

Writing Religious Communities:
The Spiritual Lives and Manuscript Cultures of
English Women, 1740–90

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Abstract

This thesis examines the spiritual lives of eighteenth-century English women through an analysis of their personal writings. It explores the manuscripts of religious women who practised their faith by writing letters, diaries, poetry, and other highly personal texts—texts that give unique access to the interior, spiritual lives of their authors. Concerned not only with the individual meaning of those writings but with their communal meanings, it argues that women's informal writing, written within personal relationships, acted to undergird, guide, and indeed shape religious communities in vital and unexplored ways. Through an exploration of various significant personal relationships, both intra- and inter-generationally, this thesis demonstrates the multiple ways in which women were active in 'writing religious communities'. The women discussed here belonged to communities that habitually communicated through personal writing. At the same time, their acts of writing were creative acts, powerful to build and shape religious communities: these women wrote religious community.

A series of interweaving case studies guide my analysis and discussion. The thesis focuses on Catherine Talbot (1721–70), Anne Steele (1717–78), and Ann Bolton (1743–1822), and on their literary interactions with friends and family. Considered together, these subjects and sources allow comparison across denomination, for Talbot was Anglican, Steele Baptist, and Bolton Methodist. After an introductory chapter, Chapter Two focuses on spiritual friendship, showing how women used personal writings within peer relationships to think through religious ideas and encourage faith commitments. Chapter Three considers older women as spiritual elders, arguing that elderly women

sometimes achieved honoured status in religious communities and were turned to for spiritual direction. Chapter Four explores the ways in which women offered religious instruction to spiritual children through the creative use of informal writings, including diaries and poetry. And Chapter Five considers women's personal writings as spiritual legacy, as they were preserved by family and friends and continued to function in religious communities after the death of their authors.

Long Abstract

This thesis examines the spiritual lives of eighteenth-century English women through an analysis of their personal writings. It explores the manuscripts of religious women who practised their faith, in part, by writing letters, diaries, poetry, and other highly personal texts—texts that give unique access to the interior, spiritual lives of their authors. Yet this thesis is concerned not only with the individual meaning of those writings but with their communal meanings, and argues that women’s informal writing, written within personal relationships, acted to undergird, guide, and indeed shape religious communities in vital and unexplored ways. Through an exploration of various significant personal relationships, both intra- and inter-generationally, this thesis demonstrates the multiple ways in which women were active in ‘writing religious communities’. The women discussed here belonged to communities that habitually communicated through personal writing. At the same time, their acts of writing were creative acts, powerful to build and shape religious communities: these women wrote religious community.

A series of interweaving case studies guide my analysis and discussion. The thesis focuses on Catherine Talbot (1721–70), Anne Steele (1717–78), and Ann Bolton (1743–1822), and on their literary interactions with friends and family with whom they were particularly close. Talbot, Steele, and Bolton were chosen, firstly, because they left extensive personal archives that illuminate a particular kind of very personal and highly interactive writing; secondly, because their papers are complemented by the extant personal papers of friends and family, making it possible to consider their writing and religious lives within close relationships; and thirdly, because they were fully integrated

in Anglican, Baptist, and Methodist religious worlds respectively, thus enabling substantive theological and cultural comparisons to be developed.

Various strands of enquiry weave through this thesis: questions of gender and religion, themselves inflected by denomination; themes related to personal writing and manuscript cultures; and the interplay between the writer as individual and her relationships and communal affiliations. The result is a multilayered discussion that is simultaneously historical, literary, and theological, in some ways also constituting a work of collective biography. This interdisciplinary approach requires that diverse scholarly literatures and historiographies, which typically exist in isolation, be drawn together in discussion. The result is a variegated and highly textured account of eighteenth-century women's spiritual and writing lives.

The first of the interrogative strands is that of women and religion. Rather than focusing on women's engagement in formal religious structures and activities, this thesis explores women's informal and often hidden participation in religious communities, focusing on the capacity of women's personal writing to have communal religious effect. This informal activity was not in protest or opposition to formal activity, but rather acted alongside and supported more formal religious activities. The sources used here suggest a female spiritual practice, for extant manuscripts demonstrate women, more than men, engaging in the kind of literary interaction and developing the distinctive manuscript culture that is analysed here. Concerned not just with the form but the content of women's religious lives, this thesis is attentive to matters of theology, belief, and interiority, and in the process illuminates subtle and significant differences across denominations. Including women across a range of denomination supports a contextual analysis that attends to theological distinctions which went to the heart of religious

identities and would have mattered to my subjects themselves. This approach not only avoids the false notion of an amorphous ‘religious woman’, but allows me to cut across denominational silos, bringing into dialogue often isolated religious historiographies. Talbot and her set were Anglicans (members of the Establishment), Steele and her family were Baptist (deeply rooted in Old Dissent), and Bolton and her circle were Methodist (actively forming a New Dissent). Denominational histories have developed independently and unevenly, have emphasised different themes, and the diverse nature of their historiographies presents both challenges and opportunities in drawing these subjects together. Despite divergent historiographies, these women lived in the same religious world and drew from the same religious tradition, and putting them in conversation with each other illuminates not only distinctiveness in their manuscript cultures and spiritual lives, but significant commonalities as well.

The second strand of enquiry weaving through this thesis is personal writing and manuscript cultures. The letters, diaries, poetry, and other highly personal or ‘private’ writings considered here speak eloquently of their authors’ own religious belief and experience. Employed within close relationships, these texts were also uniquely capable of educating, empathising, and encouraging faith in others. This was an active and creative process that pressed against traditional generic boundaries: diaries were sometimes addressed and sent through the post; greetings and closures were scanned into poetry; and conversion narratives were embedded in correspondence and diaries. Rather than limiting the analysis to letters or diaries, this thesis therefore addresses a range of genres found in personal archives and so allows for a richer portrayal of women’s writing and religious lives. This thesis highlights the materiality of manuscripts, which themselves speak to the manner in which women’s personal writings were intentionally

used to stimulate faith in others as they were shared, annotated, copied, and distributed within religious communities. Beyond their immediate use, personal writings also had a more extended function in which women also played key roles. The activity and intentionality of women is evident in the preservation of manuscripts and the construction of archives, firstly by the authors themselves, and later by friends and family. Thus the archive itself became an artefact that was used by friends and family following an author's death and is considered here as an agent in the further shaping of religious communities.

The third strand of enquiry is the interplay between the writer as individual and her relationships and communal affiliations. While the writings considered here formed part of women's personal faith practices, they were not written wholly for themselves but for those in overlapping formal and informal, familial and religious communities. While recognising the meaning, for historical actors, of their affiliation with local church communities and their placement within particular families, this thesis looks beyond church and the nuclear family, allowing women's own manuscripts to illuminate particularly transformative relationships. Maintaining this broader perspective demonstrates how kinship and friendship relationships were fluid and how traditional relationship boundaries would not hold: single women loved, as 'daughters', girls with whom they shared no biological ties; friends became 'sisters'; and older women were spiritual 'mothers'. Women actively chose and invested in these relationships, effectively (and affectively) constructing community through writing. The thesis reveals the activity and spiritual authority of frequently overlooked women, notably aunts, single women, and older women, and argues that a wide family heritage was necessary to pass on faith. Finally, since women did not live in a hermetically sealed feminine world, the thesis does

not limit its discussion to women but considers also their relationships with men and the writings of men in their familial and religious circles.

The chronological parameters of this thesis are c. 1740 to c. 1790. By 1740 dissenting denominations such as the Baptists enjoyed a fairly well-established toleration, and the Methodist movement was beginning to take shape. The year 1790 corresponds with Methodism entering a new, more settled phase (as an autonomous, organised denomination), as well as increasing political and social instability with accompanying shifts in gender understandings. The intervening fifty years thus present a pivotal period within which to analyse Old and New Dissent, and to make comparisons with the Established Church. These dates also correspond with traditional periodisations of the evangelical revival, allowing my research to be mapped onto related and relevant historiographies. The fifty-year span permits attention to be paid to inter-generational engagement. Since the final chapter concerns the posthumous use of women's personal writings, in the latter part of the thesis the discussion extends beyond the period 1740–90 and into the nineteenth century.

Chapter One comprises a theoretical and historiographical discussion organised according to the three strands of enquiry just outlined, after which I set the scene, introducing Talbot, Steele, and Bolton and their extant personal writings. Since the thesis examines the ways in which personal writings functioned within religious communities, here I also introduce those communities, highlighting emotional, spiritual, and intellectual links that are later developed. The form of Chapters Two through Four is parallel, each highlighting a particularly significant relationship, a mode of interaction, and a spiritual theme, thus broadly addressing questions about *who* was active in the literary encounter analysed, *how* the encounter proceeded, and *what* constituted the content of their belief.

Chapter Two explores the theme of spiritual friendship. It asks how the care and concern of spiritual friends were influential not only in supporting women's public activity, but in deepening their commitment to religious communities and clarifying their spiritual identities. This chapter focuses on intra-generational literary interactions, notably between friends and siblings, and demonstrates the often flexible boundaries between such relationships. Religious women conceived of such literary interactions as conversation, and this chapter explores this mode of interaction, giving particular attention to poetic exchange as conversation while also revisiting the familiar trope of correspondence as conversation. Friends often turned to each other during distressing circumstances or at moments of crisis, and thus I consider the spiritual theme of resignation as it was discussed in different religious cultures. This analysis of women's common appeal to resignation in response to illness and death highlights subtle but significant differences in theological emphasis and belief across denominations.

Chapter Three examines the ways in which women acted as spiritual elders within religious communities. It is concerned with literary exchanges across generations, and focuses on women's relationships with those they considered to be more advanced in the spiritual life, to whom they turned in their own efforts to develop a more mature faith. Here I ask how women were mentored through the exchange of personal writings, and discuss how those mentorship relationships were purposefully sought out and subsequently nurtured. This chapter considers the activities and authority of older women and men and explores the idea of spiritual motherhood and fatherhood, relationships that often existed beyond the bounds of the nuclear family and frequently at a distance, thus relying on both travel and post to facilitate connection. It analyses the possibilities for spiritual direction as it was performed through correspondence in particular, and explores

various Protestant enactments of this Catholic religious practice. As older women and men confronted their own approaching deaths, the theme of spiritual assurance came to have especial significance. The varied expressions and meanings of assurance are thus discussed, particularly within different denominational and cultural contexts.

Chapter Four analyses the manner in which women communicated religious ideals and ideas to much-loved children. It thus also focuses on inter-generational relationships, asking how women used personal writings to transmit faith to younger friends and family they thought of as their spiritual children. Again pressing beyond the boundaries of nuclear families, the chapter demonstrates how single women and aunts performed particularly important and overlooked roles in instructing younger friends and family members in the spiritual life by modelling belief, expression, and religious practice. Focusing in particular on the shared use of diaries, this chapter argues that women used informal literary interactions as a means of education by which they taught young friends not only how to write about their faith but what to believe, including how to order their days and live a holy life. The theme of holy living was common across religious cultures while having particular denominational resonances, and women's modelling of personal patterns of living and their reflections on holiness illuminate these commonalities and distinctiveness across religious communities.

Chapter Five considers women's personal writings as spiritual legacies. It extends the discussion beyond contemporary relationships to ask how women's personal writings continued to function within religious communities after their authors' deaths. In writing to others about their faith, women were not only working out contemporary religious identities, personally and communally, but were producing a textual record of their theological ideas and spiritual experience that was preserved. Women were especially

active in these acts of preservation: in some instances, authors intentionally and self-consciously bequeathed manuscripts to family members with expressed hopes that their personal writings would bear spiritual fruit in the lives of others; in others, they played integral roles in constructing domestic archives in which personal writings were preserved. The chapter argues that women's arguably 'private' writings not only constituted personal memory, but acted in important and overlooked ways as communal memory as well, sustaining and shaping religious communities long after their author's death, not just temporally but often geographically distant from when and where they were written. Finally, while the preservation and posthumous use of women's personal writings was common across the religious cultures considered here, an analysis of preservation patterns, manuscript usages, and attitudes toward time and memory communicate subtle and significant differences regarding denominational identities and cultures.

This thesis offers fresh perspective on the presence and participation of women in religious cultures by attending closely to their activities as writers within close, personal relationships. It shows how their acts of writing had multiple meanings, both individual and communal: an analysis of women's manuscript cultures across denominations shows women actively involved in processes of self-examination and self-expression by which, in effect, they wrote themselves; it also demonstrates their vital and neglected activities in writing religious communities.

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Abbreviations

AL	Angus Library, Regent's Park College, Oxford
AM	<i>Arminian Magazine</i>
Beinecke	Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University
BLARS	Bedfordshire and Luton Archives and Record Services
Bodl.	Bodleian Library
BL	British Library
DNP	Duke of Northumberland Papers, Alnwick Castle
GA	Gloucestershire Archives
HL	Huntington Library, San Marino, California
JRL	John Rylands Library, Manchester
Lond.	Bolton Family Papers, London
LPL	Lambeth Palace Library, London
Pudl.	Bolton Family Papers, Pudlicote, Oxfordshire
Stain.	Bolton Family Papers, Stainland, Yorkshire
WRO	Warwickshire Record Office

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Chapter 1

Introduction

In July 1755 Catherine Talbot travelled the twenty miles through Oxfordshire that took her from her home in the Bishop of Oxford's palace at Cuddesdon to an Anglican vicarage at Witney.¹ She may have made the journey on behalf of Thomas Secker, with whom she had lived since childhood, for he was then suffering from gout and confined to their home at Cuddesdon.² Religious conversation blended with polite sociability, and the evening concluded with her beating William Freind at a game of chess. Freind was the rector of St Mary's, the Anglican Church at Witney, and in his congregation was a twelve-year-old girl called Ann Bolton. Seven years later, Bolton would make the decision to join the Methodists who met at Witney, and her spiritual seriousness launched a lifelong habit of writing. She described her ongoing spiritual quest in a 1773 letter to John Wesley who, considering it exemplary, later published it in the *Arminian Magazine*.³ On the facing page is a poem written by the Baptist Anne Steele and addressed to her niece Mary, in which Steele encouraged her young and much-loved niece to live a life of thoughtful religious engagement.⁴ The poem remained in manuscript until after Steele's death when Caleb Evans, Baptist minister and friend of the family,

¹ William Freind to Thomas Secker, 29 July 1755. A. P. Jenkins, ed., *The Correspondence of Bishop Secker* (Oxford: Oxfordshire Record Society, 1991), 247-248.

² Montagu Pennington, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Elizabeth Carter* (London: Printed for F. C. and J. Rivington, 1807), 127.

³ Ann Bolton to John Wesley, 16 June 1773. *AM* 9 (September 1786): 517-518. For her draft letter, see Ann Bolton to John Wesley, 16 June 1773. *Pudl.*, 4/7/13.

⁴ Anne Steele, 'To Silvia'. *AM* 9 (September 1786): 519.

published a volume of her miscellaneous verse, where Wesley probably encountered it.⁵ Catherine Talbot, Ann Bolton, and Anne Steele never met, passing much of their lives in very different social, literary, and religious worlds, yet together they offer a particularly fruitful example of a neglected tradition of women's writing in religious communities. This thesis examines this tradition by bringing their spiritual lives and personal writings into conversation with each other.

Talbot, Bolton, and Steele were deeply religious women who throughout their lives practised their faith by writing letters, diaries, poetry, and other highly personal texts. While these writings sometimes found their way into print (as described above), they were not intended for publication, and here I am primarily concerned with how they functioned in manuscript. Focusing on manuscript use highlights the social function of women's personal writings, for Talbot, Bolton, and Steele often wrote for friends and family, and analysing their use within friendship and kinship circles illuminates certain significant relationships, both within and across generations. Further, it demonstrates the literary range of such writing, for material clues in manuscripts highlight the creative and fluid ways in which women used textual forms to participate in spiritual communities.

This thesis is a comparative study, across a denominational spectrum: Talbot's religious self-understanding was Anglican, Bolton's was primarily Methodist, and Steele's Baptist. They were highly involved in their respective religious cultures and personally connected to religious leaders such as Secker, Wesley, and Evans. My comparative approach to women's personal writings highlights the diversity of women's religious lives, and attending to cultural and theological distinctions enables a more nuanced and highly textured analysis of eighteenth-century belief and practice than has

⁵ Anne Steele, 'To Silvia'. AL, STE 3/3/5, sheet 28. 'To Silvia', Anne Steele, *Poems on Subjects Chiefly Devotional*, by Theodosia, 2nd ed., 3 vols. (Bristol: Printed by W. Pine, 1780), 3:87-88.

often been presented. Yet points of intersection existed, as indicated, and the comparative approach reveals significant commonalities as well. Moreover, the women considered in this thesis exhibit a shared awareness of the potency and possibilities of personal writings, and used their writings to great spiritual effect. Women's highly personal, purposefully shared use of letters, diaries, and poetry reveal important and as yet overlooked ways in which women engaged intellectually and spiritually in diverse communities. Indeed, women's informal literary activities effectually guided and shaped diverse religious cultures in ways that have not been sufficiently recognised.

My research thus highlights multiple ways in which eighteenth-century women were engaged in writing religious communities. Firstly, the phrase is descriptive of the communities in which Talbot, Bolton, and Steele participated. They wrote letters to each other, they exchanged diaries, and they addressed affectionate poetry to friends and family. These religious communities wrote. They wrote out of love for one another even as they wrote to encourage faith, to challenge and educate, to empathise, and to urge continued trust in God even in suffering circumstances. Whether separated by distance or near to each other, they wrote to maintain emotional and spiritual ties that bound them together in religious communities. Secondly, the phrase describes what their writing accomplished: it shaped religious communities and cultures. These women wrote religious communities. Their writing provided a text by which contemporaries and later generations learned religious life and language. In this way, women's personal writings complemented certain formalised means of culture formation (such as listening to ministers or reading religious books), such that through writing women engaged in the creative act of shaping religious cultures. Women's personal writings both emerged from

spiritual communities and undergirded those communities. Women both inherited and created religious cultures.⁶

Various strands of enquiry are woven through this thesis: questions of gender and religion, including denominational affiliation; themes related to personal writing and manuscript cultures; and the interplay between the writer as an individual and her relationships and communal affiliations. These interrogative strands are interwoven throughout the thesis. Here, however, they are introduced briefly in turn.

Women and Religion

Religious women of the past have been studied from multiple perspectives, depending on scholars' disciplinary positions. On the one hand, women's and gender historians increasingly recognise the influence of religion on women's subjectivities and activities and are engaging in a range of nuanced analyses. Sue Morgan and Jacqueline deVries identify this historiographical trend as a 'religious turn' in gender history.⁷ Such renewed calls to 'take religion seriously' in the eighteenth century have taken place alongside the frequently intertwined discourses of the Enlightenment and gender, all leading to an exciting and growing field of scholarship,⁸ though not typically characterised by

⁶ Sarah Williams makes the point that women both inherited and created religious cultures in Sarah C. Williams, 'Victorian Religion: A Matter of Class or Culture?' *Nineteenth Century Studies* 17, no. 3 (2003): 13-17.

⁷ Sue Morgan and Jacqueline deVries, eds., *Women, Gender and Religious Cultures in Britain, 1800-1940* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), 2. This 'turn' is relatively recent. Writing in 1986 Gail Malmgreen argued that religion had so far been neglected in the study of women's history. Gail Malmgreen, ed., *Religion in the Lives of English Women, 1760-1930* (London: Croom Helm, 1986), 1. Both historians and literary scholars have begun to speak of a 'religious turn'. See Thomas Albert Howard, 'Commentary: A "Religious Turn" in Modern European Historiography?' *Church History* 75, no. 1 (2006): 157-162; Ken Jackson and Arthur F. Marotti, 'The Turn to Religion in Early Modern Studies,' *Criticism* 46 (2004): 167-190.

⁸ See Sarah Apetrei, *Women, Feminism, and Religion in Early Enlightenment England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Karen O'Brien, *Women and Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Phyllis Mack, *Heart Religion in the British Enlightenment: Gender and Emotion in Early Methodism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Sarah Knott and Barbara Taylor, eds., *Women, Gender and Enlightenment* (Houndmills: Palgrave

theological precision. On the other hand, while historians of religion continue to expand their understandings of the church as institution and of eighteenth-century theology,⁹ Morgan and deVries argue that they have produced little sustained research on women and gender.¹⁰ Rather than locate my research solely within either gender or religious histories, in this thesis I attempt to integrate gendered with religious interpretations in a way that respects my subjects' dominant religious motivations while being sensitive to women's distinctive experiences and expression. While this kind of integrative work exists for the nineteenth century, the eighteenth century has been much less well served.¹¹ The study of religious women has also tended either to be denominationally specific or to label devout women with the monolithic term 'religious', and thus I attend carefully to religious affiliation, highlighting denominational distinctions in theology and religious life as well as commonalities across belief systems. Finally, the study of religious women has tended to focus more on women's public activity rather than the inner life of faith, and thus I use women's personal writings as a lens into their spiritual aspirations and self-understandings. These three lacunae in scholarship on religious women—in relation to period, denomination, and interiority—are here discussed briefly in turn.

Macmillan, 2005), especially Section 7: 'Feminism and Enlightened Religious Discourses'. There is also a large historiography on Enlightenment and religion more broadly. See, for example, Jeremy Gregory, 'Introduction: Transforming "the Age of Reason" into "an Age of Faiths": Or, Putting Religions and Beliefs (Back) into the Eighteenth Century,' *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 32 (2009): 287-305; David Hempton, *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), Ch. 2: 'Enlightenment and Enthusiasm'; Jonathan Sheehan, 'Enlightenment, Religion, and the Enigma of Secularization,' *American Historical Review* 108, no. 3 (2003): 1061-1080; Brian W. Young, *Religion and Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century England: Theological Debate from Locke to Burke* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).

⁹ Gregory, 'Transforming "the Age of Reason" into "an Age of Faiths",' 295.

¹⁰ Morgan and deVries, eds., *Women, Gender and Religious Cultures in Britain*, 2. Writing in 2002 Merry Weisner-Hanks observed that in many cases religious historians had not even reached the stage of 'add women and stir' that characterised early studies of women's history. Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, 'Women, Gender, and Church History,' *Church History* 71, no. 3 (2002): 614. See also Elizabeth A. Clark, 'Women, Gender, and the Study of Christian History,' *Church History* 70, no. 3 (2001): 395-426.

¹¹ For example, Morgan and deVries, eds., *Women, Gender and Religious Cultures in Britain*. Jacqueline deVries's 2006 review article of ten recent books on religion and gender focuses on Victorian Britain. Jacqueline deVries, 'Rediscovering Christianity after the Postmodern Turn,' *History Compass* 4, no. 4 (2006): 698-714.

The eighteenth century

Studies of eighteenth-century religious women often locate women within the institutions of church and family and have interpreted their experiences on a spectrum with subordination and empowerment (victim and agent) at the extremes. A more authentic account of eighteenth-century religious women's lives must accept that women's spiritual concerns were sincere and very deeply felt, and it must look beyond the institutions of family and church.¹² Such an account would more faithfully reflect contemporary women's self-conceptions, for most would not have perceived themselves simply in terms of victimisation or agency.

Some studies of women's religiosity have focused on religion's supposed withdrawal into the home. In *Family Fortunes* (1987), Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall argued seminally that evangelicalism, as it had emerged by the late eighteenth century, led to a domestic religion overseen by godly wives and mothers.¹³ This narrative has driven much scholarship on women's relation to the home and has been thoroughly critiqued, including whether the notion of a domestic woman is actually an eighteenth-century phenomenon.¹⁴ The debate has turned on Davidoff and Hall's account of

¹² Likewise, Janet Moore Lindman argues for the need to look 'beyond the meetinghouse' and Anthony Fletcher 'beyond the church' to gain a fuller understanding of women's religious activities and experiences. Janet Moore Lindman, 'Beyond the Meetinghouse: Women and Protestant Spirituality in Early America,' in *The Religious History of American Women: Reimagining the Past*, ed. Catherine A. Brekus (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 142-160; Anthony Fletcher, 'Beyond the Church: Women's Spiritual Experience at Home and in the Community 1600-1900,' in *Gender and Christian Religion: Papers Read at the 1996 Summer Meeting and the 1997 Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society*, ed. R. N. Swanson (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 1998), 187-203.

¹³ Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987). A revised edition, published in 2002, includes an 'Introduction' that responds to developments in scholarship since its initial publication. Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850*, rev. ed. (London: Routledge, 2002), xiii-l.

¹⁴ William George Anthony Van Reyk, 'Christian Ideals of Manliness During the Period of the Evangelical Revival, c. 1730 to c. 1840' (DPhil thesis, University of Oxford, 2007), 383-414; Leonore Davidoff, 'Gender and the Great Divide: Public and Private in British Gender History,' *Journal of Women's History* 15, no. 1 (2003): 11-27; John Brewer, 'This, That and the Other: Public, Social and Private in the

gendered ‘separate spheres’ in which they ascribe to evangelical ideals a dichotomised division of space, with women presiding over the private sphere of home, and men moving in the more public sphere of work and society.¹⁵ Within this inherently hierarchical system, religion is seen as authorising women’s oppression. Though often construed in starker binary terms than Davidoff and Hall’s account justifies,¹⁶ this formulation has generated extensive efforts to demonstrate the plurality of men’s and women’s activities and to complicate notions of public and private.¹⁷ While not wanting to engage such public/private debates directly, here I explore women’s religious engagement beyond the home, not conceiving of such activity as ‘public’, but rather personal and relational.

Rather than an oppressive force, some historians have seen religion as an empowering force that enabled women’s engagement with the church and wider society. At certain extremes, feminist historians have assigned proto-feminist motivations to women’s experience of religion. Jacqueline Eales claims that women ‘actively used their religiosity to create conditions in which they could gain time away from the busy

Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries,’ in *Shifting the Boundaries: Transformation of the Languages of Public and Private in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Dario Castiglione and Lesley Sharpe (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1995), 1-21; Lawrence E. Klein, ‘Gender and the Public/Private Distinction in the Eighteenth Century: Some Questions About Evidence and Analytic Procedure,’ *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 29, no. 1 (1995): 97-109; Amanda Vickery, ‘Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronology of English Women’s History,’ *The Historical Journal* 36, no. 2 (1993): 383-414.

¹⁵ Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, 107-118.

¹⁶ Davidoff and Hall acknowledge that there was ‘ambiguity among evangelicals as to the strict definitions of male and female responsibilities’. Ibid., 117. See further Kathryn Gleadle, ‘Revisiting *Family Fortunes*,’ *Women’s History Review* 16, no. 5 (2007): 777-778.

¹⁷ For example, Joanna Cruickshank, ‘“If God . . . See Fit to Call You Out”: “Public” and “Private” in the Writings of Methodist Women, 1760-1840,’ in *Religion in the Age of Enlightenment* (New York: AMS Press, 2010), 55-76; Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman’s Daughter: Women’s Lives in Georgian England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003); Christine Wiskin, ‘Urban Businesswomen in Eighteenth-Century England,’ in *Women and Urban Life in Eighteenth-Century England: ‘On the Town’*, ed. Rosemary Sweet and Penelope Lane (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 87-110; Elizabeth Eger, *Women, Writing and the Public Sphere, 1700-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Kathryn Gleadle and Sarah Richardson, eds., *Women in British Politics, 1760-1860: The Power of the Petticoat* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000); Jane Rendall, ‘Women and the Public Sphere,’ *Gender and History* 11, no. 3 (1999): 475-488.

demands of family life'.¹⁸ Sarah Apetrei warns against such readings that perceive women as using religion to pursue agendas, as though women would 'transcend, negotiate, manipulate and exploit' religion in order to subvert a patriarchal system.¹⁹ Yet (as Apetrei also argues) religion did stimulate and legitimise new forms of activity for women, and narratives of such activities are extensive for the eighteenth century. Women were active as preachers, founders of religious organisations, writers, philanthropists, and missionaries.²⁰ Helen Jones highlights the activities of women as patrons of religion, while Anne Stott and Dorice Elliott attribute Hannah More's and Sarah Trimmer's public activities as educators to their religious beliefs.²¹ And the opportunities afforded to Methodist women to preach are well known.²² Here I argue that religion also stimulated and legitimated less visible but equally significant activities for women as they wrote letters, diaries, and poetry within religious communities.

Recent scholarship on eighteenth-century religious women has begun to interpret women with reference to broader cultural themes and structures. In *Heart Religion in the British Enlightenment* (2008), Phyllis Mack gives a much more rounded account of Methodist women than studies that have focused just on their well-known public activities as preachers.²³ She seeks to understand the 'ideas and emotions of ordinary

¹⁸ Jacqueline Eales, *Women in Early Modern England 1500-1700* (London: Routledge, 1998), 95.

¹⁹ Apetrei, *Women, Feminism, and Religion in Early Enlightenment England*, 27.

²⁰ Anne Stott, 'Women and Religion,' in *Women's History: Britain, 1700-1850: An Introduction*, ed. Hannah Barker and Elaine Chalus (London: Routledge, 2005), 100-123.

²¹ Helen M. Jones, 'A Spiritual Aristocracy: Female Patrons of Religion in Eighteenth-Century Britain,' in *The Rise of the Laity in Evangelical Protestantism*, ed. Deryck W. Lovegrove (London: Routledge, 2002), 85-94; Anne Stott, 'Evangelicalism and Enlightenment: The Educational Agenda of Hannah More,' in *Educating the Child in Enlightenment Britain: Beliefs, Cultures, Practices*, ed. Mary Hilton and Jill Shefrin (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 41-56; Dorice Williams Elliott, 'The Gift of an Education: Sarah Trimmer's *Oeconomy of Charity* and the Sunday School Movement,' in *The Culture of the Gift in Eighteenth-Century England*, ed. Linda Zionkowski and Cynthia Klekar (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 107-124.

²² For example, Jennifer Lloyd, *Women and the Shaping of British Methodism: Persistent Preachers, 1807-1907* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009). See review of scholarship on p. 31.

²³ Mack, *Heart Religion in the British Enlightenment*.

Methodists’.²⁴ Asking how modern historians should interpret Methodist ideals of self-abnegation in light of Enlightenment ideas of self-transformation, Mack argues for a reformulated understanding of agency that recognises the personal resolve to subvert one’s will in response to divine direction. This analysis helpfully complicates gendered interpretations of religious women that understand agency primarily in terms of personal empowerment, for she recognises the primacy of belief in religious women’s lives.²⁵ Emma Major’s *Madam Britannia: Women, Church, and Nation, 1712–1812* (2012) is a multilayered work of cultural, literary, and political history in which Major gives an account of Anglican women’s activities in defining the national Church and the nation.²⁶ She perceives in printed text and image an elision of the increasingly popular figure of ‘Britannia’ with exemplary elite women, and interprets these women as active agents in shaping overlapping religious and political worlds. And in *Sarah Osborn’s World: The Rise of Evangelical Christianity in Early America* (2013), Catherine Brekus uses the manuscript diary and other writings of an eighteenth-century New England woman to explore ‘larger historical forces’ such as evangelicalism and Enlightenment, capitalism and consumerism, slavery and the American Revolution.²⁷ Mack, Major, and Brekus interpret religious women’s lives in terms larger than the institutions of church and family, as religious histories are made to intersect with intellectual and cultural histories and with literary scholarship. My approach builds on these broader analyses of eighteenth-century religious women and develops them along social and literary lines,

²⁴ Ibid., 8.

²⁵ See also Phyllis Mack, ‘Religion, Feminism, and the Problem of Agency: Reflections on Eighteenth-Century Quakerism,’ in *Women, Gender and Enlightenment*, ed. Sarah Knott and Barbara Taylor (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 434–459.

²⁶ Emma Major, *Madam Britannia: Women, Church, and Nation, 1712–1812* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

²⁷ Catherine A. Brekus, *Sarah Osborn’s World: The Rise of Evangelical Christianity in Early America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), xi.

focusing in particular on relational and generational interactions and on women's use of life writings within religious communities. Furthermore, while feminist readings of religious women's lives can become indistinct religiously as women are considered apart from their specific spiritual commitments, I keep women's beliefs and theologies central to my analysis, as discussed in the following section.

The chronological parameters of this thesis are c. 1740 to c. 1790. By 1740 dissenting denominations such as the Baptists enjoyed a fairly well-established toleration,²⁸ and the Methodist movement was beginning to take shape. The year 1790 corresponds with Methodism entering a new, more settled phase (as an autonomous, organised denomination), as well as increasing political and social instability with accompanying shifts in gender understandings. The intervening fifty years thus present a pivotal period within which to analyse Old Dissent and New Dissent, and to make comparisons with the Established Church. These dates also correspond with traditional periodisations of early evangelicalism, allowing my research to be mapped onto and at times to question related historiographies.²⁹ Since my final chapter concerns the posthumous use of life writings, in the latter part of my thesis the discussion extends beyond the period 1740–90 and into the nineteenth century, as I trace the ongoing use of women's letters, diaries, and poetry as potent spiritual legacies.

²⁸ The 1730 pamphlet 'An Enquiry into the Causes of the Decay of the Dissenting Interest' reflected the more settled religious and political situation for dissenters a generation after the 1689 Act of Toleration. Michael R. Watts, *The Dissenters*, vol. 1, From the Reformation to the French Revolution (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978), 382-393.

²⁹ On standard periodisations of early evangelicalism, see Mark A. Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitefield and the Wesleys* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004); Jonathan M. Yeager, ed., *Early Evangelicalism: A Reader* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

Denominational focus

This thesis attends particularly to distinctions in denomination. As Linda Peterson helpfully suggests, gender should not be presumed to be the ‘crucial factor’ in women’s self-understanding and self-expression; she argues that religious, regional, political, and social allegiances are equally important considerations in the study of women’s lives.³⁰ Here I foreground women’s religious allegiances, which I believe were a dominant factor in shaping women’s experience and expression. Religious histories can develop and persist in denominational silos, with little or no interaction with other denominational histories or larger religious historiographies. Putting my subjects in conversation with one another takes seriously ecclesiastical and theological distinctions that went to the heart of their religious identities, allowing me to identify ways in which their religious beliefs and experiences were denominationally distinctive. In a recent article, Sarah Williams identifies the need to develop greater sensitivity to denominational differences that ‘subtly but crucially’ distinguish religious cultures.³¹ This theme runs through the volume on gender and religious cultures in nineteenth-century Britain in which Williams’s article is published.³² Likewise, Jeremy Gregory observes the ‘spectrum of Christianities extant in the period’ and asks how they were related.³³ In such a religiously plural society, this thesis asks how Anglican, Methodist, and Baptist beliefs and cultures related to each other. Considering women across a range of denominations also draws attention to commonalities in belief and experience that might be overlooked in studies of individual

³⁰ Linda H. Peterson, *Traditions of Victorian Women’s Autobiography: The Poetics and Politics of Life Writing* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999), 2.

³¹ Sarah C. Williams, ‘Is There a Bible in the House? Gender, Religion and Family Culture,’ in *Women, Gender and Religious Cultures in Britain, 1800-1940*, ed. Sue Morgan and Jacqueline deVries (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), 27.

³² Morgan and deVries, eds., *Women, Gender and Religious Cultures in Britain*. See also Alison Twells, review of *Women, Gender and Religious Cultures in Britain, 1800-1940*, ed. Sue Morgan and Jacqueline deVries, *Reviews in History*, <http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/review/1017> (accessed 28 January 2011).

³³ Gregory, ‘Transforming “the Age of Reason” into “an Age of Faiths”,’ 288.

women or studies that consider denominations in isolation. These women drew from the same spiritual tradition, lived in the same religious world, and sometimes attended churches and chapels of other denominations,³⁴ and there were significant points of connection and continuity between their religious cultures.

Denominational histories, and in particular denominational histories that give accounts of women, have developed unevenly. A robust and multivalent scholarship has developed in relation to Methodist women. The tradition of celebrating the public ministry of certain Methodist ‘holy women’ began with Zechariah Taft’s two-volume *Biographical Sketches of the Lives and Public Ministry of Various Holy Women* (1825–28) and dominated writings on Methodist women for the next century and a half.³⁵ Consideration of Methodist ‘holy women’ evolved into a more particular interest in women’s public activities as preachers as they emerged in the eighteenth century, and this contravention of traditional gendered roles continues to fuel scholarship by both historians of Methodism and feminist historians.³⁶ Methodist historians have also been interested in women on account of their proximity to John Wesley, and thus a body of

³⁴ Jeremy Gregory writes of ‘porous and permeable’ allegiances to religious denominations in the period. Jeremy Gregory, ‘Religion, Gender, and Industry in the Eighteenth Century: Models and Approaches,’ in *Religion, Gender, and Industry: Exploring Church and Methodism in a Local Setting*, ed. Geordan Hammond and Peter S. Forsaith (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2011), 17. See also W. M. Jacob, *Lay People and Religion in the Early Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 6.

³⁵ Zechariah Taft, *Biographical Sketches of the Lives and Public Ministry of Various Holy Women*, 2 vols. (Peterborough: Methodist Publishing House, 1825 (vol. 1) and 1828 (vol. 2); facs. ed. 1992). See also Annie E. Keeling, *Eminent Methodist Women* (London: Charles H. Kelly, 1889); Alice Isabel Cook, *Women of the Warm Heart* (London: Epworth Press, 1952); Thomas M. Morrow, *Early Methodist Women* (London: Epworth Press, 1967).

³⁶ For example, Earl Kent Brown, *Women of Mr. Wesley’s Methodism* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1983); Paul Chilcote, *John Wesley and the Women Preachers of Early Methodism* (Metuchen, NJ: The American Theological Library Association and The Scarecrow Press, 1991); Christine L. Krueger, *The Reader’s Repentance: Women Preachers, Women Writers, and Nineteenth-Century Social Discourse* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Brett C. McInelly, “‘I Had Rather Be Obscure. But I Dare Not’: Women and Methodism in the Eighteenth Century,” in *Everyday Revolutions: Eighteenth-Century Women Transforming Public and Private*, ed. Diane E. Boyd and Marta Kvannd (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2008), 135-158; Lloyd, *Women and the Shaping of British Methodism*; Karen Cubie Henck, “‘That Peculiar Voice’: Jane Eyre and Mary Bosanquet Fletcher, an Early Wesleyan Female Preacher,” *Brontë Studies* 35, no. 1 (2010): 7-22.

scholarship developed in response to Wesley's close relationships with particular women; in these analyses Wesley retains a central position.³⁷ Recent interest in Methodist women has also developed along social and family lines,³⁸ childhood and education,³⁹ and psychology and the body.⁴⁰ Phyllis Mack's *Heart Religion in the British Enlightenment* initiates a more internal exploration of Methodist belief and experience using gender and emotion as an interpretative guide.⁴¹ Mack asks whether and how women thought about religious questions differently from men, and accounts for gendered distinctions in both psychological and physical terms. Here I extend Mack's examination of Methodist interiority, though use less of a psychological and more of a relational and theological framework, highlighting in particular women's interpersonal use of life writings in shaping spiritual lives and communities.

In contrast to the well-developed historiography on Methodist women, the study of Baptist women remains underdeveloped. This presents certain challenges in bringing Baptist women into conversation with Methodist women, while it also allows for ample

³⁷ Paul Chilcote, 'John Wesley as Revealed by the Journal of Hester Ann Rogers,' *Duke Divinity School Review* 44 (1979): 33-43; Maldwyn Edwards, *My Dear Sister: The Story of John Wesley and the Women in His Life* (Manchester: Penworks, 1980); Alan Lauffer Hayes, 'John Wesley and Sophy Hopkey: A Case Study in Wesley's Attitude toward Women,' in *Women in New Worlds*, ed. Rosemary Skinner Keller, Louise L. Queen, and Hilah Frances Thomas (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982), 29-44.

³⁸ Gail Malmgreen, 'Domestic Discords: Women and the Family in East Cheshire Methodism, 1750-1830,' in *Disciplines of Faith: Studies in Religion, Politics and Patriarchy*, ed. James Obelkevich, Lyndal Roper, and Raphael Elkan Samuel (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987), 55-70; Anna Lawrence, *One Family under God: Love, Belonging, and Authority in Early Transatlantic Methodism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

³⁹ Mary Clare Martin, 'Marketing Religious Identity: Female Educators, Methodist Culture, and Eighteenth-Century Childhood,' in *Educating the Child in Enlightenment Britain: Beliefs, Cultures, Practices*, ed. Mary Hilton and Jill Shefrin (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 57-76.

⁴⁰ Phyllis Mack, 'Methodism and Motherhood,' in *Culture and the Nonconformist Tradition*, ed. Jane Shaw and Alan Kreider (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1999), 26-42; Phyllis Mack, 'Religious Dissenters in Enlightenment England,' *History Workshop Journal* 49 (2000): 1-23; Phyllis Mack, 'Does Gender Matter? Suffering and Salvation in Eighteenth-Century Methodism,' *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 85, no. 2/3 (2003): 157-176; Rosemary Raughter, '"A Time of Trial Being near at Hand": Pregnancy, Childbirth and Parenting in the Spiritual Journal of Elizabeth Bennis, 1749-79,' in *'She Said She Was in the Family Way': Pregnancy and Infancy in Modern Ireland*, ed. Elaine Farrell (London: University of London, Institute of Historical Research, 2012), 75-90.

⁴¹ Mack, *Heart Religion in the British Enlightenment*.

opportunity to set new agendas for scholarly discussions. Baptist historiography has tended to be institutionally focused, prioritising pastors, ecclesiology, and missiology, and thus has been dominated by the study of men. It also has tended to be driven by sectarian interests, written by insiders for insiders, and has only infrequently engaged broader historiographical questions and themes.⁴² In his recent history of the Baptist church, David Bebbington includes a chapter on 'Women in Baptist Life' and concludes that too little research has been done on the 'role of women' in the Baptist church.⁴³ Those studies that have been undertaken have tended to be brief and have focused on so-called 'great women', predominantly in recognition of women who distinguished themselves by engaging in leadership roles.⁴⁴ Much of this work has been for the seventeenth century, a time of religious persecution and political unrest for Baptists which led to increased opportunities for women that, during the more settled period following the Act of Toleration of 1689, were withdrawn.⁴⁵ Karen Smith has argued that more work should be done to recover the 'presence and participation' of women in

⁴² On broader tendencies for eighteenth-century religion to be written 'from the inside', see Brian W. Young, 'Religious History and the Eighteenth-Century Historian,' *The Historical Journal* 43, no. 3 (2000): 852-859.

⁴³ David W. Bebbington, *Baptists through the Centuries: A History of a Global People* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010), 275. For other brief historical surveys of Baptist women, see Leon McBeth, 'The Changing Role of Women in Baptist History,' *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 22, no. 1 (1979): 84-96; Carolyn DeArmond Blevins, 'Women in Baptist History,' *Review and Expositor* 83, no. 1 (1986): 51-61; John H. Y. Briggs, 'She Preachers, Widows and Other Women: The Feminine Dimension in Baptist Life since 1600,' *Baptist Quarterly* 31, no. 7 (1986): 337-352.

⁴⁴ For example, Alberic Samuel Clement, *Great Baptist Women* (London: Carey Kingsgate Press, 1955).

⁴⁵ Kirsten Thea Timmer, 'English Baptist Women under Persecution (1660-1688): A Study of Social Conformity and Dissent,' *Baptist History and Heritage* 41, no. 1 (2006): 18-29; Curtis W. Freeman, 'Visionary Women among Early Baptists,' *Baptist Quarterly* 43, no. 5 (2010): 260-283; Curtis W. Freeman and Katherine Chidley, eds., *A Company of Women Preachers: Baptist Prophetesses in Seventeenth-Century England: A Reader* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2011). See David Hempton on 'Thirsk's Law': at the Irish Conference of Historians in Belfast in 1993, Joan Thirsk stated that at the beginning of new enterprises women were able to play important roles that were later removed as structures were cemented by men. Hempton applies this to Methodist women at the end of the eighteenth century, when women's activities became codified as Methodism settled into an autonomous denomination, but the same could be argued for Baptist women a century earlier. David Hempton, *The Religion of the People: Methodism and Popular Religion c. 1750-1900* (London: Routledge, 1996), 181. For a similar argument, see Ruth M. B. Gouldbourne, *Reinventing the Wheel: Women and Ministry in English Baptist Life* (Oxford: Whitley Publications, 1997), 17.

Baptist life more broadly, indicating that different sources will aid this process of recovery: she suggests a more thorough analysis of diaries, correspondence, personal papers, and different types of literature, including novels, poetry, and hymns.⁴⁶ Writing within the tradition and across centuries, Smith has contributed more than anyone to this work of recovery, as in her study of nineteenth-century Baptist women's activities in missions.⁴⁷ Her call, in 1991, to employ a broader range of sources in studying women remains relevant for eighteenth-century British Baptists.⁴⁸ Here I consider such sources, particularly as they were used within personal relationships, to enquire into the nature of Baptist women's 'presence and participation' in familial and spiritual communities, pressing beyond analyses that interpret women's religious roles wholly in terms of the institutional church.

Anglican historiography has also tended to be institutionally focused, emphasising the activities of male leaders, ecclesiastical hierarchy and theological controversies, or the relationship between the Church and the nation. For many years the historiography of the eighteenth-century Church of England was dominated by accusations of torpor and languidness, though more recent scholarship has challenged this characterisation, demonstrating both vitality and variety within the national Church.⁴⁹ The eighteenth-

⁴⁶ Karen Elizabeth Smith, 'Beyond Public and Private Spheres: Another Look at Women in Baptist History and Historiography,' *Baptist Quarterly* 34, no. 2 (1991): 79-87. See also Karen Elizabeth Smith, 'Forgotten Sisters: The Contributions of Some Notable but Un-Noted British Baptist Women,' in *Recycling the Past or Researching History? Studies in Baptist Historiography and Myths*, ed. Philip E. Thompson and Anthony R. Cross (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2005), 163-183.

⁴⁷ Karen Elizabeth Smith, 'Women in Cultural Captivity: British Women and the Zenana Mission,' *Baptist Quarterly* 42, no. 2 (2007): 103-113.

⁴⁸ Though note some compelling work on American Baptist women: Susan Juster, *Disorderly Women: Sexual Politics and Evangelicalism in Revolutionary New England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994); Janet Moore Lindman, *Bodies of Belief: Baptist Community in Early America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).

⁴⁹ John Walsh and Stephen Taylor, 'Introduction: The Church and Anglicanism in the "Long" Eighteenth Century,' in *The Church of England, c. 1689-1833: From Toleration to Tractarianism*, ed. John Walsh, Colin Haydon, and Stephen Taylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 1. See also William Gibson, *The Achievement of the Anglican Church, 1689-1800: The Confessional State in Eighteenth-*

century Anglican Church is more difficult to depict in terms of both belief and culture, in part because of the complexity of internal variations. It accommodated not only Catherine Talbot, but also John Wesley and George Whitefield, whose varied theologies famously resulted in very public disputes and pamphlet wars that pitted Arminians against Calvinists. Furthermore, while Methodists and Baptists naturally defined themselves in relation to other religious cultures, the privileged position and assumed identity of Anglicans meant they had no such need. A historiography of Anglican women as Anglican women is therefore more difficult to delineate. Scholars of the bluestocking circle, such as Susan Staves, have increasingly noted that many elite literary women were Anglican and had close associations with Anglican clergy, though the focus of this scholarship has been on their literary activities rather than their religiosity or, indeed, an interior piety.⁵⁰ Clarissa Campbell Orr has recently argued that the study of bluestocking women should not be limited to their literary careers, and in particular that greater attention should be given to their theology.⁵¹ Here I consider Anglican women as Anglican, critically engaging the substance of their belief as I analyse their literary and spiritual interactions within friendship and family circles.

Century England (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1995); Young, *Religion and Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century England*; Jeremy Gregory, *Restoration, Reformation and Reform, 1660-1828: Archbishops of Canterbury and Their Diocese* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000); William Gibson, *The Church of England, 1688-1832: Unity and Accord* (London: Routledge, 2001).

⁵⁰ Gary Kelly, 'Women's Provi(de)nace: Religion and Bluestocking Feminism in Sarah Scott's *Millenium Hall* (1762),' in *Female Communities 1600-1800: Literary Visions and Cultural Realities*, ed. Rebecca D'Monte and Nicole Pohl (Basingstoke: Macmillan in association with the Institute of English Studies, School of Advanced Study, University of London, 1999), 166-183; Susan Staves, 'Church of England Clergy and Women Writers,' in *Reconsidering the Bluestockings*, ed. Nicole Pohl and Betty A. Schellenberg (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 2003), 81-103; Norma Clarke, 'Bluestocking Fictions: Devotional Writings, Didactic Literature and the Imperative of Female Improvement,' in *Women, Gender and Enlightenment*, ed. Sarah Knott and Barbara Taylor (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 460-473; Betty A. Schellenberg, 'Bluestocking Women and the Negotiation of Oral, Manuscript, and Print Cultures,' in *The History of British Women's Writing, 1750-1830*, ed. Jacqueline M. Labbe (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 63-83; Judith Hawley, 'Elizabeth Carter and Modes of Knowledge,' in *Woman to Woman: Female Negotiations During the Long Eighteenth Century*, ed. Carolyn D. Williams, Angela Escott, and Louise Duckling (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2010), 157-170.

⁵¹ Clarissa Campbell Orr, 'Sarah Chapone, Christian Feminism and the Women Worthies Tradition', paper presented at the Eighteenth-Century British History seminar held at University of Oxford, 22 May 2013.

The women who are the focus of this thesis were not chosen as singular or straightforward representatives of their respective denominations, as though it were possible to locate the female denominational experience in the life of one woman. However, while Catherine Talbot, Anne Steele, and Ann Bolton may not be Anglican, Baptist, and Methodist archetypes, they do illuminate denominational beliefs and experiences. They were fully integrated in their religious cultures, connected to religious leaders, regular attendants at religious meetings, and deeply committed to their chosen faith communities. Moreover, alongside their participation in formal religious activities, they each used informal personal writings within close relationships to stimulate spiritual lives, undergird communities, and shape religious cultures.

Spiritual lives

Throughout my analysis, particular focus is given to matters of theology and religious interiority. Rather than focusing on external activities, my concern is primarily with personal piety and inward devotion: the spiritual lives of my subjects. It is unsurprising that historians with interests in religious women have frequently focused their scholarship on demonstrations of women's outward activities and achievements, thus highlighting the varied ways in which women overcame gendered constraints in religious cultures often perceived as relentlessly patriarchal.⁵² Alongside studies that have sought to recover women's 'public' activities in religious contexts, a few scholars have begun to probe the interior world of feminine devotion. Thus, as mentioned, Phyllis Mack has explored the feelings and beliefs of early Methodists.⁵³ And in her work on early eighteenth-century

⁵² For one example amongst many possible examples, see Anne Stott, *Hannah More: The First Victorian* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

⁵³ Mack, *Heart Religion in the British Enlightenment*.

women writers, Sarah Apetrei asks a question that similarly directs my enquiry: 'Rather than reading texts chiefly as they are grounded in discourse and the social world of the author, can we aspire to capture something of the internal world, the "I"?'⁵⁴

The challenge of accessing this inner world is significant. In 1986 Gail Malmgreen asked, 'To recapture the religious beliefs of ordinary women is a daunting assignment, but why should the more accessible figures...still be so little known?'⁵⁵ Almost three decades later her question still stands. Jacqueline deVries states that it is 'far easier to construct a picture of outward religious practices', and Sarah Williams concurs, suggesting that the 'content of religious belief remains a shadowy dimension which is frequently avoided because of its complexity'.⁵⁶ Alongside other historians who seek to listen to their subjects respectfully and 'on their own terms',⁵⁷ I try to hear Talbot, Steele, and Bolton as they articulate deeply felt beliefs and emotions in their own writings. The collective biographical approach employed here acknowledges the subjective and shifting nature of such belief and emotion, and I seek to gain a fuller understanding of women's inner lives by attending to their writings across a range of relationship, genre, time, and circumstance. As we will see, such an approach also demonstrates how the official writings of religious leaders did not always correlate uncomplicatedly with what lay people believed and how they lived.

⁵⁴ Apetrei, *Women, Feminism, and Religion in Early Enlightenment England*, 44.

⁵⁵ Malmgreen, ed., *Religion in the Lives of English Women*, 4.

⁵⁶ Jacqueline deVries, 'More Than Paradoxes to Offer: Feminism, History and Religious Cultures,' in *Women, Gender and Religious Cultures in Britain, 1800-1940*, ed. Sue Morgan and Jacqueline deVries (London: Routledge, 2010), 189; Williams, 'Is There a Bible in the House?' 13.

⁵⁷ Mack, *Heart Religion in the British Enlightenment*, 9; Hempton, *Methodism*, 149; D. Bruce Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative: Spiritual Autobiography in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 4. Mircea Eliade famously declared that religion must be understood 'on its own terms'. Cited in deVries, 'More Than Paradoxes to Offer,' 204.

Women Writing

Many studies of women writers focus on the capacity of authorship (whether in print or manuscript) to equip women with individualised agency and public authority. So Felicity Nussbaum considers women who wrote spiritual autobiography to be ‘claiming public territory for speaking and writing’.⁵⁸ Yet when women’s informal writings are not viewed wholly through a modern feminist prism, we see them functioning in more complex and creative ways. Neither women’s writing nor the study of interiority should imply an exclusive concern for the individual self; rather, women’s personal or ‘private’ writings exhibit ongoing interplay between individual faith, intimate relationship, and communal affiliation. In her 1993 challenge to press beyond private/public dichotomies when mapping ‘the breadth and boundaries of female experience’, Amanda Vickery stated that historians must develop ‘more sensitivity to women’s own manuscripts’.⁵⁹ Her challenge still has relevance. My research uses women’s manuscripts as a window onto their spiritual lives, asking, How did women experience and express their relationship with God? What religious rites and communities did they create? How was their spiritual experience expressed to others? What influence did women have in the transmission of religious knowledge?⁶⁰

Personal writings

My analysis makes use of a range of writings that I have called ‘personal writings’. These include letters and diaries, autobiographical reflections and memoirs, poetry and assorted

⁵⁸ Felicity Nussbaum, *The Autobiographical Subject: Gender and Ideology in Eighteenth-Century England* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 155.

⁵⁹ Vickery, ‘Golden Age to Separate Spheres?’ 413.

⁶⁰ Ursula King poses similar questions of the historical study of women’s spirituality more broadly in Ursula King, *Religion and Gender* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 17.

ephemera found in personal archives. Since I am interested in religious belief and experience, especially as a matter of interiority, these genres are particularly helpful since they are where historical women's voices are 'most clearly heard'.⁶¹ The genres I use are often classified collectively as 'life writings', and while I locate my study within recent trends in the study of women's life writing and use this language intermittently in my thesis, more often I have chosen to use the term 'personal' to describe the manuscripts analysed here.⁶² Scholarship on life writings, sometimes also called self writings, tends to focus on the individualist self that emerges in such writing: the writer (and especially the woman writer) is understood to acquire agency and liberty, and to transgress social or religious directives regarding modesty and submission, by 'writing her life' for herself and for possible future readers.⁶³ In her study of letters in eighteenth-century families, Sarah Pearsall argues that such emphases on 'self-fashioning' obscure important interpersonal dimensions of letter writing.⁶⁴ Amy Culley analyses the relational nature of women's writing in particular, arguing that women's selves were created not as autonomous selves but, crucially, through relationship: she argues for a model of 'relational selfhood' that I find helpful.⁶⁵ In a similar way, my concern is not only with

⁶¹ Malmgreen, ed., *Religion in the Lives of English Women*, 3.

⁶² Michelle M. Dowd and Julie A. Eckerle, *Genre and Women's Life Writing in Early Modern England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 3. See also Daniel Cook and Amy Culley, eds., *Women's Life Writing, 1700-1850: Gender, Genre and Authorship* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Cynthia Huff, ed., *Women's Life Writing and Imagined Communities* (London: Routledge, 2005).

⁶³ Margaret J. M. Ezell, 'Domestic Papers: Manuscript Culture and Early Modern Women's Life Writing,' in *Genre and Women's Life Writing in Early Modern England*, ed. Michelle M. Dowd and Julie A. Eckerle (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 44-45.

⁶⁴ Sarah M. S. Pearsall, *Atlantic Families: Lives and Letters in the Later Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 14.

⁶⁵ Amy Culley, 'Women's Life Writing, 1760-1830: Spiritual Selves, Sexual Characters, and Revolutionary Subjects' (PhD thesis, Queen Mary, University of London, 2007), 10, 8. Carol Gilligan wrote in 1982 that women 'define themselves in the context of a human relationship'. Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993; original publication 1982), 17. For recent explorations of women's writing as a communal activity, see Felicity Nussbaum, 'Sociability and Life Writing: Hester Lynch Thrale Piozzi,' in *Women's Life Writing, 1700-1850: Gender, Genre and Authorship*, ed. Daniel Cook and Amy Culley (Houndmills: Palgrave

the way in which personal writings were employed by women to rehearse and articulate self-understandings; it is also with the ways in which they functioned socially, within familial and religious communities. The word ‘personal’ signals not only the writer as individual, but suggests the relational possibilities of such writing.

The analysis is not limited to letters or diaries, but instead addresses a range of genres found in personal archives, including poetry, conversion narratives, and other autobiographical writings. In the chapters that follow I interact with bodies of scholarship that focus on individual genres, asking, for example, how diaries were employed as a means of religious education, and how poetry was used to enhance emotional and spiritual bonds between family members. The broader literary scope permitted by crossing generic boundaries not only allows a fuller picture of women’s religious and social worlds, but acknowledges the flexible and overlapping boundaries between such genres. Diaries were sometimes sent through the post; standard greetings and closures were scanned into poetry; and conversion narratives were embedded in correspondence and diaries. Taking her inspiration from Robert Dodsley’s popular memorandum books, in 1765 Talbot began to experiment with ‘perpetual letters’ that were a kind of diary, recounting the events of successive days.⁶⁶ Letters and diaries sometimes resisted generic classification, and this thesis thus complicates scholarship that considers literary genres in isolation. At the same time it develops the work of scholars who have noted the indeterminacy of genres and suggested the need to cut across generic labels to understand

Macmillan, 2012), 55-70; Huff, ed., *Women’s Life Writing and Imagined Communities*; Rebecca D’Monte and Nicole Pohl, eds., *Female Communities, 1600-1800: Literary Visions and Cultural Realities* (Basingstoke: Macmillan in association with the Institute of English Studies, School of Advanced Study, University of London, 1999).

⁶⁶ See Montagu Pennington, ed., *A Series of Letters between Mrs. Elizabeth Carter and Miss Catherine Talbot, from the Year 1741 to 1770*, 3 vols. (London: Printed for F. C. and J. Rivington, 1809), 3:123-130.

how a historical writer constructed her self.⁶⁷ This is true also for analyses of spiritual lives. As Michael Mascuch writes of the Puritan Samuel Ward, ‘Instead of just a diary, Ward produced a pile of papers representing his practice of piety’.⁶⁸ This more diffuse practice of religious self-expression is consistent with the archives analysed here, though extends beyond an individual practice of piety. Traditional generic boundaries not only obscure individual self-expression but can also obscure women’s relationships and religious interactions. That is, as diaries or letters alone do not articulate my subjects’ religious self-understandings, nor do they, in isolation, represent women’s interpersonal religious practices. Affectionate and spiritual bonds were built and strengthened through concurrent diary exchange, poetic dialogue, and epistolary interaction.

