough for them to share a religious inheritance or a socio-political outlook and whilst their attempt to combine Dissent with the Enlightenment was seen as futile by Davie, Jenkins saw this as deserving of some credit, even though ‘we can agree that their effort did not turn out to be successful.’⁶⁵⁶ But the failure, both men agreed, was that Dissent’s literary culture and theology, was found wanting when these attempts were made. There was a recognisable social community, but as the world expanded to them ‘too many of them settled for a tame and relaxed suburban respectability, qualified only by a marginalised pacifist idealism.’ The successive generation, in the absence of a recognisable culture, ‘kicked away the ladder on which they had risen.’⁶⁵⁷

As Davie had angrily pointed out, twentieth-century Dissent was still reeling from the failings of its nineteenth-century experience and corruption. The ‘counter-culture’ and ‘tension’ that had once been such a fundamental component of its role in society did not so much account for a growing secularism, Jenkins thought, but a loss of theological distinction. A compelling example was to be found in Davie’s world:

The old Dissenting interest which became so powerful in the nineteenth century as almost to become a majority interest, has largely dissolved and can no longer be reconstituted. Partly because of that, we have achieved a safe respectability denied to militant nineteenth-century Nonconformity. Several recently deceased or retired orthodox Dissenters who have occupied chairs at Oxford and Cambridge enjoy a degree of esteem among all the churches comparable to that of Watts and Doddridge in their own time, but that is partly because they no longer represent a counter-culture.⁶⁵⁸

⁶⁵⁶ *ibid.*, 373.

⁶⁵⁷ *ibid.*, 374.

⁶⁵⁸ *ibid.*

Safe respectability was tantamount to a betrayal of the energy that made Dissent an effective force. For whatever optimism about Dissent's position in the twentieth century Jenkins could muster, his lament for its historic communal character was in line with Manning and Davie's perspectives that absorption had hollowed out the cultural and social effectiveness of Dissenting churches: 'we have to ask how we can again become a creative minority.'⁶⁵⁹

Davie successfully agitated some corners of Dissent enough to incite engagement with his fiery polemic and, with Jenkins and Foster, he found appreciative allies. Laying such vituperative disapprobation of the Unitarians' 'wholesale denigration' of Dissent's cultural creativity was 'hardly justified when we have to regard men like Richard Price, William Turner of Newcastle, or the family life of the Lant Carpenters and the Gaskells, to mention only a few.'⁶⁶⁰ Davie's reviewer in the *Transactions of the Unitarian Historical Society* recoiled at the sweeping statements and attribution of blame to Dissent's decline over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and scoffed at the prospect of any hint of a conspiracy to infiltrate the Dissenting ranks. The defence is surprisingly limited. The reviewer, F. W., settles for a dramatic, perhaps mischaracterising, summary of his adversary:

Unitarians read books and appreciated culture. Therefore, argued their orthodox dissenting opponents, if reading books and valuing culture leads to denying the deity of Christ and the efficacy of the atonement, let books and culture be anathema, for we will have none of them!

Nevertheless Davie's 'weird argument' – with its 'absurdities' – contains some 'interesting speculations and good suggestions as to profitable lines of research. But as history it is both

⁶⁵⁹ *ibid.*, 375; *op. cit.* fn. 22.

⁶⁶⁰ F. W., 'A Gathered Church: The literature of the English Dissenting Interest, 1700-1930. Donald Davie. Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978, pp. 152. £4.25.' *TUHS* (1979), vol. 17, no. 1, 39-41, 40.

misleading and grossly defective.’⁶⁶¹ F. W.’s engagement was the only in depth engagement with Davie’s thesis from Unitarian voices. It is implied that Unitarianism’s contribution to literary culture spoke for itself when faced with unjustified assaults. But this seems to prove Davie’s point: the real injustice was that religion was something that twentieth-century society was not engaged with. Arguments between Dissenting denominations, that helped define its limits and better define Dissent’s contribution to society, were as important as debates between Dissenting denominations and the Church. Culture had the potential to redress those injustices in Britain which needed a climate where ‘religious experience of some kind was what British people... had a right to get heated about, for or against.’⁶⁶² Replying to Jenkins, Davie emphasised that Nonconformity (he seems to drift freely between this term and ‘Dissent’) was uniquely placed to recover that religious experience as ‘Its adherence to sobriety means an avoidance of immodesty’.⁶⁶³ It derived this from its forefathers but what was required was conviction that it still held value.

Modern day Dissenters were not the only group responsible for the deterioration of religious experience and culture in Britain in the twentieth century. Historians of religion, argued Davie, had to bear some responsibility for ingesting, uncritically, inaccurate representations of Dissent that had been handed down to the twentieth century by its predecessor. Christopher Hill, ‘Master of Balliol’ had taken the lead of Leslie Stephen in illicitly ‘romanticizing’ seventeenth-century Puritanism but, unlike Stephen’s ‘Victorian vice’, the reasons for Hill’s aggrandizement were more cynical: ‘Our Left-wing historians and opinion-makers have an obvious interest in extolling the Cromwellian republic and the intransigent or radical Dissent which brought that republic into being and sustained it’. The eighteenth century was a poor successor:

⁶⁶¹ *ibid.*, 41.

⁶⁶² *op. cit.* fn. 40.

⁶⁶³ Davie, ‘Nonconformist Poetics: A Response to Daniel Jenkins’, *The Journal of the United Reformed History Society* (1986), vol. 3, no. 9, 376-385, 385.

‘The cosmic battles which Milton and Bunyan depicted were succeeded by sterile controversies over deism and unitarianism.’ But of course, sterile is as sterile does; a controversy will seem fruitless when the fruit that it bears is such as you don’t want and can’t digest. If the fruit that Christopher Hill had been looking for had been a more exact grasp of doctrinal truth, and greater sincerity in religious worship, then eighteenth-century controversies about deism and unitarianism might seem even today to bear fruit that is wholesome enough.⁶⁶⁴

The eighteenth century’s neglect by Hill was not as pronounced in E. P. Thompson, who also came under fire from Davie in *A Gathered Church* for having uncritically accepted narratives of aspects of Methodist evangelists’ impact on Dissent from the nineteenth century.⁶⁶⁵

Thompson’s review of *A Gathered Church* sought to concede more positive influence to Unitarians in their contribution to Dissent’s literary culture in the eighteenth century than Davie had done. Davie’s perspective on them reflected Thompson’s second chapter of his *The Making of the English Working Class* which cast Unitarians as respectable Dissenters who, in their attempt to accommodate Enlightenment ideas, had embraced rational theological positions alongside radical politics. Thompson did not go as far as to denigrate their role in the development of Dissent in the eighteenth century but did acknowledge that there was a distinct socio-economic profile – urban, prosperous, and well educated – which distinguished Unitarians from Old Dissenters whose demographic character was much broader.⁶⁶⁶ Davie’s Protestant aesthetic necessarily excluded this sort of group on the grounds that whereas Watts and Doddridge had to ‘sink’ their language via the plain style to be as accessible as possible to their denomination’s congregants, Unitarians faced no such challenge. Their theological differences set Unitarians outside of Davie’s genealogy but, Thompson asks about their

⁶⁶⁴ Davie, *A Gathered Church*, 15.