Manuscript cultures

In attending to the specific social, religious, and cultural circumstances in which women’s writings were written and used, this thesis foregrounds the manuscripts themselves, presenting the materiality of manuscripts as a central and organising dimension. I analyse not only the content of women’s personal writings, but also how those writings functioned at the time of their writing and how manuscripts persisted after they were written. As material artefacts they authenticate their writers’ very immediate emotional and spiritual lives, while their contemporary and subsequent use attest to women’s relationships and their influence within familial and religious communities. I trace women’s manuscripts as relics of vital lives of faith that emerged as part of the memory

⁶⁷ Elspeth Graham, ‘Intersubjectivity, Intertextuality, and Form in the Self-Writings of Margaret Cavendish,’ in *Genre and Women’s Life Writing in Early Modern England*, ed. Michelle M. Dowd and Julie A. Eckerle (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 131-150; Adam Smyth, *Autobiography in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

⁶⁸ Michael Mascuch, *The Origins of the Individualist Self: Autobiography and Self-Identity in England, 1591-1791* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997), 85-86.

of religious communities, and in so doing also interact with and contribute to scholarship on material cultures, the history of emotion, and memory studies.⁶⁹ Furthermore, this thesis builds on scholarship on non-print literary cultures and manuscript circulation, such as that of Melanie Bigold and Margaret Ezell, particularly that which demonstrates how women's spheres of influence were larger than print culture would suggest.⁷⁰ I extend this work to religion, arguing that manuscript circulation was an important and neglected means of women's engagement in religious communities.

Women in Community

Emphasising the use of women's personal writings within religious communities directs my approach to analysing individual women writers within their various communities. The women I consider in this thesis were committed to their chosen denominations, and certain markers identified them as members: Methodists were issued with class tickets, an important symbol of belonging and identity that was renewed quarterly;⁷¹ Baptists underwent the one-time religious rite of baptism, thus distinguishing them as members of a local religious community with ties to a wider movement; and after having been

⁶⁹ For example, John Styles and Amanda Vickery, eds., *Gender, Taste, and Material Culture in Britain and North America, 1700-1830* (New Haven, CT: Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, 2006); Martha Tomhave Blauvelt, *The Work of the Heart: Young Women and Emotion, 1780-1830* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007); Marius Kwint, Christopher Breward, and Jeremy Aynsley, eds., *Material Memories* (Oxford: Berg, 1999).

⁷⁰ George L. Justice and Nathan Tinker, eds., *Women's Writing and the Circulation of Ideas: Manuscript Publication in England, 1550-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Melanie Bigold, 'Women of Letters, Manuscript Circulation and Print Afterlives in the Eighteenth Century: Elizabeth Rowe, Catharine Cockburn and Elizabeth Carter' (DPhil thesis, University of Oxford, 2006); Schellenberg, 'Bluestocking Women and the Negotiation of Oral, Manuscript, and Print Cultures,' 63-83. See also Margaret J. M. Ezell, *Social Authorship and the Advent of Print* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999); Ezell, 'Domestic Papers,' 33-48; Betty A. Schellenberg, "'The Society of Agreeable and Worthy Companions': Bookishness and Manuscript Culture after 1750,' in *Bookish Histories: Books, Literature, and Commercial Modernity, 1700-1900*, ed. Ina Ferris and Paul Keen (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 214-231.

⁷¹ Sarah Lloyd, "'A Testimony under My Own Hand': Identity, Belonging and Rejection in the Methodist Practice of Ticketing', paper presented at the Oxford-Manchester Methodist Studies seminar held at Oxford Brookes University, 20 April 2013.

catechised and having learned historic confessions, Anglicans were confirmed. These women did not wholly understand their religious identities in terms of these official memberships, however, and alongside formal associations they belonged to more informal spiritual communities that were defined by affectionate ties of kinship and friendship. Throughout this thesis I use the terms ‘religious community’ and ‘spiritual community’. ‘Religious’ carries institutional connotations while ‘spiritual’ suggests something more experiential and internal; these terms are thus used, respectively, to designate women’s formal associations with church or chapel and their more informal and affectionate connections. Yet since these associations were often overlapping and interconnected, the categories do not always hold. In observing the ways in which women interacted in writing within such communities, my research highlights certain transformative relationships—across gender and both intra- and inter-generationally—and so enriches our understanding of women’s roles and activities within religious communities. Before turning to these relationships, however, I consider certain theoretical issues that attend the analysis of individuals within communities.

The self in community

My emphasis on the use of women’s personal writings within spiritual communities challenges social, feminist, and religious understandings of subjectivity as it relates to writing. Dror Wahrman traces a transformation in the eighteenth century from a socially-oriented to an introspective, individualist self, and Michael Mascuch describes autobiographical writing, as it emerged in the eighteenth century, as distinctly

individualist.⁷² Mascuch argues that autobiographical writing enabled the individualist self to be ‘a creator/medium/product unified as a single, autonomous totality’, and he identifies the author as ‘the hero and originator of his heroism’.⁷³ According to Mascuch, it was the ability to consider oneself the subject of one’s life and to regard oneself as distinct from family and community that created an individual.⁷⁴ Bruce Hindmarsh qualifies Mascuch’s depiction of the eighteenth-century individualist self, arguing that the evangelical conversion narrative attests to an ‘important alternative version of Enlightenment individuality’ such that evangelicals in the period understood themselves as individually called out even as their religious identity was bestowed by others.⁷⁵ According to Hindmarsh, the construction of evangelical identity involved ‘both individuation and community’.⁷⁶ Charles Taylor similarly argues that identity is a matter of individual conviction and agency as it is ‘enframed in a social understanding of great temporal depth’: it is both individual and shaped by social and temporal realities.⁷⁷ Taylor contends that the self exists within ‘webs of interlocution’ and can only be articulated with reference to a ‘defining community’.⁷⁸ In contrast to studies that emphasise the formation of an autonomous individualist self in the period, I wish to consider further the significance of religious communities (as suggested by Hindmarsh and Taylor) in identity formation and spiritual self-understanding. Who were these defining communities?

⁷² Dror Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self: Identity and Culture in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004); Mascuch, *Origins of the Individualist Self*.

⁷³ Mascuch, *Origins of the Individualist Self*, 22-23.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 88. See also Elaine McKay, ‘English Diarists: Gender, Geography and Occupation, 1500-1700,’ *History* 90, no. 298 (2005): 205.

⁷⁵ Hindmarsh, *Evangelical Conversion Narrative*, 344.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 346. See also D. Bruce Hindmarsh, ‘Reshaping Individualism: The Private Christian, Eighteenth-Century Religion and the Enlightenment,’ in *The Rise of the Laity in Evangelical Protestantism*, ed. Deryck W. Lovegrove (London: Routledge, 2002), 67-84.

⁷⁷ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 39.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 36.

Alongside formal religious communities, my analysis explores the flexible forms of spiritual communities, in which religious ties were often interwoven with familial and affectionate ties. This thesis is concerned not so much with writing as a device by which the self was constructed, either individually or communally, but with the spiritual function of writing within interpersonal and communal relationships.

At the same time, my focus on women's writings highlights tensions in feminist historiographies between writing as a means of individuation and personal empowerment on the one hand, and a focus on women's interpersonal relationships on the other. As will be discussed in Chapter Four, scholarship on women's diaries, in particular, has emphasised the liberating power of writing for women.⁷⁹ Yet alongside an emphasis on personal writing as a means for a woman to 'actualise her interiority', in effect creating herself through writing, scholars have argued that women's writing was distinctly interpersonal.⁸⁰ In her 1980 essay on women's autobiography, Mary Mason argues that 'the self-discovery of female identity seems to acknowledge the real presence and recognition of another consciousness' in a way that is distinct from men's autobiography.⁸¹ This characterisation of female autobiography as distinctly relational has persisted in feminist historical and literary scholarship.⁸² Rather than orient my discussion in such wholly individual or relational ways, I argue that women's writing had simultaneous individual and communal meanings.

⁷⁹ See p. 216.

⁸⁰ Linda Anderson, 'At the Threshold of the Self: Women and Autobiography,' in *Women's Writing: A Challenge to Theory*, ed. Moira Monteith (Brighton: Harvester, 1986), 60.

⁸¹ Mary Mason, 'The Other Voice: Autobiography of Women Writers,' in *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, ed. James Olney (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 210.

⁸² For example, Susan Stanford Friedman, 'Women's Autobiographical Selves: Theory and Practice,' in *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings*, ed. Shari Benstock (London: Routledge, 1988), 34-62.

In my analysis of women's personal writings and the ways in which those writings functioned within spiritual communities, I allow surviving sources to point to especially significant relationships. Beginning with women's writings, rather than the categories of wife and mother, removes hierarchy from relationships and demonstrates how traditional relational categories do not adequately describe the emotional and relational realities and spiritual interactions of historical subjects. It also illuminates the significance to religious communities of frequently neglected women. Apart from Bolton, who married briefly and late in life, none of my principal subjects married or had children of their own. Talbot's, Steele's, and Bolton's experiences as childless single women provide a perspective that is almost entirely overlooked, and one that complicates scholarship on the family. While Joanne Bailey, in her recent study of parenthood in eighteenth-century England, focuses her discussion on the idealised, affectionate parent-child relationship, my research shows aunts and single women playing particularly important roles in faith transmission. Bailey acknowledges instances of 'shared parenting', when grandparents or aunts and uncles assisted biological parents, including assisting efforts to pass on religious values, but her emphasis on biological parenting leads her to interpret aunts, uncles, and others in light of nuclear families, and so she casts them in secondary roles.⁸³

In considering how women engaged in religious communities beyond the nuclear family and localised settings, my research also highlights the geographical scope of women's engagement in spiritual communities. Tracing familial and literary patterns shows women's roles as conduits of belief and culture far beyond the home. For example, my research shows aunts and single women driving important literary interactions that were designed to guide the religious education of a younger generation, and these literary

⁸³ Joanne Bailey, *Parenting in England, 1760-1830: Emotion, Identity, and Generation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 199-221.

interactions often transpired through the post. Women's manuscripts also demonstrate how literary interactions through the post were often augmented by travel and visits. Katherine Turner shows that the grand tour undertaken by men is not representative of eighteenth-century travel, but that travel had other, more diverse meanings, particularly for women.⁸⁴ One of the meanings of women's travelling was jointly spiritual and relational. Historians who have studied women's activities as preachers have observed the tensions that sometimes emerged for women preachers, as their responsibilities as wives and mothers did not easily harmonise with their religious call to travel and preach.⁸⁵ Rather than generating tensions, however, my research demonstrates that women's travel in the cause of religion was sometimes actively propelled by kinship and friendship ties.

I have chosen to describe the defining communities to which my subjects belonged as 'communities' rather than 'networks' because this more closely reflects language they used themselves. When Mary Steele composed a letter requesting admission to her local Baptist church, she wrote of her desire to be received 'into y^r Community'.⁸⁶ At the same time, the word community is suggestive of close relationship between individuals who knew, loved, and trusted each other, rather than the functional exchange of ideas implied by larger, more complex, and less affectionate networks. Community also has religious connotations (convents are religious communities, and the 'communion of saints' designates the Christian church across space and time), wherein

⁸⁴ Katherine Turner, *British Travel Writers in Europe 1750-1800: Authorship, Gender and National Identity* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001). See also Katharine Glover, *Elite Women and Polite Society in Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2011), Ch. 6: 'Travel, Tourism and Place'; Ruth Watts, 'A Gendered Journey: Travel of Ideas in England c. 1750-1800,' *History of Education* 37, no. 4 (2008): 513-530; Kristi Siegel, ed., *Gender, Genre and Identity in Women's Travel Writing* (New York: Peter Lang, 2004).

⁸⁵ Eve Colpus, 'Preaching Religion, Family and Memory in Nineteenth-Century England,' *Gender and History* 22, no. 1 (2010): 38-54; Sheila Wright, "'Every Good Woman Needs a Companion of Her Own Sex': Quaker Women and Spiritual Friendship, 1750-1850,' in *Women, Religion and Feminism in Britain, 1750-1900*, ed. Sue Morgan (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 89-104.

⁸⁶ Mary Steele to Broughton Baptist Church, [1795]. AL, STE 5/9/6.

members engage in a common life based on shared beliefs and practices. Finally, and not insignificantly, the language of community makes explicit the practice of communication that transpires between members, thus evoking the intimate and informal literary interactions that are at the heart of this thesis.⁸⁷

Women's 'work of kin'

My analysis of women's literary interactions resonates with Amanda Vickery's assessment that the 'well-turned letter' of an eighteenth-century woman became a performance in a 'longstanding female work of kin'.⁸⁸ However, where Vickery associates this literary engagement with women's access to 'worldly exchange and debate....a world far beyond the boundaries of their parish', I ask how correspondence and other informal literary interactions enabled women to participate in the religious regeneration of their families, broadly conceived, including across time and distance.⁸⁹ Such writing was not a one-way means of relaying religious doctrine or precept, but was dialogic, experiential, and personal.

Vickery is not alone in regarding the 'work of kin' as uniquely feminine. In his study of aunts and uncles, Robert Milardo refers to women as 'kin-keepers' on account of their distinctive efforts to perpetuate and strengthen relations between kin.⁹⁰ Comparably, Christopher Johnson and David Warren Sabean identify a 'small army of relatives' whose 'officers' were sisters, mothers, and aunts who actively knit together family members

⁸⁷ On letters playing out the etymological connections between communion, communication, and community, see Clare Brant, *Eighteenth-Century Letters and British Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 313.

⁸⁸ Vickery, *Gentleman's Daughter*, 287.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Robert M. Milardo, *The Forgotten Kin: Aunts and Uncles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 25.

through letter and visit.⁹¹ And in her study of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Quakers, Sandra Stanley Holton argues that women played crucial roles in binding together kinship networks through writing, adding that women's activities in this regard extended beyond the act of writing to that of creating and preserving family archives.⁹² The archives used here likewise show a greater tendency on the part of women to forge emotional bonds through literary exchange and manuscript preservation, and to use personal writings in the generational transmission of meaning and culture. While the subjects of Holton's research are Quakers, her discussion turns more on their political and emotional connections than on an in depth engagement with their religious beliefs. Here I build on Holton's work to explore the spiritual dimensions of women's 'work of kin'.

Women and men

This thesis is primarily concerned with women's spiritual lives and manuscript cultures but it does not disregard the presence of men in religious communities. It thus challenges gendered interpretations of women's sociability that focus on the gynosomal,⁹³ for rather than exposing a hermetically sealed feminine world, my research shows women living alongside and interacting with men. The men with whom my subjects interacted include brothers and friends, relationships that are frequently overshadowed in historiographies by those with husbands and fathers. My subjects also interacted with prominent religious

⁹¹ Christopher H. Johnson and David Warren Sabean, *Sibling Relations and the Transformation of European Kinship, 1300-1900* (New York: Berghahn, 2011), 12. See also David Warren Sabean, *Kinship in Neckarhausen, 1700-1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 490-510; Micaela di Leonardo, 'The Female World of Cards and Holidays: Women, Family, and the Work of Kinship,' *Signs* 12, no. 3 (1987): 440-453.

⁹² Sandra Stanley Holton, *Quaker Women: Personal Life, Memory and Radicalism in the Lives of Women Friends, 1780-1930* (London: Routledge, 2007), 2. See also Sandra Stanley Holton, 'Kinship and Friendship: Quaker Women's Networks and the Women's Movement,' *Women's History Review* 14, no. 3/4 (2005): 365-384.

⁹³ For example, Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, 'The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth-Century America,' *Signs* 1 (1975): 1-29.

leaders such as John Wesley and Thomas Secker, who are here illuminated in fresh ways. Rather than highlighting these men's public roles and activities by focusing on treatises, sermons, and other official writings, my use of personal correspondence and diaries reveals them as friends and pseudo-parental figures.

While men and their writings feature in my analysis, the greater attention is given to women and their writings. This imbalance reflects the nature of the archives I have used, in which women's personal writings outnumber men's. Anne Steele's manuscripts, for example, are preserved in a vast, multi-generational family archive in which the literary presence of women far surpasses that of men. Neither did the men in Ann Bolton's and Catherine Talbot's circles use diaries and letters in the same way as the women analysed here. Or if they did, their writings have not survived, which may suggest that women's writings had a unique posthumous meaning. The sources used thus suggest the presence of a female spiritual practice. They also, however, limit the ability to make gendered comparisons. Additional research would be required to offer a detailed comparison of men's and women's distinctive uses of personal writings in the manner under consideration here.

Subjects and Sources

A series of interweaving case studies are used to analyse the manuscript cultures of eighteenth-century women and, through those manuscript cultures, women's spiritual lives. The thesis focuses on Catherine Talbot (1721–70), Anne Steele (1717–78), and Ann Bolton (1743–1822), and on their friendship and family circles. Talbot, Steele, and Bolton left extensive personal archives that illuminate a particular kind of interactive writing that functioned in personal and social ways within spiritual communities.

Moreover, their surviving manuscripts are complemented by the extant personal papers of friends and family, making it possible to consider their lives within their social and spiritual communities and to analyse the manner in which personal writings functioned within those communities. These women were key figures in their religious and social worlds and provide a window into a central and neglected aspect of their religious and literary cultures.

The case studies approach I employ allows for historical specificity and complexity, acknowledging the ‘unpredictable variety of private experience’ described by Amanda Vickery.⁹⁴ Alongside denominational distinctions I attend to differences in socioeconomic status, location, and friendship and kinship patterns. Since I am concerned with the ways in which personal writings functioned both individually and communally, this thesis considers Bolton, Steele, and Talbot within their religious communities. It is a multilayered discussion that is simultaneously historical, literary, and theological, while in some ways also a work of collective biography. Biographical details for persons within these communities are included in Appendix 1, which should assist the reader in navigating the many names included in the discussion that follows. As well, in order to trace the generational transmission of spiritual and literary legacies it was necessary to assemble family trees, which are included in Appendix 2. Biographical sketches and family trees included in these appendices have been reconstructed from a wide range of material, including letters, diaries, church books, and antiquarian sources. It is hoped they will be of value to historians and literary scholars. Before turning to the main discussion, in this section I introduce the three principal subjects whom I have chosen as the hubs of their social and spiritual circles, offering a summary of their respective lives and writings,

⁹⁴ Vickery, ‘Golden Age to Separate Spheres?’ 390.

and considering them within the context of the emotional, spiritual, and intellectual communities that sustained them. While all of my primary subjects published during their lifetimes, this thesis is concerned more specifically with their manuscript writings. Here I also introduce the rich and highly textured archives used in my analysis, some of which have not previously been used. Throughout the thesis, original spelling and punctuation have been retained in order to illuminate differences in education, and I have used *[sic]* sparingly to avoid interruptions. All emphases in transcriptions and quotations are in originals, and all translations are my own.

Catherine Talbot

Catherine Talbot (1721–70) (see Figure 1) had an eminent Anglican genealogy and was raised in the heart of the Established Church. She was the only child of Edward Talbot and Mary Talbot, who both came from ecclesiastical families. Her father was Archdeacon of Berkshire when he died five months before she was born, after which she and her mother were taken into the household of Thomas and Catherine Secker. Thomas Secker considered Talbot ‘instead of a child to my wife and me’, and he, together with Martin Benson (who was Bishop of Gloucester as well as Catherine Secker’s brother), supervised Talbot’s broad and comprehensive education.⁹⁵ Talbot lived for most of her life in ecclesiastical homes and palaces, for she accompanied Secker when he advanced through various bishoprics and eventually became Archbishop of Canterbury. Her life was comfortable and privileged, and she spent her days reading, painting, writing, and in

⁹⁵ Thomas Secker to Catherine Talbot, 22 February 1733. Beinecke, OSB 53/vi. On Talbot’s education, see Robert G. Ingram, *Religion, Reform and Modernity in the Eighteenth Century: Thomas Secker and the Church of England* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2007), 51; Rhoda Zuk, ed., *Catherine Talbot and Hester Chapone*, 6 vols., *Bluestocking Feminism: Writings of the Bluestocking Circle, 1738-1785* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1999), 4. See also Duchess of Somerset to James Wilkins, 12 November 1752. Beinecke, OSB c.22.



Figure 1: Catherine Talbot⁹⁶

a relentless round of visits. More than the other women considered in this thesis, Talbot's life was patterned after the social expectations of politeness. Her summers were spent happily in the country at Cuddesdon and the winters (or 'seasons') she spent in London where she attended the theatre and other social events. She professed to prefer the quiet life of Cuddesdon:

Shew & Gayety is not my business in Town....Upon the whole a quiet Life like mine is better for me than any Other, both for my health & my turn of Mind, & I will take Care that it shall not be a dull or a dronish one.⁹⁷

Talbot was thoroughly committed to the Anglican Church. She attended St Paul's when in London, referring to it affectionately as 'notre chere Cathédrale', and taking particular delight in the choir music.⁹⁸ She was often unwell and was grieved when illness prevented her from attending services on account of the cold cathedral air, and was

⁹⁶ Catherine Talbot miniature by Christian Friedrich Zincke, private collection.

⁹⁷ Catherine Talbot reflection, undated. Beinecke, OSB 53/xiii.

⁹⁸ St Paul's was 'our beloved Cathedral'. Catherine Talbot diary, 23 December 1753. BL, Add. 46688.

delighted when she was able to return.⁹⁹ Talbot never married, but lived with her mother for her entire life along with, during their lifetimes, Thomas and Catherine Secker.

Talbot's social and religious worlds were complex and overlapping, yet depending on their interests, scholars have tended to consider her in terms of one sole community or another. Talbot's close friendship with Elizabeth Carter and her association with Elizabeth Montagu, together with her own literary activity, have led scholars of the bluestocking circle to interpret her primarily in terms of her intellectual life and literary output.¹⁰⁰ This accounts for her most common inclusion in historical and literary scholarship, though her 'failure' to publish a great deal during her lifetime has resulted in her being considered something of a disappointing bluestocking.¹⁰¹ But this is to judge her in terms she would not have recognised, for there was no clear membership in a bluestocking circle in the eighteenth century, nor is 'bluestocking' an appellation that can be assigned uncomplicatedly today. Emma Major argues that 'bluestocking', as it bridges eighteenth-century letters and modern critical debate, and spans single-sex friendship and mixed sociability, is 'a term that needs further honing'.¹⁰² Talbot's inclusion in this indistinct society seems to stem from her relationships with particular persons, for her diary and letters do not indicate that she attended the salon gatherings that might more clearly define her membership. In observing her not primarily as a bluestocking, this thesis casts fresh light on her (including by considering manuscripts in ecclesiastical

⁹⁹ Catherine Talbot to Eliza Berkeley, 4 January 1763. BL, Add. 39311.

¹⁰⁰ For example, Sylvia Harcstark Myers, *The Bluestocking Circle: Women, Friendship, and the Life of the Mind in Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990); Zuk, ed., *Catherine Talbot and Hester Chapone*.

¹⁰¹ Zuk, for example, describes Talbot as 'notorious' for not publishing very much. Zuk, ed., *Catherine Talbot and Hester Chapone*, 3. See also Myers, *Bluestocking Circle*, Ch. 8: "'A Buried Talent': The Writings of Catherine Talbot".

¹⁰² Major, *Madam Britannia*, 84. On the complexities of the term, see *ibid.*, 80-84; Anni Sairio, 'Methodological and Practical Aspects of Historical Network Analysis: A Case Study of the Bluestocking Letters,' in *The Language of Daily Life in England (1400-1800)*, ed. Arja Nurmi, Minna Nevala, and Minna Palander-Collin (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing, 2009), 107-137.

archives, as discussed below), while it simultaneously makes new enquiries into the bluestocking circle. Talbot was also connected with aristocratic circles through her friendships with the Yorke and Grey families, and as such has been studied in terms of elite women's intellectual lives.¹⁰³ Recently, her close associations with ecclesiastical circles have also been observed, although as with other Anglican women, as mentioned earlier, again primarily in terms of her literary activity.¹⁰⁴ I do not limit myself to one of these circles, but instead survey Talbot's surviving personal writings to allow particularly significant relationships and interrelationships to present themselves. Some of these relationships have not been discussed previously.

Talbot wrote from an early age and as a young girl achieved a reputation as a prodigy owing to her poems and letters circulating in manuscript.¹⁰⁵ Later in life she wrote essays that were published posthumously as *Reflections on the Seven Days of the Week* (1770) and *Essays on Various Subjects* (1772). *Reflections* in particular was enormously popular, selling 25,000 copies in thirty-five editions well into the nineteenth century.¹⁰⁶ Her personal writings have never been considered in their entirety, and some manuscripts are analysed here for the first time. The bulk of her diary and her surviving correspondence with the Berkeley family form part of the Berkeley Collection at the British Library.¹⁰⁷ Also at the British Library are assorted letters to aristocrats and clergy.¹⁰⁸ Correspondence with Thomas Secker and members of his extended family, as

¹⁰³ Leonie Hannan, 'Women, Letter Writing and the Life of the Mind in England, c. 1650-1750' (PhD thesis, University of London, 2009).

¹⁰⁴ Staves, 'Church of England Clergy and Women Writers,' 81-103; Clarke, 'Bluestocking Fictions,' 460-473.

¹⁰⁵ Myers, *Bluestocking Circle*, 207; Zuk, ed., *Catherine Talbot and Hester Chapone*, 4.

¹⁰⁶ Clarke, 'Bluestocking Fictions,' 460, 472 n. 2.

¹⁰⁷ BL, Add. 39311, 39312, 39316, 46688, 46690.

¹⁰⁸ BL, Add. 4291, 4319, 4475, 19684, 19689, 35597, 35607, 35608, 35368, 35639, 39311.

well as other ecclesiastical correspondence, are archived at Lambeth Palace Library.¹⁰⁹ And at the Bedfordshire and Luton Archive and Record Service are kept a smaller portion of her diary as well as correspondence with the Yorke family and other aristocrats.¹¹⁰ These materials have previously been used, usually separately, by literary scholars. At Alnwick Castle, letters from Talbot to Frances Seymour, then the Duchess of Somerset, have not previously been used in discussions of Talbot or the Duchess.¹¹¹ Other letters, primarily to clergy and family, are preserved at the Beinecke Library at Yale University and similarly have not been drawn on in studies of her life and work.¹¹² A few letters also form part of the Montagu Collection at the Huntington Library in San Marino, California.¹¹³ Fresh interpretations of Talbot's spiritual life and her engagement in religious communities are enabled through my reading of these materials alongside each other.

Anne Steele

Anne Steele (1717–78) was born in the village of Broughton, in Hampshire, into a family that was well established in the Baptist church. By the eighteenth century, the Steeles had been Particular Baptists for several generations, and members of various branches of the family had been and continued to be involved in its leadership.¹¹⁴ Her father and great uncle between them supplied the pulpit of the Broughton Baptist Church for seventy

¹⁰⁹ LPL, 1349, 1719, 2872.

¹¹⁰ BLARS, L30/9, L30/21, L31/106.

¹¹¹ DNP 31.

¹¹² Beinecke, OSB c.22, 53.

¹¹³ HL, MO 5139, 5140.

¹¹⁴ Particular Baptists were Calvinistic in theology, believing that Christ died for the elect, while General Baptists were Arminian, believing that Christ's death was for all. Roger Hayden traces distinctions in these communities in Roger Hayden, *English Baptist History and Heritage*, 2nd ed. (Didcot: Baptist Union of Great Britain, 2005). On the Steele family's early activities in the Baptist church in Hampshire and Wiltshire, see J. R. Broome, *A Bruised Reed: Anne Steele: Her Life and Times* (Harpending, UK: Gospel Standard Trust Publications, 2007), 13-50.

years.¹¹⁵ Her father and, later, her brother were also successful timber merchants, and by the mid-eighteenth century the Steeles had achieved sufficient wealth to become the wealthiest family in the neighbourhood as well as the primary financial backers of the Broughton Baptist Church.¹¹⁶ They were thus spiritually and financially at the heart of their religious community. In the period covered by this thesis, the Steeles were moving into a higher social stratum, and their personal papers disclose their attempts to negotiate a new world of provincial politeness. Steele lived a life of considerable comfort, though without the same social privilege as Talbot. And while Talbot's social and spiritual worlds were complex and overlapping, Steele's were comprised primarily of a close family circle and her local Baptist church. She was devoted to her family, and often recorded walking in the gardens near her family home or writing poetry within a familial setting. Never marrying, Steele lived with her parents and later her brother for her entire life.

The Steeles were a remarkably literary family, and from a young age Steele wrote verse on both familial and religious themes. As she aged, she also began to compose hymns, some of which were sung in the Broughton Baptist Church.¹¹⁷ In 1760, at the age of forty-three, she published two volumes of her hymns and poems as *Poems on Subjects*

¹¹⁵ Henry Steele was minister of the Broughton Baptist Church from 1699 until his death in 1739. His nephew William Steele assisted him from 1708 and assumed the role of minister upon Henry Steele's death, continuing to serve in this capacity until his own death in 1769.

¹¹⁶ J. R. Broome indicates that Henry Steele donated land and buildings for the church and burial ground. Broome, *Bruised Reed*, 48. As well, the church books of the Broughton Baptist Church show that Henry Steele and William Steele consistently contributed considerably more money to the church than any other church member. Church books of Broughton Baptist Church. AL, Broughton 1/2–1/4. On the wealth of the Steele family, see further *ibid.*, 224–236; Timothy Whelan, ed., *Nonconformist Women Writers, 1720–1840*, 8 vols. (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2011–2012), 1:2.

¹¹⁷ Evidence of this early local use of Steele's hymns is found in her stepmother's diary, wherein are pinned transcriptions of Steele's hymns along with the dates they were sung. For example, Anne Cator Steele diary, March 1750. AL, STE 2/1/2.

Chiefly Devotional, by Theodosia.¹¹⁸ A selection of her hymns was also published in Caleb Evans and John Ash's *A Collection of Hymns Adapted to Public Worship* (1769), which had a wide use in Baptist churches at the time.¹¹⁹ The publication of her verse contributed to her growing public reputation, and her personal papers confirm that ministers and others began to correspond with her and visit her at Broughton. Hymns were only one genre for Steele's religious expression, however, for she also wrote poems on a wide range of subjects, many of which illuminate her spiritual life and social world. And she wrote letters to friends and family, some of which have been retained in the Steele family archive. This large, multi-generational archive is preserved at the Angus Library at Regent's Park College in Oxford.¹²⁰ Other, related manuscript materials that are used in this thesis are likewise preserved at the Angus Library, the Bodleian Library, and the British Library.¹²¹

Unsurprisingly, Steele has been studied almost exclusively as a writer of hymns. In his authoritative *The English Hymn* (1999), J. R. Watson designates her as 'the first major woman hymn-writer', while Margaret Maison notes how she has been hailed as the 'mother' of the English hymn.¹²² Until recent years, most treatments of her were cursory, noting her popularity as a hymn-writer well into the nineteenth century. They were also hagiographical, recycling the sensational and sentimental story of her fiancé's death by

¹¹⁸ Anne Steele, *Poems on Subjects Chiefly Devotional*, by Theodosia, 2 vols. (London: Printed for J. Buckland and J. Ward, 1760).

¹¹⁹ Of the 412 hymns in Ash and Evans's collection, 62 were by Steele. The collection was popular, reaching an eighth edition in 1801.

¹²⁰ AL, Steele Collection.

¹²¹ AL, Attwater Papers; Bodl., Reeves Collection; BL, M468.

¹²² J. R. Watson, *The English Hymn: A Critical and Historical Study* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 191; Margaret Maison, "'Thine, Only Thine!'" Women Hymn Writers in Britain, 1760-1835,' in *Religion in the Lives of English Women, 1760-1930*, ed. Gail Malmgreen (London: Croom Helm, 1986), 14. See also R. W. Thomson, 'Anne Steele, 1716-1778,' *Baptist Quarterly* 21, no. 8 (1965): 368-371; Richard Arnold, 'A "Veil of Interposing Night": The Hymns of Anne Steele (1717-1778),' *Christian Scholar's Review* 18, no. 4 (1989): 371-387.

drowning on the eve of their wedding. The story cannot be substantiated, yet it has stimulated a persistent and unifying interpretation of her hymnody: what is perceived as a melancholy tone in her hymns has often been attributed to her inability to recover from the emotional shock and romantic disappointment of her fiancé's death.¹²³ Marjorie Reeves, a descendent of one of the branches of the Steele family and the inheritor of some of the manuscripts analysed here, used the papers then in her possession to reconstruct the lives of parts of the family, though not that of Anne Steele and her immediate family.¹²⁴ J. R. Broome's 2007 biography of Steele was the first thorough reconstruction of her life and context using the family's manuscripts, and my own 2008 study was the first book-length examination of her hymns.¹²⁵ Timothy Whelan has recently edited a critical edition of Steele's manuscripts, alongside the manuscripts of other nonconformist women writers, in an eight-volume collection.¹²⁶ The emphasis of this collection is on women's activities as writers. Here I draw on a range of archival material to consider Steele not primarily as popular hymn-writer or poet, instead focusing on her spiritual life and her commitment to and engagement in interwoven familial and religious communities.

¹²³ For example, Edwin F. Hatfield, *The Poets of the Church: A Series of Biographical Sketches of Hymn-Writers with Notes on Their Hymns* (New York: Anson D. F. Randolph, 1884), 571; Emma R. Pitman, *Lady Hymn Writers* (London: T. Nelson and Sons, 1892), 67-68; Ernest Emurian, *Living Stories of Famous Hymns* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1955), 40.

¹²⁴ Marjorie Reeves, *Sheep Bell and Ploughshare: The Story of Two Village Families* (Bradford-on-Avon: Moonraker Press, 1978); Marjorie Reeves, *Pursuing the Muses: Female Education and Non-Conformist Culture, 1700-1900* (London: Leicester University Press, 1997); Marjorie Reeves, 'Literary Women in Eighteenth-Century Nonconformist Circles,' in *Culture and the Nonconformist Tradition*, ed. Jane Shaw and Alan Kreider (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1999), 7-25.

¹²⁵ Broome, *Bruised Reed*; Cynthia Alders, *To Express the Ineffable: The Hymns and Spirituality of Anne Steele* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2008).

¹²⁶ Whelan, ed., *Nonconformist Women Writers*.

Ann Bolton

Ann Bolton (1743–1822) (see Figure 2) was born in Witney, Oxfordshire, and spent most of her long life living either there or in the nearby village of Finstock. Her father was a baker or a brewer, her brother a farmer, and she was often drawn into their worlds of work, helping to organise their finances and representing them in business matters when they were ill or absent. She carried a higher level of fiscal responsibility and work-related anxiety than either Talbot or Steele. This range of socioeconomic experience allows me to ask how social factors influenced spiritual and literary interactions, and to observe continuities in such interactions across social strata. Belonging to a lower social stratum, with considerably more demands on her time, Bolton did not habitually record the pleasures of walking, painting, and writing poetry or reading within a close family circle. Rather, she recorded working and worrying about money, caring for her elderly parents and other family members, and attendance at a ceaseless round of Methodist events. She alternately lived with her parents and her brother until she married George Conibeere at the age of forty-eight.

The pattern of Bolton's participation in social and religious communities has two phases, and the transition between them was gradual. The first phase is notable for its social fracturing. Bolton's conversion to Methodism at the age of nineteen began with a fragmenting of her social world and an attraction to a new community. She was the first member of her family to convert, and her parents and other relatives responded with fear and anxiety about her new association with disreputable 'enthusiasts'. Her parents cast her out of the house, and Bolton turned with expectation to the local Methodist society, writing, 'my delight was to be in their company for I believe^d they were walking in the



Figure 2: Ann Bolton¹²⁷

path to heaven & my desire was to go with them'.¹²⁸ It is this pattern of social fracturing and reconstruction that has led historians such as Gail Malmgreen to write that for the dislocated and disinherited, Methodism could supply a surrogate family.¹²⁹ In contrast, the second phase of Bolton's social and religious engagement demonstrates a remarkable consolidation that is not often observed in Methodist historiography. In time most members of her family would likewise convert to Methodism, and as her association with the Witney Methodist Society strengthened she became deeply involved in a tight local community. Yet the Methodist network she participated in went well beyond the local, and the ties that bound her to other Methodists were not only religious. She was connected through marriage and business interests to a number of Methodist families,

¹²⁷ Ann Bolton c. 1791, private collection.

¹²⁸ 'First account of Ann Bolton's conversion experience'. Pudl., 4/28. 'Second account of Ann Bolton's conversion experience'. Pudl., 2/1.

¹²⁹ Malmgreen, 'Domestic Discords,' 59.

including the Scudamores, Freeburys, and Arundells, who lived in close proximity to each other and to the Methodist Chapel at Stroud, Gloucestershire.¹³⁰ Bolton was also related through marriage to the Edens and Wards—Methodist families who lived, respectively, at Broad Marston, Worcestershire and Oxhill, Warwickshire. Her Methodist identity was located in belonging to an expansive new world in which friendship, marriage, and business overlapped closely with religious affiliation.

Bolton's writing life appears to have begun with her conversion to Methodism. Her earliest preserved piece of writing is a conversion experience labelled 'A Bolton's first experience 1762' (see Figure 3).¹³¹ This narrative recounts events from 1762, when she first heard a Methodist preacher, until September 1764, a year after she joined the Witney society. Other conversion narratives survive, both as discrete documents and embedded in her diary and correspondence. She also wrote letters, recorded sermon notes, and kept commonplace books. But the largest document in Bolton's personal papers is a diary that she kept for a significant part of her life: the first extant entries are for April 1769, written during a period of increasing spiritual seriousness, and the final entries were written during a visit to Mary Fletcher at Madeley, Shropshire in July 1797. In the intervening years she amassed a vast and complex diary record, almost 1,300 manuscript pages of which are extant. The diary survives in nearly a hundred fragments, from notebooks to torn sheets (most of which were incompletely dated), and I had to reconstruct it carefully, using both internal and material evidence, before it could be used in the discussion that follows. It is hoped that the restored diary will make a substantive contribution to Methodist scholarship. For a description of this reconstructive process, see Appendix 3.

¹³⁰ Stroud deeds. GA, D7824/1 (1700-1952).

¹³¹ 'First account of Ann Bolton's conversion experience'. Pudl., 4/28.

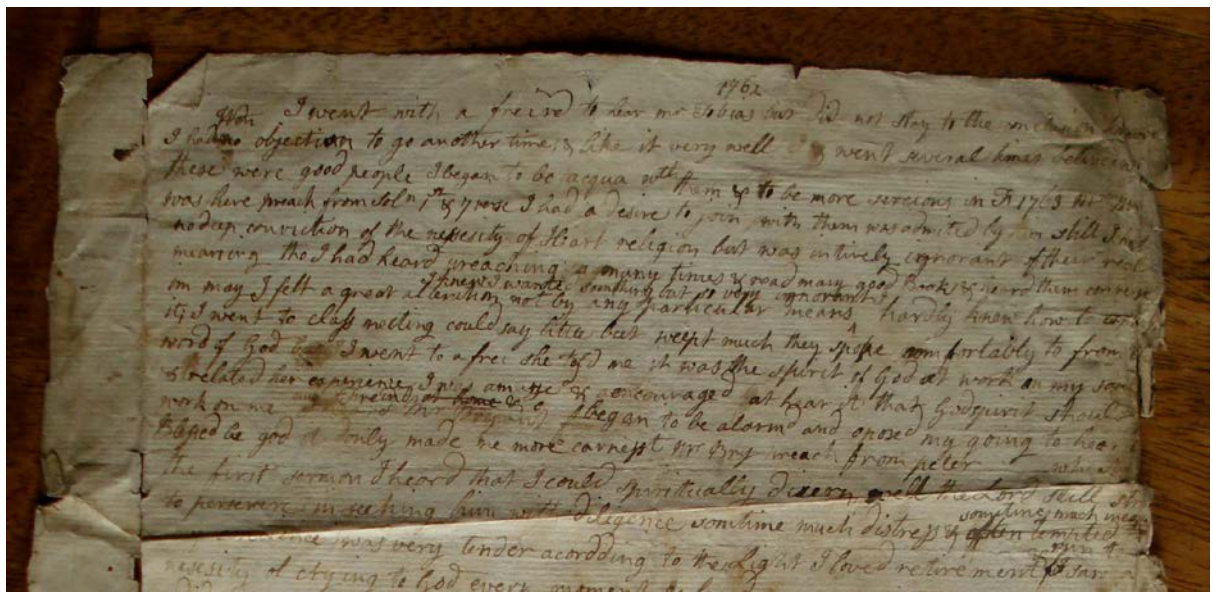


Figure 3: First account of Ann Bolton's conversion experience¹³²

The vast majority of Bolton's manuscripts—including her diary, many of her letters, and some miscellaneous documents—remain in private hands.¹³³ Other correspondence, both to and from Bolton, is preserved at the John Rylands Library in Manchester.¹³⁴ Additional letters are scattered singly throughout Britain and beyond.¹³⁵ My emphasis on the use of women's personal writings within spiritual communities led me to additional papers, including the correspondence of the Ward family (Bolton's friends living at Oxhill, Warwickshire), which is archived at Warwickshire Record

¹³² Pudl., 4/28.

¹³³ Vanessa, Lady Bolton, of Pudlicote, Oxfordshire, is in possession of most of Bolton's personal papers. Anne Bolton Logue, of London, owns additional correspondence. And Nancy Rycroft, of Stainland, Yorkshire, has in her possession related manuscripts, including the diary of Elizabeth Bolton, written in the next generation. For details see Bibliography.

¹³⁴ JRL, MA 1977.610.33, MAM FL 2/1/15–2/1/16, MAM JW 1.66–1.71 and 1.73–1.99, MAW Ms 296–297.

¹³⁵ For locations of others of Wesley's letters to Bolton, see the late Frank Baker's inventory, now kept at Duke Divinity School in Durham, North Carolina. Baker began the ongoing project of editing Wesley's letters; the first two volumes, covering 1721 through 1755, have been published to date. John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, ed. Frank Baker, vol. 25: Letters I, 1721–1739 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980); John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, ed. Frank Baker, vol. 26: Letters II, 1740–1755 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982).

Office.¹³⁶ The majority of Bolton's personal papers and the related manuscripts mentioned here have been used minimally or not at all, and never collectively.

Amongst Methodist historians, Bolton is well known as a long-term correspondent of John Wesley. In fact, at 116 letters, there are more letters extant from Wesley to Bolton than to any other of his correspondents; thirty-one of these letters, which are used in this thesis, remain in private hands.¹³⁷ Yet since she is typically mentioned only with reference to Wesley, she has not been the subject of significant analysis in her own right. Maldwyn Edwards, in *My Dear Sister: The Story of John Wesley and the Women in His Life* (1980), includes a chapter on 'the dependable Ann'.¹³⁸ John Banks's longer work is titled '*Nancy Nancy*' (1984), an allusion to Wesley's affectionate address in his letters to her.¹³⁹ In most works on Methodism she is referred to only in passing. This is partly because her life did not conform to the narratives of female empowerment that have long dominated Methodist women's historiography, with its emphasis on preaching. But it is also due to the lack of access to her personal papers, the majority of which are used here for the first time. Bolton's personal papers are substantial and provide significant opportunity for fresh appraisals of the literary cultures, social interactions, and spiritual lives of Methodist women.

Structure

The structure of this thesis is shaped by my overarching argument that women used informal literary interactions within personal relationships to stimulate religious belief in

¹³⁶ WRO, Ward Family Papers.

¹³⁷ Pudl., 4/7; one letter is owned by Michael Davies, a member of the extended Bolton family (for a copy, see Stain.).

¹³⁸ Edwards, *My Dear Sister*, 100-114.

¹³⁹ John Banks, '*Nancy Nancy*': *The Story of Ann Bolton, the Friend and Confidante of John Wesley, from Her Unpublished Journal and Letters She Kept* (Leeds: Penwork, 1984).

others, and that their writings continued to have spiritual effect within religious communities after the death of their authors. Chapters Two through Four follow a parallel format: each chapter combines an examination of a particularly significant relationship, a mode of literary interaction, and a spiritual theme, thus asking questions about *who* participated in the literary interaction under consideration, *how* that encounter proceeded, and *what* they discussed and believed. The spiritual themes chosen—resignation, spiritual assurance, and holy living—enable me to draw out denominational distinctions in belief while also demonstrating that different religious cultures engaged common ideas, though in distinct ways. Analysing such themes across a denominational spectrum allows for a more nuanced understanding of eighteenth-century English religion than possible when considering denominations in isolation.

Chapter Two explores the theme of spiritual friendship. It focuses on literary interactions between peers, asking how women used letters, diaries, and poetry to encourage each other in their spiritual lives. While scholarship on women's spiritual friendship has tended to focus on the capacity of friendship to facilitate public activity, my focus is more internal: I analyse the manner in which friendship enabled a deepening of personal commitment to religious communities and a clarification of spiritual identities. I frame my discussion of spiritual friendship under three subthemes: I highlight sibling and friendship relationships, probing the flexible and overlapping boundaries between such relationships; I ask how religious women conceived of their literary interactions as conversation, and give particular attention to poetic exchange as a mode of literary interaction; and I focus on resignation, a common religious theme in the period, though one with different resonances and meanings, as a way of beginning to draw out denominational distinctions and to identify commonalities between religious cultures.

Chapter Three explores the hidden ways in which women acted as spiritual elders in religious communities. It is concerned with literary interactions across generations and focuses on the relationships of women with those they considered to be more advanced in the spiritual life, and to whom they turned in their efforts to develop a more mature faith. I ask how women were mentored through the exchange of letters, diaries, and poetry, and discuss how those mentorship relationships were purposefully sought out and nurtured. The chapter explores the idea of spiritual fatherhood and motherhood, relationships that often were formed outside the nuclear family and frequently at a distance, thus relying on travel and the post to facilitate connection. The discussion is organised around three subthemes: I analyse women's relationships with parents and elders, and give special focus to the constructive, and overlooked, contributions of older women in religious cultures; I explore the practice of spiritual direction as it was performed through correspondence in particular; and I discuss the varied meanings of spiritual assurance within different denominational and cultural contexts.

Chapter Four analyses the extensive and often hidden efforts to communicate religious ideals and ideas to much-loved children. It thus also focuses on inter-generational relationships, asking how women used letters, diaries, and poetry to model religious belief, expression, and practice to children. Again pressing beyond the boundaries of nuclear families, the chapter examines how women thought of younger friends and more distant family members as their spiritual children, and argues that women's instruction through personal writings played an important role in the transmission of faith to a younger generation. The discussion is organised around three subthemes: I highlight the significant and often hidden contributions of single women and aunts to the spiritual instruction of a younger generation; I explore how women educated

younger friends and family through manuscript cultures, giving particular attention to religious training through diaries; and I discuss the theme of holy living, especially with regard to the use of time and the establishment of daily routines, as I continue to explore denominational distinctiveness and commonalities.

Chapter Five extends the discussion beyond contemporary relationships to ask how women's manuscripts functioned as spiritual legacies within religious communities after their authors had died. In writing to others about their faith, women were not only working out contemporary religious identities, personally and communally, but were producing a textual record of their theological ideas and spiritual experience that was preserved. In some instances, authors intentionally and self-consciously bequeathed manuscripts to family members with expressed hopes that their personal writings would bear spiritual fruit in the lives of others. In others, manuscripts were preserved in domestic archives and became the subject of reflection in later manuscripts, thus producing a complex generational layering of religious writing. Such manuscripts became a collage of a group's religious identity over generations. More than personal memory, women's arguably 'private' writings also acted in important ways as communal memory, guiding and shaping religious communities long after death.

This is not an account of women overcoming social or religious constraints to engage public fields of education or philanthropy, nor of women nobly performing often overlooked roles within the home. Rather, it offers fresh perspective on the presence and participation of women in religious cultures by attending closely to their activities as writers within close, personal relationships. Motivated by deep faith, love for others, and a powerful impulse to write, Catherine Talbot, Anne Steele, and Ann Bolton performed personal and communal acts of devotion when they put pen to paper. An analysis of

women's manuscript cultures across denominations shows women actively involved in processes of self-examination and self-expression by which they, in effect, wrote themselves. Yet it also demonstrates their vital and neglected activities in writing religious communities.

Chapter 2

‘To do my soul good by religious conversation’:

The Encouragement of Spiritual Friends

...will you not favor me with a visit this summer I think you could not come at a time when I more need the conversation and advice of a spiritual friend...¹⁴⁰

When Nancy Overbury (*fl.* 1800) wrote to her friend Mary Whitaker (1773–1800) late in the century and invited her to visit her at Tetbury, Gloucestershire, she felt in need of spiritual support. Overbury was born into a family with a long history in the Baptist church: in 1750 Nathaniel Overbury had been minister in the Baptist church at Tetbury, the family had been key contributors to the building of a new chapel in 1779, and they continued to worship there.¹⁴¹ Nancy Overbury looked particularly to her aunt Hannah for religious guidance, but Overbury wrote that a family dispute had prompted her father to ‘la[y] his commands’ on her ‘not to visit her [aunt] lest she should prejudice my mind’.¹⁴² Overbury continued to attend the Baptist church with her father, but she felt the ‘great loss’ of her aunt’s spiritual influence ‘very soberly’. This was the context in which she wrote to Whitaker, a member of another longstanding Baptist family at Bratton, Wiltshire, to suggest a visit during which they might speak on spiritual subjects. Whitaker was unable to travel the thirty miles to Tetbury, and so the two young women devised an

¹⁴⁰ Nancy Overbury to Mary Whitaker, undated, but late eighteenth century. Bodl., Reeves Collection 22/6.

¹⁴¹ Arthur S. Langley, ‘Baptist Ministers in England About 1750 A. D.,’ *Transactions of the Baptist Historical Society* 6, no. 2 (1918): 148; A. P. Baggs, A. R. J. Jurica, and W. J. Shells, ‘Tetbury: Protestant Nonconformity,’ *British History Online*, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=19149&strquery=tetbury> (accessed 12 July 2013); ‘Early Life of the Late Mr. Thomas Burchell,’ *Primitive Church Magazine*, no. 68 (1849): 234.

¹⁴² Nancy Overbury to Mary Whitaker, undated, but late eighteenth century. Bodl., Reeves Collection 22/6.

intentional and regular correspondence in which they encouraged each other to live thoughtful and serious religious lives. Overbury later wrote:

With great pleasure I begin a correspondence with my dear Miss Whitaker and oh may it be for our mutual edification may the blessed spirit of all grace direct us to write only such things as shall tend to quicken each other that we may run the way of Religion with greater vigour and delight...¹⁴³

This chapter analyses the rich variety of spiritual friendship enacted within intra-generational relationships and asks how women within a peer group, such as Nancy Overbury and Mary Whitaker, used letters, diaries, and other personal writings to learn religious belief and life together. While historians have observed the importance of women's friendship in supporting public activity, including religious activity, friends also played important and underacknowledged roles in supporting a more personal, interior faith. Taking a broad view of such friendships, this chapter notes especially the porous relational boundaries between friends and siblings, and observes the possibilities for spiritual friendship between women as well as between women and men. It focuses in particular on the mutuality of such relationships (Overbury's 'mutual edification') and considers literary interactions as 'conversation', a term that highlights the personal and interactive nature of such encounters. Friends often turned to each other during distressing circumstances, when various cultural voices urged their resignation to illness or death. More than a cultural trope, resignation was a religious directive and is here analysed as a subject of conversation between spiritual friends of various denominational commitments. When analysed as acts of spiritual friendship, women's literary interactions illuminate one of the hidden ways in which women constituted religious communities, for these informal literary encounters helped women not only to think

¹⁴³ Nancy Overbury to Mary Whitaker, undated (6 November), but late eighteenth century. Bodl., Reeves Collection 22/6.

through religious ideas and personal faith commitments, but to articulate what they believed and so guide friends' responses to suffering within diverse religious communities.

Friends and Siblings

Varieties of spiritual friendship

In 1773, when Anne Steele was ill and confined to her room in Broughton, Hampshire, her niece Mary, then twenty years old, attended her with great concern. Mary Steele (1753–1813) was distressed by her much-loved aunt's illness and felt powerless to help. In a poem addressed to her friend Jane Attwater (1753–1843) she wrote sadly of how she bent 'hopeless o'er the Bed of pain'.¹⁴⁴ She hoped that Attwater would help her to respond with resignation, that 'Heavenly Guest' with its power to 'soothe the Sorrows of the human Breast'. She wrote:

...teach my woe worn Mind
These Heaven-descended Visitants to find
Teach me that happy calm thy Bosome knows
That views with equal Eye Life's Joys & Woes...
With friendly aim direct my erring Mind
To soar with Thee to pleasures all refine...

Having written her poem, Mary Steele signed and addressed it, and sent it to Attwater, who lived fifteen miles distant at Bodenham, near Salisbury. Attwater's response came in a long and sympathetic letter, dense with religious advice and interspersed with poetry:

For you my friend the ardent pray'r shall rise
May heaven indulgent hear a suppliant's cries¹⁴⁵

Members of the same extended Baptist family since they were born within weeks of each other in 1753, Jane Attwater and Mary Steele were also dearest friends. Their literary

¹⁴⁴ Mary Steele, 'To Myrtilla 1773'. AL, STE 5/5/iv.

¹⁴⁵ Jane Attwater to Mary Steele, 5 May 1773. AL, Attwater Papers, acc. 76, II.B.2(b).

interaction on this occasion indicates how their familial and affectionate relationship was also a spiritual friendship, as they helped each other respond to anxiety and grief with appropriate religious perspective. It also suggests the complexities and varieties of such friendship, wherein diverse forms of sociability were often interwoven.

As mentioned, historians and literary scholars have tended to interpret the significance of women's friendship in terms of support for public activities.¹⁴⁶ Thus in her study of the bluestocking circle, Sylvia Harcstark Myers credits women's friendships with providing the 'supporting structure' necessary for intellectual women to live a 'life of the mind'.¹⁴⁷ A comparable trend can be observed in studies of religious women's friendships: Sandra Stanley Holton shows how friendship provided the psychological support necessary to Quaker women embarking on unconventional paths, such as political engagement;¹⁴⁸ Sheila Wright argues that friendship supplied Quaker women ministers with emotional support not supplied by their husbands;¹⁴⁹ Phyllis Mack attributes the capacity of the Methodist Mary Fletcher to manage an orphanage and home for impoverished women to her friendship with Sarah Ryan;¹⁵⁰ and Sarah Prescott

¹⁴⁶ There is an extensive literature on women's friendships in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. See, for example, Smith-Rosenberg, 'Female World of Love and Ritual,' 1-29; Lillian Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love between Women from the Renaissance to the Present* (New York: Morrow, 1981); Irene Q. Brown, 'Domesticity, Feminism, and Friendship: Female Aristocratic Culture and Marriage in England, 1660-1760,' *Journal of Family History* 7 (1982): 416-424; Stuart Curran, 'Dynamics of Female Friendship in the Later Eighteenth Century,' *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 23, no. 2 (2001): 221-240; Patricia Crawford, 'Friendship and Love between Women in Early Modern England,' in *Venus and Mars: Engendering Love and War in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. A. Lynch and P. Madder (Perth: University of Western Australia Press, 1995), 47-61; Heather King, "'Nay, Then 'Tis Past Jest": Piety and Female Friendship in Catharine Trotter's *Love at a Loss*,' in *The Pious Sex: Essays on Women and Religion in the History of Political Thought*, ed. Andrea Radasanu (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010), 127-148. On eighteenth-century friendship more broadly, see Naomi Tadmor, *Family and Friends in Eighteenth-Century England: Household, Kinship, and Patronage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

¹⁴⁷ Myers, *Bluestocking Circle*, 2.

¹⁴⁸ Holton, 'Kinship and Friendship,' 365-384.

¹⁴⁹ Wright, "'Every Good Woman Needs a Companion of Her Own Sex'," 89-104.

¹⁵⁰ Mack, *Heart Religion in the British Enlightenment*, 157-163. On Fletcher and Ryan's collaborative friendship, see also Joanna Cruickshank, "'Friend of My Soul": Constructing Spiritual Friendship in the Autobiography of Mary Fletcher,' *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 32, no. 3 (2009): 373-387.

demonstrates how friendship enabled religious women's intellectual engagement and sometimes facilitated publication.¹⁵¹ Notwithstanding the importance of female encouragement in supporting women in these ways, here friendship is examined in terms of its encouragement of religious belief and interiority.

Spiritual friendship had a plurality of meanings that spanned religious affiliation, social alliance, and affectionate ties. This is quickly apparent in Methodist life writings, which refer to some friends as those provided through formal religious structures and to others as those chosen personally. Historians of Methodism have tended to emphasise the first kind of friendship, interpreting Methodist sociability in terms of its official connectional polity. John Wigger thus refers to the 'social principle' that undergirded Methodism's elaborate ecclesiological structure, and David Lowes Watson describes bands and classes as mutually supportive of 'intimate fellowship' and 'spiritual growth'.¹⁵² Membership in bands and classes provided a sense of belonging to a community drawn together by common beliefs and experiences and supported by formalised affiliations that encouraged openness and honesty, and these official Methodist connections were frequently expressed in terms of friendship. Thus Ann Bolton often referred to those Methodists with whom she had official connection as friends, as in, 'a friend of our Society' or 'in meeting my band I had sweet fellowship with my friends'.¹⁵³ Or again, when she met for prayer and conversation with her 'Friend

¹⁵¹ Sarah Prescott, 'Provincial Networks, Dissenting Connections, and Noble Friends: Elizabeth Singer Rowe and Female Authorship in Early Eighteenth-Century England,' *Eighteenth-Century Life* 25, no. 1 (2001): 29-42.

¹⁵² John H. Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm: Methodism and the Rise of Popular Christianity in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 80-103; David Lowes Watson, 'Methodist Spirituality,' in *Protestant Spiritual Traditions*, ed. Frank C. Senn (New York: Paulist Press, 1986), 226-227. See also Mack, *Heart Religion in the British Enlightenment*, 135, 151; Hempton, *Methodism*, 78.

¹⁵³ Ann Bolton diary, 11 December 1783. Pudl., 3/3. Ann Bolton diary, 15 February 1784. Pudl., 3/4.

M^{rs} Robinson' in 1777, she wrote in her diary, 'Our Souls seem'd sweetly knit together in the bond of unity & love.'¹⁵⁴

Opposition from those outside the Methodist community enhanced such intimacy. Many early Methodists faced tensions within their natal families and so turned for understanding and acceptance to fellow Methodists.¹⁵⁵ This was certainly the experience of Bolton who, after converting to Methodism in 1763, wrote that her 'enemies' (whom she identified as 'my neibours...my parants...my relation & acquaintance') were 'very powerfull' in pressuring her to abandon Methodism.¹⁵⁶ She found comfort and acceptance in the Witney Methodist Society.¹⁵⁷ Such opposition to Methodist beliefs was felt beyond home and family. Feared as religious 'enthusiasts' who threatened political, religious, and social stability, Methodists experienced prejudice from mobs attacking itinerant preachers, in popular prints satirising Methodist 'enthusiasm', and through verbal and physical assaults made on individuals.¹⁵⁸ In 1771 Bolton wrote to Sukey Smith, recounting the story of a young woman in her band who was accosted by a man who used 'abusive language swearing she was a Methodist & y^t he would kill her'.¹⁵⁹ He pulled a weapon from his coat and moved to stab her, but the position of her stays prevented the knife from entering and the woman escaped with her life and a beating that left her 'exceedingly black for some time'.¹⁶⁰ Under such circumstances, Methodists would understandably be drawn together.

¹⁵⁴ Ann Bolton diary, 7 July 1777. Pudl., 2/8.

¹⁵⁵ Malmgreen, 'Domestic Discords,' 55-70; Lawrence, *One Family under God*, Ch. 2: 'Loosening the Bonds of Family and Society'.

¹⁵⁶ Ann Bolton, 'Second account of Ann Bolton's conversion experience'. Pudl., 2/1.

¹⁵⁷ Ann Bolton, 'Second account of Ann Bolton's conversion experience'. Pudl., 2/1.

¹⁵⁸ Hempton, *Methodism*, 86-108; John Walsh, 'Methodism and the Mob in the Eighteenth Century,' *Studies in Church History* 8 (1972): 213-227. For an example of satire in print, see William Hogarth's 'Credulity, Superstition and Fanaticism' (1762).

¹⁵⁹ Ann Bolton to Sukey Smith, November 1771. Pudl., 4/2/1.

¹⁶⁰ Ann Bolton to Sukey Smith, November 1771. Pudl., 4/2/1.

From her conversion, Bolton participated faithfully in her local Methodist society and its attendant bands and classes, yet it is clear that her band and class did not meet her need for religious friendship. In fact, formal relationships of this kind were sometimes strained. In late 1782 she wrote in her diary that ‘one that I meet wth in Class much tried my humility & love’, and by early 1783 she was troubled by ongoing friction with Mrs Endol, with whom she co-led a class.¹⁶¹ She wrote in her diary, ‘I needed more of that Love that bears all Things...and more of that true genuine Humility that lays the Soul at the Feet of every one’.¹⁶² Such frustration with their relationship was not only personal, for she was concerned that the difficult relationship between her and Endol would harm those under their care: she did not wish to ‘hurt...any feeble Lamb I earnestly wish tenderly to lead’.¹⁶³ Nearly a year later things were unimproved, and she continued to pray that their ‘union in spirit & in our Lords work might be perfected’.¹⁶⁴

While religious ‘friends’ were supplied through her membership in the Witney Methodist Society, Bolton felt the lack of a particular, chosen friend. She wanted a friend who was empathetic, spiritually mature, and with whom she could converse honestly about her religious desires. In May 1784 she wrote in her diary, ‘Oft have I look’d about to see if help cou’d be obtaind out of God, to see what friend cou’d advise or counsel but none appear’d suitable for my case – if I did attempt to speak to any I soon found an insufficiency in them so I was constraind to go simply unto the Lord’.¹⁶⁵ The next day she continued, ‘I want a suitable companion, to whom I cou’d unbosom all my troubles’.¹⁶⁶ She expressed this deep desire in a letter to John Wesley (1703–91): ‘It is true, “a friend

¹⁶¹ Ann Bolton diary, 19 December 1782. Pudl., 2/28/6.

¹⁶² Ann Bolton diary, 9 January 1783. Pudl., 3/1.

¹⁶³ Ann Bolton diary, 10 January 1783. Pudl., 3/1.

¹⁶⁴ Ann Bolton diary, 22 November 1783. Pudl., 3/3.

¹⁶⁵ Ann Bolton diary, 4 May 1784. Pudl., 3/4.

¹⁶⁶ Ann Bolton diary, 5 May 1784. Pudl., 3/4.

is born for adversity,” but a suitable one is not all ways at hand, for though I have *much* union with the dear children of God here, yet I seem sometimes to be called to beat the trackless path, and follow him, “who drank the bitter cup, the wine-press trod alone.”¹⁶⁷ Unconvinced that Bolton’s social and spiritual needs could not be met by her participation in the Witney society, he responded, ‘I wonder you do not find one person that knows how to sympathize with you. Surely there must be some such in the Society at Witney.’ He thought her lack of a particular friend might be due to a lack of prayer for such a friend, and so he advised her ‘to make it a matter of earnest prayer; and certainly God will give you a friend’.¹⁶⁸ Yet Bolton remained dissatisfied with the possibilities for friendship in her class and band, and six months later Wesley wrote of her ongoing disappointments with ‘bosom-Friends’ living nearby.¹⁶⁹ As we shall see, the support she most needed from peers was found, on the one hand, in a brother who also converted and was thus both biological and spiritual sibling and, on the other, from Methodist friends living outside her local circumstances and with whom she interacted predominantly through correspondence.

While Bolton’s experience introduces the varieties of spiritual friendship that women experienced, Catherine Talbot’s experience illustrates how spiritual friendship sometimes blended with other forms of sociability. Talbot’s friendship with poet and classical scholar Elizabeth Carter (1717–1806) provided valuable stimulation and support to women attempting to pursue intellectual lives in the eighteenth century. In fact, Sylvia

¹⁶⁷ Ann Bolton to John Wesley, 22 June 1784. *AM* 14 (November 1791): 589. See also draft letter, Pudl., 4/7/24. Cf. Proverbs 17.17; ‘Hymn XXI’, John Wesley, *Hymns on the Lord’s Supper* (Bristol: Printed by Felix Farley, 1745), 16. In this letter, Bolton refers to reading Catherine Talbot’s essay on ‘accommodableness’. See Catherine Talbot, *Essays on Various Subjects* (London: Printed for John and Francis Rivington, 1772), 25-34.

¹⁶⁸ John Wesley to Ann Bolton, 28 June 1784. John Telford, ed., *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley*, 8 vols. (London: Epworth Press, 1931), 7:223-224.

¹⁶⁹ John Wesley to Ann Bolton, 24 December 1784. ‘Letters of John Wesley at Charterhouse,’ *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* 26 (1947): 36.

Harcstark Myers describes it as critical in enabling Carter's translation and publication of *All the Works of Epictetus* (1758).¹⁷⁰ Yet their friendship also nurtured their mutual efforts to live serious religious lives. This aspect of their friendship has been neglected, since Anglican women's spiritual concerns have often been eclipsed by scholarly interest in their writing activities, even as they are obscured by practices of polite sociability. While intellectual and polite, Talbot and Carter's friendship was also a spiritual friendship, providing a critical space within which they could discuss their religious lives.

Talbot and Carter met in 1741, when Talbot was not quite twenty years old and Carter was twenty-three, and the manner of their meeting illustrates how the formation of some spiritual friendships was regulated by social protocol and etiquette. For several years Carter had wanted to meet Talbot, who had a reputation in London as a pious and learned young woman, and Carter sought out her friendship with some determination. In a letter to her friend Hannah Underdown (*fl.* 1738, *d.* 1783), Carter wrote of her 'very restless & impatient pursuit of a young Lady whom I have been in Quest of for these 2 or 3 years'.¹⁷¹ Carter relayed her pursuit of Talbot over the course of several letters, concluding that the 'whole Affair' was 'a perfect Romance'.¹⁷² Their eventual meeting took place inside St James's Church, Piccadilly, at the centre of fashionable Anglicanism

¹⁷⁰ Myers, *Bluestocking Circle*, 157-176. For similar readings of Talbot and Carter's friendship, see Afag S. Fazlollahi, 'Elizabeth Carter's Legacy: Friendship and Ethics' (PhD thesis, Georgia State University, 2011), 92-128; Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace, 'Two Anomalous Women: Elizabeth Carter and Catherine Talbot,' in *Eighteenth-Century Women and the Arts*, ed. Frederick M. Keener and Susan E. Lorsch (New York: Greenwood, 1988), 19-27.

¹⁷¹ Elizabeth Carter to Hannah Underdown, [December] 1740. Gwen Hampshire, ed., *Elizabeth Carter, 1717-1806: An Edition of Some Unpublished Letters* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005), 100.

¹⁷² Elizabeth Carter to Hannah Underdown, 3 January 1741. *Ibid.*, 102. On the notion of 'romantic friendship' between women, see Curran, 'Dynamics of Female Friendship in the Later Eighteenth Century,' 221-240; Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men*; Elizabeth Mavor, *Ladies of Llangollen: A Study in Romantic Friendship* (Hammondsworth: Penguin, 1971).

in London, and involved an elaborate performance involving fans.¹⁷³ On arriving at church, Carter appealed to the vergers to seat her in the pew next to Talbot, and though they did not speak nor even look at one another directly, Carter recorded that ‘by something wrote on my Fan we had a perfect Knowledge of each other’.¹⁷⁴ The next Sunday the performance resumed. Earlier in the week Talbot had, through a friend, sent Carter an ‘enigmatical Line’, which Carter transposed to her fan, adding two lines of her own.¹⁷⁵ She carried the fan with its message to church, but whether through reserve or observance of some social code, she could not bring herself to speak nor deliver her hidden message. The impasse was overcome when Talbot dropped *her* fan into Carter’s pew, and when Carter retrieved it they spoke with each other at last. Carter would not reveal Talbot’s identity to Underdown, though she did send to her a ‘puzzle’ that concealed Talbot’s name—perhaps similar to the ‘enigma’ (see Figure 4), written by Carter, which mingles the letters of her and Talbot’s names, a material indication of Carter’s attachment to her. The verse below reads:

Oh! may our social Thoughts united joyn
Close as our Names in this expressive Line¹⁷⁶

Carter and Talbot’s meeting was formal and ritualised, regulated by social convention, though at the same time it was suffused with emotion and rich with potential for more serious and personal dialogue.

¹⁷³ On the capacity of fans to express emotion and to be imbued with affection, see Susan M. Stabile, *Memory’s Daughters: The Material Culture of Remembrance in Eighteenth-Century America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 155-163.

¹⁷⁴ Elizabeth Carter to Hannah Underdown, [December] 1740. Hampshire, ed., *Elizabeth Carter, 1717-1806*, 100.

¹⁷⁵ Elizabeth Carter to Hannah Underdown, 3 January 1741. *Ibid.*, 102. The intervening friend was Thomas Wright. See Wright and Carter’s letters of 14 January 1741 and 28 January 1741. Pennington, ed., *Letters between Carter and Talbot*, 1:1-4.

¹⁷⁶ Bodl., Add. C 243, f. 399.

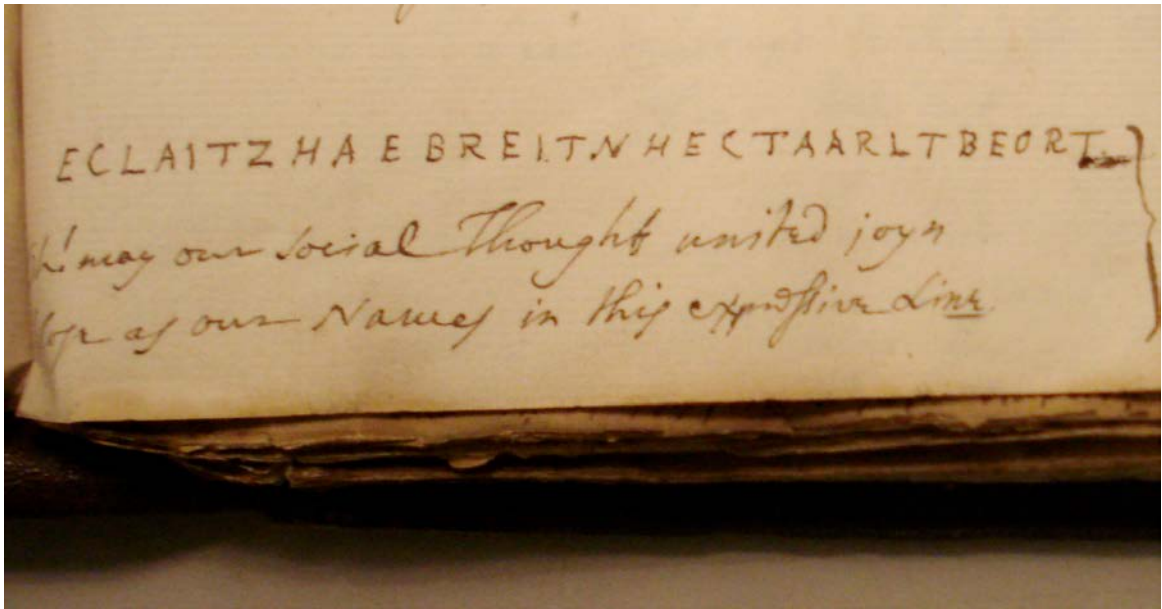


Figure 4: Elizabeth Carter's 'enigma'¹⁷⁷

As Talbot and Carter's friendship had its origins inside St James's, Piccadilly, so it developed within the Anglican Church more broadly, and as propriety controlled the manner of their meeting, so social prescription and politeness shaped their developing friendship. Talbot and Carter passed their lives in markedly different circumstances. Carter spent much of her life in Deal, Kent, concerned, as she wrote, 'with my books, and half a dozen friends'; there she was relieved of the social expectations and perceived artifices associated with fashionable social gatherings in London.¹⁷⁸ Talbot moved in a more formal social world where polite codes of behaviour and discourse might inhibit serious conversation on spiritual subjects, lest religion prove disagreeable or potentially divisive.¹⁷⁹ By the time she was in her thirties, such conventions proved constraining and

¹⁷⁷ Bodl., Add. C 243, f. 399.

¹⁷⁸ Elizabeth Carter to Catherine Talbot, 5 July 1746. Pennington, ed., *Letters between Carter and Talbot*, 1:155.

¹⁷⁹ Jon Mee, *Conversable Worlds: Literature, Contention, and Community 1762 to 1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 11-12. See also Lawrence E. Klein, 'Politeness and the Interpretation of the British Eighteenth Century,' *Historical Journal* 45 (2002): 874.

frustrating to Talbot, who had become increasingly earnest and wished to discuss her religious beliefs and practice more openly. In 1756 she complained to Carter, 'I have no patience with the false politeness of the world which banishes every subject that is interesting and delightful, if it bears but the name of seriousness'.¹⁸⁰ Feeling that she could not speak of what concerned her most, especially in the larger social gatherings in which she often found herself, Talbot picked up her pen. She wrote to Carter, 'I take the unconscionable liberty of writing to you who do *not* need it, what I dare not speak in polite companies that *do*'.¹⁸¹ As we shall see, their correspondence filled a spiritual need for Talbot, providing a context within which she could reflect honestly on her interior life within the context of personal friendship.

Women's spiritual friendships thus exhibited greater variety and complexity than previously has been observed. Yet such diverse representations of spiritual friends had a common religious impulse: these friends desired to seek God together, and to be encouraged and supported in their efforts to live serious religious lives. Before turning to the ways in which informal literary interactions nurtured such efforts, a further complexity is introduced: siblings could be spiritual friends, and friends could act as siblings.

Siblings in religious cultures

As Jane Attwater and Mary Steele reminded us at the beginning of the previous section, spiritual friendship and affective kinship could overlap. This section argues that the boundaries between friend and sibling were porous and that siblings shaped religious life

¹⁸⁰ Catherine Talbot to Elizabeth Carter, 24 February 1756. Pennington, ed., *Letters between Carter and Talbot*, 2:218. See also Elizabeth Carter to Catherine Talbot, 13 March 1756. *Ibid.*, 2:224.

¹⁸¹ Catherine Talbot to Elizabeth Carter, 24 February 1756. *Ibid.*, 2:218.

in ways that have not been sufficiently recognised. In studies of the family, an historiographical bias toward vertical parent-child and husband-wife relationships has tended to obscure the significance of horizontal sibling relationships, though recent moves have been made to correct this neglect. Scholars such as Leonore Davidoff, Amy Harris, and Sandra Stanley Holton have shown how sibling connections—which Davidoff designates ‘life’s longest relationship’—were active in shaping the personal, economic, and political lives of women and men.¹⁸² Such studies of literal siblinghood have not been primarily concerned with religion, while studies of siblings within religious contexts have tended to interpret siblingship as a metaphorical relationship. Thus Patricia Crawford notes how monks and nuns and some members of separatist churches were known as ‘brothers’ and ‘sisters’.¹⁸³ And indeed Bolton employed such familial language for fellow Methodists: so Patty Chapman was ‘Sister Chapman’ and John Taylor was ‘Brother Taylor’.¹⁸⁴ Rather than considering siblings in either strictly literal or strictly metaphorical terms, this section demonstrates how the significance of siblings is magnified and complicated when spiritual ties are recognised as interwoven with familial and affectionate ties.

The fluid boundaries between friend and sibling are seen particularly clearly in Catherine Talbot’s social circle. Talbot had no biological siblings, yet circumstance, personal affection, and common intellectual and religious ideals meant that particular friends acted as pseudo-siblings in her life. The peer who knew Talbot most intimately

¹⁸² Leonore Davidoff, *Thicker Than Water: Siblings and Their Relations, 1780-1920* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 2; Amy Harris, ‘That Fierce Edge: Sibling Conflict and Politics in Georgian England,’ *Journal of Family History* 37, no. 2 (2012): 155-174; Amy Harris, “‘This I Beg My Aunt May Not Know’: Young Letter-Writers in Eighteenth-Century England, Peer Correspondence in a Hierarchical World,’ *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 2, no. 3 (2009): 333-360; Holton, *Quaker Women*.

¹⁸³ Patricia Crawford, *Blood, Bodies and Families in Early Modern England* (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2004), 214. See also Davidoff, *Thicker Than Water*, 35; Naomi J. Miller and Naomi Yavneh, eds., *Sibling Relations and Gender in the Early Modern World: Sisters, Brothers and Others* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006).

¹⁸⁴ Ann Bolton diary, 23 December 1770. Pudl., 2/2. Ann Bolton diary, 6 June 1779. Pudl., 2/11.

from her childhood years was Jemima Campbell (later Yorke) (1722–97). From 1733 Thomas Secker (1693–1768), with whom Talbot lived, was rector of St James’s, Piccadilly, and Campbell lived nearby in St James’s Square where her grandfather, the Duke of Kent, had established her in a household after the death of her parents.¹⁸⁵ The duke’s primary residence was at Wrest in Bedfordshire, and when separated from his granddaughter he asked Secker to look in on her.¹⁸⁶ This Secker did, in letters styling himself Campbell’s ‘loving Guardian’.¹⁸⁷ Living within a short walk of each other in St James’s Square and both cared for by the Seckers, Talbot and Campbell—in 1733 aged twelve and eleven, respectively—grew up as something like siblings. When they were separated from each other they wrote letters, and these letters record the girls’ growing affection as well as their shared reading, a practice they later associated with their early bond.¹⁸⁸ Recalling their long relationship in 1751, Talbot expressed gratitude for those ‘Who have travelled thro Life sometimes in the same Path forming their Likeness together’.¹⁸⁹ She wrote that her friendship with Campbell ‘unies vois & moi doucement depuis tant d’années’, in much the same way that a sibling might.¹⁹⁰

Talbot explicitly employed familial language to denote ties of affection, with Campbell and others. Familial affection was not bound to biological connections. As an adult, while most often she addressed Elizabeth Carter as ‘my dear Miss Carter’, she also

¹⁸⁵ This household included her aunt Mary Grey, just three years older than Campbell, and a housekeeper, Mrs Gregory. Joyce Godber, *The Marchioness Grey of Wrest Park* (Bedford: Bedfordshire Historical Society, 1968), 12. See further p. 210.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 13–14; Myers, *Bluestocking Circle*, 65; Ingram, *Religion, Reform and Modernity in the Eighteenth Century*, 63–64.

¹⁸⁷ Thomas Secker to Jemima Campbell, undated (but after 1737). BLARS, L 30/9/84/2.

¹⁸⁸ For example, Jemima Campbell to Catherine Talbot, September 1741. BLARS, L 30/9a/3, ff. 75–76. On the capacity of letter writing and shared reading to enhance intimacy between intellectually-inclined women (including Talbot and Campbell), see Hannan, ‘Women, Letter Writing and the Life of the Mind in England’, Ch. 8: ‘Letter-Writing as Education and Aspiration’.

¹⁸⁹ Catherine Talbot diary, 10 June 1751. BL, Add. 46690.

¹⁹⁰ It ‘unites you & me gently for so many years’. Catherine Talbot diary, 5 May 1751. BL, Add. 46690.

addressed her as ‘sister Betty’.¹⁹¹ Indeed, this affectionate sisterhood stimulated associated bonds within her wider family, for Carter became a second daughter to Talbot’s mother. When Talbot was visiting a friend in November 1753 and her mother was ill in London, she wrote to Carter, ‘I do think mama’s daughter Betty ought to take a post-chaise in all haste and come to town to take care of her, as she did so well last April’.¹⁹² Also in 1753 Talbot began to refer to her friend George Berkeley (1733–95) as a sibling. After observing his interactions with his sister Julia Berkeley (*bap.* 1738–*fl.* 1795), Talbot later wrote in her diary, ‘J[']ai presque Envie de le prier d’être mon Frère aussi’ and, whether or not she asked him, from then he frequently appears in her diary as ‘my brother’.¹⁹³ Likewise, author and bluestocking Elizabeth Montagu (1718–1800) laid affectionate claim to Carter’s sister Mary, writing to Carter in 1763, ‘You may show all my letters to our sister Molly, she is a part of ourselves & I am entirely yours’.¹⁹⁴ In this case, letters themselves became both the symbol and means of their intimacy. In her study of letter writing in the Atlantic world, Sarah Pearsall argues that letters had the ability to create familiarity and with it ‘fictive families’.¹⁹⁵ Pearsall interprets familiarity as ease and freedom between individuals, a mode of interacting that was both domestic and free.¹⁹⁶ While it stemmed from a family setting, she argues that it moved outward into other realms, such as the spiritual communities considered here.¹⁹⁷

Friends thus became siblings, knit into fictive families, even as siblings performed the roles of friends. Ann Bolton’s relationship with her brother Edward Bolton (1746/7–

¹⁹¹ Catherine Talbot to Elizabeth Carter, 20 May 1753. Pennington, ed., *Letters between Carter and Talbot*, 2:119.

¹⁹² Catherine Talbot to Elizabeth Carter, 12 November 1753. *Ibid.*, 2:143.

¹⁹³ ‘I almost Want to ask him to be my Brother too’. Catherine Talbot diary, 15 July 1753. BL, Add. 46690.

¹⁹⁴ Elizabeth Montagu to Elizabeth Carter, 3 [June 1761]. HL, MO 3043.

¹⁹⁵ Pearsall, *Atlantic Families*, 56.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 57.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

1818) demonstrates this porous boundary between familial and affectionate ties and, indeed, spiritual ties, for they were sister and brother as well as spiritual friends. Their relationship complicates historiographies in a number of important ways. Firstly, Methodist historiography has tended to emphasise conflict within natal families, a turning *from* the biological family who opposed conversion *to* the spiritual family found in a new community, but Ann and Edward Bolton demonstrate how such a movement is too sharply defined.¹⁹⁸ Secondly, most studies of spiritual friendship have focused on relationships between women, such that the possibility for mutual spiritual support in friendships between men and women has been neglected.¹⁹⁹ And thirdly, Ann and Edward Bolton's relationship shows spiritual and familial bonds interwoven in complex ways with more material concerns: spiritual friendship took place within the broader context of home and work.

While Ann Bolton's family responded with fear and concern when she converted to Methodism, it also became the source of enormous support.²⁰⁰ In 1763, about six months after her conversion at the age of nineteen, her younger brother Edward, then sixteen years old, also converted. Bolton recorded, 'this cause^d a fresh uneasiness in the Family, He being just become capable of asisting my Father in His Business, it was a great greif to Him to lose him, thinking he would never more be fit for any thing in this world; but to asociate with those mopish people he was now connected with'.²⁰¹ Relieved to have someone within her family with whom she shared her faith, Bolton wrote, 'we

¹⁹⁸ See footnote 155, above.

¹⁹⁹ For example, Wright, "Every Good Woman Needs a Companion of Her Own Sex", 89-104; Cruickshank, "Friend of My Soul", 373-387.

²⁰⁰ Ann Bolton, 'First account of Ann Bolton's conversion experience'. Pudl., 4/28.

²⁰¹ Ann Bolton, 'Third account of Ann Bolton's conversion experience'. Pudl., 4/29.

were now much united together helping each other on thro clouds & storms'.²⁰² Her diary records frequent conversations, the spiritual benefit she experienced signalled by the word 'profitable', as in, 'My Br & I had a profitable time in converseⁿ as we rode to Witney'.²⁰³ Her closer connection to him than to her other five siblings may have been encouraged by his closeness to her in age, but it is also attributable to their shared religious beliefs. His significance is indicated by the frequency of his appearance in her diary and by the fact that he appears throughout her diary simply as 'my brother' or more affectionately as 'my dear brother', while her other brothers appear far less often and typically as 'brother Joe' and 'brother George'.²⁰⁴ Amy Harris argues that forms of sibling address replicated hierarchy, so one might expect Edward Bolton, as eldest brother, to have been called 'brother Bolton'.²⁰⁵ Thus Ann Bolton's informal term of address is suggestive of a heightened level of intimacy between them.

Ann and Edward Bolton were drawn together by familial and spiritual ties, even as they were united by more material ties. In 1774 he rented Manor Farm at Finstock, a sizable farm with large house, then part of the Cornbury Estate owned by the Duke of Marlborough.²⁰⁶ She recorded in her diary on 23 February 1774, 'Came first to Finstock',²⁰⁷ and from that time she played a role in managing the operations and finances of Manor Farm—a significant challenge, since the farm was often in jeopardy during the 1770s and 1780s. She saw to the haymakers, attended Stow Fair on business,

²⁰² Ann Bolton, 'Third account of Ann Bolton's conversion experience'. Pudl., 4/29.

²⁰³ Ann Bolton diary, 13 August 1777. Pudl., 2/8.

²⁰⁴ For example, Ann Bolton diary, 1 July 1777. Pudl., 2/8. Ann Bolton diary, 21 January 1778. Pudl., 2/8.

²⁰⁵ Harris, 'That Fierce Edge,' 159.

²⁰⁶ Nancy M. Rycroft, 'The Boltons of Sandford, Enstone, Wootton, Witney and Finstock 1543-1950,' (unpublished work, 1992). Also, personal conversations and correspondence with Nancy Rycroft.

²⁰⁷ Ann Bolton diary, 23 February 1774. Pudl., 2/5.

and stood in for Edward Bolton in his absence.²⁰⁸ Increasingly she took the larger part in managing the farm's finances, sometimes borrowing money to keep the farm solvent, and writing that 'Much of the care of raising & paying the money in the Business' was hers.²⁰⁹ Edward Bolton relied on his sister's labour and turned to her as confidante: she wrote, 'My dear Br came over & burden'd my Soul with his troubles'.²¹⁰ In 1781 she recorded in her diary, 'what a burthen of Troubles I have borne on his [Edward's] Account these last seven Years. It has been labor & sorrow of heart, day by day.'²¹¹

For years Bolton shaped her domestic, financial, and spiritual life around her relationship with her brother more than with any other person, and his marriage in 1784 proved a poignant event, as she anticipated a shifting of relational patterns and loss of spiritual support.²¹² On the Sunday prior to her brother's wedding, Bolton went with him to the parish church at Witney and later wrote of her desire to mark the significance of his coming marriage by taking communion with him 'as the last time in his present state'.²¹³ She had long invested communion with power to communicate words of wisdom to her in particular life circumstances, and her receipt of the elements was often accompanied by an impression, vision, or word of 'promise'. On this occasion she similarly approached the sacrament expectantly. As she knelt beside her brother at the altar, she was comforted by the powerful impression of words 'spoken to my heart by y^e ever blessed spirit':

²⁰⁸ Ann Bolton diary, 26 June 1777. Pudl., 2/8. Ann Bolton diary, 24 October 1781. Pudl., 2/24/1. Ann Bolton diary, 15 July 1782. Pudl., 2/28/1.

²⁰⁹ Ann Bolton diary, 3 June 1780. Pudl., 2/19. Ann Bolton diary, 25 April 1783. Pudl., 3/2.

²¹⁰ Ann Bolton diary, 25 June 1782. Pudl., 2/27.

²¹¹ Ann Bolton diary, 15 October 1781. Pudl., 2/24.

²¹² Davidoff, *Thicker Than Water*, 136.

²¹³ Ann Bolton diary, 5 September 1784. Pudl., 3/8. As a Methodist in this period, before Methodism consolidated into an autonomous denomination, Bolton attended the Anglican Church as well as Methodist preaching houses. On Church Methodism in the period, see David R. Wilson, 'Church and Chapel: Methodism as Church Extension,' in *Religion, Gender, and Industry: Exploring Church and Methodism in a Local Setting*, ed. Geordan Hammond and Peter S. Forsaith (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2010), 53-76; Gareth Lloyd, *Charles Wesley and the Struggle for Methodist Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), passim.

‘Heaven is open to thy prayers – and all that is mine is thine’.²¹⁴ Bolton did not reflect in writing on her feelings of loss after Edward’s marriage, but she must have felt them.²¹⁵

Edward Bolton was both biological and spiritual sibling, he was both sibling and spiritual friend and after his marriage he all but disappears from her diary. In fact, her struggles to find a friend, mentioned earlier, corresponded chronologically with her brother’s marriage, suggesting that her loss of his friendship at marriage generated a significant relational and spiritual need. This need was partially met by correspondents, as we shall see in the following section.

The permeable boundary between sibling and friend observed in the close relationship between Ann and Edward Bolton is likewise apparent in Anne Steele’s relationships with her siblings. Setting these relationships alongside one another also illuminates how denomination and socioeconomic status altered patterns of spiritual friendship between siblings. The importance of kinship and friendship ties in shaping the religious life of Baptist communities has been obscured by theological and ecclesiological emphases. That is, the Calvinistic Baptist belief in election locates the power to effect salvation with God rather than human relationships, while a distinctive Baptist ecclesiology that gave priority to local churches has led historians to interpret Baptist life in terms of the ‘gathered community’ more than affectionate kinship or friendship relationships.²¹⁶ Yet the Steele family demonstrates how spiritual and familial ties were

²¹⁴ Ann Bolton diary, 5 September 1784. Pudl., 3/8. She would recollect this ‘promise’ in December 1784 in a moment of discouragement: ‘This is my Comfort I know that Heaven is open to my Prayers’, she reminded herself in her diary. Ann Bolton diary, 17 December 1784. Pudl., 3/9.

²¹⁵ Bolton had earlier mourned the loss of her sister: when Sarah Bolton married in 1770 Bolton wrote in her diary, ‘I was last night something distress about my sister being parted from me, & reflecting on her new situation in life’. Ann Bolton diary, 26 February 1770. Pudl., 2/1.

²¹⁶ The historiographical emphasis on the local church is often expressed in terms of ‘covenant theology’, whereby Baptist congregations drew up covenant agreements to govern the communal life of ‘gathered communities’. See Stephen Brachlow, ‘Life Together in Exile: The Social Bond of Separatist Ecclesiology,’ in *Pilgrim Pathways: Essays in Baptist History in Honour of B. R. White*, ed. William H.

remarkably intertwined. Finally, observing Steele's relationships with her brother further demonstrates the potential for spiritual friendship between women and men.

Anne Steele was close to both her siblings: her brother William Steele (1715–85) was two years older than her, and her half-sister Mary Steele (later Wakeford) (1724–72) was seven years her junior. When Anne was three and William five their mother died, and three years later, in 1723, their father William Steele (1689–1769) married Anne Cator (1689–1760). Mary was Anne Cator Steele's only child, and though their stepmother loved and cared for Anne and William, she seems to have regarded Mary in unique terms: in her diary Anne appears often as 'Nanny Steele' while Mary is 'my own child' and 'my only child'.²¹⁷ William and Anne's early loss, the proximity of their ages, and the configuration of the family thus drew them together. They were friends as well as siblings, and their friendship shaped their religious lives.

They joined the Baptist church together in 1732, with Steele's conversion following closely on her brother's. In May Anne Cator Steele wrote in her diary with delight of William's increasing religious seriousness; finding that 'his affections are warm', she took opportunities to talk with him about 'the concerns of his soul'.²¹⁸ He was soon ready to seek formal admission to the church, the first step of which was speaking with the minister, who was also his great uncle Henry Steele (1654–1739). The next day

Brackney, Paul Fiddes, and John H. Y. Briggs (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1999), 112–125; Paul Fiddes, "Walking Together": The Place of Covenant Theology in Baptist Life Yesterday and Today,' in *Pilgrim Pathways: Essays in Baptist History in Honour of B. R. White*, ed. William H. Brackney, Paul Fiddes, and John H. Y. Briggs (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1999), 50–58; Karen Elizabeth Smith, 'The Covenant Life of Some Eighteenth-Century Calvinist Baptists in Hampshire and Wiltshire,' in *Pilgrim Pathways: Essays in Baptist History in Honour of B. R. White*, ed. William H. Brackney, Paul Fiddes, and John H. Y. Briggs (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1999), 165–183; Karen Elizabeth Smith, 'The Community and the Believer: A Study of Calvinistic Baptist Spirituality in Some Towns and Villages of Hampshire and the Borders of Wiltshire, c. 1730–1830' (DPhil thesis, University of Oxford, 1986).

²¹⁷ For example, Anne Cator Steele diary, 6 June 1733, 16 May 1749, and 29 May 1751. AL, STE 2/1/1 and 2/1/2.

²¹⁸ Anne Cator Steele diary, 20 May 1732. AL, STE 2/1/1.

William gave an account of his religious experiences before the congregation and the following week he was baptised.²¹⁹ William was seventeen at the time, and fifteen-year-old Anne was much affected by observing her older brother's religious awakening. Her stepmother recorded that Anne 'was troubled & seem'd very much cast down' on the day that William spoke with their uncle about joining the church. Whether this was due to a sense of exclusion from the experience or was a manifestation of her own tender and awakening religious conscience is unknown, but her emotional and/or spiritual reaction was clearly in response to her brother's religious experience. It had its effect. Within two weeks Anne also made her way to her uncle's house to discuss joining the church and her stepmother wrote in her diary that on 11 June 'Nany Steele gave in her Experience to the full satisfaction of the Church'.²²⁰ Significantly, Mary, who was just seven years old at the time, also watched closely and was much affected by what was happening in the house. Anne Cator Steele noted with concern her daughter crying, anxious that she was 'ensnared by sin' and 'should not be saved'.²²¹ Her mother, however, considered her daughter too young to seek baptism, writing that Mary talked about her 'soul concerns' in a manner that seemed 'far beyond her age'.²²² Like Edward Bolton's conversion to Methodism following closely his sister's, Anne Steele's decision to be baptised followed her brother's. Yet while the bond between Ann and Edward Bolton was strengthened by making a decision *away* from their family's faith, Anne and William Steele's decision to *accept* their family's faith together forged a new bond between them.²²³

²¹⁹ Anne Cator Steele diary, 27 May 1732, 28 May 1732, 8 June 1732, 11 June 1732. AL, STE 2/1/1.

²²⁰ Anne Cator Steele diary, 11 June 1732. AL, STE 2/1/1.

²²¹ Anne Cator Steele diary, 14 May 1732. AL, STE 2/1/1.

²²² Anne Cator Steele diary, 5 January 1731. AL, STE 2/1/1. See also Anne Cator Steele diary, 26 November 1731. AL, STE 2/1/1. Mary Steele would wait until 1742, when she was eighteen years old, to join the church.

²²³ Bruce Hindmarsh describes Baptist conversions as 'a rite of passage, more than a protest against social custom or filial piety'. Hindmarsh, *Evangelical Conversion Narrative*, 320.

Anne Steele's emotional and spiritual life remained closely linked with her brother's. She lived near him in the village of Broughton for her entire life, and indeed lived with him from 1769, eventually dying in his home in 1778. When they were together they conversed and wrote poetry in dialogue, and when apart they wrote letters. In 1736, when she was nineteen, Steele devised a correspondence intended to help them turn their minds together to 'Eternal things'.²²⁴ She wrote, 'I really believe your writing to me wou'd be very useful; both to improve my understanding, and to exalt my thoughts more to the solid pleasures of virtue and Religion; the most necessary and important Subjects'.²²⁵ Steele's apparent deference to her brother might be accounted for by his being the eldest sibling. Unlike Methodist families, in which spiritual experience was a source of authority that had the capacity to invert conventional social hierarchies,²²⁶ the Baptists considered here were more likely to be regulated by typical patterns of sibling hierarchy with their assumptions regarding masculine primacy.²²⁷ In the middle part of the eighteenth century, the increasing wealth and social position of the Steele family, together with their more socially acceptable status as Baptists (now decades after the 1689 Act of Toleration), influenced their transformation into a polite provincial family and their greater conformation to wider social expectations. As Judith Jennings refers to 'polite Quakerliness', there is a sense that by the mid-eighteenth century the Steeles had

²²⁴ Anne Steele to William Steele, 27 June 1736. AL, STE 3/8/i.

²²⁵ Anne Steele to William Steele, 27 June 1736. AL, STE 3/8/i.

²²⁶ See, for example, p. 158.

²²⁷ Leonore Davidoff, 'Where the Stranger Begins: The Question of Siblings in Historical Analysis,' in *Worlds Between: Historical Perspectives on Gender and Class* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995), 209. See also Davidoff's exploration of the effects of birth order and gender on sibling relationships in Davidoff, *Thicker Than Water*, Ch. 10: 'Gender, Age, and Authority: The Case of Anne, William Ewart, and Helen Gladstone'; Leonore Davidoff, 'Kinship as a Categorical Concept: A Case Study of Nineteenth-Century Siblings,' *Journal of Social History* 39, no. 2 (2005): 411-428.

become polite Baptists.²²⁸ William Steele was clearly well educated: his letters were written in a beautiful hand, and he wrote in a polite, affected style, which he skilfully employed to support his chosen spiritual themes. Anne Steele's education was more limited, and her deference to her brother may also reflect her reliance on her brother's 'wider horizons'.²²⁹ While as a young woman Steele engaged in a purposeful religious correspondence with her brother, in later years she engaged in a similar literary interaction with her half-sister, though in this case she sometimes took the leading role. This correspondence is analysed in the next section.

Spiritual friendship was thus interwoven with sibling connections, so that friends became siblings and siblings valued friends. In light of previous scholarly emphases on friendship between women, it is noteworthy that both Bolton and Steele found spiritual support in long-term affectionate relationships with their brothers. While Steele's tone with her brother could be deferential and much of Bolton's time was used to serve the interests of her brother, their spiritual encounters were not strictly gendered. Rather, their spiritual friendships were mutually profitable, resembling conversation.

Conversation

In *The Spectator* 68, for 18 May 1711, Addison and Steele characterised the kind of conversation that was possible in larger groups as inherently impersonal since it was 'streightned and confined' by the 'publick Topicks' of weather, fashion, and news. In

²²⁸ Judith Jennings, *Gender, Religion, and Radicalism in the Long Eighteenth Century: The 'Ingenious Quaker' and Her Connections* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 73.

²²⁹ Davidoff, *Thicker Than Water*, 125. The only archival evidence regarding the content of Steele's education is a letter written from school at age twelve, when she wrote to her stepmother, 'our work is most on headclothes'. Anne Steele to Anne Cator Steele, 26 September 1729. AL, STE 3/7/i. On Steele's education, see also Broome, *Bruised Reed*, 68, 75-78, 84-86; Reeves, *Pursuing the Muses*, 25-29; Whelan, ed., *Nonconformist Women Writers*, 1:3-4.

contrast, they observed a more intimate and particular form of conversation practised between friends:

...the most open, instructive, and unreserved Discourse, is that which passes between two Persons who are familiar and intimate Friends. On these Occasions, a Man gives a Loose to every Passion and every Thought that is uppermost, discovers his most retired Opinions of Persons and Things, tries the Beauty and Strength of his Sentiments, and exposes his whole Soul to the Examination of his Friend.²³⁰

This kind of very personal conversation between friends, where even the ‘whole Soul’ is exposed to one’s friend, provides the overarching image for this section. Conversation was a frequent theme in the pages of *The Spectator*, and the cultural interest in conversation in eighteenth-century England can be measured by the proliferation of guides to it published during the century.²³¹ These guides presented conversation as a mutual, reciprocal exchange. In his article on eighteenth-century guides to conversation, Leland Warren notes that ‘key terms’ used to define conversation were ‘together’, ‘reciprocal’, and ‘each other’.²³² Jon Mee similarly argues that definitions of British conversation in the period emphasised ‘its plain and even egalitarian quality’.²³³ This mutuality makes conversation a helpful image with which to consider peer interactions on the subject of religion. It was through intimate and informal literary exchanges, often referred to as conversations by the women considered here, that friends and siblings learned religious belief and life together.

²³⁰ Joseph Addison and Richard Steele, *The Spectator*, 8 vols., vol. 1 (London: Printed for S. Buckley and J. Tonson, [1713]), 386.

²³¹ On conversability in *The Spectator*, see Mee, *Conversable Worlds*, 39-57. On guides to conversation, see Peter Burke, *The Art of Conversation* (Cambridge: Polity, 1993), 109; Warren E. Leland, ‘Turning Reality Round Together: Guides to Conversation in Eighteenth-Century England,’ *Eighteenth-Century Life* 8 (1983): 65-87.

²³² Leland, ‘Turning Reality Round Together,’ 67.

²³³ Mee, *Conversable Worlds*, 6.

Conversation was understood in some sense to be ‘a feminized zone of practice’, though the association between women and conversation was not straightforward.²³⁴ On the one hand, women were negatively identified with ‘the world of tittle-tattle, like chat and gossip’.²³⁵ Thus in 1754 James Burgh referred to ‘the usual chit chat of the tea-table’ as it was presided over by women.²³⁶ On the other hand, women were thought to have a refining effect on men. David Hume referred to ‘Women of Sense and Education’ as ‘the Sovereigns of the Empire of Conversation’, though their reign was limited to softening male manners and operated only in certain kinds of spaces.²³⁷ Scholars have demonstrated how women’s conversation had broad scope beyond tea table ‘chit chat’ and the reformation of male manners: Elizabeth Eger emphasises the capacity of women’s conversation to act as ‘a tool of moral and intellectual reform’;²³⁸ Michèle Cohen observes how conversation was used to educate girls;²³⁹ and Kathryn Gleadle shows how women’s conversation could be an act of political engagement.²⁴⁰ This section argues that the informality and intimacy of conversation enabled women’s engagement in religious communities since it did not challenge assumptions regarding the propriety of women’s

²³⁴ Ibid., 63.

²³⁵ Ibid., 53.

²³⁶ James Burgh, *The Dignity of Human Nature* (London: Printed by W. B. and Sold by J. and P. Knapton, 1754), 13.

²³⁷ David Hume, *Essays, Moral and Political*, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (Edinburgh: Printed for A. Kincaid, 1742), 2:5; Mee, *Conversable Worlds*, 63.

²³⁸ Elizabeth Eger, ‘“The Noblest Commerce of Mankind”: Conversation and Community in the Bluestocking Circle,’ in *Women, Gender and Enlightenment*, ed. Sarah Knott and Barbara Taylor (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 289.

²³⁹ Michèle Cohen, ‘“Familiar Conversation”: The Role of the “Familiar Format” in Education in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century England,’ in *Educating the Child in Enlightenment Britain: Beliefs, Cultures, Practices*, ed. Mary Hilton and Jill Shefrin (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 99-116; Michèle Cohen, ‘“A Proper Exercise for the Mind”: Conversation and Education in the Long Eighteenth Century,’ in *The Concept and Practice of Conversation in the Long Eighteenth Century*, ed. Katie Halsey and Jane Slinn (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2008), 103-127.

²⁴⁰ Kathryn Gleadle, ‘“Opinions Deliver’d in Conversation”: Conversation, Politics, and Gender in the Late Eighteenth Century,’ in *Civil Society in British History: Ideas, Identities, Institutions*, ed. Jose Harris (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 61-78.

activity, and that women employed a rich range of conversation as a mode of interaction, the subtleties of which have not been previously appreciated.

Advice literature and scholarship alike tend to highlight the controversial or combative potential of religious conversation. Guides to polite conversation cautioned their readers to avoid religious topics in order to avoid unpleasant disagreements. In *The Conversation of Gentlemen* (1738), John Constable thus warned against ‘heat’ and ‘wrangling’ in conversations about religion.²⁴¹ In contrast to properly polite conversation that avoided religious controversy, Jon Mee argues that nonconformists such as Isaac Watts employed conversation in combative ways in their overarching interest in truth in religious matters. Yet between these extremes is a range of more subtle religious conversation, in which differences in denominational affiliation led to distinct verbal codes and spiritual goals. Between these extremes is also a range of more personal conversations, as evidenced by the literary interactions analysed here. How did women use such literary interactions to learn religious belief and life together?

Poetry and letters as conversation

One of the ways in which women engaged in religious conversation was through letter writing. It was a trope in the eighteenth century that familiar letters should resemble conversation, and popular letter-writing guides frequently made the comparison. The author of *The Complete Letter-Writer* (1755) thus wrote, ‘When you sit down to write a Letter, remember that this Sort of Writing should be like Conversation’, that is, written with sincerity, familiarity, and without affectation.²⁴² Indeed, the women I consider here

²⁴¹ John Constable, *The Conversation of Gentlemen* (London: Printed by J. Hoyles, 1738), 35.

²⁴² *The Complete Letter-Writer: Or, New and Polite English Secretary*, 2nd ed. (London: Printed for S. Crowder and H. Woodgate, 1756), 2. Bruce Redford frames his study of eighteenth-century letters around

often conceived of their literary interactions in this way. An unnamed writer, in a letter to Jane Attwater and her husband Joseph Blatch (*d.* 1840), invoked the desired qualities of mutuality and familiarity in conversation by referring to their correspondence as ‘a little paper conversation’.²⁴³ Catherine Talbot and the Duchess of Somerset emulated the turn-taking quality of conversation when they devised a plan to correspond ‘a little methodically’: Talbot cautioned that when one does not write in such a way ‘a letter is but a soliloquy about whatever trifle happens to swim uppermost in ones own head, while this exacter way gives one almost the pleasure of Conversation’.²⁴⁴ And as conversation was valued for being unaffected and ‘authentic’, Ann Bolton often asked her friends to be ‘free’ and forthright in their letters to her.²⁴⁵

Yet while it is a commonplace to liken letters to conversation, the metaphor can be extended beyond epistolary interactions. Friends engaged in literary conversations in a broader range of ways. Catherine Talbot engaged in a practice of diary exchange that she referred to as conversation.²⁴⁶ Ann Bolton participated in a shared commonplacing practice that resembled a discussion of books.²⁴⁷ And members of the Steele family used poetic dialogue to explore life and faith together. These forms of literary ‘conversation’ have not been sufficiently recognised as effective and affectionate modes of religious

the theme of ‘the familiar letter as intimate conversation’. Bruce Redford, *The Converse of the Pen: Acts of Intimacy in the Eighteenth-Century Familiar Letter* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986). See further Eve Tavor Bannet, *Empire of Letters: Letter Manuals and Transatlantic Correspondence, 1688-1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 42-53; Brant, *Eighteenth-Century Letters and British Culture*, 21-24; Hannan, ‘Women, Letter Writing and the Life of the Mind in England’, Ch. 3: ‘Letter-Writing as Conversation’.

²⁴³ Unnamed writer to Jane Attwater and Joseph Blatch, undated. Bodl., Reeves Collection 19/2.

²⁴⁴ Catherine Talbot to the Duchess of Somerset, 26 February [1754]. DNP 31.

²⁴⁵ For example, Ann Bolton to ‘my dear frd’, 21 February 1773. Pudl., 4/25/9.

²⁴⁶ Catherine Talbot diary, 20 July 1751. BL, Add. 46690.

²⁴⁷ Ann Bolton commonplace books. Pudl., 4/38 and 4/39. On commonplace books supplying evidence of both individual and social reading experiences, see Stephen Colclough, ‘Recovering the Reader: Commonplace Books and Diaries as Sources of Reading Experience,’ *Publishing History* 44 (1998): 5-37. See also David Allan, *Commonplace Books and Reading in Georgian England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

interaction. The possibilities of poetic conversation are briefly considered here. In the hands of the Steeles, poetic dialogues appear in a variety of forms.²⁴⁸ Some imitated a classical literary model that employed pastoral pseudonyms. When written by the Steeles, such dialogues were seldom explicitly religious. Others were written as discrete poems that respond to other poems. These poems were often more serious in tone and subject; they were considered, reflective, and personal. Still other poems were written in company, as a means of exploring a theme that had religious resonances. In the archive, certain conversational qualities of these poems are reflected in their physical appearance: they are written in different hands, sometimes initialled, and are untidy in their immediacy. An evening in company is captured on scraps of paper (sometimes the back of a letter), which we can imagine being passed around the room by firelight.

Anne Steele and her siblings engaged in this third type of poetic conversation when they wrote a series of verses entitled ‘Motto’s [sic] for a Watchpaper’ (see Figure 5).²⁴⁹ A watch-paper was the small disc of paper or other material inserted in the outer case of a watch, on which poetry or an image was often inscribed. Anne Steele, William Steele, and Mary Wakeford set themselves the challenge of writing short poems that might fit on a watch-paper—poems that revolved around the theme of time. In verse, they considered together what a watch might teach them regarding life and belief:

Then rouze my Soul thy lazy powers
And learn thy lesson from the Hours

²⁴⁸ On the versatility of poetic dialogues, see Clare Brant, ‘Varieties of Women’s Writing,’ in *Women and Literature in Britain, 1700-1800*, ed. Vivien Jones (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 299-302.

²⁴⁹ Anne Steele, William Steele, and Mary Wakeford, ‘Motto’s for a Watchpaper’. AL, STE 3/3/6/16. See also Mary Wakeford, ‘Poems on Devotional Subjects. By Amira’. AL, STE 10/2/i. Part of this verse sequence was later refined by Steele and published posthumously as ‘To My Watch’, Steele, *Poems on Subjects Chiefly Devotional*, 3:106.

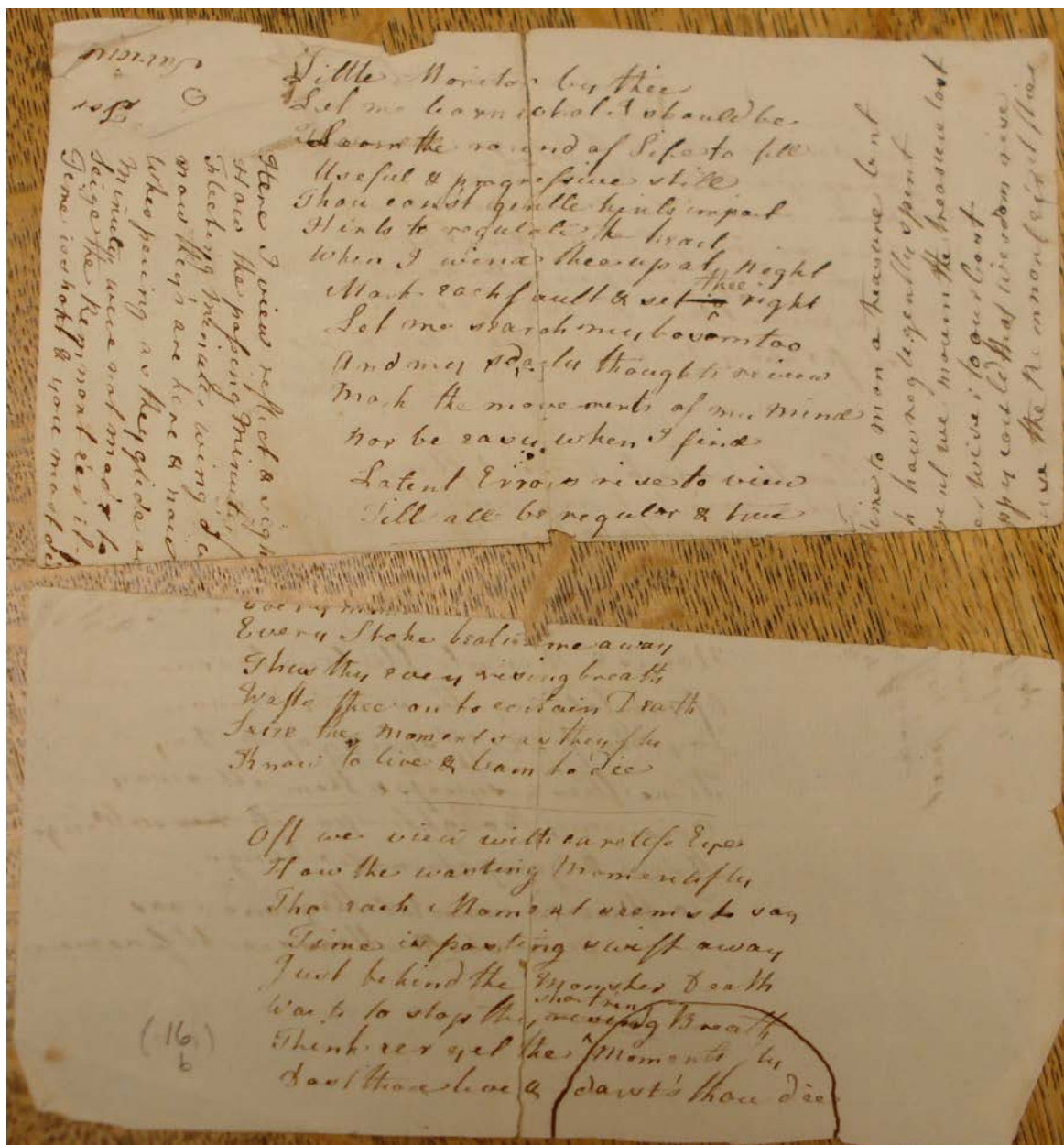


Figure 5: 'Motto's [sic] to a Watchpaper'²⁵⁰

It urged them to examine their hearts and rightly order their lives:

Thou canst gentle hints impart
 Hints to regulate the heart
 When I wind thee up at night
 Mark each fault & set thee right

²⁵⁰ AL, STE 3/3/6/16.

It reminded them that time was fleeting, and urged them to look beyond earthly time to heaven:

May my remnant minutes be
All devoted Lord to thee
May I change without a sigh
Time for blest Eternity

In poetic conversation, the Steele siblings experimented with ideas in the company of those they loved. They discussed how they should live oriented toward God and heaven, effectively catechising each other.

Mutual apprenticeship

Such literary interactions between friends and siblings can be understood as conversations as much for their interactivity as for their mutuality. Spiritual friends were peers, and while at times one or another might assume the role of guide or encourager, their writing to each other was an act of mutual religious apprenticeship. There was significant versatility in the form and content of this apprenticeship. The Anglicans Catherine Talbot and Elizabeth Carter's lengthy correspondence was directed toward their shared spiritual goal of virtuous living, even as it was supplemented by the gifting of religious tokens. Ann Bolton and her friend Mary Scudamore combined letter and visit in their efforts to support each other's spiritual lives. Methodist religious ideals directed their mutual efforts to ensure their conversation was 'free' and 'profitable'. And as we have seen, the Baptists Anne Steele and Mary Wakeford used poetry to discuss religious themes, but they also wrote letters, and often these genres intertwined. Their conversation was one of intellectual reflection within diverse domestic situations.

Catherine Talbot and Elizabeth Carter's spiritual friendship was enacted at the centre of overlapping polite and Anglican worlds, both of which shaped their literary conversation. Historians' analyses of politeness have often emphasised the outward form of social interaction rather than something more interior. Lawrence Klein correlates politeness with 'form, sociability, improvement, worldliness, and gentility', while Paul Langford delineates more sharply between inward and outward experience, arguing that politeness emphasised the outer self and behaviour rather than the 'inner self of moral or religious virtue'.²⁵¹ Contesting such externally-focused interpretations, William Van Reyk argues that codes of politeness did not subsume but rather coexisted with religious ideals in the period; in his analysis, Christian ideals of manliness are seen as compatible with the practice of politeness.²⁵² Here interconnections between politeness and religion are further considered, particularly with regard to the nature of improvement.

Talbot's letters to Carter form part of a programme of self-improvement whereby she submitted written accounts of her thoughts and activities to the scrutiny of trusted friends, inviting their comment and correction. She thought of this as improving conversation, engaged in through diaries and letters. Scholars of the bluestocking circle have tended to interpret conversation and improvement in terms of women's intellectual and social lives. Thus Elizabeth Eger describes conversation as 'rational exchange' and an 'improving art' that was particularly important to women since it offered possibilities for 'asserting social and intellectual equality'.²⁵³ Yet improvement had spiritual resonances that are frequently overlooked by scholars of the bluestocking circle, for

²⁵¹ Klein, 'Politeness and the Interpretation of the British Eighteenth Century,' 896; Paul Langford, 'The Uses of Eighteenth-Century Politeness,' *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 12 (2002): 315.

²⁵² William Van Reyk, 'Christian Ideals of Manliness in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries,' *The Historical Journal* 52, no. 4 (2009): 1055-1061.

²⁵³ Elizabeth Eger, *Bluestockings: Women of Reason from Enlightenment to Romanticism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 102; Eger, "'The Noblest Commerce of Mankind",' 289. See also Clarke, 'Bluestocking Fictions,' 460-473.

Talbot used the word improvement to denote progression in wisdom, goodness, and holiness. In *Reflections on the Seven Days of the Week* she wrote:

In all my common Conversation, I shall have my Eye continually up to Him, who alone can direct my Paths to Happiness and Improvement....I shall try to be something the better for every Scene of Life I am engaged in: to be something the wiser for every Day's Conversation and Experience. And let me not fear, but that if I daily thus faithfully strive to grow in Holiness and Goodness, be my Growth at the present never so imperceptible, I 'shall in due Time arrive at the Measure of the Fulness of Stature in Christ'.²⁵⁴

The material circumstances of Talbot's life were comfortable and she was free from the financial anxieties that constantly burdened Bolton. While Talbot served as a messenger and amanuensis for Secker,²⁵⁵ much of her time was hers to use as she chose. The prospect of wasting time or living thoughtlessly worried her and became a consistent theme in her letters and diary. Concerned to live in a virtuous and 'improving' way, her correspondence with Carter provided crucial support and encouragement, enabling her to disclose an account of her time and to discuss her spiritual 'temper' with a trusted friend.²⁵⁶ In a 1755 letter to Carter, Talbot described her understanding of proper Christian conduct to be 'to keep carefully the narrow middle path, do diligently our best, own humbly that best to be wretchedly imperfect and faulty, and yet rejoice in the more unbounded hope, and aim continually at the most unlimited improvement'.²⁵⁷ Her reference to the 'middle path' is indicative of Anglican moderation, for she did not want to appear unduly 'enthusiastic', with its evocations of unmannerly (or impolite) behaviour.²⁵⁸ And as her spiritual drive was tempered by Anglican moderation, it was

²⁵⁴ Catherine Talbot, *Reflections on the Seven Days of the Week* (London: Printed for John and Francis Rivington, 1770), 10-11. Cf. Ephesians 4.13.

²⁵⁵ Ingram, *Religion, Reform and Modernity in the Eighteenth Century*, 51.

²⁵⁶ Talbot, *Reflections on the Seven Days of the Week*, 11.

²⁵⁷ Catherine Talbot to Elizabeth Carter, September 1755. Pennington, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Elizabeth Carter*, 130.

²⁵⁸ On the eighteenth-century Anglican Church as moderate or a *via media*, see Walsh and Taylor, 'Introduction: The Church and Anglicanism in the "Long" Eighteenth Century,' 51-57.

also monitored by Carter's concern and affection for her. When Carter considered Talbot to be too serious or severe in her self-judgment, she urged her to be gentle with herself.

While on the one hand Talbot and Carter's correspondence demonstrates conventional Anglican belief and practice, on the other it provided a literary space within which to experiment with spiritual language and ideas. Some of this language had Catholic echoes, disclosing a perhaps surprising receptivity to Catholic ideas and practices at a time when there was widespread suspicion of 'papists' in England. In 1764 Talbot wrote that she considered her letters to Carter an 'examen du conduite, if not, de conscience, but I think they are much the same'.²⁵⁹ Initially formulated by Ignatius of Loyola in his *Spiritual Exercises* (composed 1522–24), the 'examen' lays out a system of prayerful self-review that was designed to be undertaken in seclusion. Significantly, Talbot invited Carter to participate with her in it, transforming a traditionally introspective and private devotional practice into an act of spiritual friendship. For her part, Carter sometimes assumed a priestly role in their correspondence, referring to herself as Talbot's 'confessor'.²⁶⁰ Anxious that Talbot was unwell in 1754, Carter urged her to be gentler with herself, assigning her 'by way of penance' for over-diligence a strict regime of rest.²⁶¹ These interactions denote the spiritual significance invested in their relationship as well as the creative possibilities of their literary conversations, which enabled them to explore religious ideas and practices perhaps not entirely acceptable in a polite Anglican culture.

During the course of their long friendship, Talbot and Carter wrote hundreds of letters to each other, and these letters they cherished as keepsakes and material reminders

²⁵⁹ Catherine Talbot to Elizabeth Carter, 13 June 1764. Pennington, ed., *Letters between Carter and Talbot*, 3:97-98.

²⁶⁰ Elizabeth Carter to Catherine Talbot, 14 February 1754. Ibid., 2:156.