⁶⁶⁵ *ibid.*, 41, 124.

⁶⁶⁶ E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London, 1963), especially 29-31.

contribution to Dissent's literary culture, 'what *is* Dissent in the late eighteenth century, if we subtract Norwich's Octagon Chapel, Nottingham's High Pavement, and Birmingham's Old Meeting?'⁶⁶⁷ The Unitarians, as Nuttall had noted, had to be accepted as part of the history of Dissent, even if the historian found it unpalatable for whatever reason:

The historian of ideas must see Old Dissent, with its strong intellectual traditions and its mercantile and professional support as serving increasingly, after 1750, as a vector of the enlightenment. Like it or not (and I do not like the elitism of a certain kind of Unitarian familial tradition any more than Professor Davie does) this is the record.⁶⁶⁸

The elitism of Unitarians informed a great part of Davie's disdain and reason for excluding them from his imagined community of restrained, sober Dissenters that traversed the centuries. Their repudiation was part of Davie's attempt to '[ponder] a particular, and narrow, cultural genealogy, which he affirms as his own.' Yet Thompson sees the value to be found in Davie's approach for whilst he becomes 'fiercely involved in long-forgotten sectarian controversies, and shows a party zeal in the arguments of nineteenth-century non-conformist [sic] historiography... I cannot regret this zeal, which illumines much that had become obscure.'⁶⁶⁹ Thompson certainly had no qualms with taking Davie's challenge to 'get heated' about religious experience in Britain. But where Thompson's (in)famous obiter dicta 'Puritanism – Dissent – Nonconformity: the decline collapses into a surrender'⁶⁷⁰ largely sought to excavate something like an accurate history of anti-Establishment religion in Britain – albeit one naturally imbued with contemporary politics and personal experiences – Davie, for the most part, and because of that, compellingly, sought to revise the received narrative about Dissent's capitulation from its

⁶⁶⁷ Thompson, 'Review of *A Gathered Church*', in *The Modern Language Review* (1980), vol. 75, no. 1, 164-70, 164.

⁶⁶⁸ *ibid.*, 165.

⁶⁶⁹ *ibid.*, 168.

⁶⁷⁰ Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, 385.

eighteenth-century perch. There was also a question for Davie about the authority of experience in writing about England's history. Davie could appreciate Thompson as a 'wonderful writer who is abundantly worth quarrelling with' yet his adversary lacked the validation of experience in order to judge and endorse a version of England's past that ultimately was not his:

I'm sorry, Edward Thompson, I think I know these people that you write about. You don't know them. You know about them and you know their history, but you've never actually grown up with them. They weren't your blood kin as they were mine. In the same way, you strike a plangent note when you say in *The Poverty of Theory*: here I am like one of the Old Believers 'who will not bare his head before authority' ... But in fact, you're an atheist. I *am* one of those Old Believers, and that was my family. In other words, with Edward Thompson, as with many much less creditable people on the Left, their proletarian heroes are romances. Life in the proletariat isn't like that and never was.⁶⁷¹

Davie and Thompson's shared disdain for the influence of Unitarians on Dissent is connected when their religious backgrounds are compared. Davie's Baptist roots were influential in the poet-critic's repudiation of the affluent, unorthodox, elitist sect that emerged at the end of the eighteenth century. Thompson was the son of a Methodist missionary whose work in India had caused a drift away towards a vague spiritualism. He was sent to John Wesley's Kingswood School where Methodist ministers still sent their sons, but the faith was expressed more culturally rather than doctrinally and as such, Thompson slipped its grasp as did his father.⁶⁷² His argument in *The Making of the English Working Class* about the role of Methodism in instilling a uneven economic system in the nineteenth century that was tacitly allied with conservative forces completed his rejection of his familial faith. Not only were Davie and Thompson from non-Establishment backgrounds, but they also both rejected their familial

⁶⁷¹ Tredell, *Conversations with Critics*, 274.

⁶⁷² David Hempton & John Walsh, 'E. P. Thompson and Methodism', in Mark A. Noll, *God and Mammon Protestants, money, and the market, 1790-1860* (Oxford & New York, 2001), 99-120, 99-101; John Rule, 'Edward Palmer Thompson', *ODNB* (2015); Eileen Janes Yeo, 'E. P. Thompson: witness against the beast', in William Lamont (ed.), *Historical controversies and historians* (London, 1998), 215-224.

faiths and, through intellectual exploration, sought to explain their revulsion. Despite their near antithetical political stances, the 1950s and 1960s proved to be transformational decades for both men. Thompson's involvement in the articulation of the New Left was effectively positioned against a New Right in Davie.

Thompson's role in the Communist Party Historians Group had diminished since 1956 when Krushchev's Secret Speech that revealed the horrors of Stalin's rule were confusingly coupled with the crushing of the Hungarian Uprising. Having moved with Raphael Samuel and John Saville away from the CPHG, the group established *The Reasoner* which became *The New Reasoner*, eventually merging with *Universities and Left Review* to become the *New Left Review*.⁶⁷³ For Davie, disillusion came over a decade later in 1968, whose politics were tested and then recalibrated after close involvement with the student riots at the University of Essex. As Pro-Vice Chancellor, Davie did not shy away from controversy when, in an interview with David Frost for BBC One television, he described many of the protestors as 'wreckers' – interpreted as a synonym for Communist – who desired to 'subvert not just the discipline but the social and academic life of the university'.⁶⁷⁴ Although the 1968 riots were merely a catalyst for Davie who had already been drifting into disillusion with British academia, this year at Essex "changed his outlook on life forever"⁶⁷⁵ and he pushed further Right and in the following year, he finally settled on consistent attendance of Episcopalian services after taking up his new

⁶⁷³ Scott Hamilton, *The Crisis of Theory: E. P. Thompson, the New Left and Postwar British Politics* (Manchester & New York, 2011), 52-53.

⁶⁷⁴ 'Interview between David Frost and Professors Donald Davie and Students' Council President Brian Downie, 20th May 1968', *The Mustard Project*: https://mustardthemoviedotorg.files.wordpress.com/2018/03/54_052068_bbc_town_and_around_downey_davie.pdf (accessed 10/10/23), 2.

⁶⁷⁵ Philip Edwards, 'Donald Alfred Davie 1922-1995', in *Proceedings of the British Academy*, (1997), vol. 94, 391-412, 400, 401-404; Tredell, *Conversations with Critics*, 269-70.

post at Stanford University in California;⁶⁷⁶ a decision that was no doubt hastened by becoming an expatriate, yearning for some spiritual connection to England.