²⁶¹ Elizabeth Carter to Catherine Talbot, 14 February 1754. Ibid.

of their friendship. They served to solidify friendship and to embody a much loved and absent friend. Carefully preserved, they also served as texts to which they could return for personal and spiritual help. Talbot referred to their correspondence as ‘silent, and permanent conversations’, and she regularly turned back through Carter’s letters.²⁶² In 1752, more than ten years after they met, Talbot wrote to tell Carter that she had lately been ‘reading over a parcel of your first Letters’ and reflected with gratefulness ‘that such a mind and heart as your’s [sic] should be desirous of a near acquaintance with mine’.²⁶³ In Carter’s reply she wrote of Talbot as a friend ‘whose regard I consider as one of the principal advantages of my life;...and from whose superior talents and excellent example I have had the means of so much improvement’.²⁶⁴ Their correspondence had not only supported them in the past but recalled common spiritual ideals in the present. In 1753 Talbot was ill and took the opportunity of her confined situation to re-read Carter’s letters ‘for many a year past’, later writing to Carter, ‘You cannot think how much I have been mended by them.’²⁶⁵ And again, in 1760, when Talbot complained of ‘being fast asleep these two years’, she returned to Carter’s letters to remind herself of God’s past care and to reinvigorate her spiritual desires.²⁶⁶ In their material and ‘permanent’ form, these letters continued to supply spiritual encouragement long after they had been written.

Talbot and Carter’s letters were often accompanied by small gifts, material tokens that, as Elizabeth Eger argues, could play a central role in constructing and recording friendship.²⁶⁷ Enfolded within text that was often explicitly religious, Talbot and Carter’s gifts to each other are emblematic of how their spiritual friendship was interwoven with a

²⁶² Catherine Talbot to Elizabeth Carter, 4 February 1750. Ibid., 1:324.

²⁶³ Catherine Talbot to Elizabeth Carter, undated but c. July 1752. Ibid., 2:84-85.

²⁶⁴ Elizabeth Carter to Catherine Talbot, 12 August 1752. Ibid., 2:90.

²⁶⁵ Catherine Talbot to Elizabeth Carter, 29 January 1753. Ibid., 2:108-109.

²⁶⁶ Catherine Talbot to Elizabeth Carter, 3 November 1760. Ibid., 2:354.

²⁶⁷ Elizabeth Eger, ‘Paper Trails and Eloquent Objects: Bluestocking Friendship and Material Culture,’ *Parergon* 26, no. 2 (2009): 137.

warm personal affection. Talbot was an amateur painter, and in 1746 Carter wrote to ask her to ‘make me the happiest of creatures by drawing me your own picture’, to which Talbot replied, ‘there are few people whom I should not sooner choose to send it to’.²⁶⁸ She believed the picture would help to bridge the distance between them, enhancing their intimacy by enabling Carter to see her, even when they were physically separated.²⁶⁹ It is uncertain whether Talbot completed the commission, but five years later she sent to Carter a personal and physical memorial of their friendship: a lock of her hair, sewn up with red and blue silk.²⁷⁰ Carter had requested the hair, and while Talbot was willing to comply she suggested that perhaps she should have included with it ‘A good protestant essay against relics’.²⁷¹ In her reply Carter promised to remain a ‘good protestant’, though added, ‘But I must be allowed to look on it with delight, as the gift of a person to whom I owe the highest obligation, that of having endeavoured to render me wiser and better’.²⁷² It was, to Carter, a symbol of their spiritual friendship—a relationship of deep personal affection that supported their mutual ideals of religious improvement and virtuous living.

Talbot and Carter’s correspondence was a long-term source of religious encouragement, practised within the context of a close personal friendship. But their friendship and correspondence existed within larger religious and social spheres, notably the bluestocking circle that gathered around Elizabeth Montagu. Carter met Montagu shortly after the publication of her translation of *Epictetus* in 1758, and through their developing friendship Talbot also became acquainted with Montagu, though their

²⁶⁸ Elizabeth Carter to Catherine Talbot, 5 July 1746. Pennington, ed., *Letters between Carter and Talbot*, 1:157-158. Catherine Talbot to Elizabeth Carter, 12 August 1746. Ibid., 1:162.

²⁶⁹ Catherine Talbot to Elizabeth Carter, 12 August 1746. Ibid.

²⁷⁰ Catherine Talbot to Elizabeth Carter, 8 June 1751. Ibid., 2:35.

²⁷¹ Catherine Talbot to Elizabeth Carter, 8 June 1751. Ibid.

²⁷² Elizabeth Carter to Catherine Talbot, 25 June 1751. Ibid., 2:36-37.

relationship was never as personally close. As early as 1759 Talbot had become the recurring subject matter of Carter and Montagu's own religious conversation, with Montagu praising Talbot as a pattern of virtue worthy of emulation.²⁷³ Over the next decade Talbot's health declined, and as she lay dying in 1769 Montagu also drew on Catholic imagery, writing to Carter of 'our Saint': 'I think, of all the Persons I ever knew, she was the most pure, holy, & righteous....I know not such another instance of a perfectly good life'.²⁷⁴ Talbot died within a few months, and soon after Montagu wrote to Carter of 'ye dear Saint', whose virtues 'were too high for my imitation but every recollection of them will be a spur to improvement'.²⁷⁵ To assist this recollection and religious improvement, Carter sent to Montagu a ring of Talbot's hair to wear about her finger—a token Montagu cherished as a '[precio]us relick'.²⁷⁶

Unlike Anglican conversation, secure in its historic religious identity and guided by an appeal to politeness, Methodist instruction regarding conversation was highly prescriptive, governed by rules, and directed toward denominationally specific spiritual goals.²⁷⁷ Instructions regarding right conversation were written into official Methodist texts and provided one of the conditions for becoming a Methodist. Thus John Wesley, in his 'General Rules' (1743), instructed Methodists to avoid 'uncharitable or unprofitable conversation'.²⁷⁸ Both subject matter and choice of words identified someone as a Methodist: Wesley wrote that one of the 'distinguishing marks' of Methodists was that

²⁷³ Elizabeth Montagu to Elizabeth Carter, [1759]. HL, MO 3033.

²⁷⁴ Elizabeth Montagu to Elizabeth Carter, 31 October [1769]. HL, MO 3261.

²⁷⁵ Elizabeth Montagu to Elizabeth Carter, [17 January 1770]. HL, MO 3272.

²⁷⁶ Elizabeth Montagu to Elizabeth Carter, [17 January 1770]. HL, MO 3272.

²⁷⁷ David Hempton sees Methodism's many rules as the sign of voluntary religious association in the active process of defining itself, in contrast to the Established Church with its system of clerical authority, historic confessions of faith, and honoured traditions. Hempton, *Methodism*, 52.

²⁷⁸ 'General Rules' (1743), John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, ed. Rupert E. Davies, vol. 9: The Methodist Societies: History, Nature, and Design (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 9:71.

they use the ‘most obvious, easy, common words’ to ‘speak of the things of God’.²⁷⁹

Published in treatises, such injunctions were also preached in local societies. In 1778 Bolton wrote in her diary of itinerant preacher James Cotty’s exhortation at Witney: ‘He advised us...to be cautious & exact in our Words, & all our Conversation....He observed, that talking tattling Christians, are never thriving ones.’²⁸⁰ And Wesley issued class tickets—material indicators of inclusion in the Methodist movement—only when satisfied with someone’s ‘seriousness and good conversation’.²⁸¹ Conversation had spiritual potency. Alongside the Lord’s Supper, prayer, and searching the scripture, Wesley considered religious conversation (or ‘Christian conference’) to be one of the ‘means of grace’: those ‘outward signs, words, or actions ordained of God, and appointed for this end—to be the *ordinary* channels whereby he might convey to men preventing, justifying, or sanctifying grace’.²⁸²

The spiritual significance and distinguishing characteristics of such conversation are perceived in Ann Bolton’s literary interactions with Mary Scudamore (*fl.* 1777–96), a fellow Methodist who provided significant emotional and spiritual support to Bolton throughout their decades-long friendship. From nearly the opening pages of her diary Bolton recorded frequent travel between Witney and Stroud, in Gloucestershire, where a tight community of Methodists including Scudamore (who were connected by marriage and family as well as by their common involvement in the textile trade), lived near the Methodist chapel. While Bolton and Scudamore visited each other regularly, the forty-

²⁷⁹ ‘The Character of a Methodist’ (1742), *ibid.*, 9:33–34.

²⁸⁰ Ann Bolton diary, 1 February 1778. *Pudl.*, 2/8.

²⁸¹ ‘A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists’ (1749), Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, 9:265.

²⁸² ‘The Large Minutes’ (1763), John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, ed. Henry D. Rack, vol. 10: The Methodist Societies: The Minutes of Conference (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2011), 10:856–857; Sermon 16, ‘The Means of Grace’, John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, ed. Albert C. Outler, vol. 1: Sermons I, 1–33 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984), 1:381. See also Richard Heitzenrater, ‘Means of grace’, in Charles Yrigoyen and Susan Eltscher Warrick, eds., *Historical Dictionary of Methodism* (London: Scarecrow Press, 1996), 202.

mile distance between Witney and Stroud meant that most of their friendship was enacted through the post. Their friendship confirms the need to look beyond the local and official when considering the social and spiritual lives of early Methodists, for they also had chosen friends, sometimes living at considerable distance.

Bolton and Scudamore's friendship was more purposeful and spiritually intense than Talbot and Carter's. Talbot and Carter's correspondence was certainly religious, but a significant proportion of their letters also concerned their reading, health, and social activities. Bolton and Scudamore's literary interactions, on the other hand, were consistently charged with spiritual purpose, carefully directed toward the Methodist spiritual ideals of assurance and sanctification and conforming to Methodist directives regarding right conversation. Their correspondence commenced in 1777 during a period of spiritual discouragement for Bolton in which she lost the sensible knowledge of God's presence in her life and the assurance of her salvation, of which she had once been so certain. Wesley wrote to her at the time, 'Your state of mind for some time has been that which the Papists very improperly term a State of Desertion.'²⁸³ She was grieved and anxious, for she remembered how hard-won and climactic her experience of assurance had been in 1771.²⁸⁴ In February she wrote in her diary, 'O how painfull it is, after haveing been favor'd for several years with almost constant sweetness in communion with God, to feel it labor to pour out my Soul before him.'²⁸⁵ She continued to attend her band and class meetings, but she did not find the support she most needed. For this she turned to Scudamore, to whom she referred as 'the helper of my Soul'.²⁸⁶ In March

²⁸³ John Wesley to Ann Bolton, 24 April 1777. JRL, MAM JW 1.87.

²⁸⁴ Ann Bolton diary, 18 February 1771. Pudl., 2/2. On Bolton's experience and understanding of spiritual assurance, see p. 180.

²⁸⁵ Ann Bolton diary, 10 February 1777. Pudl., 2/8.

²⁸⁶ Ann Bolton diary, 17 April 1777. Pudl., 2/8.

Scudamore visited her, and Bolton recorded in her diary that she was ‘much affected at seeing her’, while adding parenthetically, ‘notwithstanding I guarded against it’ (her aside pointing to the Methodist concern regarding ‘inordinate affection’ in human relationships, wherein a person might usurp God’s place in one’s affections).²⁸⁷ While Talbot could write effusively of her love for Carter, Bolton was more guarded in her affection, although she did write of Scudamore as ‘my dear friend...a friend indeed’, and exclaimed, ‘such Friendship rare to be found!’²⁸⁸ Affectionate and spiritual ties were interwoven in her friendship with Scudamore, but Methodist instructions resulted in an uneasy harmonisation between such ties.

After Scudamore returned to Stroud she and Bolton began to correspond, resuming on paper the ‘sweet counsel’ and conversation that had begun in person.²⁸⁹ When Scudamore had been with her at Witney, Bolton had written in her diary, ‘Sorely tried; but found much relief in opening my Mind freely to my dear friend’.²⁹⁰ By referring to the desired quality of ‘freedom’ in conversation, Bolton indicated how their friendship had been formed in a religious culture in which spiritual openness was considered necessary for spiritual maturity. Methodists were trained to converse freely—that is, openly and candidly—about their personal religious experiences. In his ‘Rules of the Band Societies’ (1738), John Wesley drew up a list of questions to be asked before admitting someone to a band. Such questions included, ‘Is it your desire and design to be on this and all other occasions entirely open, so as to speak everything that is in your

²⁸⁷ Ann Bolton diary, 20 March 1777. Pudl., 2/8.

²⁸⁸ For example, Catherine Talbot to Elizabeth Carter, 4 November 1749. Pennington, ed., *Letters between Carter and Talbot*, 1:316. Ann Bolton diary, 22 March 1777. Pudl., 2/8. Ann Bolton diary, 22 April 1777. Pudl., 2/8.

²⁸⁹ Ann Bolton diary, 22 March 1777. Pudl., 2/8.

²⁹⁰ Ann Bolton diary, 22 March 1777. Pudl., 2/8.

heart, without exception, without disguise, and without reserve?’²⁹¹ Bolton expected this Methodist principle of personal transparency to pass over into letter writing, and she professed to be most ‘profited’ and ‘blessed’ by correspondences such as that with Scudamore, in which she could write freely and frankly about her own religious experience and expect candid spiritual advice in return.

Bolton typically perceived such advice as direct and immediate help from God. When Scudamore arrived at Witney during Bolton’s spiritual crisis, Bolton wrote in her diary, ‘good is the Lord...in sending her in this my time of need’, and she later turned to Scudamore’s letters expectantly during times of spiritual need.²⁹² Bolton habitually received letters as divinely instructive: ‘received a Letter from a friend, w^{ch} I accepted as a particular token of favor from the Almighty’.²⁹³ In April 1777 she described herself as being ‘Much opprest in Spirit, extremely low & dejected’, and she turned to God for help, praying specifically for a letter from Scudamore.²⁹⁴ That same evening the hoped for letter arrived. Bolton received it as ‘profit & comfort’, and invested her friend’s letter with divine significance, accepting it not only as a symbol of friendship and love, but as a message from God.²⁹⁵ Scudamore was bold in mediating this message: ‘this I know’, she wrote, ‘his loving kindness will never depart from you’.²⁹⁶ In the face of Bolton’s spiritual anxiety, Scudamore wrote tenderly to her as ‘my dear love’.²⁹⁷ And when Bolton had lost her spiritual confidence, Scudamore offered her own: ‘How confidently does he give me to trust, for your full & compleat deliverance’, and, ‘My confidence in God

²⁹¹ ‘Rules of the Band Societies’ (1738), Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, 9:78.

²⁹² Ann Bolton diary, 20 March 1777. Pudl., 2/8.

²⁹³ Ann Bolton diary, 13 August 1783. Pudl., 3/2.

²⁹⁴ Ann Bolton diary, 11 April 1777. Pudl., 2/8.

²⁹⁵ Ann Bolton diary, 11 April 1777. Pudl., 2/8.

²⁹⁶ Ann Bolton diary, 11 April 1777. Pudl., 2/8.

²⁹⁷ Ann Bolton diary, 17 April 1777. Pudl., 2/8.

abounds for you, more then I can tell you'.²⁹⁸ 'How good is a friend in need', Bolton exclaimed in her diary, 'especially one whom the Lord teacheth.'²⁹⁹ And since God had instructed Scudamore, Bolton resolved to trust her not only as a companion but as a guide in the spiritual life. With an allusion to the biblical book of Ruth she wrote, 'her God is my God', thus declaring her intention to trust and follow Scudamore as Ruth followed Naomi.³⁰⁰

Bolton's resolve to 'follow' Scudamore had its textual counterpart in her practice of echoing the language of Scudamore's letters in her diary, where several of Scudamore's letters are preserved in transcription—a textual layering of personal writing with overlapping individual and communal meanings.³⁰¹ As Bolton actively strove to overcome her ongoing spiritual depression she adopted Scudamore's language in articulating her own experience. In April 1777 Bolton received a letter from Scudamore in which her friend described her as being in a 'wilderness'—a Methodist trope alluding to the Israelites' sojourn in the wilderness following the exodus from Egypt, and developed by Wesley in his sermon 'The Wilderness State', published in 1760.³⁰² During the week that followed, Bolton meditated on Scudamore's letter, which she described as 'an excitement & support to my faith'.³⁰³ Scudamore told Bolton that she believed she was 'call'd peculiarly to walk in the way of naked faith', and a week later Bolton wrote in her diary, 'I have in my late exercise of Soul been peculiarly held up, as it were by naked

²⁹⁸ Ann Bolton diary, 17 April 1777. Pudl., 2/8. Ann Bolton diary, 11 April 1777. Pudl., 2/8.

²⁹⁹ Ann Bolton diary, 13 April 1777. Pudl., 2/8.

³⁰⁰ Ann Bolton diary, 17 April 1777. Pudl., 2/8. Cf. Ruth 1.16.

³⁰¹ For example, Ann Bolton diary, 11 April 1777. Pudl., 2/8.

³⁰² Ann Bolton diary, 11 April 1777. Pudl., 2/8. Sermon 46, 'The Wilderness State', John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, ed. Albert C. Outler, vol. 2: Sermons II, 34-70 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), 2:205-221. See also Hindmarsh, *Evangelical Conversion Narrative*, 160.

³⁰³ Ann Bolton diary, 13 April 1777. Pudl., 2/8.

faith. Called & strenthen'd to trust my God were [*sic*] I cou'd not see him.'³⁰⁴

Scudamore's encouragement had begun to inform Bolton's understanding and articulation of her spiritual experience. A similar practice of echoing friends' language can be observed elsewhere in Bolton's correspondence and in her diary.³⁰⁵ As a convert to the relatively new Methodist faith, she learned the conventions of Methodism not only through the authorised channels of books, hymns, and sermons, but in a textual conversation with her friends.

Bolton and Scudamore's spiritual friendship was denominationally distinctive in a way that Talbot and Carter's was not. While Talbot valued 'agreeable' conversation, Bolton and Scudamore's literary conversation was performed according to distinctly Methodist principles that valued 'free' and 'profitable' conversation.³⁰⁶ It is striking that of the women considered in this chapter, Bolton and Scudamore had the most external demands on their time in terms of family and work and yet people and activities are least represented in their letters, despite the close ties between their families and their common employment in the textile trade. Perhaps in this sense their literary interaction was not 'free', revealing as it does their self-conscious efforts to learn and employ distinctively Methodist discourse and to conform to denominational injunctions regarding right conversation. Nevertheless, Bolton and Scudamore's friendship, enacted over the long-term through both visit and letter, provided personal and mutual encouragement vital to their religious lives—spiritual support not met by local and official Methodist structures.

³⁰⁴ Ann Bolton diary, 11 April 1777. Pudl., 2/8. Ann Bolton diary, 17 April 1777. Pudl., 2/8.

³⁰⁵ This practice of transcribing a letter into her diary and then ruminating on it throughout the week recurs in Bolton's diary. On 8 August 1780 she received a letter from her friend Nancy Arundell in which Arundell urged Bolton to believe 'the promises of God, tho every thing to the eye of reason seems to militate against it'. Bolton transcribed the letter into her diary, and on 12 August 1780 Arundell's language was incorporated into Bolton's reflection on what she perceived to be God's promise to her. Ann Bolton diary, 8 and 12 August 1780. Pudl., 2/8. See also Ann Bolton diary, 7 December 1782. Pudl., 2/28/5.

³⁰⁶ Of many possible examples, see Ann Bolton diary, 30 April 1780. Pudl., 2/17.

Baptists likewise were encouraged to guard their conversation, though they were not constrained by prescription as were Methodists, and the note of anxiety often present in Methodist discourse is absent in that of Baptists. Associational letters enjoined churches to be careful in conversation and, echoing 1 Thessalonians, to speak with love, comforting and edifying one another: ‘Watch over your conversation; take heed of foolish talking and jesting...but seek to edify one another and to comfort one another’.³⁰⁷ While Ann Bolton might have heeded this instruction literally and chastised herself when she failed, the literary conversations of the Baptist women considered here are often marked by unapologetic personal warmth and playful jesting, while also offering edification and spiritual comfort. They occupy a middle position between the intensely serious and purposeful correspondence of Methodist women, and the more amiable and polite conversations of Anglican women, and further elaborate the rich diversity of ‘conversation’ as a mode of interaction.

Anne and Mary Steele, sisters as well as friends, used correspondence and poetry to support each other emotionally and spiritually. They lived together until 1749 when Mary, then twenty-five years old, married Joseph Wakeford (1719–85) and left Broughton to reside at Andover, a distance of less than ten miles, but far enough to precipitate a change in the way in which they interacted. Steele was thirty-two and remained at home, caring for their ageing parents. Within a few months of her marriage Wakeford began to regret, not her marriage, but the lack of religious conversation in her new situation, and she wrote to Steele proposing a correspondence in which ‘some little part of our time...be spent in freely writing our serious tho’ts to each other’.³⁰⁸ She hoped

³⁰⁷ Roger Hayden, *Continuity and Change: Evangelical Calvinism among Eighteenth-Century Baptist Ministers Trained at Bristol Academy, 1690-1791* (Chipping Norton: Nigel Lynn, 2006), 54.

³⁰⁸ Mary Wakeford to Anne Steele, 23 September 1749. AL, STE 3/10/i.

that such a correspondence would provide spiritual stimulation and support no long available to her in person. Steele accepted her sister's suggestion with pleasure, and thus began their deliberately supportive and spiritual correspondence.³⁰⁹ Using the literary name by which Wakeford was known within the family, Steele described the goal of their correspondence: 'You and I my dear Amira...let us endeavour to encourage each other in the journey by talking of the Glorious Person who has wrought such wonders of surprizing Love'.³¹⁰

By 1752 Steele and Wakeford had developed the pattern of their literary conversation. One or the other would suggest a topic and they would each enlarge on it—turn by turn, letter by letter, occasionally incorporating verse. Steele wished that she and her sister could more often converse with each other in person, but she accepted this as impracticable and cheered herself, writing, 'It is, however, in my power to talk a little on paper but what shall be the Subject?'.³¹¹ Their correspondence was self-consciously an extension of the kind of conversation they engaged in when together. In 1752 Steele wrote, 'Sometimes...I have borrow'd useful hints from conversation & endeavour'd to improve them in my thoughts to some valuable purpose', and explained that the reflections she wrote to Wakeford were in fact 'the product of our friendly chat since you have been here'.³¹²

Their method of enlarging on a chosen subject has resonances with an ongoing practice within the Broughton Baptist Church, which regularly met to discuss set questions. In September 1730 Anne Cator Steele wrote in her diary, 'the question this

³⁰⁹ Anne Steele to Mary Steele, undated but c. September 1749. AL, STE 3/19/vii.

³¹⁰ Anne Steele to Mary Wakeford, undated. AL, STE 3/10/xv. The Steeles frequently used familial pseudonyms in their poetic dialogues and correspondence.

³¹¹ Anne Steele to Mary Wakeford, undated. AL, STE 3/10/vi.

³¹² Anne Steele to Mary Wakeford, 31 October 1752. AL, STE 3/10/viii.

evening was what are y^e encouragements for sinners to come to Christ', and concluded that there were 'divers answers'.³¹³ Likewise in October 1730 she wrote, 'the question this morning was what are y^e benefits of belivers' and again summarised, 'there was divers answers'.³¹⁴ Religious discussions also took place when the family was together. In May 1732, on a day that began with dreary housework ('this Day I Ironed about which work I seldom enjoy'), Anne Cator Steele recorded her pleasure in the family's spiritual conversation: 'we Improv'd all our time talking of Experience which was very agreeable to me'.³¹⁵ Her daughters thus learned a method of communal religious enquiry that passed over from the church and larger familial settings into their more intimate, personal literary conversation.

Steele and Wakeford used this purposeful epistolary format to work out their Calvinistic piety in creative ways. In 1757 Steele took as her subject for a letter the resemblance of the human heart to a garden.³¹⁶ The theme emerged from her own immediate surroundings: she had just walked through her brother's garden and recalled the care that had been taken in weeding it to prepare for the visit of some friends. Conveying a Calvinistic absorption with human sinfulness, Steele now reflected on the 'noxious...worthless Weeds' that choked her own heart.³¹⁷ She wrote, 'Many [weeds] rise perhaps unnotic'd, some with feeble effort I attempt to pull up, and sometimes think I have succeeded, but soon find my self mistaken, they spring again & convince me that the root was left behind.'³¹⁸ While Methodists actively strove to overcome sin, believing that entire sanctification was possible on earth, Calvinistic Baptists believed sin to be a

³¹³ Anne Cator Steele diary, 6 September 1730. AL, STE 2/1/1.

³¹⁴ Anne Cator Steele diary, 4 October 1730. AL, STE 2/1/1.

³¹⁵ Anne Cator Steele diary, 19 May 1732. AL, STE 2/1/1.

³¹⁶ Anne Steele to Mary Wakeford, undated but c. June 1757. AL, STE 3/10/ix.

³¹⁷ Anne Steele to Mary Wakeford, undated but c. June 1757. AL, STE 3/10/ix.

³¹⁸ Anne Steele to Mary Wakeford, undated but c. June 1757. AL, STE 3/10/ix.

pervasive and persistent aspect of earthly existence, overcome only in death. Developing her garden analogy, Steele turned to God, ‘the dilligent Gardener’, to root out weeds and so cleanse her from sin, concluding that her own labouring for salvation would be in vain if not for God’s sovereign grace.³¹⁹ Steele’s correspondence with her sister provided a place to rehearse imaginatively these Baptist beliefs and spiritual ideals and she concluded her letter, asking, ‘Let me have your thoughts in return’.³²⁰ In her reply, Wakeford recast Steele’s reflections in terms of her own surroundings: the more domestic scene of a chaotic house. But her conclusion was consistent: ‘how difficult, how imposible rather, is it for a person to cleanse & rectify the least defilement the smalest disorder of the heart’.³²¹

Yet more than rehearsing Baptist theology as they had inherited it and as they continued to hear it preached, their friendship and correspondence enabled Steele and Wakeford to probe theological ideas, experimenting with images and vocabulary and testing the implications of these ideas for their spiritual lives. While Bolton learned the language of Methodism in a textual dialogue with her friends, Steele and Wakeford, having grown up Baptist, learned to use Calvinistic language in new and nuanced ways. On the one hand, Steele articulated a conventional Calvinistic understanding of sin and salvation by assuming a passive role in response to God’s divine agency. That is, God as gardener removed sin (weeds) from her heart (the soil). Bruce Hindmarsh observes the syntactical use of the passive voice to be a telling, if subtle indication of Calvinistic ethos.³²² On the other hand, Steele sometimes cast herself in the role not of soil but of gardener. As gardener, she actively laboured to root out choking weeds by personal effort.

³¹⁹ Anne Steele to Mary Wakeford, undated but c. June 1757. AL, STE 3/10/ix.

³²⁰ Anne Steele to Mary Wakeford, undated but c. June 1757. AL, STE 3/10/ix.

³²¹ Mary Wakeford to Anne Steele, 4 and 13 July 1757. AL, STE 3/10/x.

³²² Hindmarsh, *Evangelical Conversion Narrative*, 214.

In this analysis, God supplied the conditions by which she worked: ‘seasonable Showers and chearing Sunshine’ or ‘the Winter of Adversity’ might affect her labours, but the task of weeding out sin remained hers.³²³ While Steele has been described as a ‘strict Calvinist’ who ‘adamantly adhered’ to the doctrines of predestination, total depravity, and original sin, her piety was typically more moderate and nuanced.³²⁴ In contrast to high Calvinistic Baptists in London, Roger Hayden argues that a more evangelical Calvinism was emerging in the Western Association of Baptists (which included the Broughton Baptists) under the leadership of Steele’s friend Caleb Evans (1737–91) and others.³²⁵ In her correspondence with Wakeford she engaged in an extended theological meditation on the relationship between divine and human agency in salvation and sanctification.

Steele and Wakeford’s correspondence thus enabled an ongoing intellectual reflection on their shared faith, but it also provided very personal encouragement for Wakeford when she was lonely and felt unsupported. By 1757 Wakeford had been married for eight years and had two young sons, aged four and five. She found her domestic situation difficult and she continued to feel the geographical distance from her friends and family at Broughton: ‘methinks I am an alline [sic] in a strange land’.³²⁶ She missed the emotional and psychological support of those who knew and loved her well, but also felt a painful lack of spiritual support. She wrote to Steele:

I have had no one but our children to talk with...and how insipid & tiresome is empty tittle tattle for several days together...one afternoon I was at M^{rs} Br^{ea} but tho’ with the aged there shou’d be wisdom it does not always appear to be so. in short the sence of my want of a friend here capable & willing to converse with me on sensible & serious subjects has occasion’d me many gloomy tho’ts of late....I often think of the Psalmists words, refuge failed me no man cared for my

³²³ Anne Steele to Mary Wakeford, undated but c. June 1757. AL, STE 3/10/ix. And Anne Steele to Mary Wakeford, undated, but c. July 1757. AL, STE 3/10/xi.

³²⁴ On Steele as strict Calvinist, see Whelan, ed., *Nonconformist Women Writers*, 3:5, 1:xxxii.

³²⁵ Hayden, *Continuity and Change*, xi–xii.

³²⁶ Mary Wakeford to Anne Steele, 10 November 1757. AL, STE 3/10/xiii. Cf. Exodus 18.3.

soul....there is no one here who has so much friendship for me as to seek to do my soul good by religious conversation...³²⁷

In response Steele offered encouragement and the kind of religious conversation that Wakeford lacked at Andover, where her conflicted maternal experience demonstrates an alternative to the stereotyped and sentimental representations of motherhood that have led some historians to identify an increasingly powerful ‘cult of maternity’ from the early eighteenth century.³²⁸ While Wakeford was exasperated by what she called ‘the childrens perversnesses’ and grew weary of their childish prattle, and older women in the neighbourhood disappointed her desire for spiritual guidance, her epistolary conversation with her sister supplied her need for a spiritual friend.³²⁹

Steele was pleased to be such a friend to her sister, but in her reply she delicately enquired about her husband, Joseph Wakeford: ‘may I venture to write my Mind? – why do I ask it?...I wish for his Sake as well as yours there cou’d be more freedom and frequency in religious conversation’.³³⁰ She encouraged Wakeford to try to talk seriously with her husband: ‘well-timed, repeated efforts might produce that freedom and frequency of Religious Converse which I suppose each of you think proffitable and pleasing’.³³¹ Like Wesley, Steele invested religious conversation with comparable spiritual significance to more public ‘means of grace’ such as ‘Prayer, Meditation, and attending on publick worship’.³³² She argued that it was her and her sister’s ‘Duty’ to use the ‘appointed means’ to encourage each other’s faith and that of their ‘dearest Relatives’

³²⁷ Mary Wakeford to Anne Steele, 10 November 1757. AL, STE 3/10/xiii. Cf. Psalm 142.4.

³²⁸ Bailey, *Parenting in England*, 5, 29; Beth Fowkes Tobin, “‘The Tender Mother’: The Social Construction of Motherhood and *The Lady’s Magazine*,” *Women’s Studies* 18, no. 2/3 (1990): 205-221; Carol Duncan, ‘Happy Mothers and Other New Ideas in Eighteenth-Century French Art,’ in *Feminism and Art History: Questioning the Litany*, ed. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), 214.

³²⁹ Mary Wakeford to Anne Steele, 10 November 1757. AL, STE 3/10/xiii.

³³⁰ Anne Steele to Mary Wakeford, undated but c. November 1757. AL, STE 3/10/ii.

³³¹ Anne Steele to Mary Wakeford, undated but c. November 1757. AL, STE 3/10/ii.

³³² Anne Steele to Mary Wakeford, undated but c. November 1757. AL, STE 3/10/ii.

through spiritual dialogue.³³³ Steele and Wakeford's correspondence always took place within the context of their family. Their mother was aware of it, and may have been responding with maternal concern for Wakeford's domestic situation when she wrote in her diary some weeks later that she was pleased with the 'spiritual conversation by letter between our daughters'.³³⁴

As Steele and Wakeford's correspondence demonstrates, the experience of domesticity and motherhood could inform the practice of spiritual friendship in complex ways. The demands of caring for home and family interfered with Wakeford's efforts to play her part in their epistolary conversation. She wrote in 1757, 'I have every day try'd to study up something for a letter but in vain', and concluded, 'dinner is coming my work all neglected tho' it wants to be done against washing'.³³⁵ Four months later she again complained, 'I have scarce ever oppertunity either I cannot be alone long enough or other employments demand my attention, there are innumerable things from without to hinder my writing & reading'.³³⁶ She grew worried at her inability to engage in the correspondence as she would like, for she believed in its capacity to stimulate her thought and sustain her spiritual life: 'the fewer helps I have the less I am put in mind of religious things'.³³⁷ In response to Wakeford's frustrations Steele acknowledged, 'I am sensible you have less liesure than I', and then offered some practical advice:

Will you permit me to advise a little? – whenever a thought of importance passes thro' your mind, arrest or recall it, think it over again, and consider what improvement may be made of it, write it, this will strengthen the impression, lay it by 'till your next liesure, or thinking season, read it over and perhaps new

³³³ Anne Steele to Mary Wakeford, undated but c. November 1757. AL, STE 3/10/ii.

³³⁴ Anne Cator Steele diary, 15 December 1757. AL, STE 2/1/3.

³³⁵ Mary Wakeford to Anne Steele, 23 July 1757. AL, STE 3/10/xii.

³³⁶ Mary Wakeford to Anne Steele, 10 November 1757. AL, STE 3/10/xiii.

³³⁷ Mary Wakeford to Anne Steele, 10 November 1757. AL, STE 3/10/xiii.

reflections may arise on the subject. This will I believe after a few trials be easy, and afford entertainment and profit to your self as well as to me.³³⁸

Begun with advice, Steele's letter concluded with very personal, affectionate encouragement. Since Wakeford could not think of what to write and felt spiritually discouraged, Steele proposed a topic she hoped would bolster her sister's flagging spirits:

the free, unmerited, unbounded Mercy of God, and the infinite Merits of our Great Mediator! Let this be our theme, this is the theme of Angels and Glorify'd Saints! the Song of Eternal Bliss!...O let us, imploring the powerful influences of the Blessed Comforter, endeavour to mediate on this all-important, this ever-interesting Subject 'till we find our hearts warm'd to Love and Praise!³³⁹

Steele and Wakeford's spiritual friendship was formed under the same roof and by the same inherited faith. It took new shape when Wakeford married and moved away, an event that initiated an intentional spiritual correspondence that challenged and sustained the sisters in very different circumstances: Steele as a single woman caring for ageing parents, and Wakeford as a young wife and mother. While Bolton looked for 'freedom' in conversation (the opportunity to examine candidly her spiritual experience in the company of a friend), Steele and Wakeford designed an epistolary strategy of mutual meditation on a religious theme that enabled them to reflect on and rehearse Baptist theology together and to come to apprehend it in more personal and nuanced ways. Yet while their letters were serious and sometimes abstracted, they were always affectionate and personal, encouraging intimacy and spiritual depth. And while Steele sometimes took the lead in their relationship, encouraging her more diffident and discouraged sister, she and Wakeford designed their literary conversation to be mutually beneficial: Steele wrote,

³³⁸ Anne Steele to Mary Wakeford, undated but c. November 1757. AL, STE 3/10/xiv.

³³⁹ Anne Steele to Mary Wakeford, undated but c. November 1757. AL, STE 3/10/xiv.

‘Let us...my Sister my Friend...mutually endeavour to quicken & stimulate each other’.³⁴⁰

This section has analysed the ways in which women provided spiritual encouragement to friends and siblings seeking to live serious religious lives. Women across denominations commonly conceived of their literary interactions with spiritual friends as conversations, a term that emphasises the reciprocal benefit of their literary encounters. Yet distinctions between denominations can be discerned: Anglicans such as Talbot and Carter engaged in literary conversations that functioned as ongoing spiritual exercises designed to focus their efforts to improve their lives by living purposefully and virtuously. The encouragement of these spiritual ideals was promoted through the exchange of tokens of friendship that were imbued not only with emotion but with a religious significance that recalls, sometimes explicitly, a Catholic veneration of relics. Methodists such as Bolton and Scudamore learned patterns of self-scrutiny and transparency through their participation in Methodist structures, and these patterns passed over into correspondences and visits with chosen friends. And Baptists such as Steele and Wakeford used poetry and letters to meditate on religious themes and encourage one another in very different domestic situations. Such literary interactions demonstrate how women learned to live religious lives not only through official means, but actively and together, writing to spiritual friends.

Resignation

Each of the women considered here employed the language of pious resignation in their personal writings. The theme had wide cultural application in the eighteenth century,

³⁴⁰ Anne Steele to Mary Wakeford, c. June 1757. AL, STE 3/10/ix.

when painful illness and early death touched so many lives. Ministers frequently urged the bereaved to practise resignation, as Independent minister Stephen Addington did in his published sermon *Resignation the Duty of Mourners* (1773),³⁴¹ and poets often took up the theme, as Edward Young did in *Resignation* (1761).³⁴² Roy Porter and Dorothy Porter argue that resignation was a common strategy for coping with illness and death in the period.³⁴³ And Amanda Vickery observes uniquely feminine significance in resignation, describing it as the ‘philosophy’ of genteel women confronted by the physical and emotional vulnerabilities of motherhood in the eighteenth century.³⁴⁴ Vickery reads in women’s letters and diaries a felt duty ‘to be brave in suffering and resigned to the weight of one’s biological burdens’.³⁴⁵ While the women considered here did not have children of their own, the subjects of illness and death recurred frequently in their letters, diaries, and poetry, and closer analysis demonstrates important distinctions in the meaning of resignation across denominations. In this section resignation is analysed as the subject of literary conversations between friends and siblings.

³⁴¹ Stephen Addington, *Resignation the Duty of Mourners. A Sermon Preached at Coventry, Nov. 22, 1772, on the Death of Mr. Thomas Dawson* (Coventry: J. W. Piercy, 1773). On the importance of resignation in making a good death, see Ralph A. Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion and the Family in England 1480-1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), Ch. 7: ‘Good Deaths and Bad’; Patricia Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), Ch. 2: ‘The Revival and Decline of the Good Christian Death’.

³⁴² Edward Young, *Resignation* (London: n. p., 1761). Young’s poem was occasioned by the death of Edward Boscawen and written at the request of Elizabeth Montagu for his widow Frances Boscawen. It circulated in manuscript the year that it was printed. Young sent a copy to Montagu to send to Elizabeth Carter, and he forwarded a copy to Catherine Talbot. Elizabeth Montagu to Elizabeth Carter, 1 September 1761. HL, MO 3051. Catherine Talbot to Edward Young, 3 September 1761. Bodl., Eng. Letters c. 209, ff. 92-93.

³⁴³ Roy Porter and Dorothy Porter, *In Sickness and in Health: The British Experience, 1650-1850* (London: Fourth Estate, 1988), Ch. 13: ‘Coping and Resignation’.

³⁴⁴ Vickery, *Gentleman’s Daughter*, 96.

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

Baptists: Yielding to God's sovereign will

Anne Steele's ongoing reflections on the theme of resignation exhibit particular emphases on God's sovereignty and the Christian's duty to yield herself wholly to the steady and immutable will of God, which she perceived as ever good and wise. These beliefs can be traced in her letters and poems written in response to the illness and death of her brother William Steele's first wife, Mary Bullock Steele (1713–62). Shortly after their marriage in 1749 Mary Bullock Steele's health began to fail, and in 1751 Steele, who was often ill herself, travelled with her to Bath where they spent two months drinking the water and bathing 'for their better health', an action indicative of the Steele family's rising socioeconomic status.³⁴⁶ While in Bath Steele wrote to her stepmother and her letter introduces her views on the duty of resignation in times of illness: 'I hope I desire to suppress every repining thought and look up with humble hope & reliance to that Sovereign Hand which fulfills or frustrates mortal expectations as best suits the purposes of Infinite Wisdom and Goodness'.³⁴⁷

Mary Bullock Steele's health, long fragile, had begun to decline seriously by January 1762. At the time she and her husband were visiting family at Yeovil, Somerset, and news of her sister-in-law's failing health prompted Steele to write a series of letters to her brother, which she hoped might bolster his spirits while encouraging renewed hope for healing and ongoing trust in the ever-watchful care and rule of God. Steele wrote that she hoped 'the great Physician in whose hand are the springs of Life' might direct her sister-in-law's recovery, but whatever happened, she urged her brother to trust that God would work everything towards his good purpose: 'his wise & gracious hand...sometimes sends great Afflictions for the exercise of Faith & Patience! It is good both to hope &

³⁴⁶ Anne Cator Steele diary, 29 April 1751. AL, STE 2/1/2.

³⁴⁷ Anne Steele to Anne Cator Steele, 18 May 1751. AL, STE 3/7/xi.

quietly wait for his Salvation'.³⁴⁸ Or again, 'A Christian in the exercise of Faith and Hope has the greatest reason to be contented with the dispensations of Providence, even tho' they are painful and distressing; since they are all, not only just and right, but good and kind'.³⁴⁹ But still her sister-in-law's health continued to decline, and soon Steele was starkly advising him, 'resignation is our indispensable duty'.³⁵⁰

Steele's tone in letters to Mary Bullock Steele during this period was tender and pastoral: 'I know that faintness and dejection of spirit often attends long-protracted pain and weakness; but while the Eternal God is our Refuge, and underneath are the Everlasting Arms, we can never be utterly cast down.'³⁵¹ Acknowledging the 'difficulties and dangers of our painful Pilgrimage', Steele urged her to direct her heart and hope towards heaven: 'may our Faith and Hope be often looking forward through these light and momentary Afflictions to that exceeding & eternal weight of Glory'.³⁵² During those final months of Mary Bullock Steele's life, Steele repeatedly affirmed her hope in heaven where ultimate healing and eternal life awaited. She hoped that her sister-in-law's painful illness would prompt the whole family 'to raise our thoughts, our hopes and our hearts to Heaven'.³⁵³ In times of crisis due to illness and death, the Calvinistic belief in God's sovereignty could be experienced as a spiritual comfort, and Steele wrote to encourage her brother and sister-in-law to rest in their shared belief in God's 'infinite Wisdom and unalterable Goodness'.³⁵⁴

³⁴⁸ Anne Steele to William Steele, 22 January 1762. AL, STE 3/8/vii.

³⁴⁹ Anne Steele to William Steele, 4 March 1762. AL, STE 3/8/x. Cf. Hebrews 12.10.

³⁵⁰ Anne Steele to William Steele, 31 January 1762. AL, STE 3/8/viii.

³⁵¹ Anne Steele to Mary Bullock Steele, 16 March 1762. AL, STE 3/9/v. Cf. Deuteronomy 33.27.

³⁵² Anne Steele to Mary Bullock Steele, 16 March 1762. AL, STE 3/9/v. Cf. Hebrews 12.1 and 2 Corinthians 4.17.

³⁵³ Anne Steele to William Steele, 4 March 1762. AL, STE 3/8/x.

³⁵⁴ Anne Steele to Mary Bullock Steele, 16 March 1762. AL, STE 3/9/v.

Mary Bullock Steele died at Yeovil on 13 May 1762, and while no letters survive from the period immediately afterwards to illuminate the family's response to her death, Steele did write a poem of consolation and mourning for her brother. Entitled 'To Philander', the poem employs William Steele's familial pseudonym, which marked him as affectionate friend (philos) and signalled his gender (andros). In it Steele expressed her desire to ease her brother's sorrow at the death of 'Delia', Mary Bullock Steele's familial pseudonym, by sharing his grief:

While in the arms of death your Delia sleeps
And o'er her ashes fond remembrance weeps;
In tender grief let friendship claim a share,
Friendship, that fain would ease Philander's care.³⁵⁵

Steele's poem movingly depicts her desire to be a friend to her brother as he mourned, and clarifies her belief that 'friendship's love' had greater obligations than 'To sympathize, to pity, to deplore'.³⁵⁶ For Steele, friends should be spiritual friends, encouraging those in distress to live in faith and hope, personified by Steele as the 'Celestial comforter':

See my Philander o'er your Delia's tomb
Hope smiles and dissipates the dreary gloom.
Celestial comforter! she points your eye
To life, to happiness beyond the sky.³⁵⁷

In letter and poetry, Steele encouraged her brother to resignation, which she understood as a conscious self-yielding to God's sovereign will. This was neither an act of despair nor stoic reserve, however, but was personal, tender, and infused with hope.

³⁵⁵ 'To Philander', Steele, *Poems on Subjects Chiefly Devotional*, 3:32.

³⁵⁶ 'To Philander', *ibid.*

³⁵⁷ 'To Philander', *ibid.*

Anglicans: Resignation and stoicism

Catherine Talbot frequently expressed her desire to respond to illness and death with resignation, her letters and diary disclosing an active effort to feel and exhibit appropriate religious emotion. Social expectation and propriety influenced her and her friends' responses to death. In 1761 Elizabeth Montagu wrote to Elizabeth Carter of the exemplary death of Henrietta Fermor, the Countess of Pomfret (1698–1761), who 'quitted the weary journey of human life, and pass'd with resignation to a better'.³⁵⁸ And when her Irish friend Anne Donnellan (c. 1700–62) died the next year, Montagu commended her serene passing in another letter to Carter: 'My poor friend M^{rs} Donnellan with the resignation & hopes of a christian gently departed without agony of mind or body'.³⁵⁹ In contrast to such exemplary resignation, when bluestocking hostess Elizabeth Vesey (c. 1715–91) was distraught after the death of her husband in 1785, Montagu 'severely condemn[ed] her want of resignation' and let her friend know it.³⁶⁰ She reported to Carter that she wrote Vesey '4 sides of paper on ye subject'.³⁶¹ Though a matter of propriety, efforts to submit to death with resignation should not be dismissed as mere formality, irrespective of actual belief. Talbot's desire to live in a purposeful and pious way caused her to probe the nature of resignation and monitor her emotions in her diary. When she was grieving the recent deaths of Joseph Butler (1692–1752) and Martin Benson (1689–1752) in October 1752, she wrote of being 'miserably Low', adding, 'my Spirits have

³⁵⁸ Elizabeth Montagu to Elizabeth Carter, [18 December 1761]. HL, MO 3067.

³⁵⁹ Elizabeth Montagu to Elizabeth Carter, 25 [May] 1762. HL, MO 3073.

³⁶⁰ Elizabeth Montagu to Elizabeth Carter, 19 October [1785]. HL, MO 3597.

³⁶¹ Elizabeth Montagu to Elizabeth Carter, 21 September [1785]. HL, MO 3595. Vesey's response was likely exacerbated by his husband's neglect of her in his will and his added insult of leaving £1000 to his mistress. Myers, *Bluestocking Circle*, 266–267. Montagu wrote to Carter, 'her regrets of a Worthless, peevish, inconstant Husband, appear to me little better than madness'. Elizabeth Montagu to Elizabeth Carter, 19 October [1785]. HL, MO 3597.

affected both my Health & my Temper'.³⁶² Then she asked herself, 'Is this Resignation?'³⁶³

Talbot's efforts to work out the nature of resignation also took place in literary conversations with friends, such as her correspondence with Carter following the death of Catherine Secker (c. 1695–1748) in 1748. Catherine Secker was often unwell and Talbot had long been witness to her illnesses. When she was fifteen years old Thomas Secker discovered that his wife was addicted to opium and laudanum, and he later recorded in his autobiography that it was Talbot who cared for his wife when his role as Bishop of Bristol required him to travel.³⁶⁴ Catherine Secker's addictions were 'overcome with great Difficulty', and her health remained frail for the rest of her life.³⁶⁵ Talbot was greatly attached to Catherine Secker, who appears frequently in her diary under the pseudonym Aristie. In January 1752, four years after she died, Talbot wrote in her diary of the ongoing absence in her life caused by Catherine Secker's death: 'Je Sentois que la Chere Aristie nous manquoit, & J[']ai tourn   la T  te deux ou trois fois avant que de faire reflection que Ce Vuide ne seroit jamais rempli'.³⁶⁶

In the painful days immediately following Catherine Secker's death, Talbot turned to her friend Carter to help her navigate her emotional and theological response to such loss. She wrote to Carter of Thomas Secker's and Mary Talbot's (c. 1691–1784) response to the death, which seemed to her admirably proper and pious: 'they command

³⁶² Catherine Talbot diary, 5 October 1752. BL, Add. 46690. Benson and Butler had loved and cared for Talbot since she was a child. See p. 159.

³⁶³ Catherine Talbot diary, 5 October 1752. BL, Add. 46690.

³⁶⁴ R. W. Greaves and John S. Macauley, eds., *The Autobiography of Thomas Secker, Archbishop of Canterbury* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Libraries, 1988), 17.

³⁶⁵ Ibid.

³⁶⁶ 'I felt that we were wanting Dear Aristie [Catherine Secker], & I turned my Head two or three times before reflecting that This Void would never be filled'. Catherine Talbot diary, 9 January 1752. BL, Add. 46690. Talbot's use of French here, and in about a third of her extant diary, reflects her considerable effort to maintain a social accomplishment.

themselves so well, and smooth over the outward appearance into all that calmness, and propriety of behaviour that reason and religion dictate'.³⁶⁷ Hoping to assure Carter that she also was well, she described herself as 'indifferent...about most things', a comment that suggests a surprisingly stoic suppression of feeling.³⁶⁸ Carter responded, 'you carry this virtue of indifference too far', and encouraged her friend to feel her loss.³⁶⁹ She suggested that reason and religion, independent of the heart, led to a false understanding of resignation: little more than 'a quiet unruffled melancholy'.³⁷⁰ By then she had been corresponding with Talbot regularly for more than seven years, and Carter claimed to know her friend better than she perhaps knew herself: 'whether you will always allow it, or no, sensibility in a high degree you most certainly have'.³⁷¹ Talbot's understanding of resignation and emotion was inconstant at this time, as evidenced by Carter telling her that it was 'the only subject on which I ever heard you talk inconsistently'.³⁷²

As Talbot, in conversation with Carter, attempted to respond with appropriate resignation to the very personal loss of Catherine Secker, the two friends were initiating a literary project that would culminate in 1758 in the publication of Carter's translation of the stoic philosopher Epictetus. Their participation in such work suggests their openness to a greater range of theological and philosophical influences than the other women considered here. The project, and the friends' literary interactions regarding it, helped Talbot to work out her views regarding religious emotion and resignation. In 1751, after sections of the translation project had been passing between them for two years, Talbot could write of the 'harshness of Stoic doctrines', adding, '*If affections make me suffer I*

³⁶⁷ Catherine Talbot to Elizabeth Carter, 8 June 1748. Pennington, ed., *Letters between Carter and Talbot*, 1:254.

³⁶⁸ Catherine Talbot to Elizabeth Carter, 8 June 1748. Ibid.

³⁶⁹ Elizabeth Carter to Catherine Talbot, 20 June 1748. Ibid., 1:264.

³⁷⁰ Elizabeth Carter to Catherine Talbot, 20 June 1748. Ibid., 1:263.

³⁷¹ Elizabeth Carter to Catherine Talbot, 20 June 1748. Ibid., 1:264.

³⁷² Elizabeth Carter to Catherine Talbot, 20 June 1748. Ibid.

*renounce them....No! poor Epictetus! If laudable affections give me pain, I humbly submit to it as the due lot of frail and fallen human nature.*³⁷³ Talbot was concerned with what she perceived as pagan in Epictetus, and she urged Carter to include an Introduction that would draw distinctions between what was ‘false, wild, and defective’ in Epictetus and ‘the only true philosophy, the Christian’.³⁷⁴ This Carter did, also adding footnotes that give a Christian corrective to the emotional indifference of Epictetus. In response to his counsel that one should bear the death of friends as one would a broken pipkin (cooking utensil), Carter exclaimed in a footnote:

This is a wretched Idea of Friendship; but a necessary Consequence of the Stoic System. What a fine Contrast to this gloomy Consolation are the noble Sentiments of an Apostle! Value your deceased Friend, says *Epictetus*, as a broken Pipkin; forget him, as a Thing worthless, lost, and destroyed. *St. Paul*, on the contrary, comforts the mourning Survivors; bidding them, *not sorrow, as those who have no Hope*: but remember, that the Death of good Persons is only a Sleep; from which they shall soon rise to a happy Immortality.³⁷⁵

As mentioned, epistolary conversation between peers was notable for its mutuality, so while Carter earlier supported Talbot through letters, Talbot would later write to encourage Carter. When Carter was ‘extremely low’ in 1757, anxiously attending her younger brother Harry, who was ‘in a dangerous way, and very consumptive’, Talbot wrote to encourage Christian feeling:

In such a situation of mind as your’s [*sic*] must be, how irksome would be the rules of stoicism! ‘You are a poor, paltry, unreasonable wretch, to feel these things; you descend from the dignity of your nature; your only business is to preserve the composure of your mind.’—How much happier that you are able to say to yourself, ‘these feelings, however painful, are a laudable exercise of those

³⁷³ Catherine Talbot to Elizabeth Carter, c. 1751. Pennington, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Elizabeth Carter*, 119.

³⁷⁴ Catherine Talbot to Elizabeth Carter, 8 September 1753. Pennington, ed., *Letters between Carter and Talbot*, 2:138-139.

³⁷⁵ Elizabeth Carter, ed., *All the Works of Epictetus* (London: Printed by Samuel Richardson, 1758), 417-418, n. 1. Cf. 1 Thessalonians 4.13. See also O’Brien, *Women and Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, 61.

affections which were implanted in the human heart by Him who disdained not to take upon him human nature, and to weep for our distresses['].³⁷⁶

The Epictetus project influenced the way in which Talbot had monitored her emotional response to grief, but her emotional reservations may also have been in response to scenes of excessive grief then popular in the literature of sensibility,³⁷⁷ as well as to the popular perception of excessive emotion on the part of religious ‘enthusiasts’, such as the Methodists.

Methodists: Tension between resignation and exertion

Ann Bolton, and those in her spiritual community, often expressed a conventional desire for pious resignation, though their efforts passively to submit themselves to God’s will were held in tension with a spirituality often characterised by active and anxious striving. Pregnancy and illness elicited appeals to resignation that appear formulaic. When Bolton’s friend Sarah Nind (*bap.* 1747, *d.* 1783) was pregnant again in 1778, she wrote to her sister Ann Eden (1743–1801), ‘My bodily Afflictions are but little abated, my present pregnancy is attended with new complaints which are very troublesome and render me useless a great deal of my time’, but she thanked God that she was able to ‘feel a measure of resignation to the mortifying circumstances I am in’.³⁷⁸ And when Elizabeth Ritchie (1754–1835) was suffering from ‘a dreadful inflammation in her eyes’, Bolton received a letter from their friend Elizabeth Dickinson (1751–1822) indicating that Ritchie was ‘all praise & resignation’.³⁷⁹ Yet in a culture characterised by individuals driving themselves

³⁷⁶ Catherine Talbot to Elizabeth Carter, 22 August 1757. Pennington, ed., *Letters between Carter and Talbot*, 2:256, 257–258.

³⁷⁷ G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 223–224 and *passim*.

³⁷⁸ Sarah Nind to Ann Eden, 21 May 1778. WRO, Ward Letters 14.

³⁷⁹ Elizabeth Dickinson to Ann Bolton, 20 February 1804. Pudl., 4/20/2.

to greater holiness, sometimes expressions of passive resignation strained against an emphasis on religious activity. This tension can be observed in Bolton's correspondence with Dickinson following the death of Bolton's husband in 1799.

Bolton married George Conibeere (c. 1738–99) in 1792, when she was forty-eight and he, a widower of Gloucester, was in his mid-fifties. After less than seven years Conibeere died and Bolton felt the loss profoundly, her correspondence for years afterwards betraying her continuing grief. In early 1800 she reached out in letter to Dickinson, a Methodist living in London, who replied by return of post. She offered sympathy, but she also gently encouraged Bolton not to descend into an unhealthy despondency, 'a kind of selfishness of soul', wherein she focused only on herself and her loss.³⁸⁰ Dickinson attempted to stir Bolton up to 'greater usefulness in his Church than ever', writing, 'it seems much impress'd on my mind that yr time for active service is by no means over'.³⁸¹ To help Bolton navigate her way out of her grief, Dickinson shared with her scripture passages that had once acted as 'a sacred Map to guide' her.³⁸²

Four years later Bolton again wrote to Dickinson who had, by then, lost her own husband, and Dickinson now wrote to share her own experience frankly and 'freely' (in typical Methodist fashion), hoping mutually to benefit her own and her friend's soul. She wrote:

It has been upon my mind to give you a letter sketch of the Lords dealings with me since he call'd me to endure the greatest of all trials; I do this 1st that you may help me to praise him for his abundant goodness, & 2^{dly} that you may be more than ever encouraged to trust him for yrself.³⁸³

³⁸⁰ Elizabeth Dickinson to Ann Bolton, 19 January 1800. Pudl., 4/20/1.

³⁸¹ Elizabeth Dickinson to Ann Bolton, 19 January 1800. Pudl., 4/20/1.

³⁸² Elizabeth Dickinson to Ann Bolton, 19 January 1800. Pudl., 4/20/1.

³⁸³ Elizabeth Dickinson to Ann Bolton, 20 February 1804. Pudl., 4/20/2.

Dickinson's husband was Peard Dickinson (1758–1802), and on the morning of his death in 1802 his wife 'was given' words from Isaiah 41.10, 'Fear not for I am with thee', which she received as 'a pillar to rest upon'.³⁸⁴ Dickinson told Bolton that less than five minutes after his death she heard words from 1 Timothy 5.5 (a passage about widows), 'She that is desolate—trusteth in God'; these words came with 'peculiar power' and she experienced them as 'an anchor to my soul'.³⁸⁵ Dickinson shared not only biblical passages that had sustained her, but books and hymns. She recommended Benjamin Grosvenor's popular *The Mourner* (1731), which was for her 'my almost constant companion', and gave precise bibliographic directions to several hymns that had been 'a particular blessing' to her: 'M^r C Wesley's 14th Hymn for Widows, Page 209 2^d Vol of Hymns & Sacred Poems...& the next to it the 15th I think you will find a word in season'.³⁸⁶

Dickinson laid out the 'two paths' set before Bolton: she could passively yield to 'useless grief' or she could rouse herself to 'greater activity & diligence than ever'.³⁸⁷ This was the theme of her earlier letter reprised. Dickinson's urging Bolton to 'greater activity' was coupled with a call to submission: 'resign...yrself into the hands of Infinite Love'.³⁸⁸ Phyllis Mack uses the tension between purposeful activity and passivity as a crux in her analysis of Methodism: 'the fusion of agency and self-transcendence', she writes, 'was the central principle of Methodist psychology and the goal of their religious discipline'.³⁸⁹ Dickinson interpreted this tension in biblical terms. In letters to Bolton written in 1800 and 1804 she explained the dialectic between agency and passivity,

³⁸⁴ Elizabeth Dickinson to Ann Bolton, 20 February 1804. Pudl., 4/20/2.

³⁸⁵ Elizabeth Dickinson to Ann Bolton, 20 February 1804. Pudl., 4/20/2.

³⁸⁶ Elizabeth Dickinson to Ann Bolton, 20 February 1804. Pudl., 4/20/2.

³⁸⁷ Elizabeth Dickinson to Ann Bolton, 20 February 1804. Pudl., 4/20/2.

³⁸⁸ Elizabeth Dickinson to Ann Bolton, 20 February 1804. Pudl., 4/20/2.

³⁸⁹ Mack, *Heart Religion in the British Enlightenment*, 229.

between exertion and resignation, with reference to 2 Timothy 2.21, which refers to the sanctified Christian as ‘a vessel unto honour’. She encouraged Bolton passively to allow God to ‘mould & fashion’ her ‘as clay in the hand of your divine Potter’.³⁹⁰ Yet the ‘vessel unto honour’ that God was preparing was not meant to be decorative but productive, ‘meet for the master’s use, and prepared for every good work’ (2 Timothy 2.21).

As Bolton had earlier looked expectantly to her friend Mary Scudamore’s letters, believing them to be a spiritual conduit of God’s love, she now turned with anticipation to Dickinson’s letters. When Bolton asked Dickinson about her experience of loss, she requested that Dickinson wait and pray before responding to her letter, regarding the letter form with sufficient seriousness that she expected God to speak to her through Dickinson’s reply: ‘I have done as you desired’, wrote Dickinson, ‘& waited & pray’d for divine assistance in answering your letter’.³⁹¹ For her part, Dickinson also anticipated that she might be used by God ‘as a feeble instrument to convey some measure of peace’ to her friend.³⁹² Dickinson’s letters to Bolton relating to George Conibeere’s death urged spiritual resignation in much the same manner as Baptist and Anglican letters, but their appeal to religious experience and activity, and their underlying tension between resignation and exertion, distinguish them as Methodist.

Conclusion

Historians have observed the importance of friendship in supporting religious women’s preaching, philanthropic, and political activities, but here I have argued that friendship

³⁹⁰ Elizabeth Dickinson to Ann Bolton, 20 February 1804. Pudl., 4/20/2.

³⁹¹ Elizabeth Dickinson to Ann Bolton, 20 February 1804. Pudl., 4/20/2.

³⁹² Elizabeth Dickinson to Ann Bolton, 20 February 1804. Pudl., 4/20/2.

also provided more spiritual, or interior, support. Spiritual friendships provided essential encouragement to women across a denominational spectrum by providing a space within which to ask questions, to reveal griefs and fears, and to work out theological views on, for example, the duty of resignation. Yet such friendships were not only between women, for women and men, siblings and friends, involved themselves in each other's lives in such intimate and encouraging ways. Friends used informal literary interactions to nurture mutually supportive relationships: they engaged in ongoing correspondences or initiated correspondences in light of crises, they exchanged diaries, and they wrote poetry for one another. Such literary encounters were conceived of as conversations, exhibited greater variability than usually has been acknowledged, and were egalitarian, affectionate, and personal. Peer sociability nourished a particular kind of shared spirituality, providing reciprocal encouragement that enabled friends and siblings to strengthen emotional bonds and deepen their spiritual lives, as they learned together to write about their faith. And in this often hidden literary act, they formed spiritual community.

Chapter 3

‘No one should leave her excellent heart unamended’:

The Wisdom of Spiritual Elders

I am always hurt when I hear Old Age represented Unjustly as going down Hill....It is indeed going up so high a Hill as may well put Persons out of Breath & make them Faint & Weary, but the encouraging Prospect brightens at every Step, & Assisting Angels stretch out a helping hand...³⁹³

Catherine Talbot's tribute to advancing age acknowledged the increased physical frailty that comes with growing old while celebrating the mature Christian's closer proximity to heaven. She associated the advanced age of Christians with wisdom earned through greater spiritual experience, and she sought out this wisdom by pursuing relationships with older men and women. Talbot's reflections were written in a 1763 letter to Eliza Berkeley (1734–1800) and were prompted by a recent illness of Eliza's mother-in-law, Anne Berkeley (c. 1700–86). Anne Berkeley was the widow of George Berkeley (1685–1753), philosopher and Bishop of Cloyne in Ireland, and Talbot had loved her 'extreamly' and had admired her religious character since their meeting ten years earlier.³⁹⁴ Their relationship had formed during a brief period when they lived in close proximity near Oxford, but Anne Berkeley soon moved to Ireland and then followed her son's ecclesiastical career across southern England, and thus the majority of her and Talbot's relationship transpired through the post. Talbot's long-term relationship with Berkeley, as

³⁹³ Catherine Talbot to Eliza Berkeley, 4 January 1763. BL, Add. 39311.

³⁹⁴ Catherine Talbot diary, 2 August 1753. BL, Add. 46690.

with other older women, caused her to consider ‘increasing Years...as an Advancing Scale whose last Step is in Heaven’.³⁹⁵

This chapter analyses the often hidden ways in which women acted as spiritual elders in religious communities. Focusing on relationships across generations it considers those to whom women looked for spiritual guidance and asks how the exchange of letters and other personal writings supported mentoring relationships. While historians understandably have attended to the pastoral responsibilities of clergy in providing religious guidance,³⁹⁶ this chapter argues that older women outside the nuclear family and local church also played important and underacknowledged roles in directing spiritual lives. Taking a broad view of parenthood and priesthood, it analyses the multiple meanings of such roles for both men and women and shows how overlapping affectionate and spiritual ties could strengthen (and sometimes complicate) mentoring relationships. This chapter argues that an analysis of such relationships reveals older women engaged in a range of unofficial and highly important leadership roles within diverse religious cultures. Looking beyond local contexts introduces the importance of correspondence in sustaining such relationships, and here letter writing is observed to be a powerful and versatile mode of spiritual direction. Talbot’s letter to Eliza Berkeley, hopeful in its belief that the mature Christian would achieve a heavenly reward, signals a spiritual theme with particular significance to older women and men who, as they aged, confronted death in a more immediate sense: the assurance of salvation. Often the subject of formal religious

³⁹⁵ Catherine Talbot to Eliza Berkeley, 4 January 1763. BL, Add. 39311.

³⁹⁶ Of many possible examples of analyses of eighteenth-century pastoral practices, see D. Bruce Hindmarsh, *John Newton and the English Evangelical Tradition: Between the Conversions of Wesley and Wilberforce* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 186-211.

debate and discussion,³⁹⁷ spiritual assurance is here analysed as the subject of informal literary interactions. Such literary interactions illuminate another of the hidden ways in which women constituted religious communities: honoured as spiritual elders, older women across religious cultures were active in supporting and directing the lives of younger women and men.

Older Women and Elders

In describing older women as spiritual elders the church office of elder is deliberately invoked, for the unofficial religious guidance provided by older women has clear resonances with the official responsibilities of church elders to superintend the spiritual welfare of congregations. In both capacities, elders were entrusted with the care of souls. In formal settings, this trust was conferred by ecclesial structure or voting members;³⁹⁸ in informal settings it was bestowed by affection and freely given within personal relationships. Formally and informally, perceived qualities of holiness and wisdom qualified certain persons to be called on to provide such leadership. Vital as these roles were in religious communities, insufficient work has been undertaken on spiritual eldering.³⁹⁹ The term elder would not have been used by or of the older women

³⁹⁷ The question of what constituted adequate grounds for spiritual assurance, whether certain signs of election or an inward witness of the spirit, led to Calvinist-Arminian disagreements. Such theological variation will be developed in the final section of this chapter, 'Assurance'. For a related debate, see discussion of the 'Minutes Controversy' on p. 243.

³⁹⁸ For example, William Latane Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Chicago: Judson Press, 1959), 287. See also Hayden, *English Baptist History and Heritage*, 36; David Hackett Fischer, *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 515; Smith, 'Community and the Believer', 196.

³⁹⁹ For a notable exception, see Fischer, *Albion's Seed*, 103-111, 321-326, 513-517. In his study of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century British origins of four American cultures, Fischer discusses the Puritan idea of the 'elder-saint', the Anglican idea of the 'elder-patriarch', and Quaker elders as 'nursing fathers and mothers'. On the historical practice of spiritual eldership in the Russian Orthodox Church, see Irina Paert, *Spiritual Elders: Charisma and Tradition in Russian Orthodoxy* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2010); Brenda Meehan-Waters, 'The Authority of Holiness: Women Ascetics and Spiritual Elders in Nineteenth-Century Russia,' in *Church, Nation and State in Russia and Ukraine*, ed.

considered here, but considering spiritual eldership is a more inclusive way illuminates previously hidden roles of women within religious communities.

While Quaker and Moravian women did serve as elders in the eighteenth century, the women considered here could not have taken up the role in an official capacity.⁴⁰⁰ Seventeenth-century Baptist women had exercised formal leadership roles as deacons (with responsibilities for temporal rather than spiritual care, women's participation in this role was limited to widows over the age of sixty), but by the eighteenth century those roles were withdrawn.⁴⁰¹ And while the office of elder did not exist in eighteenth-century Methodist chapels or Anglican churches, there was no comparable formal spiritual leadership in which women could engage. Eighteenth-century Methodist women are well known to have acted as preachers, but authorisation for women to preach remained the exception rather than being approved on principle: women required an 'extraordinary call' to preach.⁴⁰² Formally precluded from holding religious offices, older women were nevertheless sought out as spiritual guides on account of two interrelated traits: religious experience and advanced age.

Firstly, perceived spiritual maturity promoted some older women as especially competent guides to the religious life. Often their moral and spiritual authority was interwoven with emotional ties: rather than exercising an impersonal influence over strangers, they acted as spiritual mentors to particular, loved individuals who were attracted to how they lived and spoke of their faith. Personal piety affected the stature of

Geoffrey A. Hosking (Basingstoke: Macmillan in association with the School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University of London, 1991), 38-51.

⁴⁰⁰ Jacqueline Van Gent, 'Sarah and Her Sisters: Letters, Emotions, and Colonial Identities in the Early Modern Atlantic World,' *Journal of Religious History* 38, no. 1 (2014): 76-77; Holton, *Quaker Women*, 49; Madge Dresser, 'Sisters and Brethren: Power, Propriety and Gender among the Bristol Moravians, 1746-1833,' *Social History* 21, no. 3 (1996): 304-329.

⁴⁰¹ Briggs, 'She Preachers, Widows and Other Women,' 337-352; Smith, 'Community and the Believer', 197; Bebbington, *Baptists through the Centuries*, 55.

⁴⁰² Chilcote, *John Wesley and the Women Preachers of Early Methodism*, 171.

older women in religious communities in ways that have not been adequately observed. In her article on seventeenth-century funeral sermons, Debra Parish demonstrates how older women exercised spiritual authority by virtue of personal piety, though in her analysis such authority was attained in death and was mediated by male ministers eulogising women in print.⁴⁰³ What Parish observes in the seventeenth century can be extended to the eighteenth century, when exemplary women's diaries and letters were frequently published posthumously and similarly through the intercession of male ministers.⁴⁰⁴ Yet older women's reputations for holiness also led to spiritual authority in life and through unmediated personal writings. Historians of women and ageing have tended to interpret religion as essentially private, increasing in personal importance as one aged. Lynne Botelho and Pat Thane argue that religion formed part of the 'continuum of old age' and emphasise its analgesic qualities, 'softening the aches and pains of physical ageing'.⁴⁰⁵ Similarly, Anne Kugler observes in the ageing Lady Sarah Cowper's diary an amplified religiosity, and interprets this shift to Cowper's searching for religious comfort as she confronted her own mortality.⁴⁰⁶ Such heightened contemplation and inwardness might be predicted in the devout elderly, since faith must have provided comfort in new and perhaps frightening circumstances, as health failed, friends died, and dependency increased. Rather than generating posthumous authority or private consolation, here the

⁴⁰³ Debra Parish, 'The Power of Female Pietism: Women as Spiritual Authorities and Religious Role Models in Seventeenth-Century England,' *Journal of Religious History* 17 (1992): 33-46.

⁴⁰⁴ Of many possible examples, see Henry Moore, ed., *The Life of Mrs. Mary Fletcher, Consort and Relict of the Rev. John Fletcher*, 2 vols. (London: Thomas Cordeux, 1818); Joseph Cole, *Memoirs of Miss Hannah Ball, of High Wycombe, in Buckinghamshire. Extracted from Her Diary of Thirty Years Experience* (York: Printed for her sister, by Wilson, Spence, and Mawman, 1796).

⁴⁰⁵ Lynn A. Botelho and Pat Thane, eds., *Women and Ageing in British Society since 1500* (Harlow: Longman, 2001), 6.

⁴⁰⁶ Anne Kugler, "'I Feel Myself Decay Apace': Old Age in the Diary of Lady Sarah Cowper (1644-1720)," in *Women and Ageing in British Society since 1500*, ed. Lynn A. Botelho and Pat Thane (Harlow: Longman, 2001), 79. See also Amy M. Froide, 'Old Maids: The Lifecycle of Single Women in Early Modern England,' in *Women and Ageing in British Society since 1500*, ed. Lynn A. Botelho and Pat Thane (Harlow: Longman, 2001), 89-110.

devotion of older women is considered to have provoked valuable engagement in spiritual communities.

Secondly, advanced age contributed to women's authority as spiritual guides. The perception of wisdom and religious experience affected the trust afforded some women, but it was the wisdom of increased *age* that authorised such esteem.⁴⁰⁷ The veneration of elders can be observed across the religious communities studied here, as older persons were expected to possess certain virtues, such as wisdom and holiness, and when they did they were accorded honour and respect.⁴⁰⁸ Using age and spiritual experience as gauges for bestowing honour was not uncomplicated, however. Indeed, one of the recurrent questions in the historiography of ageing is, how old is old? While for the purposes of analysis and comparison, historians tend to agree on sixty as marking the onset of old age, they acknowledge a wide range of experiences and self-perceptions of ageing.⁴⁰⁹ Sometimes social position or the experience of illness prompted someone to be regarded as an elder, even when age was not advanced. Spiritual experience or personal piety also had the capacity to alter the perception of older people as elders, both positively and negatively. Especially devout people might achieve elder status before the age of sixty, while those considered less spiritually mature, despite advanced biological age, might

⁴⁰⁷ Recent efforts to reconstruct older people's experiences in the past include Pat Thane, *Old Age in English History: Past Experiences and Present Issues* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Botelho and Thane, eds., *Women and Ageing in British Society since 1500*; Susannah R. Ottaway, *The Decline of Life: Old Age in Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Lynn A. Botelho and Susannah R. Ottaway, eds., *The History of Old Age in England, 1600-1800*, 8 vols. (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2008-2009).

⁴⁰⁸ On elder veneration in Jonathan Edwards's church at Northampton, Massachusetts, see Kenneth P. Minkema, 'Old Age and Religion in the Writings and Life of Jonathan Edwards,' *Church History* 70, no. 4 (2001): 675-676.

⁴⁰⁹ Ottaway, *Decline of Life*, Ch. 1: 'Who was "old" in eighteenth-century England?'; Thane, *Old Age in English History*, Ch. 1: 'Did people in the past grow old?'. Lynn Botelho asks how menopause affected the perception and experiences of ageing women and argues that in the seventeenth century, women in their fifties were often considered old. Lynn A. Botelho, 'Old Age and Menopause in Rural Women of Early Modern Suffolk,' in *Women and Ageing in British Society since 1500*, ed. Lynn A. Botelho and Pat Thane (Harlow: Longman, 2001), 43-65.

never be sought out as religious guides. As Susannah Ottaway cautions, old people should not be interpreted sentimentally as receiving unqualified respect from younger generations.⁴¹⁰ Yet when advanced age combined with mature spiritual experience, older women could achieve the unofficial status of spiritual elder.

Catherine Talbot's regret that old people were perceived unjustly as going downhill rather than up a hill as they approached God and their heavenly reward was certainly intended in such spiritual terms. But it might also be interpreted in terms of women's activity within religious communities. Increased age often led to a corresponding decline in one's capacity to work and contribute economically to families and communities. Thus Gervase Babington wrote in his *Works* (1615) that in old age 'we go down the hill again and every day grow weaker and weaker'.⁴¹¹ For those whose work identities altered as they aged, increased age might come with a corresponding loss of authority. For women, however, increased age might lead to a rise in authority.⁴¹² Freed from childbearing and childrearing, women could experience older age as a time of greater personal freedom.⁴¹³ Older age could also supply greater independence and financial autonomy for both single women and married women whose husbands predeceased them.⁴¹⁴ Thus rather than going down a hill, in some senses elderly women ascended. In religious communities, the rise in authority that came with ageing was

⁴¹⁰ Ottaway, *Decline of Life*, 1.

⁴¹¹ Quoted in Keith Thomas, 'Age and Authority in Early Modern England,' *Proceedings of the British Academy* 62 (1976): 240.

⁴¹² Ibid., 235-236. On the relationship between old age and authority, see Ottaway, *Decline of Life*; Adam Fox, 'Custom, Memory and the Authority of Writing,' in *The Experience of Authority in Early Modern England*, ed. Paul Griffiths, Adam Fox, and Steve Hindle (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 89-116; Thomas, 'Age and Authority in Early Modern England,' 205-248.

⁴¹³ Froide, 'Old Maids,' 89-90.

⁴¹⁴ Ibid., 102; Susannah R. Ottaway, 'The Old Woman's Home in Eighteenth-Century England,' in *Women and Ageing in British Society since 1500*, ed. Lynn A. Botelho and Pat Thane (Harlow: Longman, 2001), 113.

manifested in older women transgressing gender boundaries and performing unofficial leadership roles.

Older women in religious cultures

Catherine Talbot was drawn to older women who confronted the end of life with courage and unfaltering faith. In late 1761 Henrietta Fermor, the Countess of Pomfret, lay dying, and in her final days she would only see her daughter and her friends Lady Isabella Finch and Elizabeth Montagu.⁴¹⁵ Talbot was reluctant to impose at such a time, but admitted to Elizabeth Carter that she ‘exceedingly long[ed] to be admitted’.⁴¹⁶ She added, ‘A fellow exile just on the point of being recalled, and sensible of the blessing, is of all companies the most interesting.’⁴¹⁷ Regarding Pomfret, Talbot wrote that for years she had ‘respected her highly’, but now that Pomfret was poised at the border of heaven, Talbot thought that she might have gained a new and valuable spiritual perspective.⁴¹⁸

Talbot may initially have encountered Pomfret, by reputation or in person, through the Countess’s longtime friend Frances Seymour (1699–1754), then the Duchess of Somerset.⁴¹⁹ Beginning in 1752, Talbot purposefully cultivated a relationship with the Duchess, describing their meeting in her diary as ‘a Day that Must not be omitted’.⁴²⁰ A generation older than Talbot, the Duchess had been a close friend of the poet and devotional writer Elizabeth Rowe (1674–1737), on whose account Talbot had wanted to meet her for years: ‘Ever since my Childhood, but especially ever since I read M^{rs} Rowes

⁴¹⁵ Elizabeth Montagu to Elizabeth Carter, 17 November 1761. HL, MO 3064.

⁴¹⁶ Catherine Talbot to Elizabeth Carter, 3 December 1761. Pennington, ed., *Letters between Carter and Talbot*, 2:394.

⁴¹⁷ Catherine Talbot to Elizabeth Carter, 3 December 1761. Ibid.

⁴¹⁸ Catherine Talbot to Elizabeth Carter, 3 December 1761. Ibid. Pomfret died on 17 December 1761.

⁴¹⁹ Frances Seymour is more often known by her early title, the Countess of Hertford, or Lady Hertford; in 1748, however, she became Duchess of Somerset, and since Talbot knew her only as the Duchess of Somerset and referred to her as such, she is referred to by her later title here.

⁴²⁰ Catherine Talbot diary, 26 March 1752. BL, Add. 46690.

Books, I have longed for an acquaintance with Cleora.’⁴²¹ Rowe was the popular author of *Friendship in Death* (1728) and *Letters on Various Occasions* (1729); the earlier volume consisted of fictional letters from the dead to the living, written to persuade the reader of the soul’s immortality, while the latter volume contained actual letters, including ten written by the Duchess under the pseudonym Cleora.⁴²² Talbot described their meeting in her diary: ‘Cleora appear’d very awful to me, but in the Course of the Conversation her Appearance was sweet & Agreeable. Had I been in less Awe Should have been still more pleas’d.’⁴²³ And she later wrote to Carter:

From my very earliest memory I have from a distance admired her character, but I find her to be much more than my highest imagination had formed. The best and the frankest of hearts: the most polite, the most easy, the most friendly behaviour: and understanding every way improved, a taste just and elegant, a candour and goodness that prevents one’s being in the least uneasy or afraid of a person whom one must at once admire, love, and revere.⁴²⁴

The degree of Talbot’s esteem was likely affected by the Duchess’s elevated social stature and literary reputation, but it was also heightened by her perceived piety and more advanced age.

The Duchess of Somerset had a reputation for piety and was active in the religious world of eighteenth-century England in previously unrecognised ways. In *The Feminiad* (1754), his encomium to accomplished British women, the clergyman John Duncombe wrote of her:

Here, sweetly blended, to our wond’ring eyes;
The Peeress, Poetess and Christian rise⁴²⁵

⁴²¹ Catherine Talbot diary, 26 March 1752. BL, Add. 46690.

⁴²² The originals of these letters are in DNP 110. See also Melanie Bigold, ‘Elizabeth Rowe’s Fictional and Familiar Letters: Exemplarity, Enthusiasm, and the Production of Posthumous Meaning,’ *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 29, no. 1 (2006): 1-14.

⁴²³ Catherine Talbot diary, 26 March 1752. BL, Add. 46690.

⁴²⁴ Catherine Talbot to Elizabeth Carter, 13 November 1752. Pennington, ed., *Letters between Carter and Talbot*, 2:99.

⁴²⁵ John Duncombe, *The Feminiad* (London: Printed for M. Cooper, 1754), 17.

Duncombe noted three aspects of her identity and activity: peer, poet, Christian. Court historians have observed her aristocratic status and activity.⁴²⁶ Literary scholars have considered her own efforts as a poet and more often her significance as a patron to several generations of poets, including Elizabeth Rowe, James Thomson, and William Shenstone.⁴²⁷ Her activities and connections as a devout woman, however, are rarely considered. Yet the Duchess's correspondence reveals a keen awareness of national religious developments and she was well connected to leading eighteenth-century religious figures in both the established and dissenting churches: when she was a child, Bishop Thomas Ken had lived with her family following his secession from the Anglican Church; the Independent minister and influential writer Isaac Watts (1674–1748) became a friend in midlife and they corresponded for more than twenty years; in the 1730s and 1740s she observed with interest the emergence and progress of the Methodist movement; and she was intimate with Selina Hastings, the Countess of Huntingdon, who founded her own 'connexion' of chapels and referred to Somerset as 'my beloved Duchess'.⁴²⁸ And as an older woman she developed a close relationship with Talbot.⁴²⁹

⁴²⁶ Clarissa Campbell Orr, 'Popular History, Court Studies, and Courtier Diaries,' *The Court Historian* 17, no. 1 (2012): 1-16.

⁴²⁷ See also Prescott, 'Provincial Networks, Dissenting Connections, and Noble Friends,' 29-42.

⁴²⁸ Helen Sard Hughes, *The Gentle Hertford: Her Life and Letters* (New York: Macmillan, 1940), 349-381. On her interest in 'our new sect, who call themselves Methodists', see the Countess of Hertford to the Countess of Pomfret, 1 September 1739. William Bingley, ed., *Correspondence between Frances, Countess of Hartford (Afterward Duchess of Somerset), and Henrietta Louisa, Countess of Pomfret, between the Years 1738 and 1741*, 3 vols. (London: Printed by I. Gold for Richard Phillips, 1805), 1:134. See also Aaron Crossley Hobart Seymour, *The Life and Times of Selina, Countess of Huntingdon*, 2 vols. (London: W. E. Painter, 1844), 1:83, 1:127. On the Countess of Huntingdon's conversion to Methodism, see the Countess of Hertford to the Countess of Pomfret, 1 May 1740. Bingley, ed., *Correspondence between the Duchess of Somerset and the Countess of Pomfret*, 1:233-234. And the Duchess of Somerset to James Wilkins, 18 December [1747]. DNP 30.

⁴²⁹ The Duchess's religious activities broadly and relationship with Talbot more narrowly are suggestive of the religious impact of other eighteenth-century aristocratic women. The Countess of Huntingdon is well known for her religious activities, but there were many deeply religious aristocratic women who participated in diverse ways in the eighteenth-century religious world. There is scope for interesting research on these women. See Jones, 'Spiritual Aristocracy,' 85-94.

Observing their relationship illuminates the Duchess's unofficial leadership of the religious community she carefully constructed at Percy Lodge, her home near Windsor. Her religious seriousness was heightened by various losses later in life. In 1744 her nineteen-year-old son died of smallpox while on a grand tour of Italy, and her grief was profound and lasting.⁴³⁰ And in 1750 her husband, to whom she was devoted, also died. Increasingly she lived in retirement at Percy Lodge and her reputation for piety enlarged.⁴³¹ Her status as a widow, her declining health, and her stature within court and literary circles contributed to Talbot's perception of her as an older woman, despite her being in her early fifties at the time. Talbot frequently made extended visits to Percy Lodge, referring to it as a 'Refuge' and 'the Abode of Peace & Happiness'.⁴³² In late 1753 she remained for six weeks and compared her happiness there to that of a nun in her 'beloved Convent', a comment that evokes the ways in which Percy Lodge resembled a religious community both in appearance and practice.⁴³³ And in both respects the Duchess served as guide and superintendent.

In appearance, aspects of Percy Lodge resembled more formal religious communities. Having bought the house with her husband in 1739, the Duchess was actively involved in its refurbishment and in redesigning its gardens. She had in mind a place of spiritual retreat or retirement, and set to work constructing it.⁴³⁴ In the midst of

⁴³⁰ Hughes, *Gentle Hertford*, 212-348.

⁴³¹ *Ibid.*, 383.

⁴³² Catherine Talbot to the Duchess of Somerset, 4 March [1753]. DNP 31. Catherine Talbot diary, 3 November 1753. BL, Add. 46688.

⁴³³ Catherine Talbot to the Duchess of Somerset, 18 December 1753. DNP 31.

⁴³⁴ Stephen Bending, *Green Retreats: Women, Gardens and Eighteenth-Century Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 34.

her garden she built a hermitage⁴³⁵ and, writing to her friend the Countess of Pomfret, the Duchess described the grounds:

There is one walk that I am extremely partial to; and which is rightly called the Abbey-walk, since it is composed of prodigiously high beech-trees, that form an arch through the whole length, exactly resembling a cloister.⁴³⁶

Daily, she took contemplative walks through this cloister.⁴³⁷ She directed considerable energy to building a chapel, and this chapel formed the centre of religious life in her home.⁴³⁸

In practice also, life at Percy Lodge resembled formal religious communities. The rhythm of life was organised around prayers held in the chapel, and everyone in the house, whether visitor or resident, was expected to attend. In a poem addressed to the Countess of Pomfret, the Duchess described life at Percy Lodge and the role the chapel played:

Then tolls the bell, and all unite
In pray'r that God would bless the night⁴³⁹

As monastic communities punctuated their days with devotion, those bells called Talbot to prayers twice daily, before breakfast and dinner. Hearing them, she would set down her reading or put aside her diary and return again to the 'wonderfully pretty Gothick Room'.⁴⁴⁰ Recounting the days she spent at Percy Lodge, her diary echoes again and

⁴³⁵ David Coffin describes the increasing popularity of religious hermitages in gardens of the period. David R. Coffin, *The English Garden: Meditation and Memorial* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 93. See also Todd Longstaffe-Gowan, *The London Town Garden, 1740-1860* (New Haven: Published for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, 2001), 116-117.

⁴³⁶ The Duchess of Somerset to the Countess of Pomfret, 21 May 1740. Bingley, ed., *Correspondence between the Duchess of Somerset and the Countess of Pomfret*, 2:3-4.

⁴³⁷ Hughes, *Gentle Hertford*, 282; David Hill Radcliffe, 'Genre and Social Order in Country House Poems of the Eighteenth Century: Four Views of Percy Lodge,' *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 30, no. 3 (1990): 449.

⁴³⁸ Hughes, *Gentle Hertford*, 349, 382.

⁴³⁹ The Duchess of Somerset to the Countess of Pomfret, 1 July 1740. Bingley, ed., *Correspondence between the Duchess of Somerset and the Countess of Pomfret*, 2:38. The Duchess also described the rhythm of life at Percy Lodge in a letter to an unnamed correspondent, 31 December [1753]. DNP 31.

⁴⁴⁰ Catherine Talbot diary, 4 November 1753. BL, Add. 46688.

again: ‘we were called to Prayers’.⁴⁴¹ The Duchess thus superintended a kind of monastic community that operated according to regular hours.⁴⁴² Talbot wrote with admiration of Somerset’s careful attention to time—‘even with her bad health & with the infinity of business she has to do is always punctual to a Minute’—and, given her religious concern to use her time wisely, Talbot responded positively to the rhythm imposed.⁴⁴³

The Duchess’s closet became a particularly important space of ritualised spiritual engagement during Talbot’s visits. Lined with pictures of hermits,⁴⁴⁴ it was a more suitable place, as Talbot wrote, for ‘a grave good woman to say her prayers’ than Lady Georgiana Spencer’s closet, lined as it was with ‘all those Cupids, and Hymens and Metamorphoses’.⁴⁴⁵ Somerset’s closet suggests a kind of intensely private space of feminine devotion. Much scholarship on historical women’s closets has emphasised this privacy, correlating the closet with feminine empowerment since it provided women with their own space within busy households and gave them permission and provision to focus on themselves.⁴⁴⁶ Yet while Somerset’s closet can be described as private, it was not always a place of solitude, for she frequently invited Talbot to join her in it. Talbot’s

⁴⁴¹ Catherine Talbot diary, 9 November 1753. BL, Add. 46688.

⁴⁴² David Radcliffe refers to the Duchess’s ‘quasi-monastic community’ at Percy Lodge. Radcliffe, ‘Genre and Social Order in Country House Poems,’ 447.

⁴⁴³ Catherine Talbot diary, 10 November 1753. BL, Add. 46688.

⁴⁴⁴ Radcliffe, ‘Genre and Social Order in Country House Poems,’ 463, n. 10. The Duchess described one such painting in a letter to her son written 4 March 1744. Hughes, *Gentle Hertford*, 309.

⁴⁴⁵ Catherine Talbot to Elizabeth Carter, 15 August 1760. Pennington, ed., *Letters between Carter and Talbot*, 2:346.

⁴⁴⁶ E. J. Clery, *The Feminization Debate in Eighteenth-Century England: Literature, Commerce and Luxury* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 136, 133. Effie Botonaki argues that the closet gave women space and freedom to be ‘self-centred’. Effie Botonaki, ‘Early Modern Women’s Diaries and Closets: Chambers of Choice Mercy and Beloved Retirement,’ in *Recording and Reordering: Essays on the Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Diary and Journal*, ed. Dan Doll and Jessica Munns (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2006), 45. See also Karen Lipsedge, ‘“Enter into Thy Closet”: Women, Closet Culture, and the Eighteenth-Century English Novel,’ in *Gender, Taste, and Material Culture in Britain and North America, 1700-1830*, ed. John Styles and Amanda Vickery (New Haven: Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, 2006), 107-122; Charles Wallace Jr., ‘The Prayer Closet as a “Room of One’s Own”: Two Anglican Women Devotional Writers at the Turn of the Eighteenth Century,’ *Journal of Women’s History* 9, no. 2 (1997): 108-121. For a more nuanced reading of closets as spaces of both privacy and sociability, see Andrew Cambers, *Godly Reading: Print, Manuscript and Puritanism in England, 1580-1720* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 43-45.

visits to Percy Lodge were punctuated by regular meetings with the Duchess in her closet, and indeed the times that Talbot recalled as most precious were those spent alone with the Duchess in her closet.⁴⁴⁷

The regularity and ritualised nature of these meetings suggests the closet as a confessional, a context in which the Duchess, who took a guiding role, acted as Talbot's spiritual director in informal and intimate ways. Together in the closet they had serious conversations, read together (often aloud), and mused together over old papers.⁴⁴⁸ While Talbot's record of her regular meetings with the Duchess leaves no doubt as to the religious nature of many of their closet conversations, she did not record their content. Perhaps in keeping between them the substance of their conversations, the confidence of the confessional was actually preserved.⁴⁴⁹ After one such meeting with the Duchess, Talbot praised her in her diary, confident that their time together would have an improving effect on her: she observed and admired Somerset's humility, fortitude in suffering, and life of active goodness, and concluded, 'no one should leave her excellent Heart unamended'.⁴⁵⁰ Having constructed a religious community at Percy Lodge, the Duchess directed its patterns of life and rituals of devotion. And Talbot, attracted to Somerset's life and faith and to the rhythm of life at Percy Lodge, was grateful to be guided by her.

While the Duchess of Somerset led an informal religious community at her home near Windsor, Anne Cator Steele performed unofficial leadership roles within a formal religious community. Surviving family and church papers reveal her activities as

⁴⁴⁷ For example, Catherine Talbot diary, 17 November 1753. BL, Add. 46688.

⁴⁴⁸ For example, Catherine Talbot diary, 21 November 1753. BL, Add. 46688.

⁴⁴⁹ Talbot may not have recorded the content of her conversations with the Duchess in her diary because she often shared her diary with friends, as will be discussed in the next chapter. See p. 217.

⁴⁵⁰ Catherine Talbot diary, 21 November 1753. BL, Add. 46688.

unofficial church clerk and pastor within the Baptist church at Broughton. Firstly, as unofficial clerk she was particularly attentive to issues of membership. Indeed, her diary mirrors official church books—noting baptisms, deaths, and transfers from other churches—though supplements their unembellished census by incorporating greater detail, personal commentary, and religious interpretation. As one example, the church books for 1732 show an unusual influx of members. Anne Cator Steele described this as a season of local ‘revival’, and her diary clarifies that most of those baptised in 1732 were children or servants of current members.⁴⁵¹ Reading official records against her unofficial record thus gives personal faces to the stark facts found in church books and clarifies how such church growth was regarded. Her diary also supplements membership records with an account of worship practices, since hymns sung in church were sometimes transcribed, dated, and pinned into the diary.⁴⁵² Her careful accounting of the corporate life of her church is also preserved in a small, worn, calf-bound notebook in which she kept a record of every sermon she heard between 1706 and her death in 1760. This list does not vary in form throughout the 54 years she maintained it: each sermon is represented by a single line on which are recorded date, preacher, and text.⁴⁵³ A key to this notebook is pinned inside the final volume of her diary, and on this single folded sheet she condensed her sermon-hearing experience to an alphabetical listing of ‘Those Baptist ministers I heard preach.’ The total number is 134.⁴⁵⁴ Though, significantly, she also recorded hearing Anglican, Methodist, Independent, and Presbyterian ministers: her religious experience was not confined within the Baptist denomination. Consistently recording, tallying, and

⁴⁵¹ Anne Cator Steele diary, 11 June 1732. AL, STE 2/1/1. Also church books of Broughton Baptist Church. AL, Broughton 1/3. See also Smith, ‘Community and the Believer’, 163-164.

⁴⁵² For example, Anne Cator Steele diary, paper slipped in at March 1750. AL, STE 2/1/2. See also AL, STE 3/1/2.

⁴⁵³ Anne Cator Steele, record of preachers heard. AL, STE 2/2/3.

⁴⁵⁴ Anne Cator Steele diary. AL, STE 2/1/3.

cross-referencing, she constructed quantifiable records of the religious life of her community—records as illuminating as any carefully managed church book.

Anne Cator Steele's diary was clearly not wholly a record of self-examination, though it does attest to the manner in which her spiritual life was constantly under review. It had both personal and communal meaning, and the same formalised approach she applied to recording the life of her community she applied to the reckoning she gave of her own life. Begun when she married in 1723, she wrote her last entry the day before she died in 1760.⁴⁵⁵ Throughout the seventeen years covered by her extant diary, her diary-writing practice was rigorously consistent: an entry every day, Sundays marked as such in the margin, Bible references also noted as marginalia. Every six weeks, in preparation for communion, she read over her diary for the previous six weeks and wrote an 'X' in the margin, which would mark the place for her to begin reading in another six weeks' time.⁴⁵⁶ And at the beginning of each year she re-read her diary for the year just past, six months over each of two days. (See Figure 6.) Her diary is thus a record of one woman's religious life as much as it is a record of her religious community's life, and as we shall see, it would come to be used within that community.

Secondly, Anne Cator Steele not only gave a reckoning of church membership as unofficial clerk, but as unofficial pastor she provided religious advice and guidance to those who wished to join the Baptist church. In 1730 she accompanied Mary Strong to the

⁴⁵⁵ The diary was written in six thick volumes, three of which have survived. See Anne Cator Steele diary. AL, STE 2/1/1, 2/1/2, and 2/1/3. The extant volumes cover the periods 1730–36 (when she was aged 41 to 47) and 1749–60 (when she was aged 60 to 71). On Anne Cator Steele commencing the diary when she married, see Broome, *Bruised Reed*, 77.

⁴⁵⁶ See Karen Elizabeth Smith, 'Preparation as a Discipline of Devotion in Eighteenth-Century England: A Lost Facet of Baptist Identity,' in *Baptist Identities: International Studies from the Seventeenth to the Twentieth Century*, ed. Ian M. Randall, Tovia Pilli, and Anthony R. Cross (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2006), 22–44.



Figure 6: Anne Cator Steele's diary⁴⁵⁷

pastor's home to discuss the possibility of baptism, and having previously spoken with Strong she judged her discourse on this occasion to be 'better than I Expected'.⁴⁵⁸ Two years later, when her stepdaughter Anne Steele wished to be baptised, Anne Cator Steele talked with her and, 'find[ing] God have been very Gracious to her', likewise accompanied her to the pastor's home.⁴⁵⁹ This pattern continued until the end of her life. In 1760 she wrote, 'I have earnest desires for some increase in our Church', and when Martha Tub arrived at her house to discuss her religious experience with her husband William Steele, who was then pastor, Anne Cator Steele was present and assessing Tub's spiritual experience: 'she talks very well', she concluded, and the following Sunday Tub

⁴⁵⁷ AL, STE 2/1/1.

⁴⁵⁸ Anne Cator Steele diary, 2 August 1730. AL, STE 2/1/1.

⁴⁵⁹ Anne Cator Steele diary, 10 June 1732. AL, STE 2/1/1.

was baptised.⁴⁶⁰ Two weeks later Anne Cator Steele died, and Anne Steele memorialised her in a poem that includes a portrait of her elderly stepmother:

...enfeebled, bent with years,
Worn out with pains, her mental powers decay'd
And lost to social joys...⁴⁶¹

Yet this image of an undeniably old woman, frail and lonely, is surely incomplete, for Anne Cator Steele had been immersed and involved in her religious community, providing informal leadership, until the end.

While the religious leadership of the Duchess of Somerset and Anne Cator Steele was hidden and is perceptible now only through their and others' personal writings, that of the Methodist Mary Fletcher (1739–1815) had two facets and, indeed, phases: one was widely visible to the English Methodist world and the other was more hidden. The first included her public philanthropic work as well as her activities as a Methodist preacher and published writer, and this has attracted much scholarly attention.⁴⁶² By the 1790s Fletcher was widowed and, her age and health now preventing the preaching that had been formally approved by Methodist authorities, she developed an informal ministry of religious counsel from her home in Madeley, Shropshire. This second, more hidden leadership she described in her diary in 1793:

I am in ye very place and situation were God would have me be – many come to me from far & are like to do so more & more – and I will not thrink [sic] from it for it is Gods call – if I was to travel about as I have sometimes done – I could do little because a small Journey lays me up – neither co^d I have liberty for publick meetings – but at home I can converse with many, in the meetings & speak to hundreds at once – true I have the Burden & Expençe of Company – but God has

⁴⁶⁰ Anne Cator Steele diary, 13 June 1760. AL, STE 2/1/3. Church book of Broughton Baptist Church. AL, Broughton 1/4.

⁴⁶¹ 'To Amira on the Sudden Death of Her Mother', Steele, *Poems on Subjects Chiefly Devotional*, 3:40.

⁴⁶² For example, Brown, *Women of Mr. Wesley's Methodism*; Chilcote, *John Wesley and the Women Preachers of Early Methodism*; Mack, *Heart Religion in the British Enlightenment*; Brett C. McInelly, 'Mothers in Christ: Mary Fletcher and the Women of Early Methodism,' in *Religion, Gender, and Industry: Exploring Church and Methodism in a Local Setting*, ed. Geordan Hammond and Peter S. Forsaith (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2011), 123-136.

given me a plentifull income to bear that Expence – and good handy faithfull servants to take off the burden, & such as delight to do faithfully all that they do either for the Brethren or Strangers....I felt a renew^d alacrity for the Service of Souls.⁴⁶³

Age and health required her withdrawal from official religious activities, but although her space contracted to her home, her ministry did not likewise contract. Instead, it altered. Rather than going out to preach, Fletcher's reputation for wisdom and holiness caused her to be sought out as a spiritual elder.

Ann Bolton met Fletcher at Madeley in 1797, although they had been corresponding since earlier in the decade. Fletcher was only four years older than Bolton, but her experience and connections had secured her distinguished public stature and caused Bolton to approach her with the honour and respect more typically reserved for someone considerably older. On Bolton and her husband's journey to visit Fletcher at Madeley, they passed by a stately aristocratic house and park at Tifnal, and she reflected in her diary on her inability to give honour simply on account of title and wealth. Exemplary spiritual qualities were necessary to earn her esteem. On their arrival at Madeley they were welcomed into 'the sacred peaceable Mansion' and Bolton found that words failed her upon meeting Fletcher: 'We were received by that blessed Woman with such humble Dignity, such benign Courtecy as I can by no means describe. I was perfectly struck with astonishment, & so I was the whole time we were with her.'⁴⁶⁴ She attended to Fletcher with almost reverential awe. Fletcher's 'every word' was 'destilld as the dew on my heart'.⁴⁶⁵ When she prayed 'y^e heavens seem'd to shower down immediate Blessings'.⁴⁶⁶

⁴⁶³ Mary Fletcher diary, 14 August 1793. JRL, MAM FL.

⁴⁶⁴ Ann Bolton diary, 4 July 1797. Pudl., 3/23.

⁴⁶⁵ Ann Bolton diary, 4 July 1797. Pudl., 3/23.

⁴⁶⁶ Ann Bolton diary, 5 July 1797. Pudl., 3/23.

Bolton's design in going to Madeley had been to seek Fletcher's guidance regarding her husband, George Conibeere. At issue was his uncertain spiritual state, which Bolton felt to be an ongoing burden. She had married him five years earlier despite his not being a Methodist, and their formal marriage negotiations were preceded by Bolton's explicit efforts to test his religious seriousness.⁴⁶⁷ Conibeere willingly submitted to such testing, and Bolton later wrote to Fletcher, 'he married me that I might be his guide & leader to heaven'.⁴⁶⁸ But five years later his spiritual state remained unresolved, so Bolton brought him to someone of greater spiritual authority. Fletcher met with them throughout their visit to offer advice and guidance and, on the third day of their visit, introduced some letters written by her late friend, Sarah Ryan (1724–68). Bolton recorded in her diary, 'those Letters were full of energetic power, & of y^e Holy Ghost'.⁴⁶⁹ Through letter and visit, prayer and conversation, and sharing the manuscripts of now-dead friends, Bolton sought and found spiritual guidance from one she referred to as a 'Minister of God for good to me'.⁴⁷⁰ Fletcher was honoured as an unofficial religious leader long after age and illness curtailed her more public and official ministries.

Rather than precipitating a retreat from meaningful engagement in communal life, advanced age could lead to older women achieving honoured positions as spiritual elders within diverse religious communities. The Duchess of Somerset developed a reputation for piety within a diffuse Anglican world and superintended an informal religious community in her home at Percy Lodge, where Talbot sought her out; Anne Cator Steele actively monitored and unofficially supervised membership of her local Baptist church; and Mary Fletcher's public activities earned her a reputation in later life as a Methodist

⁴⁶⁷ See Bolton-Conibeere courtship letters. Lond.

⁴⁶⁸ Ann Bolton to Mary Fletcher, 12 November 1792. JRL, MAM FL 2/1/15.

⁴⁶⁹ Ann Bolton diary, 6 July 1797. Pudl., 3/23.

⁴⁷⁰ Ann Bolton to Mary Fletcher, 12 November 1792. JRL, MAM FL 2/1/15.

wise woman, causing Bolton and others to seek her spiritual guidance through both visit and letter. In a subsequent section the literary aspects of such spiritual mentorship will be analysed in more detail, but first we turn to women's relationships with parents, to whom they also turned for spiritual mentorship.

Parental patterns and spiritual mentorship

When John Wesley died in 1791 at the age of eighty-seven, Ann Bolton travelled to London to attend his funeral and afterwards wrote an account of the event. As she knelt at the altar to receive communion on that sorrowful day she had a vision of Wesley in heaven:

Just as I received the Bread a ray of divine light break forth from the court of heaven &...shewd me my dear much loved Father & Friend in the enjoyment thereof & gave me to partake of such a union with his happy spirit as no words can describe. This discovery was immediately attended with these words to my admiring astonishd soul 'Where he is, there shalt thou be'...⁴⁷¹

Bolton's depiction of Wesley as her 'much loved Father', while her own father still lived, denotes the flexible manner in which parental relationships were expressed in the eighteenth century. As women sought out mentoring relationships they looked as well to those they considered parents. Who were these parental figures? Through an analysis of parental patterns that looks beyond biological parenthood and the nuclear family, this section argues that spiritual authority was entwined with familial and affectionate ties in significant and underexplored ways.

Religious authority and parental care clearly overlapped when one's parent was also one's pastor. This was the case for Anne Steele, whose father William Steele was pastor of the Baptist church she had attended since birth. Her relationship with him was

⁴⁷¹ Ann Bolton diary, 13 March 1791. Pudl., 3/16.

imbued with a formality owing to his official role. The only surviving letter written by her to her father refers to his ‘paternal affection’ and ‘tender regard’, as well as to ‘the benefit I have rec’d from y^r instructions’, and the letter suggests that these instructions were given in the contexts of both home and church.⁴⁷² The letter is more formal than is typical of Steele, and reads in part as a catechetical rehearsal of conventional Calvinistic beliefs: ‘While I reflect only on my own vileness I dare not speak it [heaven] but when I meditate the all sufficient merits of a blessed Redeemer and can see a glimpse of hope that he is mine...I fly to that gracious Savior...’⁴⁷³ Yet her relationship with him was certainly also affectionate. She lived with him from birth until he died, when she was fifty-two, and when he was an elderly and widowed man she cared for him. In 1761, when she was invited to visit her cousin at Bristol, Steele declined, giving as her reason, ‘I do not leave my Father’.⁴⁷⁴ Her response to his death in 1769 demonstrates that her ties to him were not only spiritual or a matter of duty, but were also emotional:

Ah! now one tender, one endearing tie
That held me down to earth, death has torn off,
And with it rent my heart strings...⁴⁷⁵

He had continued to pastor the Broughton Baptist Church until his death, and when he died Steele grieved the loss of one who was both her father and her ‘father in God’.

While he lived, Steele’s father was frequently away on preaching tours or scouting wood for his timber business, and when he travelled she remained at home with her stepmother, Anne Cator Steele. Steele also turned to her stepmother for spiritual guidance, but their relationship was uncomplicated by formal ministerial roles. For much of Anne Steele’s life her stepmother was her most constant companion: they lived

⁴⁷² Anne Steele to William Steele, c. 1759. AL, STE 3/5/i.

⁴⁷³ Anne Steele to William Steele, c. 1759. AL, STE 3/5/i.

⁴⁷⁴ Anne Steele to Grace Cottle, 18 May 1761. BL, M468.

⁴⁷⁵ Steele, *Poems on Subjects Chiefly Devotional*, 3:viii.

together until Anne Cator Steele's death in 1760, when Steele was forty-three and her stepmother seventy-one. They would often spend their time reading together and talking about 'Experimentall things'.⁴⁷⁶ In 1749 Steele was ill and Anne Cator Steele wrote in her diary that she 'seem'd apprehensive of death'.⁴⁷⁷ On this and many similar occasions, Steele turned to her stepmother to 'talk about her soul concerns'. Steele considered her to be 'The christian's pattern', a phrase evocative of Thomas à Kempis's work by that name, with reference to Christ.⁴⁷⁸ If her father's ministerial role engaged him as a formal representative of Christ on earth, Steele honoured her stepmother as an informal embodiment of Christ-like holiness. Born into an affectionate family with deep roots in the Baptist church, Steele looked to both father and stepmother as spiritual mentors. But as we will see in the next section, it was to Anne Cator Steele that she wrote when away from home.

While Steele, immersed in a religious world in which church and family overlapped, turned to her father and stepmother as spiritual elders, Ann Bolton had to look elsewhere for religious mentoring. Born into an Anglican family, she converted to Methodism as a young woman, and in so doing overturned customary patterns of faith transmission and compromised familial ties. Her decision to join the Witney Methodist Society was perceived by her family and friends as a radical move away from the religious experience of her family, both past and present. Her parents pleaded with her—her father weeping, her mother kneeling—to disassociate herself from the Methodists.⁴⁷⁹

⁴⁷⁶ Anne Cator Steele diary, 15 August 1752. AL, STE 2/1/2. In the eighteenth century, 'experimental' was used to describe religion that was known by experience and evidenced by warm religious affections.

⁴⁷⁷ Anne Cator Steele diary, 2 January 1749. AL, STE 2/1/2.

⁴⁷⁸ 'To Amira on the Sudden Death of Her Mother', Steele, *Poems on Subjects Chiefly Devotional*, 3:40. Thomas à Kempis's popular *Imitation of Christ* was often published as *The Christian's Pattern*. See Isabel Rivers, 'Religious Publishing,' in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain*, ed. Michael F. Suarez and Michael L. Turner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 595.

⁴⁷⁹ 'First account of Ann Bolton's conversion experience'. Pudl., 4/28.

Bolton later recalled, ‘my parants were much alarm, thinking I sh^d be mad...indeed all my relation & acquaintance was crying out against me, saying they thought I had had more sence’.⁴⁸⁰ Her parents bargained with her, threatened her, and disowned her for a time.⁴⁸¹ Later recalling this period, she wrote that Psalm 69 was ‘very expressive of my state’: ‘I am become a stranger unto my brethren, and an alien unto my mother’s children.’⁴⁸² Bolton’s conversion created ongoing tensions: she wanted to show her parents honour as the Bible instructed her, but she could not look up to them as spiritual elders. She had to look beyond her biological family for spiritual guidance.

Bolton’s most significant and long-term mentor was John Wesley. She probably met him when he visited Witney in 1764, when she was twenty-one years old and he sixty-one, and their meeting initiated a relationship and correspondence that continued until his death nearly thirty years later. Their relationship was complex and Wesley in particular described it in a range of ways. He often expressed himself in effusive terms, writing to her with evident tenderness, affection, and concern for her soul. Thus in 1772 he wrote, ‘How unspeakably near are you to me’, and in 1776 he wrote of his ‘very tender regard’ for her, adding, ‘I always loved you & I always shall’.⁴⁸³ Wesley often used the language of friendship to describe their bond: ‘Shall not I speak to my Dear Friend all that is in my heart?...Be to me always...what I am to You, A Faithfull and tenderhearted Friend.’⁴⁸⁴ And he made claims of spiritual kinship in his letters: more than half of his

⁴⁸⁰ ‘Second account of Ann Bolton’s conversion experience’. Pudl., 2/1.

⁴⁸¹ ‘First account of Ann Bolton’s conversion experience’. Pudl., 4/28.

⁴⁸² Ann Bolton to unnamed clergyman, 18 August 1786. JRL, MA 1977.610.33. The John Rylands Library indicates that the recipient was John Wesley, but internal evidence shows that she was writing to someone much less well known to her than Wesley was in 1786. Cf. Psalm 69.8.

⁴⁸³ John Wesley to Ann Bolton, 29 February 1772. JRL, MAM JW 1.76. John Wesley to Ann Bolton, 10 December 1776. ‘Two Unpublished Wesley Letters,’ *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* 24 (1943): 57.

⁴⁸⁴ John Wesley to Ann Bolton, 27 September 1777. JRL, MAM JW 1.89.

letters to Bolton are addressed to ‘My dear sister’, and he frequently signed them ‘Your affectionate brother’.⁴⁸⁵

Despite Wesley’s egalitarian terms of address, their relationship was not one of peers but rather was a religious mentorship in which he performed the role of spiritual father and she daughter.⁴⁸⁶ Bolton was more careful in maintaining a hierarchical distinction, not as much for gendered reasons as on account of his greater age and religious authority. Forty years her senior, Wesley’s advanced age surely influenced her respectful demeanour. As did his priestly office: his very appearance in clerical dress reminded her of his official and elevated position.⁴⁸⁷ She regularly described him in her diary as ‘venerable’, and when he visited her at Witney in 1787 she considered herself to be ‘highly favord’ (a phrase that evokes the angel Gabriel’s words to Mary at the annunciation: ‘thou that art highly favored, the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women’).⁴⁸⁸ Conscious of his stature as her ‘father in God’ and the father of Methodism, Bolton addressed Wesley in her letters not as ‘my dear brother’ but as ‘Reverend Sir’ or ‘Reverend and honoured sir’, and sometimes ‘Reverend and dear Sir’. Similarly, she signed her letters as ‘your obliged servant’ or ‘your affectionate child’.⁴⁸⁹ Their lengthy

⁴⁸⁵ Maldwyn Edwards alludes to Wesley’s frequent use of this term of address in the title of Edwards, *My Dear Sister*. The thorny question of Wesley’s relationships with women has been the subject of much scholarship. See, for example, Ted A. Campbell, ‘John Wesley’s Intimate Disconnections,’ *Methodist History* 51, no. 3 (2013): 185-200; Gareth Lloyd, “‘Running after Strange Women’: An Insight into John Wesley’s Troubled Marriage,” *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* 53, no. 5 (2002): 169-174; Henry D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism*, 3rd ed. (London: Epworth Press, 2002), 257-269; Henry D. Abelove, *The Evangelist of Desire: John Wesley and the Methodists* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), passim; Frank Baker, ‘Some Observations on John Wesley’s Relationship with Grace Murray,’ *Methodist History* 16 (1977-1978): 42-45.

⁴⁸⁶ D. Bruce Hindmarsh, ‘Spiritual Experience and Early Evangelical Correspondence: The Letters of John Wesley and Ann Bolton, 1768-1791’ (unpublished paper, 2011), 17.

⁴⁸⁷ Abelove, *Evangelist of Desire*, 7.

⁴⁸⁸ Ann Bolton diary, 17 October 1781. Pudl., 2/24/1. Ann Bolton diary, 16 October 1787. Pudl., 3/11. Cf. Luke 1.28.

⁴⁸⁹ Ann Bolton to John Wesley, 27 December 1782. *AM* 13 (December 1790): 668.

correspondence was not the conversation of equals, but rather in it Bolton located a fund of wisdom and spiritual guidance that her biological parents could not supply.

As Bolton turned to Wesley as spiritual father and mentor, her own father, Edward Bolton (1716/7–91), considered her his religious instructor. Initially hostile to his daughter's allegiance with the Methodists, he had in time converted through her influence and continued to look to her for spiritual guidance, even as an old man.⁴⁹⁰ Bolton's account of his final illness and death is touching in its inverted patterns of familial piety. Edward Bolton died in his mid-seventies, just six months after Wesley's death, and Bolton's account of his final days attests to her tender care for him, body and soul. She 'helpd to put him to bed, rubd his legs with my hot hand & his back with a warm flanel & told him in the morn^g I shd make him a flannel shirt', and she prayed with him.⁴⁹¹ Bolton recorded, 'he ask'd me concerning the nature of the newbirth & woud say its common for Parents to teach their Children but my Children must teach me'.⁴⁹² Susannah Ottaway argues that mentoring their adult children was one of the most fulfilling roles of older people in eighteenth-century society, but here we see an inversion of such relational patterns: this is an example of reverse mentoring.⁴⁹³ Aware that he was dying his mind turned to heaven and he asked questions about the nature of salvation, which Bolton carefully answered, catechising him on his deathbed: 'all he wanted', she wrote, 'was an assurance of the divine favor'.⁴⁹⁴ For Bolton, religion both enhanced and complicated her experience of parental mentorship. Wesley's priestly stature, together with his ongoing affection for her, caused her to look to him as a spiritual father and enabled their long-

⁴⁹⁰ Wesley wrote to Bolton in 1785, 'You have been honourd and to save from ruin your Father, Mother, Brother!' John Wesley to Ann Bolton, 16 February 1785. Pudl., 4/7/25.

⁴⁹¹ Ann Bolton, 'Account of Edward Bolton's final illness'. Pudl., 4/31.

⁴⁹² Ann Bolton, 'Account of Edward Bolton's final illness'. Pudl., 4/31.

⁴⁹³ Ottaway, *Decline of Life*, 142.

⁴⁹⁴ Ann Bolton, 'Account of Edward Bolton's final illness'. Pudl., 4/31.

term mentoring correspondence. Her relationship with Edward Bolton was likewise affectionate, although since Methodists located spiritual authority in religious experience more than age, in a spiritual sense Bolton acted as parent to her father.

As Steele turned naturally to her father and stepmother as religious mentors and models, and Bolton to Wesley as spiritual father, Catherine Talbot turned to a more complex configuration of parental figures for moral and religious guidance (see Appendix 2, p. 330). Her most constant parental presence was her mother Mary Talbot, but letters and diaries reveal other significant parental relationships. Her father Edward Talbot (1690/1–1720) had died of smallpox in 1720, five months before his daughter's birth. At the time he was Archdeacon of Berkshire and close friends with other leading Anglican clergymen—Thomas Secker, Martin Benson, Joseph Butler, and Thomas Rundle (1687/8–1743)—and after his death they rallied to care for the fatherless girl. Duty to her father blended with affection for Talbot. When she was nine years old, Rundle told her that he loved her because he had loved her father, 'the best man that ever lived'.⁴⁹⁵ Similarly, Secker wrote to her when she was twelve, 'I have many reasons, on account of other persons (one of whom you never knew), and some on your own account, to love and wish you well.'⁴⁹⁶ Benson, Butler, and Rundle did not marry and Secker had no children of his own, and Talbot became a kind of daughter to them all. Her religious guidance became a matter of communal interest and they wrote instructive letters to her as a child. Rundle urged her to be heavenly-minded (when the mind 'ceases to ascend it descends').⁴⁹⁷ And Secker advised her to do good cheerfully and patiently bear evil,

⁴⁹⁵ Thomas Rundle to Catherine Talbot, 28 May 1730. Beinecke, OSB 53/v.

⁴⁹⁶ Thomas Secker to Catherine Talbot, 22 February 1733. Beinecke, OSB 53/vi.

⁴⁹⁷ Thomas Rundle to Catherine Talbot, 28 May 1730. Beinecke, OSB 53/v.

thinking with reverence and love of God, who observed her conduct.⁴⁹⁸ Near the end of a lengthy letter composed in 1733 Secker wrote, ‘This is a very serious letter, dear Kitty; but seriousness is the foundation of the building of life’.⁴⁹⁹ As a parent would, he wanted to assist her in ‘Laying the foundation’ of her life, believing that if ‘the right care be taken first of the real, though invisible support of all; then the work rises by sure degrees, the delight of every beholder’.⁵⁰⁰ Talbot’s early life thus was shaped by multiple paternal influences that exhibited highly porous boundaries between familial and religious ties.

As she aged Talbot continued to look to the trio of Secker, Butler, and Benson, in particular, for guidance, although her adult awareness of their high ecclesiastical status required her response. She loved them all, and her letters and diary demonstrate their affectionate ties. As with Bolton and Wesley, affectionate ties were entwined with her awareness of their ecclesiastical rank and religious authority. She thought of them as those she loved, but also in terms of the national church: they were ‘the Three first Heads & Hearts in the Nation’.⁵⁰¹ The mingling of personal affection and a sense of national importance can be traced throughout their interactions. Writing to Elizabeth Carter in 1752, Talbot described an amiable scene in her dressing room, where Benson read to her and her mother.⁵⁰² When he died she felt the painful loss of her ‘faithful adviser’, but also wrote, ‘What a loss does the world sustain in such a man’.⁵⁰³ In her diary, Benson appears affectionately as ‘Marcus’, though in letters she referred to him by his title, the Bishop of Gloucester. She was comparably affectionate in her encounters with Butler, who would

⁴⁹⁸ Thomas Secker to Catherine Talbot, 22 February 1733. Beinecke, OSB 53/vi.

⁴⁹⁹ Thomas Secker to Catherine Talbot, 22 February 1733. Beinecke, OSB 53/vi.

⁵⁰⁰ Thomas Secker to Catherine Talbot, 22 February 1733. Beinecke, OSB 53/vi.

⁵⁰¹ Catherine Talbot diary, 30 September 1752. BL, Add. 46690.

⁵⁰² Catherine Talbot to Elizabeth Carter, 14 March 1752. Pennington, ed., *Letters between Carter and Talbot*, 2:69.

⁵⁰³ Catherine Talbot to Elizabeth Carter, undated but 1752. Pennington, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Elizabeth Carter*, 87, 89. Pennington incorrectly identifies the death as that of Joseph Butler.

walk and talk or read with her when he visited the Secker-Talbot household.⁵⁰⁴ Yet at the same time she was attentive to his ecclesiastical status: he often appears in her diary as ‘L’E de D’ (for l’évêque de Durham, or Bishop of Durham).