His move Right was not a lonely one amongst the academic class who experienced the student riots in 1968. Previously a philosopher inspired by Marxism, Alasdair MacIntyre at Essex with Davie, chastised “the hippy... and soul culture’ of the ‘parent-financed... children’s crusade’ which a less ‘senile’ thinker would not have mistaken for a ‘genuine’ revolution.’⁶⁷⁷ At the University of Sussex, another plate glass university, historian Donald Winch was also shocked by the assault on core academic values but engaged in a less inflammatory way than either Davie or MacIntyre.⁶⁷⁸ Yet the student riots had no such effect on Thompson, whose disillusionment with academia came at yet another modern university, Warwick, whose increased commercialisation pushed Thompson to a writing career outside of the academy, largely to the benefit of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament.⁶⁷⁹ Despite siding with the students of 1968, even Thompson had cause to be distrustful of their insincere activism: ‘Youth, if left to its own devices, tends to become very hairy, to lie in bed till lunch time, to miss seminars, to be more concerned with the style than with the consequences of actions, and to commit various sins of self-righteous political purism and intellectual arrogance’.⁶⁸⁰ There was a worrying idleness in the belief that ‘some act of occupation of a few administrators’ offices, [the student rioters of May 1968] could announce in the heart of repressive capitalist society a “red base” which would bring an instant voluntaristic proletarian revolution looming out of the

⁶⁷⁶ G. A. Schirmer, “This That I Am Heir To’: Donald Davie and Religion’, in Dekker (ed.), *Donald Davie* 129-142, 130. Davie was baptised in that Church in 1972.

⁶⁷⁷ Cowling, *Religion and Public Doctrine in Modern England*, III, 375.

⁶⁷⁸ Collini, ‘Donald Norman Winch, 15 April 1935 – 12 June 2017, elected Fellow of the British Academy 1986’, in *Biographical Memoirs of Fellows of the British Academy* (2019), vol. 18, 471-496, 480.

⁶⁷⁹ Thompson (ed.), *Warwick University Ltd: Industry, Management and the Universities* (London, 1970); Hamilton, *The Crisis of Theory*, 124-126; David Eastwood, ‘History, Politics and Reputation: E. P. Thompson Reconsidered’, in *History* (Oct., 2009), vol. 85, no. 280, 634-654, 639.

⁶⁸⁰ Thompson, *Warwick University Ltd*, 155.

streets.’⁶⁸¹ The failings of the Left in 1968 led to questions about its place in the ‘clear genealogy from religious dissent, through secular radicalism, Chartism and trade unionism, into the radical wing of the labour movement, and eventually to CND and END [European Nuclear Disarmament].’⁶⁸² Insincerity and a renewed sense of individualism at the expense of corporate and social responsibility were experienced by Davie too. Disillusionments of Thompson on the Left and Davie on the Right embodied the deterioration of the post-war consensus by 1970 that penetrated much of the academic classes.⁶⁸³

Thompson and Davie, having had almost incomparable upbringings and more similar academic interests, were churned up by the 1960s sufficiently enough to return to their religious identities to scrutinise present society through historical enquiry. Their concerns with the interactions of those with power and those without power in the British experience in the 1960s were reflected by the story of protest in British society from the eighteenth century onwards. The treacheries of Methodism at the heart of Thompson’s story were paralleled with the malicious effects of Unitarianism in Davie’s. The second generation of Dissent and Methodism in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries emerged as being responsible for the decline of meaningful cultural energy in Davie’s case and the continuation of inequality in British society in Thompson’s. Competing narratives of the eighteenth century were the prism through which competing ideologies in the mid-twentieth century attempted to dominate each other as well as attempted to succeed the enduring nineteenth-century interpretations of the eighteenth century. Furthermore, ‘At stake... was political history itself and a series of values about what the task of the historian should be amid the swirling ideological currents of the twentieth century.’⁶⁸⁴

⁶⁸¹ Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory & Other Essays* (New York & London, 1978), 309.

⁶⁸² Eastwood, ‘History, Politics and Reputation’, 642.

⁶⁸³ Reba Soffer, ‘The Conservative Historical Imagination in the Twentieth Century’, in *Albion* (Spring, 1996), vol. 28, no. 1, 1-17, 6; Michael Bentley, *Modernizing England’s Past*, chapter 7.

⁶⁸⁴ Bentley, *Modernizing England’s Past*, 168.

v. Battling with the *DNB*'s Unitarian representation:

In the previous chapter, the efforts of Alexander Gordon and others to represent Unitarians in the *Dictionary of National Biography* were explicated. According to Davie, Unitarians were overrepresented in the work. As such, Dissent was being actively misrepresented well into the twentieth century. Coupled with a penchant for social and political history in the late-twentieth century, historians investigating religion of the eighteenth century were confronted not just with burgeoning numbers of Unitarians, but they were imbibing anti-Calvinist history that was ingrained in the lines of many biographies. As Davie read it, this was far from coincidental, but a well-coordinated agenda and one allowed to emerge as the potency and sincerity of religion declined in the minds of historians in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Recovering the theological and social relevancy of Old Dissent was half the battle for Davie. He devoted a lot of energy to tearing down the pillars upon which Dissent's reputation had in part been degraded. As a 'bigoted Calvinist' and 'person of morose temper' Richard Price's father justified his son's gravitation to 'liberal opinions and the benevolent disposition of the son'. Later in his career, the *DNB* describes his move to roughly Arian or Socinian theological positions yet the distinction is inconsequential to Davie who is focussed on highlighting the biographer's narrative that 'Richard Price was, though still somehow Christian, satisfyingly far from the 'morose' and 'bigoted' Christianity of his papa.'⁶⁸⁵ Price's funeral service in 1791, was conducted by Priestley and Andrew Kippis – names that "are specially honourable in the roll of English nonconformist divines." Davie's exasperation leaks off the page. The double slander

⁶⁸⁵ Davie, *Essays in Dissent*, 192.

of relegating Calvinism and elevating heretical and degrading theological positions is almost too much to take and it is no wonder that some of the analysis drifts from understandable to unconvincing as injustice swarms Davie. He turns to one of *DNB*'s predecessor in Kippis's *Biographia Britannica* – Boswell and Johnson did not think much of as it was “too crowded with obscure dissenting teachers” – who had a ‘finger in every dissenting pie!’ His voluminous literary output was occasioned by his movement away from Calvinism:

And what released that multifarious energy was the same with him as with Price and Priestley: ‘When about fourteen years old he renounced the principles of Calvinism, in which his relatives had brought him up... Subsequently he inclined to Socinianism...’ And then – oh blessed *DNB*! – Thompson Cooper blows the gaff on Kippis and Price and Priestley and many others [...] For he quotes Wilson's *History of Dissenting Churches* to the effect that Kippis ‘highly disapproved the conduct of the modern Socinians, in assuming to themselves the exclusive appellation of unitarians’. This is the giveaway. We need look no further to explain the nominal Presbyterianism of Joseph Priestley, and the equally nominal denominational allegiances of others [...] Unitarian wolves in Calvinist sheep's clothing! Astute Andrew Kippis – his shrewd advice was widely followed; and so not just in *DNB* but by historians since [...] ‘Nonconformist’ or ‘Dissenter’, as applied to Englishmen of the later eighteenth century, means almost invariably ‘Unitarian’.⁶⁸⁶

The ‘Unitarian conspiracy’ – part of the title which this essay appears under – is well and truly alive in Davie's mind. There was no doubt added grievance in that Kippis's *Biographia Britannica* was a formulative model for the *DNB* under Stephen, publisher George Murray Smith, and co-editor Sidney Lee.⁶⁸⁷

Yet more insidious were Anglicans like John Disney who could not muster the courage to follow his latent Unitarian convictions, follow Theophilus Lindsey and honourably resign his livings

⁶⁸⁶ *ibid.*, 194.

⁶⁸⁷ Leslie Stephen, ‘National Biography’, *Studies of a Biographer*, I, 2.

in Swinderby and Carlisle in the 1770s: ‘Like many other Unitarians in Anglican orders, Disney preferred to operate as a ‘mole’ or a ‘sleeper’, as an agent ‘in place.’” After twelve years in the Essex Street Chapel pulpit as Lindsey’s successor, Disney was the beneficiary of the generosity of Thomas Brand Hollis, retiring in 1805 with £5,000 a year: ‘It’s clear’, snorts Davie, ‘that these early Unitarians, whether they originated in church or in chapel, attentively promoted each other’s welfare’.⁶⁸⁸ Not only were Unitarians insincere and malicious, but they were also wealthy; a stark contrast to the socio-economic position of Baptists and Davie’s own family who were shopkeepers in Barnsley.⁶⁸⁹ A rightful veneration of Old Dissent – its admirable sincerity, sobriety, and measure – of the early-eighteenth century is, to Davie, obscured by the deceitfulness of nominal Dissenters and nominal Anglicans. The true character of Dissent is further concealed by the inaccuracies and prejudices of the *DNB*, which extended ambivalent nineteenth-century attitudes deep into the twentieth century:

Kippis’s subterfuge was successful not just in his own day but through many succeeding generations, up to and including (quite notably indeed) our own. To the first generation of subscribers to *DNB*, the words ‘Unitarian’, ‘Arian’, and ‘Socinian’ still had some meaning, though probably a meaning less precise than for Kippis and his contemporaries a century before; but for the twentieth-century generations the words have rarely had any meaning at all, however indefinite.

All of the ‘Dissenters’ Davie investigates would, he claims, have been ‘indignantly disowned’ by Orthodox Dissent.⁶⁹⁰

Perhaps. Yet Davie’s point about the identity of Dissenters is less pressing than his point about twentieth-century historians and readers being inattentive, even willingly ignorant of the importance of such historical religious identities. In equating Dissenters with the heterodox

⁶⁸⁸ Davie, *Essays in Dissent*, 196.

⁶⁸⁹ Davie, *These the Companions*, 2.

⁶⁹⁰ Davie, *Essays in Dissent*, 200.

components of that category of English religious society, there is no room for Orthodox Dissenters and their achievements to be recognised:

what of the Dissenters who persisted and worshipped between the extremes of the Methodists on the one hand, [and] the Unitarians on the other? ... ‘Dissenter’ means ‘Unitarian’, where it does not mean downright ‘infidel’.⁶⁹¹

Davie’s vituperative article is not devoid of reason in theological terms (he makes it clear that reason was as much the domain of trustworthy Calvinists like Watts and Doddridge as much as it has been equated to the Rational Dissenters of the late-eighteenth century), yet it is his recognition that the institutionalisation of such inaccuracies that is most significant:

in these speculations have we wandered too far from considering simply the fun that we can have with the *DNB*? By no means! That ‘fun’ certainly comprehends the sardonic amusement that we get, from observing an expedient subterfuge successfully bemusing generations of later historians, including our own.⁶⁹²

The gauntlet laid down; R. K. Webb picked up. As an associate editor of the *New DNB* under the editorship of Colin Matthew, Webb was charged with revision and production of entries largely relating to Unitarians in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. His concern about how to recalibrate the representation of Unitarians in the *New DNB* forced an assessment of Alexander Gordon’s initial efforts and responsibilities in the initial *DNB* inspired an investigation into the religious affiliation of Dissenters Gordon wrote entries for who were active after 1689. Although there was a weighting to Unitarians (102 out of 593), there was a wide spread of Dissenters otherwise. Webb admired Gordon’s judiciousness in classifying individuals to one denomination or sect given the ‘fluidity’ of religious boundaries in the late-

⁶⁹¹ *ibid.*, 202.

⁶⁹² *ibid.*, 202.

eighteenth century in particular. The only definitive bias Webb finds in Gordon's entries are in the earlier volumes who are over representative of northern Irish Presbyterians; Gordon having been an Ulster Presbyterian himself.⁶⁹³

In the apparently simple process of adding names to the *New DNB*, Webb had found complication in two challenges, 'one from outside the *DNB*, the other from within.'⁶⁹⁴ Yet, for Davie, Gordon was not solely responsible for the overrepresentation of Unitarians in a work that had subsequently misguided historians deep into the twentieth century. Gordon took a leading role in the coterie of *DNB* contributors who were nothing less than co-conspirators. The biographer of Richard Price, Thomas Fowler, had been sympathetic with Tractarianism before embarking on a long academic career at Oxford eventually becoming head of Corpus Christi College.⁶⁹⁵ Joseph Priestley's biographer, Philip Joseph Hartog, was from a liberal Jewish family and attended University College School, London, and became a respected chemist at Victorian University of Manchester and when in that city was intimate with progressives such as the historian T. F. Tout and editor of *The Manchester Guardian*, C. P. Scott.⁶⁹⁶ Thompson Cooper, Andrew Kippis's biographer, became one of the most prolific contributors to and sub-editors of the *DNB* alongside his work as a journalist for various London national newspapers, often as parliamentary reporter.⁶⁹⁷ Dundee city Librarian and historian of its environs and people, assistant professor of Music at Anderson College, and music and art critic for the *Dundee Advertiser*, Alexander Hastie Millar, was Thomas Fyshe Palmer's biographer.⁶⁹⁸ Edward Smith, historian of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century England and its colonies and biographer of William Cobbett, was biographer of Major John Cartwright. Davie had contention

⁶⁹³ R. K. Webb, 'Six Years with the New DNB' in *TUHS* (2001), vol. 22, no. 3, 290-311, 298-300.

⁶⁹⁴ *ibid.*, 294.

⁶⁹⁵ J. A. Stewart & C. A. Creffield, 'Thomas Fowler', *ODNB* (2004).

⁶⁹⁶ Elizabeth Morse, 'Sir Philip Joseph Hartog', *ODNB* (2004).

⁶⁹⁷ A. A. Brodribb & G. Martin Murphy, 'Thompson Cooper', *ODNB* (2004).

⁶⁹⁸ 'Dr. A. H. Millar', *The Times*, Tuesday March 1st, 1927, iss. 44518, 9.

with all of these *DNB* biographers, in addition to the familiar Alexander Gordon. The drastic difference and range of careers exhibited in this small sample size illustrates how Davie's unearthing of the mischaracterisation of Dissenters at the end of the eighteenth century in the *DNB* was not a pattern confined to a particular background of one or two contributors. Prejudices could be detected in the pages of many contributions, and, by extension, Davie's Unitarian scheme was perpetrated by a wide variety of conspirators, not just Unitarians themselves. This hinted at a more endemic misunderstanding of Dissent and not a disease that could be located and confined to one particular limb of British religion in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.