Talbot’s relationship with Secker was similarly both affectionate and influenced by his formal religious authority. She turned to him as a father, but she also honoured him as one who held a high ecclesiastical office. The way in which Talbot harmonised affection and admiration in her relationship with Secker has not been sufficiently noted. More often, their relationship has been characterised as having a diminishing effect on Talbot. The poet and artist Susanna Duncombe published a ‘Sketch’ of her character in the *Gentleman’s Magazine* for June 1772, and in it stated that Talbot was overawed and inhibited by the presence of Secker:

She had a luxuriant imagination, when she ventured to indulge her genius in the fields of Fancy; and so sincere was her humility, so diffident was she of her own powers, so awed by the deference she paid to the respectable friend with whom she constantly resided, that her elegant and refined taste was sometimes nipped in the bud; and many sweet flowers were often stripped away by the pruning hand of too severe a judgment.⁵⁰⁵

Weeden Butler later wove Duncombe’s ‘Sketch’ into his tribute to Talbot’s character, published in his *Memoirs of Mark Hildesley* (1799), and the perception of Secker’s inhibiting influence was perpetuated.⁵⁰⁶ Modern scholars have also overemphasised Secker’s religious authority rather than their affection for each other. Sylvia Harcstark Myers attributes Talbot’s infrequent publishing to Secker’s stifling influence and his demands on her time as amanuensis and unofficial secretary, and judges her to be a

⁵⁰⁴ Catherine Talbot diary, 2 November 1751. BL, Add. 46690.

⁵⁰⁵ Susannah Duncombe, ‘A Sketch of the Character of the Author of “Reflections on the Seven Days of the Week,” and “Essays on Various Subjects”,’ *Gentleman’s Magazine* 42 (1772): 257-258.

⁵⁰⁶ Weeden Butler, *Memoirs of Mark Hildesley, D. D. Lord Bishop of Sodor and Mann* (London: Printed by J. Nichols, 1799), 584. Duncombe’s entire ‘Sketch’ is reprinted by Butler, with minor alterations and some additions.

‘buried talent’ since she did not publish more (though there is ample evidence that her writings circulated in manuscript).⁵⁰⁷ And Rhoda Zuk attributes Talbot’s ‘excessive diffidence’ to her relationship with Secker, which she depicts as ‘a subtle and complex quasi-filial relationship’.⁵⁰⁸ While acknowledging their complex relationship, she does not explore the emotional ties between them. Susan Staves, on the other hand, sees Secker as providing Talbot with intellectual opportunity and stimulation for her writing career.⁵⁰⁹ Even in this case, however, the focus remains on Talbot’s published literary output, more than her religious or emotional ties.

Talbot lived with her mother throughout her life and enjoyed a close relationship with her, but her experience of parenthood was much broader and more complex. If Benson and Butler were pseudo-uncles, the Seckers were pseudo-parents. Secker had written to Talbot as a child of twelve, ‘You are the only child of a very good woman our dear friend and instead of a child to my wife and me: the affection we all have for one another is united in you’.⁵¹⁰ And Talbot expanded the relational language. After Catherine Secker’s death in 1748, Talbot wrote a poem commemorating the woman who had played a parental role in her life:

Thy memory, still for ever dear,
I, as a parent’s, will revere!⁵¹¹

Talbot and her mother continued to live with Thomas Secker after his wife’s death, and Talbot wrote of their family circle on the last day of 1751, ‘My Dearest M: Eug: & I live

⁵⁰⁷ Myers, *Bluestocking Circle*, 207-228.

⁵⁰⁸ Zuk, ed., *Catherine Talbot and Hester Chapone*, 4.

⁵⁰⁹ Staves, ‘Church of England Clergy and Women Writers,’ 81.

⁵¹⁰ Thomas Secker to Catherine Talbot, 22 February 1733. Beinecke, OSB 53/vi.

⁵¹¹ Catherine Talbot, ‘To the Memory of Mrs. Secker, Who Died in the Spring of the Year, 1748’. Quoted in Butler, *Memoirs of Mark Hildesley*, 589.

here as happy in one another as Can be'.⁵¹² She wrote to Elizabeth Carter of her gratitude to God for giving her 'such a parent' in Secker, and after his death she remembered him as the 'tenderest Father'.⁵¹³ He was 'More than Parent' and 'plus que Pere' to Talbot, which might equally describe the depth of her affection for him as her awareness of his elevated status.⁵¹⁴ For as often as he was parent to her, he was also 'my Lord' and 'the Shah'.⁵¹⁵ He was affectionate father as well as 'father in God'.

Under very different familial and religious conditions, Steele, Bolton, and Talbot each turned to older, more experienced men and women for spiritual mentorship. Whether they were biologically related or not, these older women and men became their spiritual mothers and fathers. Historians have shown how the idea of spiritual motherhood and the related trope of the 'mother in Israel' were used to authorise women's moral authority, opening up paths to preaching and other public activities.⁵¹⁶ Yet the image of spiritual motherhood that is forming here was not public, but affectionate, relational, and individualised. It was also not necessarily biological, challenging the depiction of nurturing mothers associated with a 'cult of maternity', as mentioned earlier. Depictions of spiritual fatherhood tend to be associated with clergymen's formal religious roles,⁵¹⁷ and while Talbot's, Bolton's, and Steele's relationships with Thomas Secker, John Wesley, and William Steele were inflected with the formality of their ministerial office, they were also certainly warm and personal. Such relational and intimate encounters go

⁵¹² Catherine Talbot diary, 31 December 1751. BL, Add. 46690. 'M' was short for 'Mama', and 'Eug' for 'Eugene', Talbot's affectionate pseudonym for Secker.

⁵¹³ Catherine Talbot to Elizabeth Carter, 20-27 November 1765. Pennington, ed., *Letters between Carter and Talbot*, 3:130. Catherine Talbot to Thomas Frost, 6 October 1768. LPL, MS 1719, f. 19.

⁵¹⁴ Catherine Talbot diary, 30 September 1752. Secker was 'more than Father'. Catherine Talbot diary, 19 June 1753. BL, Add. 46690.

⁵¹⁵ For example, Catherine Talbot diary, 31 October 1753 and 19 December 1753. BL, Add. 46688.

⁵¹⁶ McNelly, 'Mothers in Christ,' 123-136; Colpus, 'Preaching Religion, Family and Memory in Nineteenth-Century England,' 38-54; Mack, 'Methodism and Motherhood,' 26-42.

⁵¹⁷ Hindmarsh, 'Spiritual Experience and Early Evangelical Correspondence'; Charles E. Hambrick-Stowe, 'The Spiritual Pilgrimage of Sarah Osborn (1714-1796),' *Church History* 61 (1992): 408-421.

unobserved in religious histories that focus on institutions and theologies, and thus Secker, Wesley, and Steele are illuminated in new ways here. This analysis suggests affinities in women's experiences of spiritual motherhood and fatherhood. Still, their relationships with older women were not affected by formal priestly office, and the next section will consider whether and how this influenced their experience of spiritual mentoring through literary encounter.

Spiritual Direction

As Protestants, the women considered in this thesis would not have understood their interactions with older religious mentors as spiritual direction, given the term's Catholic resonances. Yet conceived of broadly, it helpfully describes interactions in which a less experienced person gained insights for the spiritual life from someone with greater authority and experience.⁵¹⁸ Often this guidance was sought from clergymen on account of their priestly office.⁵¹⁹ So John Wesley wrote to his friend Ebenezer Blackwell in 1757 that 'people flock about me for direction', which he provided both in person and through the post.⁵²⁰ Spiritual direction was also sought from and provided by women in less official capacities, and considering spiritual direction in this broader sense recovers one

⁵¹⁸ Spiritual direction requires that the director is wise and mature, more experienced in the spiritual life and thus capable of giving advice. Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright, and Edward Yarnold, eds., *The Study of Spirituality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 568.

⁵¹⁹ An important means of pastoral care, George Whitefield, John Wesley, John Newton, and other religious leaders used letters to provide spiritual guidance. Hindmarsh, *Evangelical Conversion Narrative*, 74-75, 130. Wesley was especially adept at this and had a huge correspondence: Ted Campbell states that a 'reasonable estimate' of Wesley's extensive correspondence would be almost 18,000 letters. Ted A. Campbell, 'John Wesley as Diarist and Correspondent,' in *The Cambridge Companion to John Wesley*, ed. Randy L. Maddox and Jason E. Vickers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 130. On Wesley's and Newton's ministries as spiritual advisers through letter, see Hindmarsh, 'Spiritual Experience and Early Evangelical Correspondence'; Hindmarsh, *John Newton and the English Evangelical Tradition*, 240-250. See further, Ellen A. Macek, "'Ghostly Fathers' and Their 'Virtuous Daughters': The Role of Spiritual Direction in the Lives of Three Early Modern English Women,' *The Catholic Historical Review* 90, no. 2 (2004): 213-235.

⁵²⁰ John Wesley to Ebenezer Blackwell, 28 May 1757. Telford, ed., *Letters of John Wesley*, 3:216.

of the vital roles of older women in religious cultures.⁵²¹ Letters were an especially effective medium for spiritual direction, and in this section I analyse correspondence and other personal literary interactions as they supported spiritual mentorship.

Letters as spiritual direction

When John Wesley died in 1791 Bolton grieved the loss of her ‘dear beloved pastor and Father’, and wrote movingly to a friend of how she knelt by his coffin and thanked God ‘for the many gracious helps I had enjoyed thro him’.⁵²² She had received most of those ‘gracious helps’ through their long-term correspondence, and with his death she lost an important source of spiritual direction. On that day, the only other person in the room with her and ‘the dear remains’ was her friend Elizabeth Ritchie, who had spent the past few months caring for Wesley at his London home. At some time during those final months, Wesley gave Ritchie one of his letter seals: a small sunflower turned to the sun, with the motto ‘Tibi soli’ (‘For thee alone’).⁵²³ He had last used it on a letter to Bolton less than three months before he died, and not long after his death Ritchie began to use it on letters of spiritual encouragement she sent to Bolton (see Figure 7).⁵²⁴ In tracing the sunflower seal from Wesley to Ritchie, we turn from the more official spiritual direction given by clergymen through letters, to observe the more hidden, informal, and varied activities of women as providers of epistolary spiritual direction.

⁵²¹ Patricia Ranft defines spiritual direction in an especially expansive way, allowing the term to designate almost any position of women’s spiritual leadership or guidance. Patricia Ranft, *A Woman’s Way: The Forgotten History of Women Spiritual Directors* (New York: Palgrave, 2000).

⁵²² Ann Bolton to Elizabeth Scudamore, 12 March 1791. Quoted in Banks, ‘*Nancy Nancy*’, 92.

⁵²³ Frank Baker, ‘Introduction,’ in *The Works of John Wesley*, ed. Frank Baker, vol. 25: Letters I, 1721-1739 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 25:72.

⁵²⁴ John Wesley to Ann Bolton, 10 December 1790. Pudl., 4/7/37. Elizabeth Ritchie to Ann Bolton, 4 October [undated, but between 1792 and 1799]. Pudl., 4/17/3.



Figure 7: John Wesley's seal, used by Elizabeth Ritchie⁵²⁵

Sometimes described as the 'golden age of letters', the eighteenth century was an 'epistolary moment' when rising literacy rates, improved postal systems and transportation, and new apprehensions of subjectivity coincided to produce a vast expansion in the writing of personal letters.⁵²⁶ While fewer letters written by women have survived, they were active participants in this new epistolary culture, and at the time were lauded as 'naturally better' letter writers, since the 'easy, natural style' so admired in

⁵²⁵ Elizabeth Ritchie to Ann Bolton, 4 October [undated, but between 1792 and 1799]. Pudl., 4/17/3.

⁵²⁶ Susan E. Whyman, *The Pen and the People: English Letter Writers 1660-1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 228, 3-71. There is a rich scholarship on eighteenth-century letters: see, for example, Pearsall, *Atlantic Families*; Temma Berg, *The Lives and Letters of an Eighteenth-Century Circle of Acquaintance* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006); Brant, *Eighteenth-Century Letters and British Culture*; Bannet, *Empire of Letters*; Dena Goodman, 'Letter Writing and the Emergence of Gendered Subjectivity in Eighteenth-Century France,' *Journal of Women's History* 17, no. 2 (2005): 9-37; A. Gilroy and W. M. Verhoeven, *Epistolary Histories: Letters, Fiction, Culture* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000); Rebecca Earle, ed., *Epistolary Selves: Letters and Letter-Writers, 1600-1945* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999); Redford, *Converse of the Pen*; Howard Anderson, Philip B. Daghljan, and Irvin Ehrenpreis, eds., *The Familiar Letter in the Eighteenth Century* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1966).

familiar letters was thought to ally well with their ‘untutored and spontaneous expressiveness’.⁵²⁷ Too often women’s letters are considered to offer unmediated access to their thought and emotion, or are encountered as simple ‘biographical appendages’ to their private lives.⁵²⁸ Historians and literary scholars have sought to complicate this. Feminist readings sometimes regard women’s letters as a crucial means of ‘verbal self-discovery and self-invention’,⁵²⁹ while other gendered interpretations focus on the domestic life, including childbirth and children,⁵³⁰ and on a perceived propensity of women to write to other women.⁵³¹ But how did women’s letters have meaning—and particularly religious meaning—beyond self, domesticity, and a world of women? And how did women use the letter genre to provide spiritual direction to those they loved?

Often women’s spiritual care through letters was individualised, in both its personal counsel and teaching on the spiritual life comparable to the spiritual direction of ministers. In one such letter, written by Bolton in 1784, she taught ‘the Art of knowing & loving God’.⁵³² Using imagery from Mark 4, she described the process of spiritual maturation as growing corn: ‘First y^e blade – then y^e ear[,] then y^e full Corn in y^e ear’.⁵³³ A new Christian is like a blade, while a transformed soul ‘is as a shock of Corn ready ripe

⁵²⁷ Brant, *Eighteenth-Century Letters and British Culture*, 18; Earle, ed., *Epistolary Selves*, 6.

⁵²⁸ Bigold, ‘Women of Letters, Manuscript Circulation and Print Afterlives in the Eighteenth Century’, 22-23.

⁵²⁹ Patricia Ann Meyer Spacks, ‘Personal Letters,’ in *The Cambridge History of English Literature, 1660-1780*, ed. John J. Richetti (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 631. On the tendency amongst literary critics to interpret letters as ‘self-fashioning’, see Pearsall, *Atlantic Families*, 14. See also Carolyn Steedman, ‘A Woman Writing a Letter,’ in *Epistolary Selves: Letters and Letter-Writers, 1600-1945*, ed. Rebecca Earle (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), 121.

⁵³⁰ Whyman, *Pen and the People*, 141-143; Gilroy and Verhoeven, *Epistolary Histories*, 3.

⁵³¹ Whyman, *Pen and the People*, 136, 172; Gilroy and Verhoeven, *Epistolary Histories*, 6; Steedman, ‘Woman Writing a Letter,’ 21.

⁵³² Ann Bolton to unnamed recipient, undated. Pudl., 4/25/10.

⁵³³ Ann Bolton to unnamed recipient, undated. Pudl., 4/25/10. Cf. Mark 4.28. John Newton also used this verse to elucidate the spiritual life for John Thornton. See John Newton, *Twenty Six Letters on Religious Subjects* (London: Printed by J. and W. Oliver, 1774), 70-93. Though later published, the letter was originally written in response to a request from John Thornton regarding the typical progression of grace in a believer. Hindmarsh, *John Newton and the English Evangelical Tradition*, 250-253.

for y^e Garden'. Shifting metaphors, she also compared the stages of spiritual development to increasing light: first light shines indistinctly, faint in the darkness; when that light is recognised as divine and is admitted, it strikes with greater force; and finally, she explained, 'The soul is transform'd by this divine assimilating power, it is changed from darkness to light & as it faithfully & gradually proceeds on its way it becomes all Light in y^e Lord'. Finally, she described the spiritual life as a 'divine Ladder', and encouraged her correspondent, 'tho you are only at y^e bottom y^e way is open'. Bolton's teaching on the spiritual life was written in answer to an earlier, lost letter, in which someone identified only as 'my dear Frd' asked for her guidance. And while the identity of the recipient is unknown surely he or she was known to Bolton, since her tone throughout is warm and personal and she took a moment, before closing, to pass along messages to 'M^{rs} Hindes & Miss Cross'.⁵³⁴

While Bolton frequently wrote letters of spiritual guidance to women, she also wrote to men, challenging gendered interpretations of women's letter writing that focus on the gynosomal,⁵³⁵ and suggesting hidden ways in which religious imperatives overturned conventional gender dynamics. In a letter written in 1784 to Captain Richard Brackenbury, a local Methodist preacher,⁵³⁶ Bolton wrote, 'I wish to say an animating word and in y^e name of my Master to invite you to come forward', and then proceeded to give him very practical advice on setting aside set times for prayer.⁵³⁷ In reply, Brackenbury confirmed his intention to heed her spiritual guidance, adding, 'I feel a great Liberty to unbosom my thoughts to you, & I think I never wrote to anyone I can make so

⁵³⁴ Ann Bolton to unnamed recipient, undated. Pudl., 4/25/10.

⁵³⁵ For example, Melanie Bigold, 'Letters and Learning,' in *The History of British Women's Writing, 1690-1750*, ed. Ros Ballaster (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 176.

⁵³⁶ George Lester, *Grimsby Methodism, 1743-1889, and the Wesleys in Lincolnshire* (London: n. p., 1890), 50.

⁵³⁷ Ann Bolton to Richard Brackenbury, 21 March 1784. Pudl., 4/14/1.

free with'.⁵³⁸ As noted earlier, Bolton also wrote letters of spiritual instruction to George Conibeere prior to their marriage. Conibeere's letters to her expressed affection and a desire to be more closely united with her. He wooed her with gifts, on one day writing, 'Have sent you a fish and beg your acceptance of it as a Token of Love'.⁵³⁹ She responded with questions about his spiritual state and with advice to seek God more earnestly, and included a kind of sermon in letter form: 'Permit me to advise to chuse the Lord for yr God. Be much in secret prayer. Tell yr wants, yr complaints, yr desires and troubles minutely to him....Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.'⁵⁴⁰ Her greater spiritual experience authorised her epistolary guidance.

Yet the letters that Bolton wrote to offer spiritual direction to known and loved individuals might easily have become the text that guided others, since letters in the eighteenth century often had life beyond the contexts in which they were originally written, delivered, and read. Elizabeth Johnson (1720–98) was a generation older than Bolton and had a reputation for particular piety within the Bristol Methodist community, and several of her letters to Jane March (1743–c. 1816), who lived in London, were transcribed by Bolton in her letter-book for 1771–72.⁵⁴¹ She may have read the letters in either Bristol or London, for her diary describes her visits to both cities during the period covered by the letter-book.⁵⁴² And while she almost certainly transcribed her friends' letters for her own edification, Johnson's letters were also used to support her efforts to care for others. On several occasions the text of her friends' letters was later assimilated

⁵³⁸ Richard Brackenbury to Ann Bolton, 7 August 1784. Pudl., 4/14/2.

⁵³⁹ George Conibeere to Ann Bolton, 24 August 1791. Lond.

⁵⁴⁰ Ann Bolton to George Conibeere, 21 October 1791. Lond. Cf. Acts 16.31.

⁵⁴¹ See Elizabeth Johnson to Jane March, c. 1771–72. Pudl., 4/1/2 and 4/1/3.

⁵⁴² Bolton was in London from February to March 1771, and wrote in her diary of spending time with March at the Foundery. Ann Bolton diary, 18 February 1771. Pudl., 2/2. She was in Bristol from September to October 1772, where she 'drank Tea with some frds at Miss Johnsons'. Ann Bolton diary, 2 October 1772. Pudl., 2/3.

into her own letters, suggesting the almost osmotic nature of the letter-book in influencing correspondence.⁵⁴³ In a letter written by her to an unnamed correspondent Bolton repeated almost verbatim a letter from Johnson to March.⁵⁴⁴ Johnson had once asked March, ‘dont you think it profitable oftentimes while we fix y^e eye of our souls on Him who is our Wisdom to turn inward & examine wether we really advance in Holiness[?]’.⁵⁴⁵ Bolton transcribed the letter into her letter-book, and in 1771 it became the text of her letter to an unnamed correspondent.⁵⁴⁶ In addition to embedding Johnson’s spiritual advice to March in her advice to her correspondent, Bolton borrowed her post-scripted defence for assuming a voice of pastoral authority: ‘PS [she wrote] on peruseing w^t I have written I am almost ashamed to send it haveing so much asumed ye teacher but as it was wrote in simplicity & freedom of heart bear wth me’.⁵⁴⁷ In radiating out from their initial uses and contexts, as they were copied and circulated, women’s letters provided pastoral guidance to those unknown to their authors. More than a means of self-fashioning, women’s letters helped to create a religious subculture as they were copied, preserved, and used.

Epistolary spiritual direction thus transpired through the circulation of women’s letters in manuscript, but it also occurred in print. Women’s letters had a broad reach and was one of the chief mechanisms for their ministry, though far more attention has been given to their activities as preachers. While sometimes women’s letters were published as

⁵⁴³ James Daybell, *The Material Letter in Early Modern England: Manuscript Letters and the Culture and Practice of Letter-Writing, 1512-1635* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 190.

⁵⁴⁴ See Ann Bolton to ‘my dear frd’, November 1771. Pudl., 4/25/4. Elizabeth Johnson to Jane March, c. 1771–72. Pudl., 4/1/3.

⁵⁴⁵ Elizabeth Johnson to Jane March, undated. Pudl., 4/1/3.

⁵⁴⁶ Ann Bolton to unnamed correspondent, November 1771. Pudl., 4/25/4.

⁵⁴⁷ Ann Bolton to unnamed correspondent, November 1771. Pudl., 4/25/4. Cf. Elizabeth Johnson to Jane March, undated. Pudl., 4/1/3.

books, the *Arminian Magazine* published a great many more.⁵⁴⁸ Margaret Jones calculates that forty per cent of the biographical and autobiographical material Wesley published in the magazine was related to women and this material was primarily in the letters section.⁵⁴⁹ Throughout their correspondence Wesley encouraged Bolton to write openly and honestly, ‘without any shyness or reserve’,⁵⁵⁰ promising her in 1772 that ‘None sees your Letters but me.’⁵⁵¹ Yet despite Wesley’s assurance of privacy, Bolton’s letters to him were taken up into the Methodist publishing enterprise, and what is particularly interesting is that she saw the letters being printed. Beginning in 1784 Wesley began to edit and publish Bolton’s letters to him—the very letters that twelve years earlier he assured her were seen only by him. In the following seven years she watched as twenty-four of her letters⁵⁵² to Wesley were published in a magazine that, by the end of the century, had a readership of 100,000 people.⁵⁵³ These letters were now anything but private, and she knew it. Indeed, she asked for a copy of the magazine in 1788 right after one of her letters appeared in print.⁵⁵⁴ Aware that others were reading her letters, she must have felt an increased sense of responsibility and authority, so that letters written to Wesley, her ‘dear beloved pastor and Father’, were simultaneously written for a much

⁵⁴⁸ A popular example of printed letters is Jane Cooper, *Letters Wrote by Jane Cooper: To Which Is Prefixed, Some Account of Her Life and Death*, ed. John Wesley (London: n. p., 1764).

⁵⁴⁹ Margaret P. Jones, ‘From “the State of My Soul” to “Exalted Piety”: Women’s Voices in the *Arminian/Methodist Magazine*, 1778-1821,’ in *Gender and Christian Religion*, ed. R. N. Swanson (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Published for the Ecclesiastical History Society by the Boydell Press, 1998), 275. On women’s representation in the *Arminian Magazine*, see also Andrew O. Winckles, ““Excuse What Difficiencies You Will Find”: Methodist Women and Public Space in John Wesley’s *Arminian Magazine*,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 46, no. 3 (2013): 415-429.

⁵⁵⁰ John Wesley to Ann Bolton, 25 March 1772. Pudl., 4/7/4.

⁵⁵¹ John Wesley to Ann Bolton, 27 May 1772. Pudl., 4/7/6.

⁵⁵² In addition, Wesley published two death accounts written by Bolton. These accounts were written as letters to Wesley, but may have been written expressly for publication. [Ann Bolton], ‘A Short Account of Mr. John Taylor: in a Letter to the Rev. J. Wesley’, *AM* 12 (May 1789): 237-239. [Ann Bolton], ‘An Account of the Illness and Death of Mrs. Trimmell’, *AM* 13 (February 1790): 82-86. Sarah Trimmell was Bolton’s sister, and she died 12 May 1789. See also the draft of her account. Pudl., 4/7/31/1.

⁵⁵³ Hempton, *Methodism*, 67.

⁵⁵⁴ John Wesley to Ann Bolton, 23 February 1788. JRL, MAM JW 1.99

wider audience. Her letters had both individual and communal meaning. While she wrote hoping to *receive* spiritual guidance from Wesley, she also wrote to *give* such guidance to others.

The wisdom of older generations

Archives and printed sources alike testify to the extensive use of the familiar letter by Methodists as a means of spiritual direction. Not only the tool of male religious leaders, women also used letters to request accounts of religious experience and to provide religious counsel. Their epistolary pastoral care supplied an unofficial parallel to the formal care of pastors. If the letter had a privileged and distinctive place in Methodist circles,⁵⁵⁵ how did it function within Anglican and Baptist communities? Earlier we observed the unofficial priestly office of the Duchess of Somerset and Anne Cator Steele. How did these women, honoured for their advanced age, religious experience, and perceived wisdom, supply pastoral care through personal correspondence?

Catherine Talbot admired the Duchess of Somerset as a wise older woman, and she sought her warmhearted company and religious guidance not only in person at Percy Lodge but through letter. Talbot's letters to the Duchess have not previously been included in accounts of her life and writing, and they illuminate an important and previously neglected relationship and practice of spiritual direction. Rather than writing frankly and openly about their interior lives (as Methodists endeavoured to do), Talbot and the Duchess, as more moderate Anglicans whose social worlds were guided by social codes of politeness, would often discuss religious texts. Books became a means for their

⁵⁵⁵ W. R. Ward, *The Protestant Evangelical Awakening* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 2.

spiritual discourse.⁵⁵⁶ Most of their relationship was enacted at a distance, but they wrote fortnightly letters, and many of these were accompanied by ‘pacquets’ that included books and manuscript writings on temporary loan. Their letters, some of which survive, catalogue the contents of the ‘pacquets’ and include reflective notes on books sent and received, so that in their correspondence we have a lens into the means and meaning of their shared spiritual reading.

One of Talbot’s ongoing concerns in her efforts to live a religious life was striking the proper balance between action and contemplation, and in 1753 she used books to pose the question to the Duchess, as one who she perceived to be wiser and further advanced in the religious life (Talbot wrote that she was ‘following [the Duchess] a good way oft’).⁵⁵⁷ In October Talbot discussed *Lettres sur Divers Sujets de Morale et de Piété* (1718) by Jacques Duguet (1649–1733), a French theologian whom she and the Duchess had recently been reading.⁵⁵⁸ Her questions turned on the degree to which one should engage with the world in order to ‘improve’ it, or retreat as to a convent to contemplate God.⁵⁵⁹ Duguet urged one of his correspondents to withdraw into a convent to live amongst the ‘good...People’ there, and Talbot asked the Duchess, ‘Dear Madam, good & wise as [Duguet] is, is this a rational scheme for a World where ones business is to improve...Society?’⁵⁶⁰ The question weighed on Talbot, and she raised it again in a letter two months later, now with reference to her and the Duchess’s shared reading of *La*

⁵⁵⁶ On women’s sharing of books as a means of developing their religious views, see Susan Staves, “‘Books without Which I Cannot Write’: How Did Eighteenth-Century Women Writers Get the Books They Read?’ in *Women and Material Culture, 1660-1830*, ed. Jennie Batchelor and Cora Kaplan (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 203.

⁵⁵⁷ Catherine Talbot to the Duchess of Somerset, 11 October 1753. DNP 31.

⁵⁵⁸ The book’s title, translated, is *Letters on Diverse Subjects of Morality and Piety*.

⁵⁵⁹ Catherine Talbot to the Duchess of Somerset, 11 October 1753. DNP 31.

⁵⁶⁰ Catherine Talbot to the Duchess of Somerset, 11 October 1753. DNP 31.

Bonne Armelle (1676), by Jeanne de la Nativité.⁵⁶¹ *Armelle* told the story of the Catholic laywoman Armelle Nicolas (1606–71), who worked in a French convent, and Talbot likened Armelle’s happiness in her ‘beloved Convent’ to her own happiness while visiting the Duchess at Percy Lodge. Allowing their shared reading of *Armelle* to speak to her own experience, Talbot asked the Duchess how she might cheerfully and ‘usefully’ return to her life in London after her restorative retreat at Percy Lodge.⁵⁶²

Talbot and the Duchess’s shared reading ranged widely, and their religious discussion via books was not limited to texts that were explicitly devotional. In this respect their reading reflects the broadening scope of theological literature observed by Brian Young, who notes how novels, poetry, and other genres functioned as theological texts in the eighteenth century.⁵⁶³ Reading what was current was fundamental to the pursuit of politeness, and Talbot and the Duchess turned social expectation to spiritual purpose by using up-to-date texts to discuss another persistent theme in Talbot’s personal writings: how to use time well and so live a ‘good’ life.⁵⁶⁴ In 1754 they read Jane Collier’s recently published *Essay on the Art of Ingeniously Tormenting* (1753), and though Talbot described it in a letter to the Duchess as ‘low & imperfect’, she added that if one read it as an examen of conscience it might still prove useful.⁵⁶⁵ Talbot’s diary recalls the Puritan examen of conscience that is often characterised as introspective and

⁵⁶¹ *La Bonne Armelle* was published in English translation as *Daily Conversations with God, Exemplified in the Holy Life of Armelle Nicolas* (1725).

⁵⁶² Catherine Talbot to the Duchess of Somerset, 18 December 1753. DNP 31.

⁵⁶³ Brian Young, ‘Theological Books from *The Naked Gospel* to *Nemesis of Faith*,’ in *Books and Their Readers in Eighteenth-Century England: New Essays*, ed. Isabel Rivers (London: Leicester University Press, 2001), 86.

⁵⁶⁴ On women’s reading, politeness, and social expectation, see Markman Ellis, ‘Reading Practices in Elizabeth Montagu’s Epistolary Network of the 1750s,’ in *Bluestockings Displayed: Portraiture, Performance, and Patronage, 1730-1830*, ed. Elizabeth Eger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 213-232; Gillian Dow, ‘A Model for the British Fair? French Women’s Life Writing in Britain, 1680-1830,’ in *Women’s Life Writing, 1700-1850: Gender, Genre and Authorship*, ed. Daniel Cook and Amy Culley (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 86-102; Glover, *Elite Women and Polite Society in Eighteenth-Century Scotland*, Ch. 3: ‘Reading and Print Culture’.

⁵⁶⁵ Catherine Talbot to the Duchess of Somerset, 24 April 1754. DNP 31.

confessional:⁵⁶⁶ she recorded the time that she woke, and carefully accounted for how she used each hour, a reckoning of time intended to help her live a good and holy life.

Spiritual reading supported this effort. Her shared reading with the Duchess, and their shared reflection on that reading, demonstrate how Talbot's self-examination was not solely a matter of introspective piety but was also, crucially, relational. Throughout 1753 and 1754 Talbot and the Duchess were also reading Samuel Richardson's *Sir Charles Grandison* (1753–54): they sent each other the latest instalments, discussed the book in their correspondence, and read it aloud when together. *Sir Charles Grandison* was, to Talbot, 'The Book', its title character illustrating exemplary Christian character and holy living.⁵⁶⁷ Again their own lives interacted with their shared reading: reflecting on *Grandison*, Talbot began to see in the Duchess the 'most amiable & wisest of Women' whose character was 'exactly' like *Grandison's*.⁵⁶⁸ Like *Grandison*, the Duchess lived a life of 'Active Goodness', and Talbot turned to her as a wise spiritual mentor.⁵⁶⁹

Tracing Talbot and the Duchess's shared reading illuminates an alternate means of spiritual direction through letter, while it also challenges interpretations of eighteenth-century women's religious reading practices as silent and solitary. The image of the gentlewoman spending time alone, contemplating religion, and reading scripture and devotional books appears frequently in eighteenth-century texts, and for many years dominated modern scholarship.⁵⁷⁰ While representations of women reading have become more nuanced and varied,⁵⁷¹ the image of the religious woman as she read remains

⁵⁶⁶ Hindmarsh, *Evangelical Conversion Narrative*, 302.

⁵⁶⁷ For example, Catherine Talbot diary, 19 November 1753. BL, Add. 46688.

⁵⁶⁸ Catherine Talbot diary, 21 November 1753. BL, Add. 46688.

⁵⁶⁹ Catherine Talbot diary, 21 November 1753. BL, Add. 46688. For further discussion of *Grandison*, see p. 203.

⁵⁷⁰ Hannan, 'Women, Letter Writing and the Life of the Mind in England', 14.

⁵⁷¹ Heidi Brayman Hackel and Catherine E. Kelly, eds., *Reading Women: Literacy, Authorship, and Culture in the Atlantic World, 1500-1800* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 1; Ian Jackson,

uncomplicated: she was silent and solitary, alone with her books and her thoughts.⁵⁷² In her study of elite women in Scotland, Katherine Glover argues that ‘Unlike most other genres, religious reading was essentially private’.⁵⁷³ John Brewer concurs: ‘Private religious reading was truly private’, he writes, ‘it played little or no part in the realm of polite conversation and sociability’.⁵⁷⁴ In his reconstruction of the diarist Anna Larpent’s reading, Brewer considers her religious reading to be in a special category that prevented her discussing it with others, either in person or via letter. Larpent’s spiritual reading was, according to Brewer, a ‘private act of self scrutiny’, an ‘act of personal devotion’, and ‘not a subject for polite conversation’,⁵⁷⁵ and Larpent herself, as a reader of religious texts, was ‘isolated, absorbed, individual...cut off from the world’.⁵⁷⁶ By contrast, Talbot and the Duchess’s reading was a form of sociability and spiritual direction.⁵⁷⁷

As Methodist women’s letters extended out from their initial uses, so too did the correspondence of Talbot and the Duchess. However, rather than promoting the religious ideals of a tight religious culture, their letter circulation had broader social meaning, which contributed to their letters being less personally revelatory and overtly religious. Talbot transcribed the Duchess’s letters in letters to her friends, and she did not conceal

‘Approaches to the History of Readers and Reading in Eighteenth-Century Britain,’ *The Historical Journal* 47, no. 4 (2004): 1050; Patricia Howell Michaelson, ‘Women in the Reading Circle,’ *Eighteenth-Century Life* 13 (1989): 59-69.

⁵⁷² Naomi Tadmor gives a picture of women’s social reading practices, though her focus is on the family circle, and is intellectual rather than spiritual. Naomi Tadmor, “‘In the Even My Wife Read to Me’: Women, Reading and Household Life in the Eighteenth Century,” in *The Practice and Representation of Reading in England*, ed. James Raven, Helen Small, and Naomi Tadmor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 162-174. Susan Staves also notes how books were read socially in relation to women’s intellectual lives. Staves, ‘Church of England Clergy and Women Writers,’ 81-103; Staves, “‘Books without Which I Cannot Write,’” 192-211.

⁵⁷³ Glover, *Elite Women and Polite Society in Eighteenth-Century Scotland*, 58.

⁵⁷⁴ John Brewer, ‘Reconstructing the Reader: Prescriptions, Texts and Strategies in Anna Larpent’s Reading,’ in *The Practice and Representation of Reading in England*, ed. James Raven, Helen Small, and Naomi Tadmor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 239.

⁵⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷⁷ On reading as a form of sociability, see Glover, *Elite Women and Polite Society in Eighteenth-Century Scotland*, 52.

the fact that the Duchess's letters were also read by Thomas Secker and Mary Talbot.⁵⁷⁸

The Duchess, meanwhile, forwarded entire letters of Talbot's to others, including the Anglican clergyman James Wilkins (*fl.* 1741, *d.* 1755), asking him in January 1754 to take care to return it 'as I have kept all her Others'.⁵⁷⁹ The Duchess also forwarded to Talbot a letter written by her friend Lady Luxborough, in the course of which Luxborough reflected on a letter written by Talbot that the Duchess had sent to her.

Talbot returned Luxborough's letter to the Duchess, but not before 'shewing it to Mama'.⁵⁸⁰ Their letters were part of a complex round of correspondence circulation that functioned socially as well as spiritually: writing to the poet William Shenstone, Lady Luxborough referred to one of the Duchess's letters as 'a kind of sermon', and in its circulation the Duchess functioned as an unofficial epistolary pastor to more than her initial correspondent.⁵⁸¹

While Talbot intentionally pursued the Duchess of Somerset as a mentor and profited from her wisdom and guidance only in the final years of Somerset's life, Anne Steele and Anne Cator Steele's mentoring relationship was enacted over the long term and transpired within a domestic context. Their shared living situation meant that they did not often correspond via letter, but as mentioned, when Anne Steele was away from home it was to her stepmother, rather than her father, that she wrote. Anne Cator Steele was both the mother of a large household and a spiritual mother, and on both accounts Steele sought her guidance: in her letters the domestic and spiritual were interwoven. When she

⁵⁷⁸ Catherine Talbot to Elizabeth Carter, 21 July 1753. Pennington, ed., *Letters between Carter and Talbot*, 2:133. Catherine Talbot to the Duchess of Somerset, 17 November 1752. DNP 31.

⁵⁷⁹ The Duchess of Somerset to James Wilkins, 30 January 1754. Beinecke, OSB c.22.

⁵⁸⁰ Catherine Talbot to the Duchess of Somerset, 19 February [1754], and Lady Luxborough to the Duchess of Somerset, 13 February 1754. DNP 31.

⁵⁸¹ Lady Luxborough to William Shenstone, 2 February 1753. Henrietta Knight Luxborough, *Letters Written by the Late Right Honourable Lady Luxborough, to William Shenstone, Esq.* (London: Printed for J. Dodsley, 1775), 325.

was at Bath with her sister-in-law in 1751, Steele wrote weekly letters to her stepmother. The letters contain detailed reports on Steele's and her sister-in-law's health, and they address family and household concerns ('I forgot when I came away to desire you to take out my best gowns in a fine day and spread them on the Bed with y^e Window open').⁵⁸² Her letters were a way of continuing the domestic conversations that occurred in their shared home.

Steele's letters were also a means of seeking advice from her 'Hon^d Mother', who at age sixty-two had achieved a venerated status within her family and church. Steele was wearied by her long-term illness and was anxious caring for her sister-in-law, and as she attempted to understand their sufferings in spiritual terms, she turned to Anne Cator Steele for advice. She told her stepmother that she found relief in writing to her, adding 'tis the only relief I can have next to complaining to the Father of Mercies'.⁵⁸³ Anne Cator Steele directed her through word and example to trust in God's sovereign control of her and her sister-in-law's lives, including their experiences of illness. This was conventional Calvinistic theology and Steele would have heard it in sermons throughout her life, but Anne Cator Steele's own history of illness transformed her instruction from mere precept to something more personal, known by experience and communicated to someone she loved. Steele replied to her stepmother's letter, indicating her desire to 'imitate your example in a cheerful submission to and dependence on the hand of God'.⁵⁸⁴ The guidance she received from her stepmother and the themes she rehearsed in their correspondence that spring at Bath would in time become dominant themes in

⁵⁸² Anne Steele to Anne Cator Steele, 18 May 1751. AL, STE 3/7/xi.

⁵⁸³ Anne Steele to Anne Cator Steele, 11 May 1751. AL, STE 3/7/x.

⁵⁸⁴ Anne Steele to Anne Cator Steele, 18 May 1751. AL, STE 3/7/xi.

Steele's poetry and hymns. Often her hymns include images of illness. In one such hymn Christ is portrayed as 'The Great Physician':

Ye mourning sinners, here disclose
Your deep complaints your various woes;
Approach, 'tis Jesus, he can heal
The pains which mourning sinners feel....

Dear Lord, we wait thy healing hand;
Diseases fly at thy command;
O let thy sovereign touch impart
Life, strength, and health to every heart!

Then shall the sick, the blind, the lame,
Adore their Great Physician's name;
Then dying souls shall bless their God,
And spread thy wonderous praise abroad.⁵⁸⁵

Through letters, Anne Cator Steele helped her stepdaughter to transpose painful personal experiences into something with larger spiritual significance: spiritual direction given in letters extended beyond their original context in the domestic and familial to influence a much wider religious world.

Under diverse conditions, women across a denominational spectrum sought out relationships with those they considered to have greater wisdom and religious experience. In their search for spiritual direction they turned to pastors, in positions of official authority, but they also turned to older women who acted as unofficial leaders within religious communities. These women, as spiritual elders, were adept and creative in providing religious guidance via correspondence. The letters considered here have highlighted the diverse forms their epistolary spiritual direction could take: women used letters in a remarkable range of ways to care for those they loved and provide direction for their spiritual lives. The creative range employed may distinguish women's letters of spiritual direction most clearly from men's, for they were not burdened by professional

⁵⁸⁵ 'The Great Physician', Steele, *Poems on Subjects Chiefly Devotional*, 1:15-16.

obligations regarding the form and content of their epistolary guidance. Their letters also demonstrate how such spiritual correspondence had life beyond its initial writing: letters written by Methodist, Anglican, and Baptist women provided guidance to particular and loved individuals, and afterwards the letters themselves or the messages within them extended outward to address a larger religious world.

Assurance

The ability to be certain that one's salvation was secure is a spiritual theme that can be traced across the denominations considered here. While a common concern, theological variations resulted in very different understandings and experiences of assurance, and thus it is a useful theme in further defining important distinctions between denominations. The 'problem' of assurance (how can I know that I am saved?) was experienced with varying degrees of anxiety that correlated with beliefs in divine versus human agency in salvation. This was not a matter of abstract or arid doctrine to devout Christians, but was felt profoundly and personally, particularly as they aged. Historians of ageing have argued that as the elderly approached death the question of their salvation became increasingly pressing.⁵⁸⁶ In this section spiritual assurance is analysed as the subject of women's literary interactions, with and about spiritual elders.

Methodists: Striving for assurance

The Arminian theology of Wesleyan Methodism taught that salvation was available to all and that it was possible to know one was saved not by objective marks, but by an inward

⁵⁸⁶ Botelho and Thane, eds., *Women and Ageing in British Society since 1500*, 6.

‘witness of the Holy Spirit’.⁵⁸⁷ Unlike Calvinistic belief in the perseverance of the saints (it was impossible to fall from grace), Arminian assurance was unstable (it could be lost and renewed).⁵⁸⁸ This led to the oscillating pattern of anxiety and relief that Bruce Hindmarsh observes in Methodist conversion narratives, as laypeople strove to achieve and reachieve assurance.⁵⁸⁹ This was certainly the case for Ann Bolton. While Bolton joined the Witney Methodist Society in 1763, for years afterwards she was uncertain of her spiritual state. In December 1770 she was in a state of considerable spiritual anxiety as she actively laboured to achieve assurance, which she referred to throughout her diary as ‘the Blessing’.⁵⁹⁰ She wrote in her diary of finally receiving the longed for blessing in a single climactic moment on 18 December, but within a few days she had, devastatingly, lost it.⁵⁹¹ Her account of the following weeks is one of ongoing anxiety as she strove to restore this lost assurance, and in the midst of her struggle she turned to Wesley for spiritual direction. This he supplied through letters.

Wesley’s spiritual journey through the 1730s was accompanied by his own painful efforts to experience and understand assurance.⁵⁹² While he did not convey those early struggles to Bolton in his letters, his guidance emerged from personal experience. In 1738 he had discovered that his direct perception of divine favour (his experience of assurance) was inconstant, and that the joy and love he had felt following his conversion at

⁵⁸⁷ Jason E. Vickers, ‘Wesley’s Theological Emphases,’ in *The Cambridge Companion to John Wesley*, ed. Randy L. Maddox and Jason E. Vickers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 201; Hindmarsh, *Evangelical Conversion Narrative*, 245-247. See also Sermon 10, ‘The Witness of the Spirit I’, and Sermon 11, ‘The Witness of the Spirit II’, Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, 1:269-298.

⁵⁸⁸ Hindmarsh, *Evangelical Conversion Narrative*, 245.

⁵⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 156-161.

⁵⁹⁰ For example, Ann Bolton diary, 18 December 1770. Pudl., 2/2.

⁵⁹¹ Ann Bolton diary, 18 December 1770. Pudl., 2/2.

⁵⁹² Richard Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 77-95.

Aldersgate would not hold.⁵⁹³ Wesley now ‘fell back upon ratiocination’, striving again by will and reason to perceive God’s approval, as he had during his Oxford Methodist days.⁵⁹⁴ While he would continue to emphasise human agency in salvation (requiring Methodists to participate in their sanctification by using the means of grace), over time his doctrine of assurance would develop to emphasise increasingly the love of God. He came to distinguish between degrees of faith: the faith of a servant was weak and fearful, while the faith of a child was full of confidence.⁵⁹⁵ When Bolton wrote to him to describe her attainment and loss of assurance, he directed her to refrain from reasoning and simply to believe: he wanted to relieve her fearful searching for evidence of saving faith and so urged her simply to rest in the experience of God’s love. In December 1770 he encouraged her to ‘suppress to the uttermost of your power all unprofitable reasoning...abide simple [*sic*] before God’.⁵⁹⁶ Or again, ‘Certain it is that He loves you. And He has already given you the faith of a servant. You want only the faith of a child.’⁵⁹⁷ Now almost seventy, his faith more settled and confident than it had been in the 1730s, Wesley wrote to Bolton hoping to help her to rest in an assurance of God’s love.

Bolton’s striving for assurance had a geographical component in which Wesley also played a part. In February 1771 she described herself as ‘on ye very brink of despair’, and he convinced her to meet with him and other Methodists at the Foundery, his Methodist headquarters in London.⁵⁹⁸ She remained there for almost a month, and it was in London that she experienced a joyful assurance of the love of God: ‘[I]

⁵⁹³ Hindmarsh, *Evangelical Conversion Narrative*, 122.

⁵⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 126.

⁵⁹⁶ John Wesley to Ann Bolton, 29 December 1770. Telford, ed., *Letters of John Wesley*, 5:216. See also John Wesley to Ann Bolton, 15 December 1770. *Ibid.*, 5:213.

⁵⁹⁷ John Wesley to Ann Bolton, 7 April 1768. *Ibid.*, 5:86.

⁵⁹⁸ Ann Bolton diary, [11 February 1771]. *Pudl.*, 2/2.

experienced such a power from Him to come out of myself into Him'.⁵⁹⁹ She later wrote that she had been troubled by 'reasonings and perplexitys', but that God had given her a 'deep sence of His Holiness & Majesty, with a filial not distressing fear', adding, 'I cannot describe what I experienced at that time, either the happiness or the Revertial [*sic*] Awe'.⁶⁰⁰ This peace would last, and she commemorated its arrival annually. Her account clearly echoes Wesley's epistolary spiritual direction, and as we shall see in the next chapter, in time Bolton would pass on Wesley's advice to younger Methodists.

Baptists: Searching for signs of election

While Ann Bolton considered spiritual assurance an attainable earthly goal and one for which she actively strove, the Calvinistic theology of the Baptists considered here shifted agency in matters of salvation from oneself to God and caused them to search for certain marks or signs of election. This resulted in certain tensions for Anne Cator Steele, who believed that God had given her a 'promise' in March 1732 that she would be 'Instrumentaly useful' in caring for the souls of younger family members.⁶⁰¹ One morning she awoke, not uncommonly, with a biblical verse on her mind: 'Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit'.⁶⁰² The first part of the verse provided a biblical premise for her Calvinistic faith, while the second—'go and bring forth fruit'—authorised a new spiritual agency, and she undertook her new role with care and urgency, self-consciously reflecting on it over the years. In January 1753, when she was 63 years old, she wrote of her desire to 'bring forth

⁵⁹⁹ 'Third account of Ann Bolton's conversion experience'. Pudl., 4/29. See also Ann Bolton diary, 18 February 1771. Pudl., 2/2. Ann Bolton to unnamed clergyman, 18 August 1786. JRL, MA 1977.610.33.

⁶⁰⁰ Ann Bolton diary, 18 February 1771. Pudl., 2/2.

⁶⁰¹ Anne Cator Steele diary, 2 March 1732. AL, STE 2/1/1.

⁶⁰² Anne Cator Steele diary, 26 March 1732. AL, STE 2/1/1. Cf. John 15.16.

fruit in old age'.⁶⁰³ However, if God elected those who would receive salvation, how could she 'bring forth fruit'? Her practice was to observe younger family members for signs of election (which might include good works, faith, sincerity, repentance, or love for God), and then to participate with God by nurturing their spiritual lives and guiding them into the church.⁶⁰⁴ This practice will be analysed in the next chapter.⁶⁰⁵ Yet a tension persisted, signalled throughout her diary by the verbal hedge, 'I hope', which recurs as a kind of theological refrain, subtly distinguishing her own efforts for spiritual assurance from Bolton's anxious striving and eventual certainty.

As Anne Cator Steele watched others for signs of election, so she continued to scrutinise herself. Though she was sought out as a wise older woman within her familial and religious communities, performing unofficial leadership roles, she never experienced the certain knowledge of her salvation. Rather, she persistently *hoped* that she had been saved. Her diary was a textual space within which she searched herself inwardly for signs of election and to which she routinely returned, reviewing her past experience to discern whether she was truly elect.⁶⁰⁶ In April 1749 she wrote in her diary that she was now in 'my Latter end for God have lenghned [*sic*] out my Life to 60 years'.⁶⁰⁷ In the same month she composed a spiritual 'Meditation' and tucked it into her diary.⁶⁰⁸ In this autobiographical reflection she affirmed her belief in God's salvific agency: 'I was in a state of darkness & alienation from God who (as I hope) brought me out [of] that

⁶⁰³ Anne Cator Steele diary, 2 January 1753. AL, STE 2/1/3.

⁶⁰⁴ Hindmarsh, *Evangelical Conversion Narrative*, 312-313.

⁶⁰⁵ See p. 207.

⁶⁰⁶ Tom Webster, 'Writing to Redundancy: Approaches to Spiritual Journals and Early Modern Spirituality,' *Historical Journal* 39 (1996): 47, 50. See also Smith, 'Community and the Believer', 168-169.

⁶⁰⁷ Anne Cator Steele diary, 19 April 1749. AL, STE 2/1/2.

⁶⁰⁸ The meditation, titled 'A Meditation', is dated 7 April 1749 and slipped into her diary at October 1749. AL, STE 2/1/2.

darkness into his marvelous Light'.⁶⁰⁹ She expressed her desire for assurance as a spiritual desire and longing: 'what longings do I find for perseverance & assurance of the love of God, & my everlasting salvation'.⁶¹⁰ Yet she did not anticipate the satisfaction of this longing on earth, as Bolton certainly did. David Hackett Fischer states that one of the signs of election for seventeenth-century New England Puritans was old age itself, but Anne Cator Steele, at the end of her long life, felt no such certitude.⁶¹¹ One of the last entries in Anne Cator Steele's lengthy diary, written just days before her death, at the age of 71, confirms her ongoing ambivalence regarding spiritual assurance: 'I can make no progress in the ways and things of God and yet sometimes I can hope I am a child of God'.⁶¹² As she had lived in hope she now prepared to die in hope.

Anne Cator Steele's long-term religious guidance of Anne Steele led her stepdaughter similarly to interpret spiritual assurance in terms of God's sovereignty and the hope of heaven, and she in turn developed the theme of spiritual longing in verse. In her poem 'The Humble Claim', she asked how she could be sure of her salvation: 'Can I without a fear, assert my claim?'⁶¹³ Her answer reveals the same ambivalence regarding her salvation as that expressed earlier by her stepmother:

I fear, yet hope, I doubt, and yet desire,
Now tremble low on earth, and now aspire⁶¹⁴

Unable to settle the question of her salvation herself, she turned to God in hope, longing for 'full assurance':

O may my panting heart to thee aspire,
With restless wishes, with intense desire

⁶⁰⁹ Anne Cator Steele, 'A Meditation', 7 April 1749. AL, STE 2/1/2. Cf. 1 Peter 2.9.

⁶¹⁰ Anne Cator Steele, 'A Meditation', 7 April 1749. AL, STE 2/1/2.

⁶¹¹ Fischer, *Albion's Seed*, 104.

⁶¹² Anne Cator Steele diary, 25 June 1760. AL, STE 2/1/3.

⁶¹³ 'The Humble Claim', Steele, *Poems on Subjects Chiefly Devotional*, 2:15.

⁶¹⁴ 'The Humble Claim', *ibid.*

Till full assurance of thy love impart
The dawn of heaven to my enraptur'd heart!⁶¹⁵

For Anne Steele, as for her stepmother, this spiritual assurance was only possible in heaven, and thus her spiritual desires were directed towards the future when hope would be replaced by certainty:

O for the bright the joyful day,
When hope shall in assurance die!⁶¹⁶

Steele's longing differs from Bolton's striving in several important ways: Bolton's spiritual striving was a matter of personal effort and was premised on the belief that assurance was an attainable earthly goal; Steele's spiritual longing, on the other hand, was directed toward heaven where her salvation would be accomplished, and where the barrier constructed between her and God by human sinfulness—described by Steele as a 'veil of interposing night'—would at last be broken through, not by her own action or effort but by God's love.⁶¹⁷

Anglicans: The evidence of a good life

While the Baptist Anne Cator Steele may have looked for good works as an outward sign of inner renewal, and the Methodist Ann Bolton focused inward in her anxious striving for spiritual assurance while attempting to work out her salvation through good works, for Anglicans such as Catherine Talbot, a devout life, characterised by goodness, virtue, and morality, provided evidence of grace conferred. She did not explicitly reflect in writing on the nature of assurance nor articulate anxiety regarding whether she was saved, as did Steele and Bolton. There was no searching for signs of election nor striving through

⁶¹⁵ 'The Humble Claim', *ibid.*

⁶¹⁶ 'Hope in Darkness', *ibid.*, 1:126.

⁶¹⁷ 'Christ the Supreme Beauty', *ibid.*, 1:156.

human effort to achieve assurance. As her religious identity was less self-consciously adopted, so too was her salvation.

More than the other women considered here, Talbot habitually memorialised in her diary and correspondence older men and women whose piety she admired. Their goodness in life caused her to think of them as saints or angels on earth, and she wrote confidently of their translation to heaven after death. After Martin Benson's death in 1752 she wrote to Elizabeth Carter of 'this last departed saint' who 'shewed goodness in its most engaging form, who was a ministering angel upon earth'.⁶¹⁸ The next year she marked the 'Melancholy Anniversary' of his death in her diary: 'Blessed Saint who hast this day been a Twelvemonth released from this Wretched Mortal Life'.⁶¹⁹ These portraits of saintly piety again evoke Catholicism, with its ancient veneration of saints. While Baptists fondly remembered friends and family who died, such saintly portraits do not occur in their writings, their greater preoccupation with sin precluding faultless representations of humanity.⁶²⁰ And while Methodist belief allowed for the possibility of earthly perfection, when Bolton wrote of saints it was always more generally of a 'communion of saints'.⁶²¹ Believing that affectionate bonds were not broken in death, Talbot anticipated reunions in heaven: 'May our spirits be always supported by the transporting hope of meeting them again!'⁶²² Talbot trusted that the saintly Benson, and others, such as the Duchess of Somerset, Catherine Secker, and Joseph Butler, were in heaven, and she anticipated meeting them again.

⁶¹⁸ Catherine Talbot to Elizabeth Carter, 22 September 1752. Pennington, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Elizabeth Carter*, 89. See also Catherine Talbot diary, 30 September 1752. BL, Add. 46690.

⁶¹⁹ Catherine Talbot diary, 10 September 1753. BL, Add. 46690.

⁶²⁰ Dean Ebner, *Autobiography in Seventeenth-Century England: Theology and the Self* (The Hague: Mouton, 1971), 81.

⁶²¹ For example Ann Bolton diary, 24 February 1771. Pudl., 2/2.

⁶²² Catherine Talbot to Elizabeth Carter, 22 September 1752. Pennington, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Elizabeth Carter*, 89.

Associating the hope of heaven with a life well lived, Talbot was eager to surround herself with mature Christians whose saintly lives she considered evidence of their nearness to God and heaven. She sought them out, believing that they could direct her own course to heaven. As discussed earlier, in 1761 she wrote to Carter that she longed to spend time with the elderly Countess of Pomfret, then in the final weeks of her life. Talbot was attracted to the possibility of a relationship with Pomfret as she presumed it would be oriented toward heaven. She wrote to Carter, ‘a friendship began when one party is so near leaving this world, looks far beyond it’.⁶²³ In this way Talbot’s spiritual life was also directed toward heaven, though not, as for Steele, on account of a Calvinistic absorption with human sin, which she believed could only be overcome in heaven and thus longingly turned toward. Rather, Talbot’s relationships with ‘saints’ and ‘angels’ on earth—those who lived good and pious lives—assured her that those she had loved and lost, and eventually she as well, would live as whole and healthy saints in heaven.

Conclusion

Catherine Talbot considered advancing age worthy of respect and honour: while the body broke down she believed the Christian’s soul ascended to heaven, and she thus cultivated relationships with elderly women and men as she felt nearer to heaven in being with them.⁶²⁴ Historians have cautioned against a ‘sentimental model’ of old age as necessarily yielding respect and care, and have drawn attention to the many elderly people who

⁶²³ Catherine Talbot to Elizabeth Carter, 3 December 1761. Pennington, ed., *Letters between Carter and Talbot*, 2:394.

⁶²⁴ Catherine Talbot to Eliza Berkeley, 4 January 1763. BL, Add. 39311.

suffered loneliness and neglect in the eighteenth century.⁶²⁵ In this chapter I have argued that advanced age, when associated with spiritual experience and perceived wisdom, could generate especial esteem and honour within diverse religious communities, and I have used the term spiritual elders for these venerated men and women. While the word elder designated an ecclesiastical office within certain religious circles, I have used the term more broadly to describe the unofficial stature and activities of some older persons within spiritual communities. This more expansive usage recovers neglected and unofficial leadership roles, particularly of older religious women. Talbot, Steele, and Bolton each sought out spiritual elders for guidance, and these elders provided spiritual direction that was personal, individualised, and enacted through informal literary interactions, often in association with visits. Women in particular employed the letter genre in creative ways, and these letters often extended beyond their initial contexts into a wider religious world. Such literary encounters also served as experience and training for younger women, whose own interactions with children were influenced by close relationships with spiritual elders, as we will see in the next chapter.

⁶²⁵ Ottaway, *Decline of Life*, 1. See also Thomas, 'Age and Authority in Early Modern England,' 205-248; Botelho and Thane, eds., *Women and Ageing in British Society since 1500*, 1-12; Thane, *Old Age in English History*.

Chapter 4

‘To form and sooth this young mind’:

The Instruction of Spiritual Children

My dear Child, Now you have with dilligence & attention Thus far acquitted
yourself in learning to read to spell & repeat your Catechisms & Hymns...but do
not think my dear girl that you now have done all that is your duty to do No you
have thro your future Life to reduce into practice thou good Instructions you have
been favourd with at the Sunday School & in a more private Way...⁶²⁶

So wrote Jane Attwater to her young daughter, Anna Blatch (1793–1809), as part of her careful and ongoing efforts to attend to the religious instruction of her only and dearly loved child. From her daughter’s earliest days, Attwater had felt a keen duty for her spiritual care. On Anna’s first birthday, in 1794, her mother wrote a poem in her diary, which quickly slipped into a prayer:

Hail! Natal day y^t gave to Anna birth
Dear Lovely flower! but frail & brittle Earth
God of our lives accept my humble praise
Who gave this plant for us with care to raise...
Preserve & strengthen now her feeble frame
Early incline her heart to praise thy name...⁶²⁷

Attwater was concerned for her daughter’s physical protection, but the central theme of the poem is her spiritual maturation. Attwater’s later letter catalogues the various formal ways in which her daughter’s subsequent religious education proceeded: catechism, hymns, and Sunday School. And given Anna’s position in a longstanding Baptist family, we might add sermon, Bible reading, and prayer. But Attwater’s final words, ‘a more private Way’, point to less formal modes of instruction, and indeed her letter is an

⁶²⁶ Jane Attwater to Anna Blatch, undated. Draft letter, preserved in Jane Attwater diary. AL, Attwater Papers, acc. 76, I.A.25.