Davie did not live long enough to see the updated version of the *DNB* published in 2004, having died in 1995. Alan Ruston, prolific Unitarian historian and sometime editor of the *Transactions of the Unitarian Historical Society* wrote that

It is perhaps just as well that Davie has not lived to see the publication of the *New DNB*, due in a few years [sic] time. The large number of Unitarians included in the current version has not only been retained but added to significantly, often from the researches of members of this Society.⁶⁹⁹

Ruston was chief among these contributors to the *New DNB*'s new cohort of Unitarians. In all, he wrote 43 biographies, not all of whom are identified straightforwardly as Unitarian, rather as variously Presbyterian, Independent, nonconformist ministers in addition to a litany of historians, writers, social reformers and philanthropists whose associations with a particular denomination do not take centre stage despite their faith having guided or enabled their life's work. Of the forty biographies pertaining to a religious life, only eight of Ruston's entries are fresh to the *New DNB*, the rest being revisions. Of these revisions, twenty-two are revisions of

⁶⁹⁹ Alan Ruston, 'A Dissident Poet', *TUHS* (1995), vol. 21, no. 1, 226-227, 227.

entries written by Alexander Gordon in the original *DNB*. Fourteen of Ruston's contributions are labelled as Presbyterian ministers, the object of Davie's ire, and it is in this list that his claim about questionable labelling of individuals' denominational affiliation still stands. The most prominent Unitarian wolf in Presbyterian (or Old Dissent's) sheep's clothing is Andrew Kippis whose Unitarianism penetrates through in Ruston's text but who is otherwise, Davie would have thought, sully the good name of Dissent well into the twenty-first century. Ruston acknowledged Davie's concerns about the proliferation of Unitarians and Presbyterians at the expense of the adequate representation of Baptists even if he was powerless to redress the imbalance or, as Davie would have put it, the injustice.⁷⁰⁰

Recognising the sheer numerical imbalance between Baptists and Methodists on the one hand and Presbyterians, Independents and Unitarians on the other, is what most concerns Ruston. He concedes that there should be greater representation of the former group but the reasons for such high numbers of the latter group are to be found in the primary sources of the eighteenth and nineteenth century. By the end of the eighteenth century, the culture of commemoration amongst the more affluent circles of Dissent produced numerous publications of funeral sermons, biographies, and obituaries in prominent periodicals and as such the 'numerous sources on these Presbyterians/Independents available to Gordon, and of course myself, made and makes the writing of biography a relatively easy task.' An individual's wealth directly corroborates to the historical trail he leaves behind and as such, the poorer in society go unacknowledged by historians in the future. Because Baptists fell into a poorer, 'middling' category, they were more difficult to trace.⁷⁰¹ Indeed, a quick glance at the *ODNB*'s online database (by no means the most accurate way of assessing an individual's affiliation, as has

⁷⁰⁰ Ruston, 'Those Eighteenth-Century Divines: Writing for the New Dictionary of National Biography: Friends of Dr. Williams's Library Fifty-Fifth Lecture' (London, 2001), 4-5.

⁷⁰¹ *ibid.*, 19.

been acknowledged with Presbyterian ministers) confirm some of Ruston and Davie's assessments. Of the ministerial contingent represented throughout the *ODNB*, there are 182 Baptists versus 887 Presbyterians, 366 Independents or Congregationalists, 233 Methodists, 200 Quakers, and 115 Unitarians. Of those listed as being denominationally affiliated there are 797 Baptists versus 4,712 Presbyterians, 1,539 Independents or Congregationalists, 1,349 Methodists, 1,095 Quakers, and 739 Unitarians. In both cases, there are substantial qualifications to be aware of. The inclusion of the Church of Scotland under Presbyterian accounts for 2,871 of that faith. There is also a substantial exclusion of the class of individuals listed under 'protestant nonconformers' (497) in the first list and those with 'protestant tendencies' (4,156) in the second. It cannot be stressed enough how cursory these glances are but they do at least confirm that Baptists continue to be underrepresented in proportion to their numbers in Britain since the Baptists constituted a fairly coherent religious movement in the country in the sixteenth century and then more substantially under the leadership of Thomas Helwys in at the start of the seventeenth century. Michael Watts's analysis of the 1851 religious census, imperfect though it was, found that Nonconformist congregations had increased by 975 per cent between 1773 and 1851, in comparison to a 155 per cent increase in the population of England and Wales over the same time period. The number of Baptist congregation had increased from 402 in 1773 to 2,789 by 1851, accounting for 2.95 per cent of the population in England and 9.13 per cent of the population in Wales. Unitarian and Presbyterian congregations were difficult to discern between in this time period but from 741 Unitarian or Presbyterian congregations in 1773 (the vast majority of which will have identified as Presbyterian given that Lindsey's Essex Street Chapel would only be founded in 1774), the Presbyterians had 142 in 1851, compare to the Unitarians who sustained 202. For the Unitarians in 1851, this

amounted to accounting for 0.2 per cent of the population in England and 0.29 per cent of the population in Wales.⁷⁰²

Whilst Ruston unsurprisingly thinks that ‘Most of Davie’s historical assumptions and claims are wrong’ – and nothing more is said about this – ‘the basic argument that English Presbyterians are over-represented at the expense of the other dissenters does deserve consideration.’⁷⁰³ But their inclusion was justified when their contribution to theology, literature and politics are measured by significance. Historical representation of Dissent is weighted towards London and its environs but ultimately

those who leave written records and accounts of their activities and have published works aimed at a wider society rather than a purely sectarian interest have a greater chance of being memorialised in biography than those who have not. Perhaps this is obvious but in relation to the Davie argument it does need stating. Worthiness and orthodox beliefs are not and never have been the key determinants for inclusion in biographical dictionaries like the *DNB*.⁷⁰⁴

Furthermore, Ruston contends, ‘if the Davie thesis is accepted, the inclusion in the *DNB* of uneducated country Baptist ministers of exemplary orthodoxy would be even more difficult to justify.’⁷⁰⁵ This implies that Unitarians were outward looking from their church. It also supports Davie’s argument that the very reason for the degradation of Dissent since the eighteenth century was hastened by churches, the Unitarians’ chief of all, that prioritised social and political work rather than a culture of ‘simplicity, sobriety, and measure’ that guaranteed theological and spiritual sincerity. The social elitism that Thompson and Davie both balked at in the mid-twentieth century had manufactured a greater defence in the twenty-first century, but

⁷⁰² Michael Watts, *The Dissenters: Volume II: The Expansion of Evangelical Nonconformity* (New York, 1995), 22-29.

⁷⁰³ Ruston, ‘Those Eighteenth-Century Divines’, 19-20.

⁷⁰⁴ *ibid.*, 20.

⁷⁰⁵ *ibid.*, 22.

it was still essentially deteriorative to a pursuit of a more accurate representation of England's past. Revd David Cornick, nonconformist, ecumenicist, and historian of ecumenicism, reflected on the situation:

A question which nags in the back of my mind though, is why? Why have we produced such skilled historians and so few creative theologians? When I was a young research student a minister colleague asked what I was doing. When he found out he muttered, 'Another contributor to the nostalgia industry.' Is it just the English temperament, the yearning for warm beer, village cricket and chapel teas, or is it that the past is a more comfortable country than the present?⁷⁰⁶

vi. Conclusion:

The Unitarian representation of the eighteenth century has been contested since the denomination emerged at the end of the eighteenth century under Theophilus Lindsey at Essex Street Chapel. The processes that it has adopted in order to establish itself as a denomination have affected how it is analysed to the twenty-first century. Liturgy, biography, education, historical research were acts consciously undertaken to first establish difference and then increasingly to assimilate into British society's mainstream. These processes and acts that gathered the Unitarians their church were challenged by Davie's examination of English religious history through the lens of literary culture which argued that those same processes and acts served to obscure a Dissent that had been left behind in the eighteenth century. The deleterious effects of such obscurantism were also seen in new histories of the mid-twentieth century which sought to either ignore the significance of eighteenth-century Dissent's contribution to English culture and society by focussing on the seventeenth or nineteenth

⁷⁰⁶ Cornick, 'Twentieth-Century Historians of England Protestant Nonconformity', 77.

centuries instead, and when historians did focus on the eighteenth century, as E. P. Thompson did in his seminal work on the origins of the English working class, they missed the literary significance that Davie had sought to revive. Davie's challenge was not engaged with by historians of Unitarianism, who instead dismissed the critic's arguments, the reasons for which are not ever fully explained. Of course, Davie's arguments may just not be of importance to historians of Unitarianism, but this chapter has sought to demonstrate that beneath the vituperative, exasperating, and autobiographical tone, Davie's critique could still be used as a springboard from which to regain energy in the field once again, integrating 'the commerce between literary criticism and a range of historical assumptions, frameworks, and claims' into its arsenal in order to examine its past via a fresh lens.⁷⁰⁷

⁷⁰⁷ Collini, *The Nostalgic Imagination*, 208.

Conclusion

By the start of the twentieth century, Unitarianism did not generally provoke alarm amongst those who were concerned about the Church's place in society. The nineteenth century had proffered a respectability that stretched beyond the communities of Dissent. Unitarians held political, economic, social, and cultural positions that were akin to individuals of other less heretical churches. People read Elizabeth Gaskell's novels, were challenged (acceptably) by James Martineau's philosophy, worked in Manchester's Unitarian-owned mills, coveted and owned Wedgwood crockery, learned Darwin's evolutionary biology, and were influenced by the Chamberlains' policies in civic and national contexts. For all the integration and assimilation, Unitarians were still barred from some aspects of society. Three years before his retirement from the principalship of Manchester College in 1931, after sixteen years at its helm, L. P. Jacks withdrew his name from the roll of Unitarian ministers collated by the recently created General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches. He was committed to Martineau's non-denominational Unitarianism and desired to abolish all the denominations, reconstituting 'the whole lot as a universal Society of Friends.'⁷⁰⁸ Regardless, it was as a Unitarian that he was invited to preach in various Anglican pulpits, notably by Dean Inge in St. Martin-in-the-Fields. However, some quarters were less accepting: with the support of Albert David, the Bishop of Liverpool, Frederick Dwelly, the Dean of Liverpool, invited Jacks to deliver three addresses in Liverpool Cathedral. Jacks addressed large weekday evening congregations without notes but was dragged into controversy when Dwelly invited a local

⁷⁰⁸ L. P. Jacks, *The Confession of an Octogenarian* (London, 1942), 202.

Unitarian minister Lawrence Redfern to preach at a full Sunday morning service. Local ministers in more rural parishes in the Diocese of Liverpool protested about the incident: ‘the cathedral was not built to be a sort of civic temple where all sorts and conditions of people might get a hearing.’⁷⁰⁹ The incident attracted the attention of Lord Hugh Cecil who drew up a petition that urged the Archbishop of York to discipline David and Dwelly. Adopting a measure presented by Henley Henson, Bishop of Durham, Convocation resolved to tighten up rules around inviting members of other churches to preach in Anglican pulpits, re-emphasising the sanctity and authority of doctrine over the prevailing ecumenical atmosphere; to admit Unitarian preaching in Anglican places of worship risked plunging the Church into an existential crisis.⁷¹⁰ Recognising that the bishops were presented with no real choice but to pass the resolution, Jacks still lamented that they had to ‘perpetrate an anachronism.’⁷¹¹ The controversy was not caused by Unitarians but by Dwelly’s doctrinal indiscipline and Cecil wrote to Jacks assuring him that his Unitarianism was not the issue.

This was not the case a few years later in 1938 when Cecil, then Provost of Eton College, wrote to *The Times* concerning the ‘scandalous and intolerable’ involvement of Neville Chamberlain in the appointment of bishops:⁷¹²

I still think it unseemly that a Unitarian should have the predominant voice in the appointment of Bishops. I do not in the least doubt that the Prime Minister is high-minded, conscientious, and painstaking in the business. But those who believe that the Church is a spiritual body animated by a spiritual life must feel

⁷⁰⁹ ‘Ecclesiastical News’, *The Times* (Dec., 23, 1933), iss. 16635, 13; ‘Unitarians in a Cathedral’, *The Times* (Dec., 29, 1933), iss. 46638, 7.

⁷¹⁰ Herbert Henley Henson, *Unitarianism or Historic Christianity? The Substance of a Speech in the Convocation of York, 7 June 1934* (London, 1934).

⁷¹¹ Jacks, *The Confession of an Octogenarian*, 204. A more in-depth account of the controversy from the Anglican point of view is in Herbert Henley Henson, *Retrospect of an Unimportant Life* (2 vols., London, 1943), II, 312-329.

⁷¹² ‘Election of Bishops’, *The Times* (Feb., 9, 1938), iss. 47914, 18.

it to be unseemly when the organ for the expression of that life in the important function of choosing chief pastors is a Unitarian.⁷¹³

As weak a Unitarian as Chamberlain was, his faith still mattered in devoutly Anglican quarters. But the issue was illustrative of the anachronistic and dysfunctional relationship between Church and State. It was a relationship governed by laws from Henry VIII's reign and adjustment was needed, for if bishops could be penalised for neglecting ecclesiological matters, then

a Unitarian would not be in Downing Street. He would be burned at Smithfield. And if Mr. Chamberlain had ceased to be combustible at Smithfield that had been due to a movement of enlightenment and toleration.