⁶²⁷ Jane Attwater diary, 16 July 1794. AL, Attwater Papers, acc. 76, I.A.21.

example of the way in which literary interactions were used in the religious instruction of children. Moreover, her letter suggests the presence of other adults who loved Anna and had an interest in her spiritual nurture: Attwater wrote that it would delight ‘all our hearts’ to see Anna, her ‘Lovely flower’, blossom into ‘a real Christian’.⁶²⁸

This chapter analyses the extensive and often hidden efforts of women to communicate religious ideals and ideas to much-loved children and to encourage their spiritual development. It asks who nurtured children spiritually, and how the exchange of letters, diaries, and poetry supported an inter-generational transmission of faith. While historians have privileged the role of parents and church leaders in providing religious education, this chapter demonstrates that a range of female relatives and friends, notably aunts and single women, played important roles in the religious instruction of children. It further explores the boundaries of relational categories, demonstrating how aunts and other women became mothers to girls and boys for whom they chose to care as spiritual children. Looking beyond the home and nuclear family introduces the importance of literary interactions in religious education, and here diaries are highlighted as ongoing, innovative tools for instruction. This chapter argues that the transmission of spiritual ideals and the formation of the young owed as much to women’s instruction through personal writings as to the more formal and well-known activities listed in Attwater’s letter.⁶²⁹ It further bridges generations, asking how women’s relationships with those identified as spiritual elders in the previous chapter informed their relationships with spiritual children. Finally, Attwater’s instruction to Anna that she must ‘reduce into

⁶²⁸ Jane Attwater to Anna Blatch, undated. Draft letter, preserved in Jane Attwater diary. AL, Attwater Papers, acc. 76, I.A.25.

⁶²⁹ On religious education, see Kenneth Charlton, *Women, Religion, and Education in Early Modern England* (London: Routledge, 1999), Chs. 2-3: ‘The Media’ and ‘The Methods’; Paul Sangster, *Pity My Simplicity: The Evangelical Revival and the Religious Education of Children 1738-1800* (London: Epworth Press, 1963), Ch. 3: ‘The Method of Their Teaching’. On Sunday Schools, see, for example, Elliott, ‘Gift of an Education,’ 107-124; Stott, ‘Evangelicalism and Enlightenment,’ 41-56.

practice' what she had learned signals the spiritual theme of holy living, a theme that had particular meaning for women endeavouring to teach children how to order their lives. Holy living was a common aspiration across denominations, though one with different theological inflections and patterns of expression, and as women taught children to think about holiness and to live holy lives, they helped to shape religious communities.

Aunts and Single Women

In framing this discussion around the notion of 'spiritual children', this chapter argues that the spiritual nurture of children was frequently the concern of those other than biological parents. Sometimes spiritual and affectionate ties overlapped with familial ties, though not always, and so girls and boys could become the spiritual children of anyone who loved them and took an active part in their religious training. Mothers certainly were involved in the spiritual instruction of children, as Attwater's care for Anna demonstrates, but here the role of mother is decentred, considered as one in a range of nurturing relationships. This analytical shift reveals aunts and single women, who are often overlooked in religious histories and histories of the family, playing vital and unexplored roles in children's spiritual lives.

Single women in religious cultures

In May 1788 Ann Bolton was forty-four years old and single when she awoke one morning hearing in her 'inmost soul' the words, 'Wilt thou have this Man to be thy wedded Husband – thy Prophet, Priest, and King?'⁶³⁰ Immediately and with joy she offered herself as a spiritual bride to Jesus: 'O what an holy calling, to be a chaste virgin

⁶³⁰ Ann Bolton diary, 28 May 1788. Pudl., 3/14.

espoused unto the Lord Jesus Christ!’⁶³¹ Bolton’s experience on that May morning was spiritually decisive as it spurred her to ‘enter more fully into a Union with the Holy Jesus’, and she continued to reflect on it in the coming days.⁶³² It was, however, but one episode in her ongoing religious reflections on marriage and singleness. Bolton’s interpretation of her experience as a single woman, as other religious women’s reflections on singleness, was wide-ranging and fluid: singleness was sometimes understood to be a holy calling, sometimes the lonely will of providence, sometimes a deliberate choice made on intellectual or social grounds. Such reflections were made as women confronted increasingly derisive voices in the press and popular literature portraying single women as isolated, miserable, and guilty of not fulfilling their natural roles as wives and mothers.⁶³³ So William Hayley, in his popular *Philosophical, Historical, and Moral Essay on Old Maids* (1785), catalogued the ‘particular failings’ of single women and insinuated that they were ‘maimed’ because they lacked husbands.⁶³⁴ The bookseller James Lackington connected this derogatory depiction with religion when he noted the large number of women Methodists, ‘and not a few of them sour, disappointed old maids’.⁶³⁵ Pressing beyond derogatory depictions of single women as ‘old maids’,

⁶³¹ Ann Bolton diary, 28 May 1788. Pudl., 3/14. Cf. 2 Corinthians 11.2. This language of bridal union has a long history in Christian spirituality and during the eighteenth century was used across a denominational spectrum. On Moravian bridal mysticism, see Hindmarsh, *Evangelical Conversion Narrative*, 180-183.

⁶³² Ann Bolton diary, 28 May 1788. Pudl., 3/14.

⁶³³ Amy Froide traces a transition from seventeenth-century perceptions of single women as society’s victims to an understanding of them as society’s villains in the eighteenth century. Amy M. Froide, *Never Married: Single Women in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), Ch. 6: ‘Spinsters, Superannuated Virgins, and Old Maids: Representations of Singlewomen’. See also Katherine Holden, Amy M. Froide, and June Hannam, ‘Introduction,’ *Women’s History Review* 17, no. 3 (2008): 317-319; Katharine Ottaway Kittredge, “‘Tabby Cats Lead Apes in Hell’: Spinsters in Eighteenth-Century Life and Fiction” (PhD thesis, State University of New York, 1992).

⁶³⁴ William Hayley, *A Philosophical, Historical, and Moral Essay on Old Maids*, 3 vols. (London: Printed for T. Cadell, 1785), 1:18. Hayley paid Elizabeth Carter the dubious compliment of dedicating his essay to her, ‘as a Poet, as a Philosopher, and as an Old Maid’. Ibid., 1:v. His essay was popular, going through six editions and being translated into French and German. Froide, *Never Married*, 179.

⁶³⁵ James Lackington, *Memoirs of the First Forty-Five Years of the Life of James Lackington* (London: Printed for and sold by the author, 1791), 68.

‘surplus women’, or ‘females without a function’ who were to be ‘despised, pitied, and avoided’, and observing an historiographical bias toward married women while at least a third of adult women were single in the late seventeenth century, scholars such as Amy Froide and Bridget Hill have explored the diverse lived experiences of historical single women.⁶³⁶ Single women have thus been studied in relation to work and economics, and as elite participants in local society.⁶³⁷ But what were the religious meanings of singleness? And what opportunities did singleness present for the transmission of faith to a younger generation?

Many of the women considered here either never married or married late, and so spent considerable proportions of their adult lives as single women. Together they provide a valuable prism through which to observe the experiences and spiritual influence of frequently hidden women. Of the chief subjects of this thesis, Anne Steele and Catherine Talbot did not marry, while Ann Bolton married at the age of forty-eight, lost her husband seven years later, and lived another twenty-three years as a widow. None of them had children of their own, but they did love and invest themselves in the lives of particular children and demonstrated a striking concern for their religious training. Understanding the nature of these women’s singleness is central to recognising how they

⁶³⁶ Susan E. Whyman, ‘Gentle Companions: Single Women and Their Letters in Late Stuart England,’ in *Early Modern Women’s Letter Writing, 1450-1700*, ed. James Daybell (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), 177; Olwen Hufton, ‘Women without Men: Widows and Spinsters in Britain and France in the Eighteenth Century,’ *Journal of Family History* 9, no. 4 (1984): 356; Holden, Froide, and Hannam, ‘Introduction,’ 314; Amy M. Froide, ‘Hidden Women: Rediscovering the Singlewomen of Early Modern England,’ *Local Population Studies* 68 (2002): 26-41. See also Froide, *Never Married*; Bridget Hill, *Women Alone: Spinsters in England, 1660-1850* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001); Judith M. Bennett and Amy M. Froide, eds., *Singlewomen in the European Past, 1250-1800* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999).

⁶³⁷ Ruth Larsen, ‘For Want of a Good Fortune: Elite Single Women’s Experiences in Yorkshire, 1730-1860,’ *Women’s History Review* 16, no. 3 (2007): 387-401; Pamela Sharpe, ‘Dealing with Love: The Ambiguous Independence of the Singlewoman in Early Modern England,’ *Gender and History* 11, no. 2 (1999): 202-232; Pamela Sharpe, ‘Literally Spinsters: A New Interpretation of Local Economy and Demography in Colyton in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries,’ *Economic History Review* 44 (1991): 46-65.

were not ‘despised, pitied, and avoided’, but deeply embedded in their social and religious worlds and remarkably involved in the lives of a younger generation.

Anne Steele chose singleness, and in so choosing unlocked opportunities for public poetic activity as well as enabling possibilities for religious instruction of a more personal kind through poetic exchange. Observing the large number of nonconformist women who married late or never married, Amy Froide argues that religious endogamy may have limited suitable prospective husbands.⁶³⁸ While Calvinistic Baptists did not impose discipline on those who married outside the denomination, they did encourage marriage within Baptist circles.⁶³⁹ Yet Steele’s not marrying was not the result of her inability to find a suitable husband, for of the several marriage proposals she received, one was from the Baptist minister of Bourton-on-the-Water, Gloucestershire: Benjamin Beddome (1717–95).⁶⁴⁰ He might have been a most suitable match, for not only did Steele and Beddome have a common faith, they shared a love for poetry and both wrote hymns.⁶⁴¹ In the same year that Beddome proposed to Steele, he composed a poem on marriage:

Let the companion of my youth
Be one of innocence and truth;
Let modest charms adorn her face,
And give her thy superior grace;
By heavenly art first make her thine,

⁶³⁸ Froide, *Never Married*, 189–190.

⁶³⁹ Smith, ‘Community and the Believer’, 164.

⁶⁴⁰ The persistent story of James Elcombe, to whom Steele was purportedly engaged in 1737, drowning just hours before their wedding can be traced back to the early Baptist historian Joseph Ivimey, but is not substantiated by archival evidence. Joseph Ivimey, *A History of the English Baptists*, 4 vols. (London: n. p., 1811–1830), 4:312. See also Aalders, *To Express the Ineffable*, 103–105; J. R. Watson and Nancy Cho, ‘Anne Steele’s Drowned Fiancé,’ *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 28, no. 1 (2005): 117–122. Besides Beddome’s and possibly Elcomb’s, a further proposal, from an unnamed man, is evident in correspondence with Mary Wakeford in 1757. See AL, STE 3/10/ii, iii, and xiii.

⁶⁴¹ Beddome’s hymns were published posthumously as Benjamin Beddome, *Hymns Adapted to Public Worship, or Family Devotion* (London: Printed for Robert Hall, 1818).

Then make her willing to be mine!⁶⁴²

Steele evidently was unwilling 'to be' Beddome's, for when his letter of 23 December 1742 arrived ('Would You but permit me to cast my self at your Feet & tell You how much I love...'), she declined his offer of marriage.⁶⁴³

Steele's decision to remain single was impelled by her sense of poetic vocation, for she believed that in assuming the domestic duties of a wife and mother she would necessarily relinquish the time and freedom she required to write. She perceived 'chains' and 'fetters' in marriage, and in a poetic dialogue with her married half-sister, Mary Wakeford, in which the sisters debated the virtues of their various states, Steele wrote, 'Wives give up their freedom in one fatal day'.⁶⁴⁴ When in 1757 Steele received a proposal from an unnamed man, Wakeford urged her to comply with social convention: 'why pray shouldn't you conform to custom as well as otherfolk?'⁶⁴⁵ 'I chuse to be alone', Steele responded, arguing that she preferred to pursue her 'quiet way alone' in the 'Ever-verdant Groves' where her poetry was stimulated by 'the Muse...and Contemplation'.⁶⁴⁶ Steele's 'Ever-verdant Groves' were a poetic reference to the mental space required for her to write, but they also evoke the extensive gardens at Broughton that in her generation had been developed into a formal garden with parterre. One of her earliest biographers indicates that according to family tradition Steele was inclined to walk in those gardens while composing verse, and an outbuilding in the garden, referred

⁶⁴² Benjamin Beddome, 'The Wish', quoted in 'Obituary of Rev. Benjamin Beddome, A. M.,' in *The Baptist Annual Register, for 1794, 1795, 1796-1797, Including Sketches of the State of Religion among Different Denominations of Good Men*, ed. John Rippon (London: Sold by Dilly, Button, and Thomas, 1797), 318.

⁶⁴³ Benjamin Beddome to Anne Steele, 23 December 1742. AL, STE 3/13/i.

⁶⁴⁴ Anne Steele, 'A Dialogue'. AL, STE 3/3/1, pp. 38-44.

⁶⁴⁵ Mary Wakeford to Anne Steele, 10 November 1757. AL, STE 3/10/xiii.

⁶⁴⁶ Anne Steele to Mary Wakeford, undated but c. November 1757. AL, STE 3/10/ii. Anne Steele to Mary Wakeford, undated but c. November 1757. AL, STE 3/10/iii.

to by Steele as her 'Cell', may have been the setting for much of her poetic activity.⁶⁴⁷

Steele elided her poetic vocation with a religious one and interpreted her experience of singleness in religious terms when, in several autobiographical poems in which she situated herself in her 'Cell', she imagined herself to be both a 'nun' and a 'hermit'.⁶⁴⁸

While post-Reformation England no longer presented possibilities for single women to find a place and purpose in convents, Steele imagined her own religious retreat and vocation in a way that was not inconsistent with her commitment to the Baptist church.⁶⁴⁹

Yet for all her references to the pleasures of solitude and the contemplative space essential to her poetic/religious vocation, Steele was wholly engaged in the life of her family. While she had avoided the duties of marriage and parenthood, there was nothing isolating about her experience of singleness. She was frequently sought out by younger friends and family members, mostly girls and young women with literary aspirations who admired her piety and poetry.⁶⁵⁰ And she lived with family her entire life. Steele was fifty-two when her father died in 1769, and she then moved down the lane to her brother's house. Broughton House was a large and busy home, and there she lived not only with her brother, sister-in-law, and various servants, but also with her three nieces: Mary (aged sixteen in 1769), Anne (born in 1769), and Martha (born in 1770). Her relationship with Mary Steele was especially close and became an important source of religious guidance for Mary. Mary loved her aunt and admired her skills as a poet, and from an early age she tried her own hand at writing verse. And so Anne Steele devised an instructive practice of

⁶⁴⁷ John Sheppard, 'Memoir,' in *Hymns, Psalms, and Poems by Anne Steele* (London: Daniel Sedgwick, 1863), vii-viii.

⁶⁴⁸ Anne Steele, 'To Melinda'. AL, STE 3/3/1, pp. 10-12. Anne Steele, 'The Solitary'. AL, STE 3/3/1, pp. 14-16.

⁶⁴⁹ See also Bridget Hill, 'A Refuge from Men: The Idea of a Protestant Nunnery,' *Past and Present* 117 (1987): 107-130.

⁶⁵⁰ Reeves, *Pursuing the Muses*, Ch. 5: 'A Literary Circle of Friends and Their Writings', especially "'Theodosia" at the Centre', 61-84.

using poetic exchange to discuss religious themes with her niece, as will be explored in the following section.

Ann Bolton's experience of singleness was more conflicted than Anne Steele's and more complicated by her religious identity. In early 1767, four years after her conversion to Methodism, Bolton was 'on the Point of Marriage to one in [the Witney] society' when she fell ill with a violent cough that she feared would develop into consumption.⁶⁵¹ Interpreting her illness as a warning that 'the creature' was drawing her affections from God, she vowed that if she recovered she would not marry but devote herself entirely to Jesus.⁶⁵² Later, she pointed back to this moment as pivotal in her religious life, for it had reinvigorated her faith, which had been in 'a Luke warm state' for several years.⁶⁵³ During these years, Bolton's ideals regarding marriage reflected John Wesley's, which she encountered in both print and letter. His *Thoughts on a Single Life* (1765) promoted the single life as providing greater freedom to 'wait upon the Lord without distraction', and a year after her broken engagement he wrote her a letter that echoed his published directive:

The best and most desirable thing of all is that you should live and die wholly devoted to God, waiting upon Him without distraction, serving Him without carefulness, and studying one thing—to be holy both in body and spirit, an whole burnt sacrifice of love. If you have not steadiness and resolution for this, the next thing to be desired is that you may marry a man of faith and love...⁶⁵⁴

⁶⁵¹ Ann Bolton, 'Spiritual reflection in illness'. Pudl., 4/30. Cf. Ann Bolton, 'Third account of Ann Bolton's conversion experience'. Pudl., 4/29.

⁶⁵² Ann Bolton, 'Spiritual reflection in illness'. Pudl., 4/30.

⁶⁵³ Ann Bolton, 'First account of Ann Bolton's conversion experience'. Pudl., 4.28. Cf. Revelation 3.15-16. Four years later, Bolton used the same language to describe her 1767 illness: it had released her from 'the Creature' and enabled her to devote herself to Jesus. Ann Bolton, 'Third account of Ann Bolton's conversion experience'. Pudl., 4/29. The similarity in language may reflect her use of the earlier reflection (4/30) in composing the later conversion experience (4/29).

⁶⁵⁴ John Wesley, *Thoughts on a Single Life* (London: Printed and sold at the Foundery, 1765), 10. Cf. 1 Corinthians 7.35. John Wesley to Ann Bolton, 13 February 1768. Telford, ed., *Letters of John Wesley*, 5:80. On Wesley and marriage, see Bufford W. Coe, *John Wesley and Marriage* (Bethlehem: Lehigh University Press, 1996). On Methodist marriage more generally, see Lawrence, *One Family under God*, Ch. 5: 'Celibacy in the Methodist Family: The Case Against Marriage'; Anna Lawrence, "'A Most Solemn Season of Love": Charles Wesley and Marriage in Early Methodism,' in *Charles Wesley: Life, Literature and*

Bolton's resolution in 1767 not to marry was a model Methodist decision, but it would not prove stable.

While Bolton's reflections on her 1767 decision suggest emotional detachment and firm religious resolve, subsequent experiences narrated in her diary and correspondence reveal higher levels of anxiety and uncertainty. Throughout the 1770s and 1780s, Bolton had an intermittent relationship with John Arundell (*fl.* 1774–85) of Stroud, Gloucestershire. She wanted to marry him but considered him insufficiently advanced in the religious life. Anna Lawrence identifies this as a common problem for Methodists hoping to marry, for they 'had to find not just love matches, but soul mates'.⁶⁵⁵ For years Bolton tried to resolve the problem of their spiritual incompatibility, entering into a correspondence with him designed to encourage and instruct. Arundell wrote to her in 1776, 'y^r Letters are always blest to me & y^e plainer you are in showing me y^e dangers I'm expos'd to & of reprovng for tardy steps the more do I esteem you as a real friend & y^e person ordain'd to be an helper & aid'.⁶⁵⁶ She turned the agonistic struggle to believe, so characteristic of Methodist spirituality, outward on his behalf: in 1780, she entered into a fresh 'work of faith' for Arundell, praying for his 'reconversion' and, with an allusion to Jacob wrestling with the angel in Genesis 32, addressed God in her diary, 'Wrestleing I will not let thee go untill thou bless him'.⁶⁵⁷ As she tried to reconcile her desire to marry Arundell with her Methodist convictions, Wesley told her flatly, 'I am fully persuaded, That is not the person. He has neither such a measure of Understanding, nor of spiritual

Legacy, ed. Kenneth G. C. Newport and Ted A. Campbell (Peterborough: Epworth, 2007), 465–485; Henry D. Rack, "'But, Lord, Let It Be Betsy!': Love and Marriage in Early Methodism," *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* 53, no. 1 (2001): 1–13.

⁶⁵⁵ Anna Lawrence, "'I Thought I Felt a Sinful Desire": The Question of Celibacy for Eighteenth-Century Methodists,' *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 85, no. 2 and 3 (2003): 191.

⁶⁵⁶ John Arundell to Ann Bolton, 5 December 1776. Pudl., 4/10/1. Cf. Tobit 8.6.

⁶⁵⁷ Ann Bolton diary, 23 April 1780. Pudl., 2/17. Ann Bolton diary, 16 March 1780. Pudl., 2/11.

Experience, as to advance you either in Divine Knowledge, or in the Life of God.’⁶⁵⁸ In time Bolton relinquished, as a ‘sacrifice’, her hopes of marriage to Arundell.⁶⁵⁹ In these circumstances too, while they were more protracted and painful than her experience in 1767, Bolton’s decision to remain single was wholly guided by her Methodist ideals.

Bolton’s surviving papers contain an unexpectedly personal reflection on singleness, which despite being personal was not kept secret and wholly private. Amidst nearly 1,300 manuscript pages of Bolton’s extant diary, written entirely in prose, is a page containing a poem on her experience of being single. She wrote the poem on waking one day in July 1778: after pausing to ‘pour out my soul’ in prayer, she poured out ‘the feelings of my heart’ in verse:

If call’d the Creature to forego —
A Single life to live —
Lord to thy Sov’reign will I bow —
My heart to thee I give —⁶⁶⁰

As interesting as Bolton’s uncharacteristic appeal to poetry in this instance, is the fact that her poem achieved a readership. This page of her diary is in a different hand, for Bolton lent the page out, after which it was copied and returned. A later annotation in Bolton’s hand reads, ‘I lent this to a person who wore it out & wrote it again’ (see Figure 8).⁶⁶¹ A watermark in the paper indicates the year 1799, but whether Bolton lent it considerably later than she wrote it, or whether it was in circulation for several decades before being

⁶⁵⁸ John Wesley to Ann Bolton, 17 February 1774. JRL, MAM JW 1.79. In 1785 Wesley was still urging Bolton to see that marriage to Arundell would not be to her spiritual benefit: ‘Some years since an agreeable man courted you. But tho you liked his person & his temper, yet you ran from him, “Because he was not Religious.” And now a scruple comes into your mind, “Whether you did well in refusing him”? Whether you ought not to accept him now?...Is M’ A more religious now than before? Nay, less if possible. He has now neither the Power of Religion nor the form.’ John Wesley to Ann Bolton, 16 February 1785. Pudl., 4/7/25.

⁶⁵⁹ Ann Bolton diary, 19 December 1776. Pudl., 2/7.

⁶⁶⁰ Ann Bolton diary, 2 July 1778. Pudl., 2/9.

⁶⁶¹ Ann Bolton diary, 2 July 1778. Pudl., 2/9.

returned to Bolton, is unknown.⁶⁶² In either case, this entry first recorded in 1778 had life beyond her own, more than twenty years after she wrote the poem early one morning, alone in her room. Alongside the official guidance on marriage and singleness—as encountered in Wesley’s publications and correspondence—Bolton’s poem also circulated, supplying an informal and very personal voice of experience.

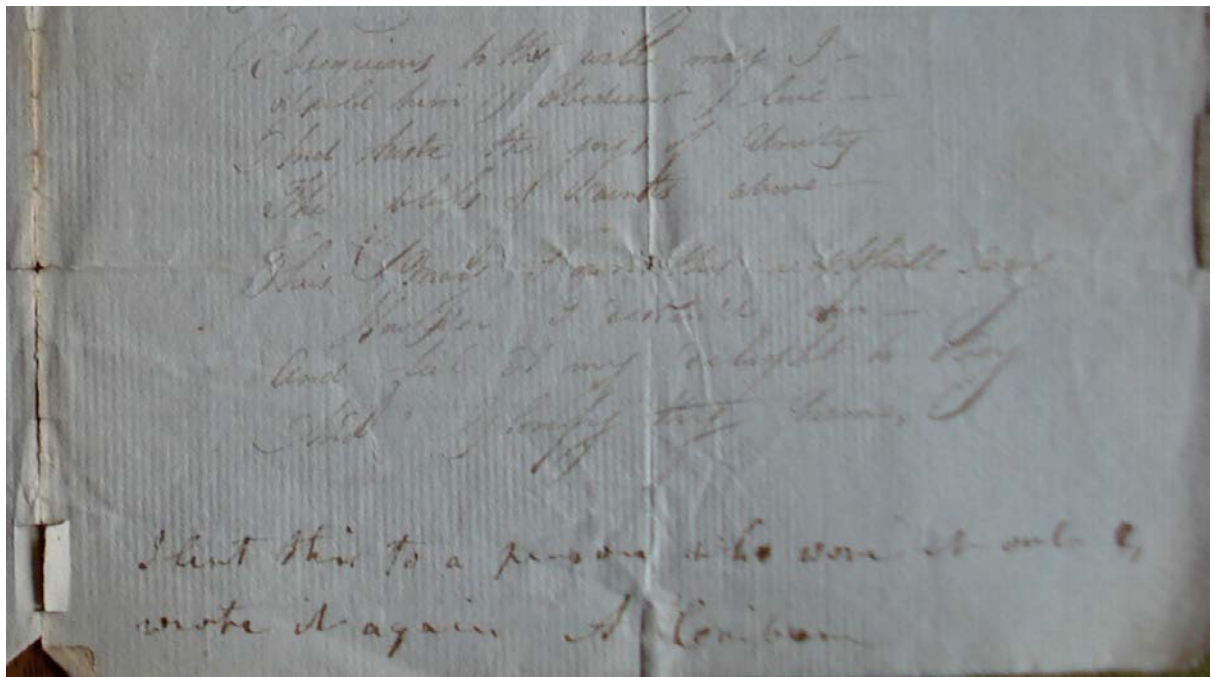


Figure 8: Ann Bolton’s poem on singleness⁶⁶³

While Bolton’s experience of singleness was less willing and welcome than Steele’s, and while caring for her parents at Witney and helping her brother manage his farm at Finstock meant that she had considerably less leisure than Steele, her singleness still allowed a certain freedom, enabling her to travel extensively in support of her own spiritual quest and Methodist affairs more widely. Bolton’s journeys to Methodist friends

⁶⁶² Bolton’s note is signed ‘A. Conibear’, indicating that it was written in 1792 or later, since she married George Conibeere in 1792.

⁶⁶³ Ann Bolton diary, 2 July 1778. Pudl., 2/9.

and communities across southern England brought her into contact with a range of young Methodists, and her reputation for piety caused them to turn to her for advice. Some of the instruction she gave occurred in person, but Bolton's obligations to her family meant that her frequent journeys quickly brought her home again. In Oxfordshire she continued her interactions with younger friends through the post.

Catherine Talbot did not marry, though she, like Steele and Bolton, had opportunity to do so. While Steele chose not to marry in order to preserve the conditions necessary for writing, and Bolton's desire to marry was complicated by her Methodist ideals, there were financial and social reasons for Talbot's remaining single. In 1752 her family and friends undertook negotiations for her marriage to an unnamed man of Oxford, but his family would not agree to the marriage settlement that her family and friends thought appropriate. Talbot's friends persuaded her that it would be a 'most eligible' match, and she seemed willing to marry him (despite 'my Dear Love of my own way of Life'), but afterward she wrote in her diary, 'how much happier am I at present in finding that Providence seems not to destine me to Make it [this marriage]'.⁶⁶⁴ Later, George Berkeley probably proposed marriage.⁶⁶⁵ While her earlier proposal had seemed socially promising and had been undone by financial obstacles, this proposal was objected to for social reasons. Talbot responded to his declaration, writing, 'Selon le Monde il y auroit assez d'Objections des deux Cotés, – Suffit hélas! qu'ils sont insupérables', and then attempted to reestablish their relationship as pseudo-siblings,

⁶⁶⁴ Catherine Talbot diary, June 1753. BL, Add. 46690. Myers, *Bluestocking Circle*, 112-113.

⁶⁶⁵ Sylvia Harcstarck Myers dates Berkeley's proposal in 1758, though the letter on which she bases her analysis is undated. *Ibid.*, 114. See Catherine Talbot to George Berkeley, undated. BL, Add. 39312, ff. 333-334.

repeatedly referring to Berkeley as ‘mon Frère’ and to herself as ‘cette Soeur’.⁶⁶⁶ The objections are unstated, but Sylvia Harcstarck Myers suggests that Talbot’s lack of a dowry together with the difference in their ages (for Talbot was twelve years older than Berkeley) may have overruled any emotional arguments for their marrying.⁶⁶⁷

Talbot’s extant correspondence and diary do not suggest a particular reflectiveness regarding her single state, and her references to being single tend towards a philosophical rather than personal voice. As friends of Samuel Richardson’s, Talbot and Elizabeth Carter were asked to recommend exemplary traits for the title character of *Sir Charles Grandison*.⁶⁶⁸ Afterwards, having created Grandison’s image, Talbot confessed to Carter that she was ‘falling in love with it’.⁶⁶⁹ Ann Bolton’s religious sensibilities meant that she was unlikely to read novels on her own initiative, but while travelling, a friend read *Grandison* to her. Initially uneasy, she was pleased that the title character led her ‘to a much higher one...the lovely Jesus’.⁶⁷⁰ While Bolton contemplated Christ directly through Grandison, for Talbot Grandison enabled her to recognise Christ-like characteristics in those close to her, and to make decisions regarding marriage based on the presence or absence of the Christ-like qualities of Grandison.⁶⁷¹ She wrote in her

⁶⁶⁶ ‘According to the World there are enough Objections on two sides – Only alas! they are insuperable’, and she referred to Berkeley and herself as ‘my Brother’ and ‘this Sister’. Catherine Talbot to George Berkeley, undated. BL, Add. 39312, f. 333. On Talbot and Berkeley as siblings, see p. 83.

⁶⁶⁷ While Secker provided for Talbot in his household, she seems to have remained a fatherless woman without a dowry. Myers, *Bluestocking Circle*, 115-116.

⁶⁶⁸ Catherine Talbot to Elizabeth Carter, 23 December 1751. Pennington, ed., *Letters between Carter and Talbot*, 2:64. On Talbot’s role in the writing of *Grandison*, see T. C. Duncan Eaves and Ben D. Kimpel, *Samuel Richardson: A Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 357-364.

⁶⁶⁹ Catherine Talbot to Elizabeth Carter, 23 December 1751. Pennington, ed., *Letters between Carter and Talbot*, 2:64.

⁶⁷⁰ Bolton was staying with Sarah James at Gloucester when James read *Grandison* to her. Ann Bolton to John Wesley, 23 February 1782. *AM* 13 (May 1790): 271. See also John Wesley to Ann Bolton, 8 March 1782. JRL, MAM JW 1.93.

⁶⁷¹ On *Grandison* promoting the imitation of Christ, see Van Reyk, ‘Christian Ideals of Manliness in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries,’ 1053-1073. A counterpart to Richardson’s *Clarissa* (1748) and *Pamela* (1740), *Sir Charles Grandison* provided a masculine example of ‘religion and morality’. Barker-Benfield, *Culture of Sensibility*, 263. See also Major, *Madam Britannia*, 99-117; Jeremy Gregory, ‘Homo

diary in December 1751, 'And now what shall I say of Sir Charles – My long sought & never to be found, Ideal.'⁶⁷² Since men were so seldom Grandisons, she wrote, 'let me Honour a Single Life'.⁶⁷³ There were men in her life she honoured with the epithet: Thomas Secker was 'the Most Sir Charles in Principle & Action that I know', and when she reflected in her diary on the death of her father thirty-one years earlier she wrote, 'I fancy Sir Charles has a great deal of Him.'⁶⁷⁴ Nor did she perceive Christ-like characteristics only in men, for in 1752 she remembered Catherine Secker as 'a Grandison of the First Class' and, as noted in the previous chapter, she admired the Duchess of Somerset for having a character 'exactly' like Grandison's.⁶⁷⁵ Her social world was populated with many she loved and admired, and she was content to remain single, though her single state did not yield social isolation.

Talbot, like Steele and Bolton, was deeply embedded in her social world, and the pattern of her life provided ample opportunity to interact meaningfully with a younger generation. She found pleasure in the company of children generally, but she also developed affectionate relationships with particular children. In 1745 Jemima Yorke teased her that her religious seriousness would make 'good Old Women...set her as a Pattern to their Children'.⁶⁷⁶ And when Yorke's own daughters were born in 1751 and 1757, Talbot became for them a model of polite Anglicanism, which for her mixed cheerful sociability with religious seriousness. She visited them frequently and, when

Religious: Masculinity and Religion in the Long Eighteenth Century,' in *English Masculinities, 1660-1800*, ed. Tim Hitchcock and Michèle Cohen (London: Longman, 1999), 105-106.

⁶⁷² Catherine Talbot diary, 3 December 1751. BL, Add. 46690.

⁶⁷³ Catherine Talbot diary, 28 December 1751. BL, Add. 46690.

⁶⁷⁴ Catherine Talbot diary, 28 December 1751. BL, Add. 46690. See also Catherine Talbot diary, 9 December 1753 and 27 December 1753. BL, Add. 46690.

⁶⁷⁵ Catherine Talbot diary, 27 January 1752. BL, Add. 46690. Catherine Talbot diary, 21 November 1753. BL, Add. 46688.

⁶⁷⁶ Jemima Yorke to Catherine Talbot, January 1745. BLARS, L 30/9a/4, f. 27.

they were apart, wrote letters to them.⁶⁷⁷ Talbot was also fond of Algernon Percy, the four-year-old grandson of the Duchess of Somerset, and his cousin George Greville, aged eight: while visiting the Duchess at Percy Lodge in 1754, Talbot wrote a 'Fairy Tale' and left the manuscript in their possession.⁶⁷⁸ The tale introduced a fairy woman called Instruction who, together with the help of such friends as Truth, taught two young boys and made them gifts of 'a little Catechism bound in silver enamelled [and] a Pocket Bible with Ruby Clasps'.⁶⁷⁹ Talbot's care for particular children derived from personal affection as well as a sense of duty to provide guidance: thus of Julia Berkeley she wrote in her diary, 'C[']est une fille aimable & charmante, Je m'interesse pour elle, Je l'aime, il me semble que c'est un de mes Devoirs d'èpier tous ses petits d'enfants & de les redresses.'⁶⁸⁰ Affection and duty led to an ongoing instructive relationship in which Talbot sought to provide moral and spiritual guidance for Julia, both in person and on paper.

Rather than 'despised, pitied, and avoided', Steele, Bolton, and Talbot were each deeply immersed in their social and religious worlds and nurtured affectionate and instructive relationships with a younger generation.⁶⁸¹ Indeed, to some extent their experiences as single women enabled these relationships, since freedom from the duties of wives and mothers provided increased opportunity for travel and engaging in literary interactions with younger friends and family members. Olwen Hufton notes that single women were often prolific letter-writers, which was certainly true of the women

⁶⁷⁷ See BLARS, L 30/21/2. On Talbot's correspondence with the girls, see Godber, *Marchioness Grey*, 80-81.

⁶⁷⁸ The Duchess of Somerset to Catherine Talbot, 5 May 1754. BL, Add. 19689.

⁶⁷⁹ Catherine Talbot, 'A Fairy Tale', in Zuk, ed., *Catherine Talbot and Hester Chapone*, 125-136 (125, 126). The 'Fairy Tale' was published posthumously in Talbot, *Essays on Various Subjects*, 77-109. See also Myers, *Bluestocking Circle*, 215-216; Hughes, *Gentle Hertford*, 414.

⁶⁸⁰ 'This is a lovely & charming girl, I am interested in her, I love her, I think it is one of my duties to watch all young children & reform them.' Catherine Talbot diary, 30 July 1753. BL, Add. 46690.

⁶⁸¹ Hufton, 'Women without Men,' 356.

considered here.⁶⁸² Interactions of these sorts were important means of passing on faith to a younger generation. Historians have observed how single women were especially close to nieces and goddaughters, and it is to aunts in personal and religious relationship with nieces and nephews that we now turn.⁶⁸³

Aunts, nieces, and nephews

In 1789 Sarah Hawkes (1759–1832), who was connected through marriage to Ann Bolton, travelled from her home in London to visit her family in Broad Marston, Gloucestershire. She carried her diary with her on her journey, and on 15 September wrote:

Went to visit my aged and excellent aunt, S. ‘an Israelite indeed’, not outwardly only, but in the heart. She is naturally more like an angel than any character I know; but grace superadded, makes her also a saint....she is a mirror of humility, true and unfeigned.⁶⁸⁴

Hawkes’s reflection on her aunt’s character denotes the influence she had on her niece’s efforts to live a religious life. Aunt S. mirrored true humility, reflecting this and other exemplary qualities back to her niece. The manuscript cultures of religious women show aunts, both single and married, playing substantial though underacknowledged roles in the religious lives of nieces and nephews. In her recent book on siblings, Leonore Davidoff devotes a chapter to the ‘forgotten figures’ of aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews, and cousins, arguing that the ‘inner landscape’ of children could be deeply affected by aunts.⁶⁸⁵ How did aunts affect those inner landscapes in the spiritual contexts under

⁶⁸² Ibid., 368.

⁶⁸³ Holden, Froide, and Hannam, ‘Introduction,’ 322; Froide, *Never Married*, 44, 66, 71.

⁶⁸⁴ Catharine Cecil, *Memoirs of Mrs. Hawkes, Late of Islington; Including, Remarks in Conversation and Extracts from Sermons and Letters of the Late Rev. Richard Cecil* (London: R. B. Seeley and W. Burnside, 1838), 30. Born into a Methodist family, she began to identify more as Anglican after she married and moved to London.

⁶⁸⁵ Davidoff, *Thicker Than Water*, 180.

discussion here? Judging by their representations in prescriptive literature, aunts could be expected to be dull, pious, and morally righteous, but how do such stereotypes correspond to aunts as they appear in women's own manuscripts?⁶⁸⁶ Across denominations, women's manuscripts suggest that the role of aunt often elided with other affectionate and familial roles. Who performed the role of aunt in children's lives, and how did this role correspond with broader family patterns?

As noted, the Calvinistic theology of the Steeles complicated their understandings of human agency in the transmission of faith to a younger generation (since election was a matter of divine agency), but this did not preclude active efforts to guide younger kin to seek baptism. Aunts played a key role in this process. Anne Cator Steele wrote of her hope that nieces and nephews might 'receive soul benefit by coming into our family'.⁶⁸⁷ She clearly developed a reputation within her extended family for facilitating conversion, for her diary shows that nieces and nephews frequently travelled to Broughton to talk with her. The autumn of 1732 brought concurrent visits from nieces from three branches of the family: Molly Cottle (*fl.* 1732) from Trowbridge, Wiltshire; Nanny Froude (*fl.* 1732) from East Knoyle, Wiltshire; and Anna Gay (1710–84) from Haycombe, near Bath.⁶⁸⁸ In her diary, their aunt recorded concern for their souls that fuelled a deliberate programme of spiritual conversations with them. The same year she talked with local kin Sarah and Clemence Etheredge, as they moved towards baptism.⁶⁸⁹ (See Appendix 2, p. 333.) When separated from nieces and nephews she initiated correspondences, hoping to encourage religious seriousness through the post: in June 1732 she wrote in her diary,

⁶⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 165–167. Linda Mitchell shows how virtually every eighteenth-century letter-writing manual included examples of letters from aunts that warned nieces against loose behaviour and fortune hunters. Linda C. Mitchell, 'Entertainment and Instruction: Women's Roles in the English Epistolary Tradition,' *Huntington Library Quarterly* 66, no. 3/4 (2003): 332.

⁶⁸⁷ Anne Cator Steele diary, 11 July 1732. AL, STE 2/1/1.

⁶⁸⁸ Anne Cator Steele diary, March–August 1732. AL, STE 2/1/1.

⁶⁸⁹ Anne Cator Steele diary, 27–28 May 1732. AL, STE 2/1/1.

‘my desires run out for the good of my sisters Childrens souls and haveing writ to some of them I reciev’d a letter from my second niece’.⁶⁹⁰ Anne Cator Steele felt a particular burden of care for her nieces and nephews and played a critical role in their religious training.

Whatever their biological relationship, Anne Cator Steele looked upon the young people she guided towards baptism as her children. After talking with her niece Elizabeth Gay (1715–43), she wrote in her diary, ‘I was drawn out to cry to the lord not only on her account but for all the dear children belonging to me that Christ may be form’d in all their souls’.⁶⁹¹ Elizabeth was ‘my sisters Child’, but as Anne Cator Steele guided her toward her new birth at conversion, she also became her aunt’s spiritual child.⁶⁹² This spiritual understanding of family extended beyond familial ties and beyond her relationship with girls, for when one of her servants expressed an increased religious seriousness she talked with him as well, afterwards writing in her diary, ‘I was engag’d to thankfulness...and said the lord shall adde to me another son’.⁶⁹³ Naomi Tadmor has shown how familial relationships were flexible in the eighteenth century, and indeed it is sometimes difficult to specify relationships in Anne Cator Steele’s diary, for she often used the generic term ‘cousin’ to refer to nieces or nephews.⁶⁹⁴ While Tadmor emphasises the importance of the household in constructing family, for Anne Cator Steele it was spiritual interest in particular individuals that defined familial bonds: aunt or employer, she was also their mother.

⁶⁹⁰ Anne Cator Steele diary, 16 June 1732. AL, STE 2/1/1. Her ‘second niece’ was Elizabeth Gay.

⁶⁹¹ Anne Cator Steele diary, 31 August 1731. AL, STE 2/1/1.

⁶⁹² Anne Cator Steele diary, 16 June 1732. AL, STE 2/1/1.

⁶⁹³ Anne Cator Steele diary, 11 May 1732. AL, STE 2/1/1.

⁶⁹⁴ Tadmor, *Family and Friends in Eighteenth-Century England*.

As they aged, aunts became particularly honoured members of the extended Steele family, and their renewed identities as revered aunts gave them a new spiritual authority, as discussed in the previous chapter. Anne Cator Steele had long acted as spiritual mother and midwife within her family and in time came to be regarded as ‘hon^d Aunt Steele’ by her niece Jane Attwater.⁶⁹⁵ Anne Steele achieved a reputation for especial piety within her extended family and was so honoured that at least three younger members of the family were given her pseudonym, Theodosia.⁶⁹⁶ With its meaning ‘gift of God’, Theodosia recalled Steele both as having received poetic gifts from God and as an ongoing gift to her family. Her nieces and nephews sought her counsel in person and, in times of crisis, turned habitually to her poetry, circulating in manuscript within the extended family. Thus when Mary Whitaker was dying at the age of twenty-seven, she asked her aunt Jane Attwater to read to her some of Steele’s verse ‘relative to the joys & Employments of the Saints in Heaven’.⁶⁹⁷ Attwater was ‘My beloved precious Aunt’ to her niece Marianna Jane Head, and by the time Attwater was ninety she became, to her nephew Philip Whitaker’s (1766–1847) wife Anne, ‘Our venerable relative’.⁶⁹⁸ In the extended Steele family, aunts were deeply and personally involved, both directly and indirectly, in the transmission of faith to younger family members.

While members of the Steele family developed a strong (and strongly interconnected) religious and familial lineage, Catherine Talbot’s experience of family relationships was far more fluid. Her diary and correspondence do not reveal the same kind of personal and long-term interactions with aunts or uncles, though she did have

⁶⁹⁵ For example, Jane Attwater diary, 9 May 1790. AL, Attwater Papers, acc. 76, I.A.20.

⁶⁹⁶ Her cousin, Jane Gibbs, had a daughter in 1755 and called her Elizabeth Theodosia Gibbs; Jane Gibbs’s niece, Marianna Head, had a daughter in 1784 and called her Elizabeth Theodosia Head; and Marianna Head’s sister, Jane Attwater, had a daughter in 1793 and called her Anna Jane Theodosia Blatch.

⁶⁹⁷ Jane Attwater to Nancy Overbury, c. 1800. Bodl., Reeves Collection 19/2/a.

⁶⁹⁸ Marianna Head to Jane Attwater, undated. Bodl., Reeves Collection 19/2/o. Anne Whitaker diary, 26 November 1843. Whelan, ed., *Nonconformist Women Writers*, 8:114.

them. Her father's death before her birth and her transplantation with her mother into the Secker household created new patterns of intimacy not based primarily on genetic relationship. As an only child and a single woman, she had no nieces and nephews of her own. Yet she had grown up alongside Jemima Yorke and Mary Grey (later Gregory) (1719–61), who acted as pseudo-siblings to her, and their children came to be especially dear to Talbot. The lines of family were endlessly complex in this circle, confounding standard family tree diagrams, for Jemima and Mary were actually niece and aunt, though their closeness in age (they were only three years apart) and the circumstances of their family caused them to be raised essentially as siblings.⁶⁹⁹ Mary Grey died in 1761 and her husband David Gregory in 1767, after which their daughter Jemima was adopted by Jemima Yorke, so that cousin raised cousin.⁷⁰⁰ Yorke's children, Amabel and Mary Jemima (known to Talbot as Bell and Mouse), looked to Talbot as a surrogate aunt.⁷⁰¹ Within this elite ecclesiastical and aristocratic world, aunts were more flexible family members. And though also less prominent figures in family patterns, they likewise performed key roles in caring for a younger generation and in guiding their moral and religious development.

Aunts and aunt figures sometimes became spiritual mothers when a child's parent died.⁷⁰² Talbot performed this role in the life of fifteen-year-old Julia Berkeley when her father George Berkeley died suddenly in 1753, at the moment that his daughter handed him a cup of tea.⁷⁰³ As Talbot and her mother had from 1725, the bereaved Berkeleys found comfort and shelter in the home of Thomas Secker, then Bishop of Oxford. Talbot

⁶⁹⁹ Godber, *Marchioness Grey*, 11-15.

⁷⁰⁰ Ibid., 79; Catherine Talbot to Elizabeth Carter, 24 December 1767. Pennington, ed., *Letters between Carter and Talbot*, 3:159.

⁷⁰¹ Myers, *Bluestocking Circle*, 67.

⁷⁰² Bailey, *Parenting in England*, 211-214; Holton, *Quaker Women*, 27; Brown, 'Domesticity, Feminism, and Friendship,' 422.

⁷⁰³ Arthur Aston Luce, *The Life of George Berkeley, Bishop of Cloyne* (London: Routledge, 1992), 221.

was particularly attentive to Julia at this time and grew deeply attached to her, referring to her affectionately as ‘my daughter’ and ‘my Julia’.⁷⁰⁴ Julia’s mother still lived, but Talbot’s flexible and capacious sense of family allowed her to write to Julia of ‘all her mamas & grandmamas’ who loved and cared for her.⁷⁰⁵ While no formal ties united them, Talbot invested herself in the young girl’s life, attending with particular care to her religious instruction. She nurtured Julia as a surrogate aunt and spiritual mother.

As the first of her family to convert to Methodism, aunts do not feature in Ann Bolton’s conversion narratives nor in subsequent accounts of her religious experience. In converting, she overturned typical patterns of passing on faith from parent or aunt to child, for as we have seen it was through her influence that her parents eventually converted to Methodism. A reversion to expected patterns of faith transmission occurred as Methodism moved into a second generation. Sarah Eden (*fl.* 1770–82) was the youngest daughter of Nathaniel and Ann Eden (who were connected through marriage and friendship to Bolton), and her grandfather Thomas Eden was ‘intimately acquainted’ with John Wesley and had built a Methodist chapel near his home in Broad Marston, Gloucestershire.⁷⁰⁶ Her mother had been born Ann Ward in Oxhill, Warwickshire, and it was probably through her marriage that she and the rest of the Ward family were introduced to Methodism. By 1769 a Methodist gathering was meeting in her family home at Oxhill.⁷⁰⁷ Sarah was born to parents with strong connections to the Methodist movement, and would have been raised to observe Methodist beliefs and customs. In the

⁷⁰⁴ For example, Catherine Talbot diary, 2 November 1753. BL, Add. 46688.

⁷⁰⁵ Catherine Talbot diary, 3 December 1753. BL, Add. 46688.

⁷⁰⁶ Cecil, *Memoirs of Mrs. Hawkes*, 2.

⁷⁰⁷ Betty Smith, *The Village of Oxhill and the Church of Saint Lawrence* (n. p.: n. p., 1971), 27.

late 1770s, when she was perhaps eight or nine years old,⁷⁰⁸ Sarah began to show signs of increasing religious seriousness, and at this time three of her aunts joined together to advise her via letter. (See Appendix 2, p. 334.) Sarah Nind, who lived at Ramsbury Park, Wiltshire, wrote in 1778 to encourage her to ‘do every thing to Perfection’, motivated by ‘a hearty desire to please God’.⁷⁰⁹ In 1782 Nind wrote to ask more directly ‘to hear of your Souls prosperity’, and urged her niece to ‘keep up good desires’ through the Methodist means of grace: prayer, reading, and religious conversation.⁷¹⁰ Meanwhile, Nind’s sister Elizabeth Ward (b. 1749), most likely living at home at Oxhill, wrote with the distinctly Methodist counsel to ‘aspire after perfection’.⁷¹¹ And on the other side of the family, Sarah Eden’s aunt Sarah Hawkes, who in 1789 would visit and be instructed by her own ‘aged & excellent aunt’ (as observed at the beginning of this section), wrote to offer advice and support, concluding, ‘I make not the least doubt but that my dear Sally will one day be a useful worthy woman and a honer [honour] to her sex.’⁷¹² In a network of families united by Methodism, three aunts, in three locations, had a common interest in their niece’s religious development and wrote hoping to guide Sarah to take up her place in what had become a family faith.

This section has explored the significant roles aunts played in the transmission of faith to a younger generation. The forms of their relationships with children and young people were diverse: while in some circumstances aunts had traditional familial ties with nieces and nephews, in other circumstances aunt-like relationships reflect intimate but unrelated ties across generations. Further relational slippage occurred as aunts conceived

⁷⁰⁸ Sarah Eden was the fourth daughter of Nathaniel and Ann Eden, who were married in 1765. Ettwell Augustine Bracher Barnard, *The Edens of Honeybourne, Gloucestershire: An Old-Time Correspondence, 1785-1839* (Evesham: W. & H. Smith, Journal Press, 1929), 24.

⁷⁰⁹ Sarah Nind to Sarah Eden, 20 December 1778. WRO, Ward Letters 15.

⁷¹⁰ Sarah Nind to Sarah Eden, 26 May 1782. WRO, Ward Letters 16.

⁷¹¹ Elizabeth Ward to Sarah Eden, 7 September 1782. WRO, Ward Letters 18.

⁷¹² Sarah Hawkes to Sarah Eden, c. 1782. WRO, Ward Letters 19.

of themselves as spiritual mothers to those whose religious and moral lives they guided. In all cases such ongoing acts of spiritual nurture were motivated by love for particular girls and boys. While religious education often occurred in person, this section has also introduced the ways in which it occurred through writing, which is the subject of the following section.

Education

Eighteenth-century advice literature portrayed religious education as located in the church and the home and described these instructional locales as reinforcing and mirroring each other. In his popular *Religious Instruction of Children Recommended* (1770), James Stonhouse encouraged parents to prepare their children at home to receive the lessons they heard in church, arguing that without the reinforcing influence of formal religious instruction by parents, children would be ill-equipped to understand what they heard from clergy or ministers.⁷¹³ Advice literature also stressed the responsibility of parents in their children's religious education, urging parents to attend to the spiritual health of their children by implementing a routine of family worship that followed the formalised round of Bible readings and prayers occurring in church. Thus Philip Doddridge, in *A Plain and Serious Address to the Master of a Family, on the Important Subject of Family-Religion* (1750), urged fathers in particular to lead their families in daily worship, thereby constructing 'Nurseries of Piety'.⁷¹⁴ In his sermon 'On Family Religion', John Wesley argued that religion practised in families (which he defined in terms of nuclear families

⁷¹³ James Stonhouse, *Religious Instruction of Children Recommended*, 2nd ed. (London: Printed for J. and F. Rivington, 1770), 6, 18.

⁷¹⁴ Philip Doddridge, *A Plain and Serious Address to the Master of a Family, on the Important Subject of Family-Religion*, 4th ed. (London: Printed for C. Hitch and L. Hawes, J. Buckland, J. Rivington, et al., 1761), 15.

plus servants) was necessary to ensure that the ‘present revival’ did not die away but was passed on to ‘the rising generation’.⁷¹⁵ Historians have tended to echo these prescribed patterns of location and relationship, while sometimes adding a third site in schools. Michael Watts credits ‘pious parents and charity schools’ with religious instruction in the period, while Paul Sangster locates religious education in church, school, and home.⁷¹⁶ Sangster depicts an ideal type of formal familial instruction as presided over by exemplary fathers and resulting in ‘a deeply religious atmosphere, godly conversation, industrious use of time, family prayers twice daily, holy books much in evidence’.⁷¹⁷ In his study of women and religious education, Kenneth Charlton, while primarily concerned with women as recipients of instruction, devotes a final chapter to mothers as educators and in it emphasises their participation in formalised family worship.⁷¹⁸ The picture drawn in both advice literature and historiographies is formal and highly localised, emphasising the relationship between parent and biological child.

These representations of religious education are, however, incomplete. Analysing the manuscript culture of religious women complicates this picture in three respects: method, location, and relationship. Focusing on formal methods of religious education neglects the individualised and very personal instruction that took place through correspondence as well as diary and poetry exchange. Analysing these more informal literary exchanges reveals previously overlooked patterns of religious instruction in

⁷¹⁵ Sermon 94, ‘On Family Religion’, John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, ed. Albert C. Outler, vol. 3: Sermons III, 71-114 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986), 3:335.

⁷¹⁶ Watts, *The Dissenters*, 421-428; Sangster, *Pity My Simplicity*, Ch. 4: ‘The Medium of Their Teaching’. See also Anthony Fletcher, *Growing up in England: The Experience of Childhood, 1600-1914* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), Part 1: ‘Prescription’. The volume *Educating the Child in Enlightenment Britain* refers throughout to education within the context of the nuclear family, emphasising the roles of father and mother. Mary Hilton and Jill Shefrin, eds., *Educating the Child in Enlightenment Britain: Beliefs, Cultures, Practices* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009).

⁷¹⁷ Sangster, *Pity My Simplicity*, 71.

⁷¹⁸ Charlton, *Women, Religion, and Education*, Ch. 7: ‘Mothers as Educators’.

which women played essential roles. In addition, an emphasis on home, church, and school as the locations of religious education obscures the less localised aspects of religious training. Home and church environments were certainly important influences on the spiritual development of younger persons, but focusing solely on local interactions is to overlook the substantial distances sometimes involved in religious training—distances traversed through the post and travel—and to risk distorting the scope of women’s moral and religious influence, circumscribing them within the home. Finally, while the instruction of parents was clearly influential in guiding a child’s religious development, an exclusive focus on the nuclear family disregards the considerable complexity of family patterns in the period, as the previous section demonstrated. A wider perspective, unlimited by home and nuclear family, recognises the educative agency of previously neglected women, such as aunts and single women. This section analyses how women used informal literary interactions to embody their faith and instruct younger friends and family in the religious life. Such education was intentional, personal, and interactive. In teaching a younger generation through personal writings, these women not only taught them religious belief and practice, they taught them how to write and so to respond to the instruction they were given.

Religious training through diaries

One of the ways this religious training proceeded was through diaries.⁷¹⁹ While religious

⁷¹⁹ Historians and literary scholars use diverse terminology for the diary, including journal, spiritual journal, and confessional diary. The term ‘diary’ is used consistently here since it is used most often in historiography on women’s writings. Further, the descriptors ‘spiritual’ and ‘confessional’ are not used, since they suggest an essentially internalised document and mask the social content and uses of religious diaries. The diarists considered here most often used the terms diary and journal interchangeably, though Talbot tended to use ‘journal’ to designate that part of her diary that gave a careful accounting of her time. For example, on 26 June 1751 she reflected more expansively on her life and ‘usefulness’ and then wrote, ‘Let’s see how the days Journal looks’, after which she gave a bare bones account of how she had spent the

and women's historians have tended to emphasise the self-orientation of diaries, religious women's manuscript cultures reveal diaries being used as an innovative and effective site of religious instruction. Religious diaries have often been understood as a distinctively private genre, a space for self-examination within which writers could safely expose the inner, secret movements of the soul. In *The Rise of Puritanism* (1938), William Haller likened the diary to a Protestant 'confessional', stating that in the pages of a diary the writer 'could fling upon his God the fear and weakness he found in his heart but would not betray to the world'.⁷²⁰ This interpretation of religious diaries as inherently private has persisted.⁷²¹ At the same time, scholars have tended to stress the self-concern of women's diaries, highlighting their function as a liberating space within which women could escape the demands on their time and constraints on their lives to focus on themselves, cultivating their minds and hearts in isolation.⁷²² Effie Botonaki thus argues that the diary provided both space and freedom for women to be 'self-centred', while Harriett Blodgett likens the diary to a 'book of self' and argues that women wrote diaries to assert themselves as individuals in a society that thwarted female selfhood.⁷²³

hours of that day. Catherine Talbot diary, 26 June 1751. BL, Add. 46690. For discussions of such terminology, see Rebecca Steinitz, *Time, Space, and Gender in the Nineteenth-Century British Diary* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 8; Catherine Delafield, *Women's Diaries as Narrative in the Nineteenth-Century Novel* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 2; Hindmarsh, *Evangelical Conversion Narrative*, 92.

⁷²⁰ William Haller, *The Rise of Puritanism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938), 38.

⁷²¹ For example, Avra Kouffman, 'Women's Diaries in Late Stuart England: An Overview,' in *Recording and Reordering: Essays on the Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Diary and Journal*, ed. Dan Doll and Jessica Munns (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2006), 66; Effie Botonaki, 'Seventeenth-Century Englishwomen's Spiritual Diaries: Self-Examination, Covenanting, and Account Keeping,' *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 30, no. 1 (1999): 3-21; Webster, 'Writing to Redundancy,' 33-56; Margo Todd, 'Puritan Self-Fashioning: The Diary of Samuel Ward,' *Journal of British Studies* 31 (1992): 256-257.

⁷²² Clery, *Feminization Debate in Eighteenth-Century England*, 136, 133.

⁷²³ Botonaki, 'Early Modern Women's Diaries and Closets,' 45; Harriett Blodgett, *Centuries of Female Days: Englishwomen's Private Diaries* (Gloucester: Alan Sutton, 1989), 86, 96-97. See further Gillian Beattie-Smith, 'Writing the Self: The Journal of Sarah Stoddart Hazlitt, 1774-1843,' *Women's History Review* 22, no. 2 (2013): 197-210; McKay, 'English Diarists: Gender, Geography and Occupation, 1500-1700,' 191-212; Christina Sjöblad, 'From Family Notes to Diary: The Development of a Genre,' *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 31, no. 4 (1998): 521; Elspeth Graham, 'Women's Writing and the Self,' in *Women and Literature in Britain, 1500-1700*, ed. Helen Wilcox (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 209-233; Judy Simons, 'Invented Lives: Textuality and Power in Early Women's Diaries,' in

Talbot's diary practice complicates these notions of religious women's diaries as private and self-concerned, for it performed a social purpose that was no less personal for not being 'private'. During the months the Berkeleys stayed with her at Cuddesdon and when they lived at nearby Oxford, Talbot embarked on a programme of religious education with Julia, and this instruction not only included comprehensive guidance on how to keep a diary, but transpired within the shared space of exchanged diaries. In an effort to promote her spiritual ideals of personal piety and holy living and to instill them in her much-loved younger friend, Talbot set Julia the task of keeping a diary, which was then regularly submitted to Talbot for comment and correction. Talbot wanted to teach Julia to live mindfully and not idly, and to be religiously serious without becoming excessively grave or sober. To navigate this balance, Talbot practised and subsequently taught Julia an exacting method of accounting for how she used each hour of the day. When Julia sent Talbot a diary with unaccounted hours, she replied that 'the Journal was not...by any means what I wished it'.⁷²⁴ To guide Julia in marking her time well she supplied her with 'a little State of Accounts'.⁷²⁵ Talbot was patient with Julia's early efforts, explaining that 'it requires some time to get into a right method', and encouraged her, writing, 'Your Journal, my Love...be as long as it will. The longer it is the more pleasure it will give me.'⁷²⁶ Talbot's fond addresses communicate her very personal motivation in translating her faith to Julia by teaching her the 'right method' to account for her time and so live a pious life.