The question was, then, if penalties on Unitarians had been abolished, why were Anglican bishops held to punitive sixteenth-century standards?⁷¹⁴ Where Chamberlain's occupation of Downing Street was remarkable to Cecil, Chamberlain's funeral in Westminster Abbey on November 14th, 1940 was mystifying to Henson:

I travelled to London in order to attend the funeral of Neville Chamberlain in the Abbey. The service had been kept secret, but, though there was no crown, it was most impressive... I could not but reflect on the profound significance of the fact that an avowed Unitarian was buried in the Abbey with full rites as if he had been an orthodox Christian. The form in the Prayer Book was, indeed, not used; but the prayers substituted were such as assumed the completely satisfactory Christianity of the Departed. The truth is that nobody any longer takes ecclesiastical discipline seriously, or attaches any real importance to doctrinal orthodoxy. Yet one must draw the line somewhere, and I cannot see any other defensible line than that which makes belief in Christ's Divinity the *unum necessarium* of Christian profession. But even so, I dare not act, nor would even wish to act, on this assumption!⁷¹⁵

⁷¹³ Hugh Cecil, 'Appointment of Bishops', *The Times* (Feb., 15, 1938), iss. 47919, 15.

⁷¹⁴ 'Election of Bishops'.

⁷¹⁵ Henson, *Retrospect of an Unimportant Life: Volume Three, 1939-46 the years of retirement* (London, 1950), 171. An reduced version is quoted in Cowling, *Religion and Public Doctrine*, III, 319.

The former Prime Minister's death was not noticed by any obituaries in the Unitarian press.⁷¹⁶ If Chamberlain's significance in Unitarianism was negligible, the significance of a man of his faith was recognised by the likes of Cecil and Henson. From preaching in Cathedral pulpits to the appointment of bishops, there were still areas and processes of British society that were closely guarded by ardent Anglicans. Although it could not be claimed that Jacks or Chamberlain belonged to any gathered church in the way that Davie had envisaged it, they were vestiges of a Unitarianism that had managed repeatedly and effectively to historicize its denominational iteration that was at its most powerful in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. Even if some of the church's sons had forgotten elements of its tenets in the early-twentieth century, its adversaries had not.

Historicization was a critical part of Unitarianism from its inception in 1774. The denomination sought to position itself as the inheritor of reformed Christianity by becoming a church whose doctrines were consistent with the apostolic Church. It did so by blending the eighteenth century's growing support of freedom of conscience in religion and rationality. Theophilus Lindsey and his successor at Essex Street Chapel, John Disney, embodied the Anglican nature of the church. There was a commitment to attract disillusioned Anglicans like themselves to perpetuate the cause. The other and more numerous community that grew Unitarianism came from Dissent, who brought with it a history of its own, quite different from the Anglican party in the church. Central to the historicization of the community was the commitment to forms of worship. The long tradition of prayer book revision in the eighteenth century set an influential precedent for Lindsey's *BCP Reformed*. It was, as with all liturgies, the way in which Unitarians

⁷¹⁶ Ruston, 'The Chamberlains and Unitarianism', *TUHS* (2008), vol. 24, no. 2.

could bear witness to their faith; to commemorate a faith that was the purest and most apostolic. The centrality of commemoration brought together two traditions of Christianity that had previously existed largely independently of one another. The steady revision of the liturgy by Lindsey and Disney was consistent with the desire for Unitarianism to be at the forefront of reformed religion.

It was these precedents in the first years of Unitarianism's existence as a recognisable church that proffered its historians and biographers of the early-nineteenth century with material to manage and synthesise into cohesive narratives. Biographers concerned with commemorating subjects whose pasts were sometimes Anglican sought to present Unitarianism as a religiously and theologically coherent church, full of the gathered 'elect' who had understood that true Christianity lay in the Unitarian doctrine. While Lindsey was remembered, albeit less vigorously, as the nineteenth century progressed, his synonymity with Biblical Unitarianism created a dilemma for Unitarian historicizers who wished to draw on Unitarian ancestors to authorise and validate the Unitarian movement. If commemorations of Lindsey diminished as the century progressed, his successor's legacy was almost eradicated. John Disney's literary commemorations of latitudinarian Anglicans in the late-eighteenth century were viewed as vital contributions to the creation of a literary community. Yet Disney's historic Anglicanism and the manner of his secession from the Church – later than ideal for commemorators – were driving forces behind his fading out from Unitarian attempts to historicize the community in the nineteenth century. The denominationalism associated with the first generation of Unitarianism in the late-eighteenth century was integral to commemorating the diversity of the community's members and for demonstrating that true Christianity was appealing to those whose religious inheritances lay in a variety of other Trinitarian churches. Yet it was the commitment to denominationalism – so integral to the founding of the church from 1774 – that

came to complicate the religious and theological coherence of the church in the late-nineteenth century.

As denominationalism faded from literary commemoration, so too did it fade from Unitarianism's institutions. With the alleviation of restrictions to England's ancient universities in the middle of the nineteenth century, nonconformists could 'return' to Oxford and Cambridge. Where Mansfield College offered more orthodox theological training for Congregationalists, Manchester College came to disassociate itself from explicitly Unitarian doctrines. Far from being solely initiated by developments within Unitarianism, Manchester College's move towards offering a non-sectarian theological education was hastened by the urge to assimilate in Oxford where some quarters still viewed Unitarianism with suspicion. As Oxford was reformed and opened to nonconformists, and theology increasingly became a science akin to the developments in history, attempts were made to guard against theology becoming a completely open faculty where post holders were not required to take Anglican orders. The resistance was partly successful but did not prevent the interaction of nonconformist and liberal Anglican collaboration in theological studies. The College's removal was supported by a network of predominantly Manchester-based Unitarians who were more committed to denominational, Biblical Unitarianism than the staff of the College. Both types of Unitarianism saw the significance of the removal of Manchester College to Oxford; it was symbolic of the continued reformation of English Christianity. The buildings of the college, designed by a prominent Manchester architect were, however, a connection to the college's history, rather than the denominational, Biblical Unitarianism which still dominated Lancashire and its environs. The historicization of Unitarianism was subjugated in preference to assimilation. Just as Lindsey had sought to create attractive conditions for Anglicans to secede

from the Church in the late-eighteenth century, Manchester College was founded with similar deferential intent.

This did not mean that all Unitarians had lost touch with their inheritance. Biography writing was still a vitally important way of demonstrating an authorised genealogy of individuals who, in the face of orthodoxy, had chosen a more difficult course in search of true Christianity. Just as when Manchester College removed to Oxford in 1889 and found that theology was becoming increasingly historical and scientific within universities, the professionalisation and modernisation of history had transformative effects on the way that Unitarians could historicize their community. First, the Victorian inclination to organize and historicize on ever grander scales culminated in the voluminous *DNB*, offering the opportunity for historians of Unitarianism to historicize their community alongside figures who were part of the traditional British historical canon. Second, the growth of local historical societies and the proliferation of new historical research methods and outlooks were influential when denominations came to establish their own historical societies. In both instances, the act of historicizing the community retained semblances of Christian duty. Yet the work that was done by the Unitarian historical society had an increasing tendency to treat the denomination as an entity whose existence was in the past, rather than as a continuous body of thought that impelled history for the sake of perpetuation of the community in the future. History had largely become detached from its religious moorings.

The success of the *DNB* was made possible by the fact that it was intended to be representative of all communities within Britain, however obscure, insidious, or distant. Yet concerns about the representation of Dissent drew literary-critic and poet Donald Davie to query whether Unitarianism deserved such a large representation in the *DNB* in his 1976 Clark Lectures where

he contended that Unitarianism was not Dissent at all. To Davie, if the apotheosis of Dissent was in the literary purity of Isaac Watts in the early-eighteenth century, its nadir was in the rise of Unitarianism from the 1770s. Watts had gathered his church around a precious theology and preserved it in his hymns, whereas Unitarians had not only adopted an insidious theology but were more concerned with social and political action. But it was the success of Unitarian historicization that Davie was most concerned with. He was alarmed to find that historians gave ample attention to Unitarianism over real, Old Dissent. This wrong could be righted if literary culture was given greater attention. Despite attracting copious criticism – often rightly, for he was no historian – Davie’s lectures and sustained challenge of Unitarianism exposes how the denomination’s acts of historicization from the late-eighteenth to the early-twentieth centuries, expressed in liturgy, literary commemoration, and institutionalization, were successful in claiming theological and historical significance for a small community once considered to be radical, subversive, and marginal.

The thesis has sought to demonstrate how histories of Unitarianism have been refracted through multiple lenses. The earliest generation of Unitarian historians provided distorted accounts that consciously and self-interestedly emphasised the presence of a Unitarian community. These distortions, digested through personal experience of that community, reinforced by similar tendencies to construct and reinforce the existence of a community, were weaponised to deal with divergent desires for the denominational character of Unitarianism in the nineteenth century. The tendencies of some within the denomination to develop the church in line with other Dissenting churches led to the movement of Unitarianism to the academy. At the same time, assimilative tendencies combined with the ‘commemorative instinct’ of Unitarianism found a fortuitous outlet in the *DNB*, where its community now sat inside the national history rather than being in tension with it, as it had existed from its foundation in the late-eighteenth

century. The literary character or culture of Unitarianism enabled it to integrate into national history more ably than other Dissenting communities, who, as Davie correctly pointed out, had a lasting impact on the nature of historical research deep into the twentieth century. Historians of religion are heirs to this legacy; however faint it may seem to them. Circumvention of these distortions is achieved directly by going back to the primary sources. But adequate literary analysis, especially through paying attention to the processes and historicizing tendencies of Unitarianism, must inform any historian of this denomination. This thesis suggests, then, that Unitarianism was very much a gathered church, despite the divergent schools of thought that existed within it in the nineteenth century. It had a remarkably strong literary culture that enabled the community to elevate itself to a station of significance; politically, socially, theologically, literarily, culturally. As with many other churches, the primacy and importance given to appearing gathered was of paramount importance. That it was able quickly to historicize itself and perpetuate these narratives lent it an air of authority that enabled it to position itself as an indispensable part of the nation's religious history.

Like all other Christian denominations in the twentieth century, Unitarianism has dwindled from the heights it held in the early-nineteenth century. Few chapels have been erected, few congregations added, and the century has borne witness to the closure or assimilation of its educational institutions. The Unitarian Home Mission now only offers ministerial and lay training courses as part of the conglomeration of various protestant denominational bodies at Luther King Centre, fittingly located near the historic centre of the Unitarian Northern milieu in South Manchester. Manchester College, Oxford became a full constituent college of the University of Oxford in 1996 and at the same time changed its name to Harris Manchester College, adopting its new carpet-magnate benefactor's name whose religious affiliations do not appear to be in line with the foundation of the College. But this is representative of the

denomination's desire to integrate and adapt. The third chapter of this thesis demonstrated how Manchester College's Unitarian roots provoked cautious reactions from some Anglicans who were intent on protecting the Church's position at the heart of the University's theological teaching. That caution has dissipated into complete tolerance with the College's Unitarianism being nominal at most (its chapel is still the centre of Unitarianism in Oxford). It has an Anglican priest as its college head in Jane Shaw, who succeeded a Methodist minister in Ralph Waller, and boasts just one Theology tutor who presides over a denominationally unaffiliated course for undergraduates.⁷¹⁷ The tension at the centre of this is that Unitarianism set out wanting such unaffiliated study but has won such a victory at the expense of its religious vibrancy that maintained and sustained it. In this sense, Unitarianism is, in the main, a historical religion and it is now possible not only to write of how it historicized itself, but to ask if it too is historicized.

There is undoubtedly vibrancy in many areas of the history of Dissent. The major denominations, and some of the minor ones, maintain historical societies whose transactions remain valuable sources of denominational history and Dissent has always received increased attention from historians of British religion. Yet there are indications that this energy is fading. The *Price-Priestley Newsletter* (1977-1981) expanded its horizons in 1982 and renamed itself *Enlightenment and Dissent* which regrettably ceased publishing in 2016 as it could not ensure a flow of high quality research articles.⁷¹⁸ Long a mainstay of religious history research in Britain, the abrupt closure of Dr. Williams's Library in London in 2020, seemingly without a plan for reopening, is a concerning development for the sustenance of the intellectual aspect of Dissent.⁷¹⁹ Yet new avenues are opening up for research too. The Dissenting Academies project

⁷¹⁷ <https://www.hmc.ox.ac.uk/people/professor-jane-shaw> (accessed 20/10/2023); <https://www.hmc.ox.ac.uk/theology> (accessed 20/10/2023).

⁷¹⁸ JD & Martin Fitzpatrick, 'Editorial', in *Enlightenment and Dissent* (2016), vol. 31, iii-iv, iii.

⁷¹⁹ <https://dwl.ac.uk> (accessed 20/10/2023).

coordinated from Queen Mary's University London promises to make significant contributions to the field after it launched a database of the academies' teachers and students. Whereas there have been studies on Harris Manchester College's foundation, these are by no means comparable to the regular and dedicated college histories that other colleges have acquired. Such a study would illuminate the denomination and Manchester College's history as well as the University of Oxford's, whose own history does not afford much space to the arrival of nonconformist institutions to Oxford in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.

Even more tempting for intellectual historians of the twentieth century would be an extension of work started by Maurice Cowling and continued by B. W. Young in examining the extent to which confessional history still dominated religious history in the late-twentieth and early-twenty-first centuries.⁷²⁰ Nineteenth century historicizations of Unitarianism cast a long shadow over those in the twentieth century. Whereas Davie looked back to the eighteenth century to highlight the distorted history this presented to twentieth-century historians, his engagement with religious history demonstrates the value in searching other disciplines to understand how religious history – of the eighteenth, nineteenth or twentieth centuries – was received, understood, and reacted to in the twentieth and early-twenty-first centuries. The long-eighteenth century which is traditionally said to have ended in 1832, can be said to have ended sometime towards the end of the nineteenth century when examining the history writing traditions that still contended with the preceding century. The same could be said of the long-nineteenth century. Modernity, ever averse to being periodized, began patchily in twentieth-century minds. Attacking Unitarianism as if he were living in the nineteenth century, Davie had a point: nineteenth century history was alive and well deep into the twentieth century.

⁷²⁰ Cowling, *Religion and Public Doctrine*; Young, 'Religious History and the Eighteenth-Century Historian'.

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