Inscribing the Daily: Critical Essays on Women's Diaries, ed. Suzanne L. Bunkers and Cynthia Huff (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), 252-263; Judy Nolte Temple and Suzanne L. Bunkers, 'Mothers, Daughters, Diaries: Literacy, Relationship, and Cultural Context,' in *Nineteenth-Century Women Learn to Write*, ed. Catherine Hobbs (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1995), 197-216; Felicity Nussbaum, 'Toward Conceptualizing Diary,' in *Studies in Autobiography*, ed. James Olney (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 134; Anderson, 'At the Threshold of the Self,' 54-71.

⁷²⁴ Catherine Talbot diary, 30 October 1753. BL, Add. 46688.

⁷²⁵ Catherine Talbot diary, 30 October 1753. BL, Add. 46688.

⁷²⁶ Catherine Talbot diary, 30 October 1753. BL, Add. 46688.

To help Julia, then fifteen years old, understand what was required of her, Talbot sent her sections of her own carefully executed diary as a pattern to follow. Her diary thus had both personal and communal meaning as she directed her self-reflection toward religious instruction. The diary sent to Julia is partly an account of hours spent, and partly a more discursive reflection on Talbot's thoughts, reading, and social interactions. It very often reads as a letter and, indeed, the way in which the diary could conflate with letters in the period is signalled by the manner in which these sections are folded and addressed on the outside, 'Pour La Chere Julie' (see Figure 9).⁷²⁷ Her use of French is further indication of her remarkable self-discipline as a diary writer. Writing in French was always an extra effort, but one that she did not require of Julia, worried that the added exertion might discourage the developing diary writer: 'Je ne souhaite pas que vos Journaux soient en Français parce que cette difficulte ajoutée les rendroient trop fatigantes pour vous, & moins exactes.'⁷²⁸ By sharing her diary in this way, Talbot provided Julia with both textual example and personal pattern. She encouraged Julia to read her diary, and indeed part of her motivation in writing was to help her younger friend to self-reflect and narrate, hoping that in so doing she would pass on to Julia her own deeply held religious beliefs. She was determined to 'form & sooth this Young Mind Capable of becoming every thing it ought'.⁷²⁹

While some of Talbot's diary appears to have been delivered by hand, other sections of it were sent through the post, including those sections written when she was visiting the Duchess of Somerset at Percy Lodge. These sections catalogued for Julia the books Talbot read, and modelled her method of making reflective notes on her reading. It

⁷²⁷ See, for example, Catherine Talbot diary, 3 December 1753. BL, Add. 46688.

⁷²⁸ 'I do not wish your Journals to be in French because this added difficulty would render them too tiring for you, & less accurate.' Catherine Talbot diary, 1 December 1753. BL, Add. 46688.

⁷²⁹ Catherine Talbot diary, 6 August 1753. BL, Add. 46688.



Figure 9: Catherine Talbot diary, sent to Julia Berkeley⁷³⁰

is striking how Talbot's book discussions with the Duchess, as discussed in the previous chapter, clearly informed her instruction of Julia. Talbot's relationship with a spiritual elder now guided her relationship with her spiritual child. When Talbot and the Duchess read Jacques Duguet together at Percy Lodge,⁷³¹ Talbot reflected on their shared reading in her diary, and these reflections were then sent on to Julia. Talbot included notes to Julia, such as, 'Let me give You a rule or two from Abbé du Gue [Duguet]', and then transcribed for her an extract from his book of letters:

Il vous seroit utile de ne vivre qu'un moment à la fois, & d'oublier dans chaque action celle qui l'a précédée & celle qui doit la suivre...vous abandonnes pleinement à la divine Providence, à vous décharger dans son sein du poids de vous-même & de tout ce qui vous environne....Ne perdre Jamais Courage...⁷³²

⁷³⁰ Catherine Talbot diary, 3 December 1753. BL, Add. 46688.

⁷³¹ See p. 173.

⁷³² 'It would be useful to you to live one moment at a time, & to forget everything that preceded it and that must follow....abandon yourself fully to divine Providence, unloading the weight of yourself and all that surrounds you....Do not lose Courage...' Catherine Talbot diary, 9 November 1753. BL, Add. 46688.

Such efforts to trust in Providence, and actively to seek contentment by suspending one's own immediate wishes and fears, form a recurrent theme in Talbot's personal writings. By directing Julia to this passage, she offered spiritual comfort and guidance to a much-loved younger friend still grieving the death of her father. She also demonstrated for Julia her method of making extracts as a way to aid reflective reading.⁷³³

Talbot and Julia's shared reading also proceeded via more direct lessons, which can be traced in their diary exchange. Talbot sometimes intervened in Julia's reading by commenting on the books she read. In early 1754 Julia read the novel *Princess of Cleves* (1678) and discussed it in the next section of her diary sent to Talbot.⁷³⁴ Talbot approved of Julia's assessment, writing, 'Your Judgment of it is very just,' and added that the novel was 'very bad', its principles 'Romantick & Abominable'.⁷³⁵ Talbot considered *Sir Charles Grandison* a more fitting text for reflection, and as she and the Duchess read it together at Percy Lodge (as discussed in the previous chapter⁷³⁶), she guided Julia's simultaneous reading of it by asking leading questions and assigning specific tasks in her diary. She asked Julia to consider Sir Charles's actions in certain circumstances, or to compare two characters.⁷³⁷ Talbot's religious instruction of Julia through a guided reading of *Grandison* again confirms Brian Young's observation that the purposes of fiction and theological literature—to correct and improve—could be closely allied in the eighteenth century.⁷³⁸ Talbot also commented on the manner in which Julia read. When Julia told her that she read in a variety of books, Talbot cautioned, 'Does not the variety

⁷³³ Mark R. M. Towsey, "'I Can't Resist Sending You the Book': Private Libraries, Elite Women, and Shared Reading Practices in Georgian Britain,' *Library and Information History* 29, no. 3 (2013): 217.

⁷³⁴ *La Princesse de Clèves* is a French novel that was published anonymously, though the author is generally held to be Madame de La Fayette.

⁷³⁵ Catherine Talbot diary, 4 February 1754. BL, Add. 46688.

⁷³⁶ See p. 175.

⁷³⁷ Catherine Talbot diary, 7 November 1753. BL, Add. 46688.

⁷³⁸ Young, 'Theological Books from *The Naked Gospel* to *Nemesis of Faith*,' 86. See also p. 174.

sometimes confuse your Ideas?’ then added, ‘However my Love I do not mean to check Ingenuity or rob You of any innocent Amusement, I only mean to warn You against flying from Book to Book’.⁷³⁹ She wanted to teach Julia to read with attention, to ask questions of the text, to reflect on it in writing and in company, and to apply that reading to her life.

In late 1753 Talbot wrote in her diary of an evening spent with the Duchess who read aloud from *Sir Charles Grandison* while Talbot worked on a cross-stitched sampler for Julia’s mother. Talbot was so enraptured by the Duchess’s reading and her own reflections that her mind wandered from the needlework in her lap. She wrote with frustration in her diary, ‘Attentive to the Book I every now & then make a wrong stitch unperceived & have half my Evenings work to undo again’.⁷⁴⁰ And then she paused to address a lesson to Julia, who would soon receive the diary in the post: ‘A Wrong Stitch upon Canvas may be set right’, Talbot wrote, ‘but a faux pas in Life is not so easily retried: how much ought one therefore to Study the Art of Living’.⁷⁴¹ Julia learned her lessons dutifully, pleasing Talbot by her receptiveness to suggestions, though it is not known whether the effort had lasting effect.⁷⁴² Julia’s health deteriorated through 1753 and 1754 and in September 1754 her mother, Anne Berkeley, returned with her to Ireland.⁷⁴³ She is next encountered much later in the will of her sister-in-law, Eliza

⁷³⁹ Catherine Talbot diary, 4 February 1754. BL, Add. 46688.

⁷⁴⁰ Catherine Talbot diary, 23 November 1753. BL, Add. 46688.

⁷⁴¹ Catherine Talbot diary, 23 November 1753. BL, Add. 46688.

⁷⁴² Catherine Talbot diary, 4 February 1754. BL, Add. 46688.

⁷⁴³ See George Berkeley diary, 26 July–16 September 1754. BL, Add. 46689. See also George Berkeley to Samuel Johnson, 25 May 1756. ‘Berkeley-Johnson Correspondence,’ *Yale University Library Gazette* 8, no. 1 (1933): 32-33.

Berkeley, who sadly recorded that in 1795 both Julia and her brother Henry were confined and ‘insane’: ‘poor suffering persons in their melancholy situations’.⁷⁴⁴

While Talbot used the diary to model religious seriousness to a new young friend within an elite Anglican circle spanning England and Ireland, Jane Attwater employed diaries as educative tools to construct bonds between generations of a longstanding Baptist family centred in Hampshire and Wiltshire. As with Talbot, Attwater’s diary practice functioned in personal ways, both individually and communally. The Puritan antecedents of eighteenth-century Calvinistic diaries were characterised by diligent self-examination.⁷⁴⁵ Devotional manuals such as John Beadle’s *The Journal or Diary of a Thankful Christian* (1656) encouraged Christians to keep daily and precise records of their religious lives, including ‘the personall and private passages of Providence’.⁷⁴⁶ Attwater was a prolific diary writer and her own diary is such a record. She began it at the age of thirteen and kept it faithfully for the next sixty-eight years, during which time she amassed a vast and complex diary record through which she turned back regularly—re-reading it, annotating it, and carefully preserving it for her own use and for that of her family. Unlike Talbot, Attwater self-consciously reflected on her denominational identity. In 1784 she wrote:

I thank God I was bro’t up in the Baptist denomination. The more I know of Religion either as doctrines or y^e Experimental & practical part of it the better I am satisfied with my own sect not y^t I wish to put any undue stress on y^t but I have no temptation to alter my sentiments as I think the particular baptist is very consistent with y^e word of God.⁷⁴⁷

She thought of her family as members of a gathered church that needed to reinforce itself,

⁷⁴⁴ David Berman, ‘Introduction’, in Luce, *Life of George Berkeley*, ix. Berman cites Eliza Berkeley’s will, Trinity College, Dublin, MS 3530, ff. 8, 20.

⁷⁴⁵ See Webster, ‘Writing to Redundancy,’ 33-56; Hindmarsh, *Evangelical Conversion Narrative*, 33-60.

⁷⁴⁶ John Beadle, *The Journal or Diary of a Thankful Christian* (London: Printed by E. Cotes, 1656), 48.

⁷⁴⁷ Jane Attwater diary, 3 November 1784. AL, Attwater Papers, acc. 76, I.A.13.

so while she used the diary for self-examination, she also used it purposefully to initiate younger family members into a diary-writing culture with roots in the seventeenth century as she integrated them into a family faith and a local Baptist community.

Attwater's educational strategy involved training younger family members in established patterns of self-examination and expression. Particularly as a young diary writer, she shaped her entries around services she attended at the local Baptist church. As Talbot measured her life in hours spent, Attwater measured hers in sermons heard. Marjorie Reeves considers her to have been an 'addicted sermoniser', based on the very long sermon notes she often made in her diary.⁷⁴⁸ Attwater may have learned this devotional discipline from her mother or great-aunt, both of whom left diaries that include details of sermons attended, and both of which she gave evidence of having read.⁷⁴⁹ Later, as an aunt and mother herself, she taught this method of scriptural and self-reflection to younger generations of her family. She trained her daughter, Anna Blatch, to keep a diary, and evidence of her instruction is embedded in Attwater's own diary. Here we find a notebook once given to Anna by her mother, with a note instructing her to 'write down y^e texts' she heard.⁷⁵⁰ Also tucked into Attwater's diary is a sheet written in a childish hand, a record of Anna's first diary-writing efforts.⁷⁵¹ Anna must have been quite young when she first took up her pen to write in her diary, for her handwriting is large and uncertain, her spelling difficult, and she interrupted herself often to write her name in large script, 'Anna Blatch', and once to draw a small horse—but, supervised by her mother, her religious instruction proceeded in step with her literary education as she

⁷⁴⁸ Marjorie Reeves, 'Jane Attwater's Diaries,' in *Pilgrim Pathways: Essays in Baptist History in Honour of B. R. White*, ed. William H. Brackney, Paul Fiddes, and John H. Y. Briggs (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1999), 208.

⁷⁴⁹ On the diary of Attwater's mother, Anna Attwater, see p. 274. On the diary of her great aunt, Anne Cator Steele, see p. 148.

⁷⁵⁰ Jane Attwater diary. AL, Attwater Papers, acc. 76, I.A.25.

⁷⁵¹ Anna Blatch diary, preserved in Jane Attwater diary, July 1804. AL, Attwater Papers, acc. 76, I.A.24.

carefully recorded preacher and text and her thoughts on what she heard and experienced (see Figure 10 and Figure 11).

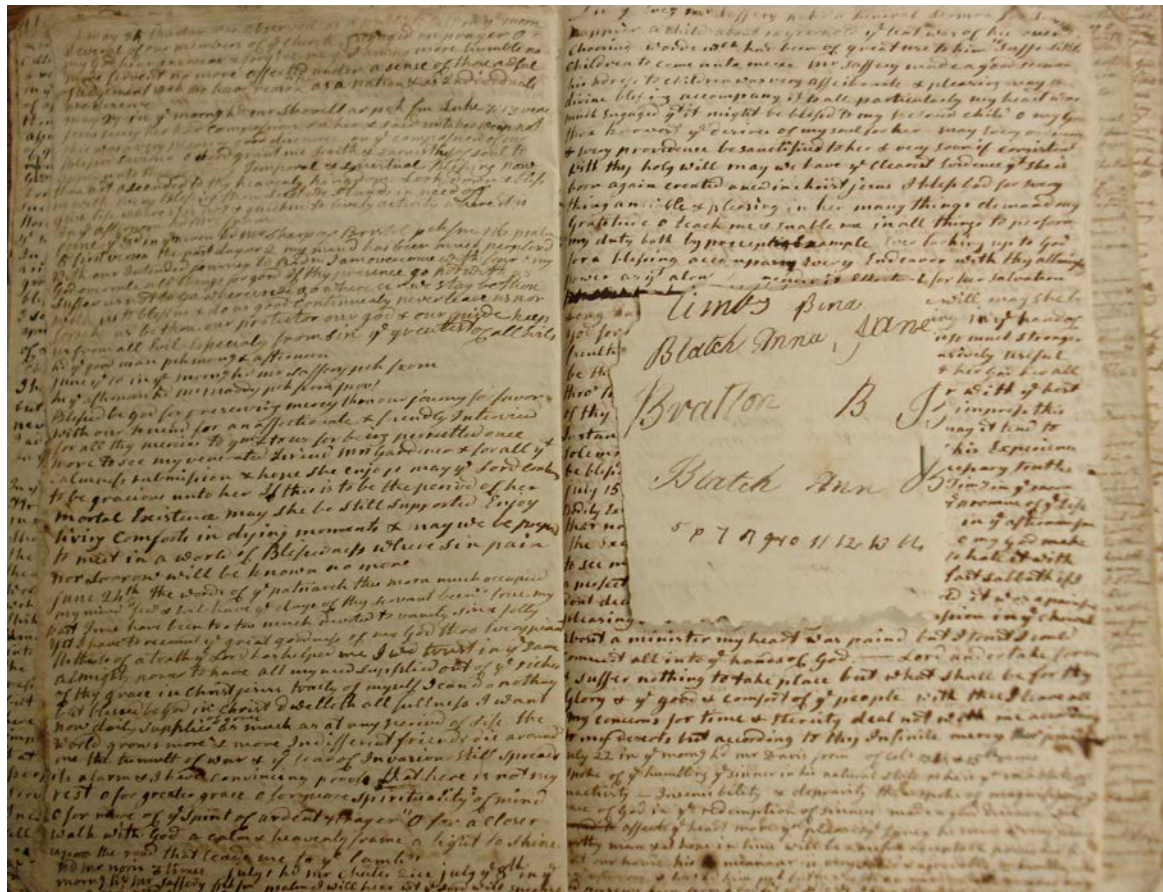


Figure 10: Anna Blatch's diary, preserved in Jane Attwater's diary⁷⁵²

Attwater's religious instruction was not limited to her daughter, but extended to her nieces and nephews. Her niece wrote her a poem in love and gratitude for her 'counsel', which contains the lines:

Yet still let your voice gently sound in my Ear....
Yet still we are taught to reflect and review⁷⁵³

⁷⁵² Anna Blatch diary, preserved in Jane Attwater diary, July 1804. AL, Attwater Papers, acc. 76, I.A.24.

⁷⁵³ Bodl., Reeves Collection 19/2/m. The identity of this niece is uncertain. See Whelan, ed., *Nonconformist Women Writers*, 4:337, n. 24.

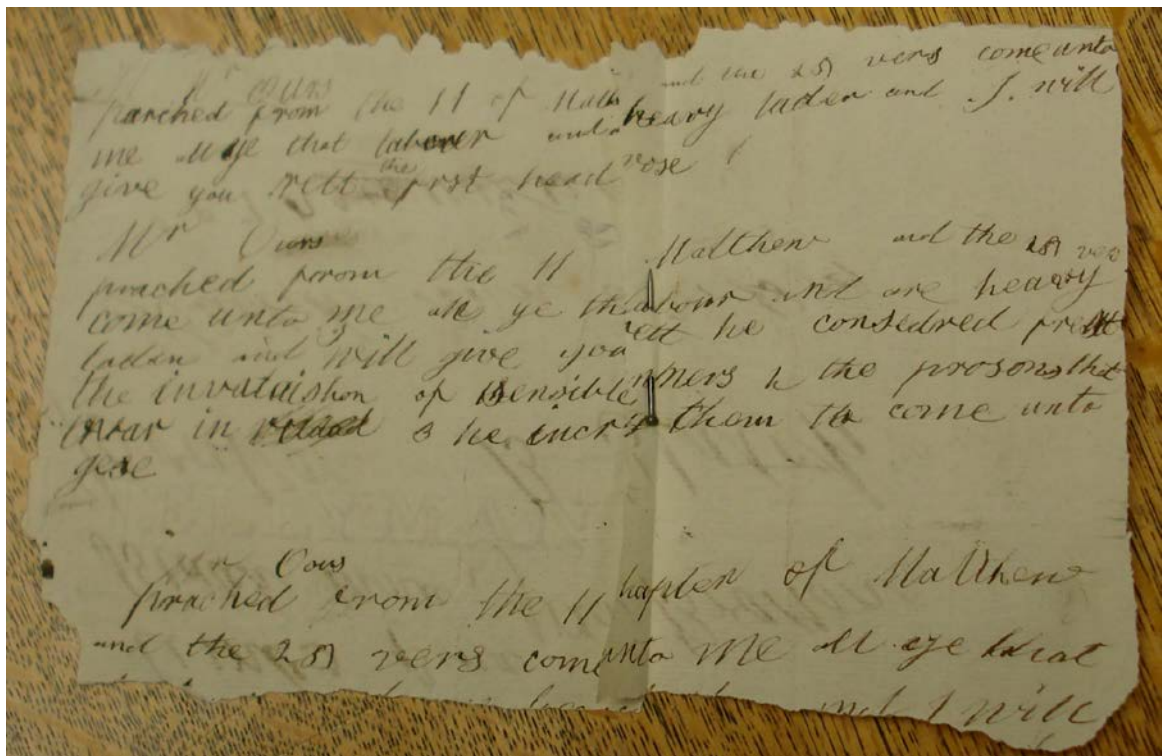


Figure 11: Anna Blatch's diary⁷⁵⁴

While there is more evidence of Attwater's instructing girls in her family, she also invested herself in the religious instruction of boys, and when she did the lessons given were not gendered. She trained her nephew Philip Whitaker in the method of keeping a diary, encouraging him to record 'texts and particular Events' as a record of his religious life. As she referred to her own diary as her 'Ebenezer', a biblical reference to the stone Samuel raised as a physical reminder of God's help, she taught Philip to approach his diary as an aid to memory, a record he could later review as spiritual encouragement or reproach for spiritual lapses.⁷⁵⁵ Her instruction is recalled in a poem which she wrote for him and asked him to inscribe on the inside cover of his diary. The poem begins:

⁷⁵⁴ Anna Blatch diary, preserved in Jane Attwater diary, July 1804. AL, Attwater Papers, acc. 76, I.A.24.

⁷⁵⁵ On Attwater's diary as her 'Ebenezer', see, for example, Jane Attwater diary. AL, Attwater Papers, acc. 76, I.A.5 and I.A.27. Cf. 1 Samuel 7.12.

Sacred to Memory and Religion pure,
Let these Mementoes, and these lines endure.⁷⁵⁶

The diary—a large, vellum-bound book with brass clasps—contains the title, ‘Texts preached from, at Bratton, and Memorandums of some remarkable Occurrences beginning with the Year 1786’, but while Philip continued to attend the local Baptist church where he would later become a leader, he did not maintain the habit of scriptural and self-reflection taught him by his aunt: the majority of the book remains blank. Yet perhaps Attwater’s lessons only lay dormant, ready to be absorbed in the future, for about ten years later he began to record his spiritual experience and his attendance at church in little homemade notebooks.⁷⁵⁷ Now in his twenties, Whitaker’s spiritual sensitivities seem to have heightened and, as his aunt had earlier taught him, he examined himself in light of his participation in the local Baptist church, initially dissatisfied with his spiritual state but resolved to use his diary to grow in knowledge of himself and God:

I began this little book in an unstable wandering Frame of Mind after attending the Word and the solemn Ordinance of the Lord’s Supper in a very dark Frame, reviewing with painful reflections the Backslidings of the past Month....I’m little better than a Formalist, Lord assist me in self-examination and if to this hour I’m a Stranger to myself and thee, give me now a right Knowledge of myself and thee...⁷⁵⁸

As Talbot’s religious instruction of Julia combined diary writing with guided reading, so did Attwater train Philip to keep a diary while also encouraging his reading. In 1772, when Philip was six years old, she gave him John Huddleston Wynne’s *Choice Emblems, Natural, Historical, Fabulous, Moral and Divine, for the Improvement and*

⁷⁵⁶ On a copy of the poem kept for herself, Attwater wrote, ‘Some line[s] I wrote to cousin Philip to be inserted in his Book designd for texts & particular Events Jan^y 1786.’ AL, Attwater Papers, acc. 76, II.A.7. See also Reeves, *Sheep Bell and Ploughshare*, 44.

⁷⁵⁷ Reeves, *Pursuing the Muses*, 148.

⁷⁵⁸ Ibid., 148-149.

Pastime of Youth (1772).⁷⁵⁹ Wynne used forms from nature to teach lessons, so the sunflower's natural action of turning to the sun is made to signify the habit of a pious heart turning toward God.⁷⁶⁰ (See Figure 12.) In his 'Introduction', Wynne emphasised a parental duty to instruct their children.⁷⁶¹ Yet Attwater's gift of it to Philip is unsurprising: in his analysis of the acquisition of books by children, Matthew Grenby uses book inscriptions to demonstrate that aunts were the most frequent donors of books to children, outnumbering even mothers.⁷⁶² Attwater's participation in this culture of gift giving supported her efforts of religious training through diaries.

Attwater's instruction was purposeful and addressed to particular, loved persons, but it also proceeded more broadly by example, for Anna and Philip surely observed her performing the same task she described to them, as she filled notebook after notebook, year after year. In teaching her daughter and nephew to reflect on their spiritual states, Attwater trained them in a spiritual discipline that ordered her own life and, by instilling in them habits of devotion and reflection, she may have hoped to guide their entry into the local Baptist church (and thus the faith of their ancestors), for in due time their spiritual states and characters would have to be examined publicly before they could gain membership in the Baptist church.

Attwater's training of her daughter through the diary took several forms, for as she taught Anna to narrate her own life and faith, she was also creating and preserving a book of religious instruction for her, whom she often addressed directly in the pages of her own diary. When her daughter was just six years old, Attwater heard a sermon for

⁷⁵⁹ John Huddleston Wynne, *Choice Emblems, Natural, Historical, Fabulous, Moral and Divine, for the Improvement and Pastime of Youth* (London: Printed for George Riley, 1772). See Reeves, *Sheep Bell and Ploughshare*, 34-35.

⁷⁶⁰ Wynne, *Choice Emblems*, 33.

⁷⁶¹ *Ibid.*, vii.

⁷⁶² M. O. Grenby, *The Child Reader, 1700-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 172.



E M B L E M IX.

OF ZEAL TOWARDS GOD.

TO the all-cheering sun's enlivening rays
 The grateful plant its op'ning leaves
 displays,
 Rejoicing in his beams and radiance bright
 Expands and opens with approaching light;
 But when dim night extends her dusky shade
 Its closing beauties sicken all and fade!
 The flow'r which Phœbus' warmth first bade
 to rise
 Lives in his beams, and in his absence dies.

Each human breast may this example
 move
 To acts of gratitude and heav'nly love
 To HIM who gives us all our hearts to raise,
 Live in his light, and triumph in his praise.

Figure 12: Wynne's *Choice Emblems*

young people and made notes in her diary for Anna's future perusal, adding, 'if It should please God to spare her to years of understanding...' ⁷⁶³ Attwater pinned into her diary notes to her daughter, such as, 'My dear Anna remember your dear Fathers remark at Breakfast this morn^g', and transferred to the written page religious instruction given at the dining table (see Figure 13). ⁷⁶⁴ Framed as question and answer, the note is catechetical:

⁷⁶³ Jane Attwater diary, 27 October 1799. AL, Attwater Papers, acc. 76, I.A.23.

⁷⁶⁴ Jane Attwater diary, 2 February 1804. AL, Attwater Papers, acc. 76, I.A.24.

‘what is it constitutes our usefulness & comfort in Life? proper thoughts – proper words & proper actions – proper thoughts are y^e buds proper words the flowers & proper actions y^e fruit’.⁷⁶⁵ As her daughter grew, Attwater was pleased to observe her increasing spiritual seriousness and her hopes for Anna’s future enlarged. She tucked a prayer into her diary:

I trust thou hast made my dear child a partaker of rich & saving grace Glory Glory to God for this Inestimable Gift – Thou hast Inclind her heart to attend Constantly to the duty of prayer & reading thy word O shine on her soul Enlighten her mind draw her by y^e cords of Love Establish her heart in the Truth...⁷⁶⁶

Anna Blatch died of consumption when she was sixteen years old, and on the day of her death, her mother wrote a melancholy account of her daughter’s final hours and addressed her daughter in her diary one final time: ‘Dear Happy spirit you are now arrived where the Instructions from mortals are no more needed...’⁷⁶⁷

⁷⁶⁵ Jane Attwater diary, 2 February 1804. AL, Attwater Papers, acc. 76, I.A.24.

⁷⁶⁶ Jane Attwater diary. AL, Attwater Papers, acc. 76, I.A.25.

⁷⁶⁷ Jane Attwater diary. AL, Attwater Papers, acc. 76, I.A.25.

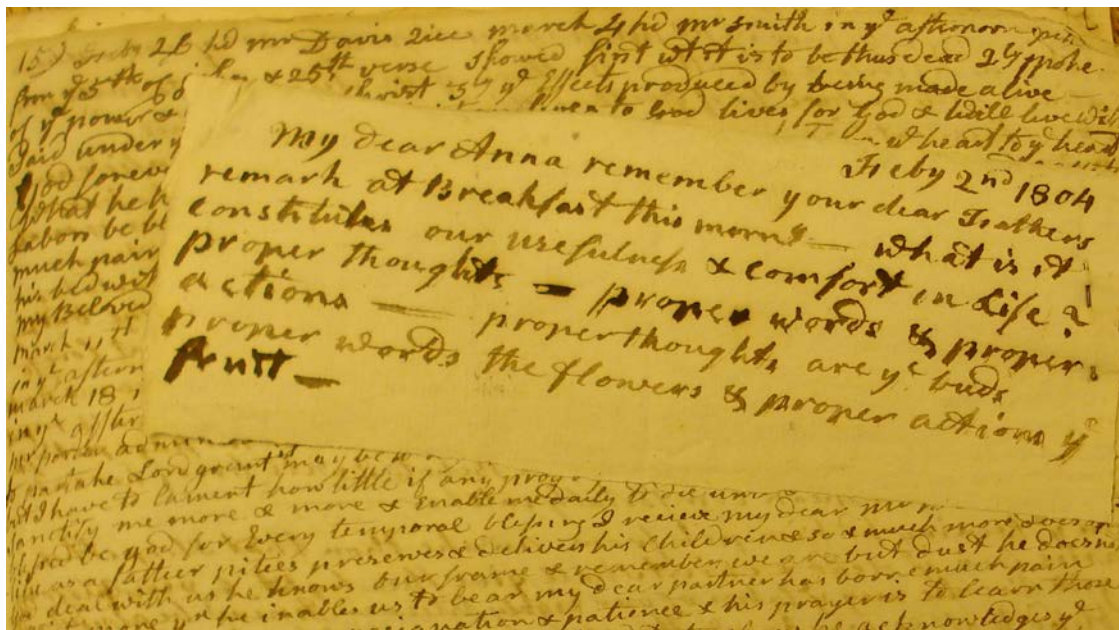


Figure 13: Jane Attwater's note to Anna⁷⁶⁸

The example of living and writing

The religious instruction given by Talbot, Attwater, and other women located its authority in the example of their own spiritual lives. Within close relationships, boys and girls observed how older family and friends lived and what they believed, and their willingness to be apprenticed to religious cultures depended on the integrity of witness they observed. Writing played a crucial part in negotiating apprenticeship relationships and, as we will see, this occurred in diverse ways. By mid-century the Steele family had developed a collective habit of interacting in verse, and so poetry, often interwoven with letters, conveyed religious instruction and example within this Baptist family. And having mastered the Methodist practice of recounting her religious experience in person and on paper, Ann Bolton modelled Methodist expression and behaviour in her correspondence with younger friends. They found her testimony convincing and compelling because it derived from personal experience.

⁷⁶⁸ Jane Attwater diary, 2 February 1804. AL, Attwater Papers, acc. 76, I.A.24.

Anne Steele was Jane Attwater's older cousin and part of the same localised Baptist network, and while Attwater used the diary as a space of religious interaction and instruction, teaching set patterns of self-examination and narration, Steele chiefly used poetry to guide the spiritual development of her nieces and nephews, and to train their religious emotions in response to uncertainties and distressing events. In certain respects this poetry parallels religious verse written for children by Isaac Watts and others in the period.⁷⁶⁹ While both Watts and Steele wrote to instruct, their differing intended audiences generated very different verse. Unlike Watts, who wrote as a minister intending publication and so composed straightforwardly didactic and anonymous verse, Steele's poetry was very personal in nature, written within the context of a tight religious and family network for particular, loved children. Her poems are warm and sometimes playful in tone and written with evident fondness as they reference real and known people, places, and events, drawing her readers into the poems and evoking very personal responses. This poetry was preserved within the family for several decades before it was published posthumously as *Verses for Children* (1788) and its usefulness extended. But originally Steele used it to communicate her deeply felt faith to nieces and nephews, hoping to draw them personally into the family faith.

The child to whom Anne Steele addressed the most verse and with whose religious education she was most concerned was her niece Mary Steele. Mary's mother, Mary Bullock Steele, had died in 1762, when she was 9 years old, and from that time Anne Steele had stepped in to care for her. She was, simultaneously, affectionate aunt,

⁷⁶⁹ Isaac Watts, *Divine Songs Attempted in Easy Language for the Use of Children* (London: M. Lawrence, 1715). See also Philip Doddridge, *Principles of the Christian Religion, Expressed in Plain and Easy Verse, and Divided into Short Lessons for the Use of Children and Youth*, 2nd ed. (London: Printed by J. Waugh, 1748); Charles Wesley, *Hymns for Children* (Bristol: Printed for E. Farley, 1763); Anna Letitia Barbauld, *Hymns in Prose for Children* (London: Printed for J. Johnson, 1781).

religious and literary exemplar, and spiritual mother. Mary would later memorialise her aunt in verse as a ‘maternal friend’ and as ‘My Friend, My second Parent’.⁷⁷⁰ Steele wrote a great deal of affectionate and instructive poetry for her and, as Mary grew up, she began to respond in verse addressed to her aunt. Mary was a sensitive girl, and in response to her continuing sorrow over the loss of her mother Steele used poems to elucidate for her theological concepts such as providence, as well as spiritual ideals like childlike trust in the love of Jesus.⁷⁷¹ She wanted to teach her niece that during ‘Affliction’s darkest hours’ she could trust that a providential God remained ‘profusely kind’, caring for her in her loss and fear.⁷⁷² She wrote to encourage her niece, urging her to live in hope, and passed on to her lessons she had learned through her own experiences of illness and loss. Addressing Mary by her familial pseudonym, ‘Silvia’, she wrote:

And see, my Silvia, see that Friend appear!
 And hark! he calls you to his guardian arms!
 Jesus, that Friend indeed! forever near,
 When grief approaches or when Death alarms.⁷⁷³

In verse, Steele encouraged her niece to contemplate Jesus as near and loving, even in the midst of her grief and doubt.

Mary loved her aunt, turning to her not only as a surrogate mother, but as a spiritual and literary exemplar, and in a poem written to her in 1773, when she was 20 years old, she expressed a desire to respond positively to her aunt’s religious instruction and example:

Thy bright Example may I ever view
 At humble Distance the same path pursue:

⁷⁷⁰ Mary Steele, prefatory poem in Steele, *Poems on Subjects Chiefly Devotional*, 3:xiii. Mary Steele, ‘A Reflection written in a Garden 1772’. AL, STE 5/5/iii.

⁷⁷¹ Anne Steele, ‘To Silvia Pensive’. AL, STE 3/3/5, sheet 17. Anne Steele, ‘To Silvia’. AL, STE 3/3/5, sheet 16.

⁷⁷² Anne Steele, ‘To Silvia Pensive’. AL, STE 3/3/5, sheet 17.

⁷⁷³ Anne Steele, ‘To Silvia’. AL, STE 3/3/5, sheet 16. See also Anne Steele, ‘To Silvia’. AL, STE 3/3/5, sheet 29.

May I like Thee with full Affiance trust
That Power immensely Kind supremely just.⁷⁷⁴

This poem was written from Yeovil, in Somerset, where Mary had travelled to visit her uncle, and in her poem she suggested that in the absence of her aunt she was soothed by the substitutionary presence of her poetry:

Whilst absent from the Friend who shares my heart
To soothe the pain that Absence must impart,
I turn the much lov'd page by her designd
And view those lovely Pictures of the Mind.⁷⁷⁵

The way in which the physical presence of Steele's poetry is made to stand in for her in her absence, as well as the dialogical nature of this poetry more generally, highlight the manner in which it functioned as a form of epistolary communication and reveal another way in which the Steele women employed an informal literary culture to communicate their faith across generations. Some of this poetry conforms to the genre of the verse epistle, a popular poetic form in the eighteenth century that embedded stylistic elements of letters in verse.⁷⁷⁶ For example, Mary's poem to her aunt was titled 'To Theodosia an Espistle [*sic*] from Yeovil 1773', and its final lines incorporate in verse a conventional letter closing:

To all my much lov'd Hon'd Absent Friends
My Heart its warmest Love & Duty sends⁷⁷⁷

On this and other occasions, Mary chose to address her aunt as 'Theodosia', the name under which she published. Material evidence also indicates that these personalised poems were once circulated as letters: they were carefully folded and inscribed by name,

⁷⁷⁴ Mary Steele, 'To Theodosia an Espistle [*sic*] from Yeovil 1773'. AL, STE 5/5/iv.

⁷⁷⁵ Mary Steele, 'To Theodosia an Espistle [*sic*] from Yeovil 1773'. AL, STE 5/5/iv.

⁷⁷⁶ See Bill Overton, *The Eighteenth-Century British Verse Epistle* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

⁷⁷⁷ Mary Steele, 'To Theodosia an Espistle [*sic*] from Yeovil 1773'. AL, STE 5/5/iv.

‘To Theodosia’, on the outside.⁷⁷⁸ Anne Steele reached beyond the typically philosophical and romantic themes of the verse epistle, however, to continue her religious instruction of her niece. In verse that Steele wrote to the child Mary, she described her poem as a ‘tiny letter’, and in it she gave her young niece a ‘lesson’:

It is this, as the blossoms soon wither and die,
 So beauty will quickly decay;
 But virtue the rigour of time will defy,
 And live like the evergreen bay.⁷⁷⁹

Mary was conscious of her religious heritage in the Baptist church and of her advantages in the religious instruction she received from her aunt, yet she was troubled by the Calvinistic doctrine of election and so was unable to align herself fully with her family’s faith.⁷⁸⁰ Her questions and anxiety were not resolved before her aunt’s death in 1778, and Steele’s desire to ease Mary’s troubled spirit and resolve her spiritual impasse led her to enlist Caleb Evans, her friend and founder of the Bristol Education Society, to take up the task she could no longer perform by encouraging and instructing Mary via letter.⁷⁸¹ It would not be until 1795, however, when Mary was forty-two years old, that her aunt’s hopes for her (communicated so personally in poems written expressly for her) would be fulfilled when Mary made the decision to seek admission to the local Baptist church.⁷⁸²

While Steele and Attwater provided informal religious instruction to younger family members within a localised Baptist network, Ann Bolton, without the same sense of family lineage, offered religious instruction chiefly to younger friends. For Methodists,

⁷⁷⁸ For example, Mary Steele, ‘To Theodosia’. AL, STE 5/5/iii.

⁷⁷⁹ Anne Steele, *Verses for Children* (Salisbury: E. Easton, 1788), 8-9.

⁷⁸⁰ See Mary Steele, spiritual autobiography written in letter to William Steele, 22 July 1779. AL, STE 5/9, no. 4.

⁷⁸¹ See Caleb Evans to Mary Steele, 12 December 1778. AL, STE 5/16/ii.

⁷⁸² See letter from Mary Steele to Broughton Baptist Church, 1795. AL, STE 5/9, no. 6.

spiritual experience was a crucial indicator of conversion, and so Bolton trained younger friends in the religious life by sharing her experience in personal correspondence. This might be interpreted as a literary extension of the activity of local band and class meetings where Methodists gave oral testimony to their experience, though in this case the goal was not one's own growth in holiness, but the spiritual education of others.⁷⁸³ This form of instruction can be observed in Bolton's interactions with eighteen-year-old Philothea Briggs (1753–1823). Briggs grew up at the very heart of Methodism in London and had many Methodist influences: her father William Briggs was John Wesley's book steward at the Foundery, and her mother Elizabeth Briggs was the daughter of Vincent Perronet (1693–1785), a trusted advisor of the Wesleys. Philothea regularly visited her widowed grandfather in nearby Shoreham, where she sometimes kept house for him; she met John Wesley as a child and when she was sixteen they began a correspondence; and she may have been present when the Countess of Huntingdon visited Shoreham in 1770 and would have witnessed the religious revival that occurred in that year.⁷⁸⁴ Yet despite years of participation in Methodist practices, she lacked assurance of the love of God: 'I thought I was farther off than ever; that the little sense of Religion I had, was only delusion'.⁷⁸⁵

Philothea's spiritual anxieties resonated with Bolton: she met Philothea very shortly after the resolution to her own prolonged and painful conversion to Methodism, so she was able to respond to Philothea's doubts from the centre of her own experience. As

⁷⁸³ 'The Nature, Design, and General Rules of the United Societies' and 'Rules of the Band Societies', in Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, 9:69-79.

⁷⁸⁴ Margaret Batty, *Vincent Perronet, 1693-1785: The Archbishop of the Methodists* (Emsworth: W. M. H. S. Publications, 2002), 68, 77; Seymour, *Life and Times of Selina, Countess of Huntingdon*, 1:387; Peard Dickinson and Elizabeth Briggs Dickinson, 'Memoirs of the Rev. Vincent Perronet,' *Methodist Magazine* 22 (1799): 106-108. This last account is based on the recollections of Philothea's sister, Elizabeth Dickinson. See also A. W. Harrison, 'The Perronets of Shoreham,' *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* 16 (1928): 43.

⁷⁸⁵ Philothea Briggs to John Wesley, 24 March 1771. *AM* 7 (1784): 446.

discussed in the last chapter, Bolton's quest for spiritual assurance brought her to the Foundery in early 1771,⁷⁸⁶ and it was during the month she spent in London that she met Philothea, who was then in the midst of her own spiritual travail. Very shortly after Bolton returned to Witney the two began a correspondence. Bolton recorded that Philothea was open and personal in their literary interactions, writing to her in 'the language of Her own Heart', and Bolton responded with sympathy and spiritual advice, encouraging her in her doubts.⁷⁸⁷

It is striking how Bolton's advice to Philothea echoes the spiritual guidance she had received from John Wesley, who mentored her during her own religious struggles. Again the guidance of a spiritual elder is seen to have influenced the instruction of spiritual children. As we have seen, one of the recurring themes of Wesley's advice to Bolton was that she refrain from reasoning and simply believe: he wanted to relieve her anxious searching for evidence of saving faith and so urged her simply to rest in the experience of God's love. Recalling her earlier anxiety, and clearly echoing Wesley, she advised Philothea, '*reason not one moment but attend to Believeing*'.⁷⁸⁸ Remembering the relief she experienced when she 'came out of herself' to rest in God's grace and love, and anticipating entire sanctification, she urged Philothea, 'hold fast that w^{ch} you *now* possess, & look to feel the utmost powers of perfect Love'.⁷⁸⁹

Significantly, Bolton's epistolary instruction formed only one part of Philothea's initiation into Methodism, for she was simultaneously interacting with a network of Methodist women and men who were, in turn, interacting with each other. The connectional nature of instruction mirrored the connectional character of the movement,

⁷⁸⁶ See p. 182.

⁷⁸⁷ Ann Bolton diary, 23 April 1771. Pudl., 2/2.

⁷⁸⁸ Ann Bolton to Philothea Briggs, 8 September 1771. Pudl., 4/5/1.

⁷⁸⁹ Ann Bolton to Philothea Briggs, 8 September 1771. Pudl., 4/5/1.

all of which placed a high value on the sharing of personal experience.⁷⁹⁰ As Philothea corresponded with Bolton, she was also making regular and prolonged visits to Jane March at her home in Moorfields, and she was connected through letter and visit with not only Bolton, Wesley, and March, but others including her aunt Damaris Perronet (1727–82).⁷⁹¹ The bonds formed by this extensive travel and correspondence point to a geographically wide-ranging Methodist network within which women took active parts, complicating interpretations of Methodist women's lives as delimited by local bands and classes. Phyllis Mack draws distinctions between the religious lives of Methodist men and women based on their differing patterns of relationship and distinctions in their locations; unlike male leaders who travelled extensively, Mack argues that women 'lived and worked in a relatively stable collective environment' and that the 'heart of women's collective religious life...was the band or class meeting'.⁷⁹² Yet Bolton was active throughout a wide-ranging Methodist network, and within this network, Wesley, her spiritual mentor, promoted her as an exemplar. In a letter to Mary Stokes, Wesley wrote, 'Be you herein a follower of Nancy Bolton, as she is of Christ,' and when he was concerned for his thirteen-year-old niece Sarah Wesley, he urged her, 'Write to Nancy Bolton without delay.'⁷⁹³ When Philothea wrote to Wesley in March 1771 she told him, 'About a month ago, I became acquainted with Miss B—lt—n, who encouraged me to be in earnest', and he responded, 'So poor, tempted, disconsolate Nancy Bolton was sent to London for *your* sake also! She was sent to you among others to quicken your

⁷⁹⁰ David Hempton refers to the Methodist 'compulsion to share and tell'. Hempton, *Methodism*, 52. See also Hindmarsh, *Evangelical Conversion Narrative*, 150–156.

⁷⁹¹ On Philothea's visits to Jane March, see John Wesley to Philothea Briggs, 30 March 1771, 2 May 1771, 13 September 1771, 31 August 1772, 29 September 1773. Telford, ed., *Letters of John Wesley*, 5:232–233, 5:240–241, 5:277–278, 5:337–338, 6:45. On Damaris Perronet's influence, see Philothea Briggs to John Wesley, 24 March 1771. *AM* 7 (August 1784): 446.

⁷⁹² Mack, *Heart Religion in the British Enlightenment*, 135, 151.

⁷⁹³ John Wesley to Mary Stokes, 11 February 1772. Telford, ed., *Letters of John Wesley*, 5:305. John Wesley to Sarah Wesley, 28 August 1772. *Ibid.*, 5:336.

expectations of the great salvation.’⁷⁹⁴ Bolton’s efforts with Philothea were not in vain. Three years after they met, John Wesley, in a letter to Jane March, explained that he did not judge a person’s spiritual life by the length of it, but by its ‘depth and breadth’, and he gave as example Philothea and her sister Elizabeth. About a person’s spiritual experience, he asked:

Does it sink deep in humble, gentle love? Does it extend wide in all inward and outward holiness? If so, I do not care whether they are of five or five-and-thirty years’ standing. Nay, when I look at Miss Betsy Briggs or Miss Philly Briggs, I am ready to hide my face: I am ashamed of having set out before they were born.⁷⁹⁵

Received images of formal education in church, or of obedient children attending to the instruction of pious fathers or learning at their mothers’ knees are clearly inadequate portrayals of eighteenth-century religious education. Informal literary interaction, through correspondence and through diary and poetry exchange, was a powerful and important means by which women, including aunts and single women, from across a denominational spectrum trained a younger generation in religious belief and expression. These interactions demonstrate a creative and sophisticated use of diverse and overlapping literary genres, and are notable for their very personal nature. Within the context of individualised and affectionate relationships, spiritual children looked to women as exemplars, modeling religious belief and expression and patterns of holy living with an integrity they found compelling, and so sought to emulate in their own lives.

⁷⁹⁴ Philothea Briggs to John Wesley, 24 March 1771. *AM* 7 (August 1784): 446. John Wesley to Philothea Briggs, 30 March 1771. Telford, ed., *Letters of John Wesley*, 5:232. See also John Wesley to Philothea Briggs, 3 December 1772 and 29 September 1773. *Ibid.*, 5:348-349, 6:45.

⁷⁹⁵ John Wesley to Jane March, 30 November 1774. Telford, ed., *Letters of John Wesley*, 6:129. Philothea would later marry Thomas Thompson, a local Methodist preacher and banker at Hull. On her later life, see Arthur R. B. Robinson, *The Counting House: Thomas Thompson of Hull (1754-1828) and His Family* (York: William Sessions, 1992).

Holy Living

The women considered here not only instructed their spiritual children in matters of belief and religious expression, but they taught them through word and example how to pattern a holy life. Richard Heitzenrater argues that a concern for holy living ‘for centuries had bridged many of the traditional divisions within Christianity’, and indeed it is a spiritual theme that can be traced across a denominational spectrum.⁷⁹⁶ One can detect commonalities in the ways that Talbot, Bolton, and Steele wrote about holy living, notably in their shared concern regarding time. Whether they expressed their concern in terms of ‘redeeming the time’ or ‘improving’ their time, they all exhibited a religious concern to use their time well. Yet while a common concern, theological emphases varied by denomination and so it is a useful theme in further defining distinctions between the spiritual cultures under consideration here. In this section the theme of holy living is analysed with regard to women’s instruction of younger friends and family members.

Anglicans: A ‘Vie Sainte’ and agreeable

Catherine Talbot’s high church piety was inflected with the holy living tradition popularised by Jeremy Taylor’s *Rule and Exercises of Holy Living* (1650).⁷⁹⁷ While Talbot did not specifically record reading Taylor, her personal writings evoke his published writings in advocating the careful use of time as necessary for living a holy life. She did record reading essays and sermons on similar themes, such as Robert Bolton’s *On the Employment of Time* (1750) and a sermon titled ‘Go to the Ant Thou Sluggard’,

⁷⁹⁶ Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 320-321.

⁷⁹⁷ Jeremy Taylor, *The Rule and Exercises of Holy Living* (London: Printed for R. Royston, 1650).

which she read as ‘a sermon against myself’.⁷⁹⁸ In *Reflections on the Seven Days of the Week*, Talbot wrote of ‘daily...faithfully striv[ing] to grow in Holiness and Goodness’, and stated that the means of achieving this spiritual goal lay in self-examination.⁷⁹⁹ She wrote, ‘That I may be better for the last twenty-four Hours, let me examine a little what Temper I have been in all that Time,’ and not only in general, ‘but let me descend to Particulars’.⁸⁰⁰ Like Taylor before her, who wrote that the ‘first general instrument of holy living’ was ‘Care of our time’, Talbot advocated a careful accounting of time and ‘temper’ as necessary for growth in holiness.⁸⁰¹ What she theorised in *Reflections* she practised in her diary and pattern of living: ‘our own deep Voiced Clock’, she wrote, ‘reminds one not to lose a single quarter’.⁸⁰² Her diary registers the time at which she rose, and contains a careful tally of how she used her time. Her goal was to be ‘better’ and ‘wiser’, to advance in the ‘Path of Improvement’, and to do as much good as the circumstances of her life allowed.⁸⁰³ And what she practised herself she took careful pains to teach young Julia Berkeley. She understood this to be one way in which she could be useful.

⁷⁹⁸ Catherine Talbot to Elizabeth Carter, 29 February 1751. Pennington, ed., *Letters between Carter and Talbot*, 2:9. Catherine Talbot diary, 15 November 1753. BL, Add. 46688.

⁷⁹⁹ Talbot, *Reflections on the Seven Days of the Week*, 11.

⁸⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁸⁰¹ Taylor, *Rule and Exercises of Holy Living*, 4. In this way Talbot’s diary-writing practice parallels John Wesley’s during his Oxford Methodist phase, during which time he kept his ‘exacter’ diary, a columnar diary that included a record of his hourly ‘temper of devotion’. Wesley began to keep a diary after reading Taylor’s *Holy Living*. Richard Heitzenrater, ‘Editorial Introduction to MS Journals and Diaries’, in John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, ed. W. Reginald Ward and Richard Heitzenrater, vol. 18: Journal and Diaries I (1735-38) (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988), 18:302-303.

⁸⁰² Catherine Talbot diary, 30 October 1751. BL, Add. 46690. On the influence of the new technology of clocks on diary writings, see Stuart Sherman, *Telling Time: Clocks, Diaries and the English Diurnal Form, 1660-1785* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

⁸⁰³ Talbot, *Reflections on the Seven Days of the Week*, 11, 7. Catherine Talbot diary, 27 June 1753. BL, Add. 46690.

Yet Talbot's intent on living a 'Vie Sainte & Exempleire' was held in tension with her concern not to be excessively serious.⁸⁰⁴ Purposeful as *Reflections* and her diary accounting practices appear, her writings do not have the same spiritual intensity or penetrating inner searching as Bolton's. Talbot was more concerned with outward activity, both in terms of maintaining an appropriate behavioural code of holy living and in not appearing unduly 'enthusiastic', which would be an affront to social propriety. Her teaching and practice of holy living took place in the context of what she approvingly termed 'agreeable' society. As mentioned, in 1754 she read *La Bonne Armelle*, the life of a seventeenth-century Catholic laywoman whose exemplary holiness inspired many (including Bolton, who read her life in 1797 and was encouraged by Armelle's example of entire devotion), but Talbot was conflicted.⁸⁰⁵ After reading it she sent the book on to the Duchess of Somerset with a note regarding the book's mixture of 'reasonable & excellent sentiments' and 'Enthusiasm'.⁸⁰⁶ Talbot closed her letter with a frustrated reference to 'This impertinent Clock that is always striking': as she worried about the boundaries between appropriate and excessive religious seriousness, she experienced constant reminders of the passing of time, recalling her ideals of usefulness and religious improvement.⁸⁰⁷

Talbot's efforts to live a holy life by closely monitoring her time were thus tempered by expectations regarding social propriety, and her guidance of Julia's religious development took place alongside her concern for her social and emotional wellbeing. In 1754 she wrote to the Duchess that she was shopping for Julia, buying 'all sorts of Gowns

⁸⁰⁴ A 'Holy & Exemplary Life'. Catherine Talbot diary, 20 December 1751. BL, Add. 46690.

⁸⁰⁵ Ann Bolton diary, 6 July 1797. Pudl., 3/23. Bolton read *Armelle* while visiting Mary Fletcher at Madeley. On Talbot's reading *Armelle* with the Duchess, see p. 173.

⁸⁰⁶ Catherine Talbot to the Duchess of Somerset, 29 January 1754. DNP 31.

⁸⁰⁷ Catherine Talbot to the Duchess of Somerset, 29 January 1754. DNP 31.

& Petticoats & Caps for equipping her in her first Womanly Dress'.⁸⁰⁸ In the months following Julia's father's death, Talbot attended carefully to her emotional needs as well. And as Talbot cared for her, Julia grew increasingly attached to her. Talbot wrote in her diary in June 1753, 'Elle m'aime infiniment – Comment trouverai Je le moiën de lui être utile! C'est pourtant mon Devoir.'⁸⁰⁹ The next day, however, Talbot found she needed solitude: 'La Chere Julie by her good will would never let me be one moment alone....Foreseeing my Danger I barricaded up the Door between our rooms with a Bureau, but alas it opens on her side & she is putting in her very pretty face (which I love dearly to see whenever I had not rather be alone) continually.'⁸¹⁰ Despite these occasional frustrations, Talbot was devoted to Julia and wrote to Jemima Yorke praising her, 'Elle à le meilleur petit Coeur du Monde' and 'elle a tout ce qu'il faut pour la rendre dans quelques Années une Personne Aimable et accomplie'.⁸¹¹ She concluded, 'J[']ai Acquis cet Eté une Fille'.⁸¹² Talbot loved Julia and thought of her as a daughter, a daughter for whom she took care to model a moderate form of holy living, of polite Anglicanism, a daughter whose social and spiritual wellbeing she took care to nurture and guide.

Methodists: Personal accounts of holiness

The nature of holy living is central to eighteenth-century Methodism, since the developing movement and its devotional emphases were shaped by John Wesley's own efforts to understand the nature of personal holiness. His reading of William Law's *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* (1729) in the early 1730s fuelled his and other

⁸⁰⁸ Catherine Talbot to the Duchess of Somerset, 29 January 1754. DNP 31.

⁸⁰⁹ 'She loves me very much – How do I find a way to be helpful to her! Yet it is my Duty.' Catherine Talbot diary, 26 June 1753. BL, Add. 46690.

⁸¹⁰ Catherine Talbot diary, 27 June 1753. BL, Add. 46690.

⁸¹¹ 'She has the best little Heart in the World' and 'she has everything it will take to make her in a few Years an Amiable and accomplished Person'. Catherine Talbot diary, 15 July 1753. BL, Add. 46690.

⁸¹² 'I have acquired a daughter this summer'. Catherine Talbot diary, 15 July 1753. BL, Add. 46690.

Oxford Methodists' pattern of ascetical and holy living.⁸¹³ He later attributed his ideas about inward religion and holiness of heart and life to Law's *Serious Call*, Thomas à Kempis's *Imitation of Christ*, and Jeremy Taylor's *Holy Living* and *Holy Dying* (1651).⁸¹⁴ In time, Wesley controversially promoted the possibility of earthly perfection, and perfect holiness (or entire sanctification or 'pure love') came to be understood as not only possible on earth but to be indeed the goal of Methodist spirituality.⁸¹⁵ Ann Bolton characterised her own quest for holiness as a 'longing' and an 'insatiable thirst', and she described her often anxious pursuit of perfect holiness as a process, a path she followed, the 'high way of holiness'.⁸¹⁶ Where Talbot was 'fearful of going backward instead of advancing in the Path of Improvement', Bolton strove forward on a path of perfection.⁸¹⁷ This pursuit was not mediated, as Talbot's seeking after holiness, by social conventions or propriety.

Not that it was uncomplicated, especially since Methodist theology was actively being debated in public forums at the same time that laypersons were trying to apprehend its meaning in their lives. Bolton's anxious longing for sanctification concurred with the so-called 'Minutes Controversy' of 1770 in which Arminians and Calvinists openly argued over the relationship between faith and works in matters of salvation, and her diary and letters reveal ongoing uncertainty over the nature of sanctification.⁸¹⁸ In fact, Bolton's diary suggests that her quest for assurance in 1770–71, as earlier described,⁸¹⁹

⁸¹³ Isabel Rivers, 'William Law and Religious Revival: The Reception of *A Serious Call*,' *Huntington Library Quarterly* 71, no. 4 (2008): 636.

⁸¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 637.

⁸¹⁵ John Wesley to Ann Bolton, 8 February 1775. Telford, ed., *Letters of John Wesley*, 6:138.

⁸¹⁶ Ann Bolton diary, 21 November 1770, 12 February 1777, 29 September 1783. Pudl., 2/2, 2/8, 3/2.

⁸¹⁷ Catherine Talbot diary, 27 June 1753. BL, Add. 46690.

⁸¹⁸ On the Minutes Controversy, see Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 239–242; Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 391–392, 454–455.

⁸¹⁹ See p. 180.

was often conflated (and confused) with her quest for perfection.⁸²⁰ Her striving for assurance reached a point of climax in December 1770 when she lay in bed one night and repeatedly heard a biblical locution from Song of Solomon 4.7: 'Thou art all fair my Love there is no spot in thee'.⁸²¹ This was followed in 1772 by a series of letters written by Wesley, in which he corrected her confusion between justification (the activity of Christ in justifying sinners, which Wesley believed had been made for all) and sanctification (the consequence of justification).⁸²² In light of the confusing and often contentious nature of public debates, personal accounts of holiness, both published and unpublished, became especially important educative narratives.

Bolton's care for Philothea Briggs was particularly concerned with her progress towards holiness. In 1771 she recounted her own experience, writing that God 'still hides me in His Pavilion ye secret chamber of His Presence & keeps my soul in Perfect peace', and she urged Philothea likewise to strive after this perfect peace: 'look to feel the utmost powers of perfect Love....then shall you feel His Image more sensibly stamp't on yr soul. He is now melting you as wax, to fit you for the Lovely impress'.⁸²³ Bolton's imagery is taken from Wesley's *Plain Account of Christian Perfection* (1766), where he likened the attainment of holiness to 'the image of God fresh stamped on our hearts'.⁸²⁴ In May 1772 Bolton wrote to Philothea again, giving another account of her ongoing pursuit of holiness: 'I ask & pant for more of y^e divine Life the drop of pure love my soul has hitherto been permitted to enjoy, has so elevated my taste yt all beside hath lost its

⁸²⁰ See, for example, Ann Bolton diary, 14 December 1770. Pudl., 2/2.

⁸²¹ Ann Bolton diary, 18 December 1770. Pudl., 2/2.

⁸²² John Wesley to Ann Bolton, 1 July 1772. JRL, MAW Ms 296-297. John Wesley to Ann Bolton, 13 August 1772. Pudl., 4/7/7.

⁸²³ Ann Bolton to Philothea Briggs, 8 September 1771. Pudl., 4/5/1.

⁸²⁴ John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* (Bristol: Printed by William Pine, 1766), 28.

relish'.⁸²⁵ Bolton pressed Philothea with questions about her spiritual desires and urged her to so concentrate her desires on God that she would experience constant peace and joy: this earthly experience of holiness she described as 'glory in y^e Bud' and 'Heaven begun below'.⁸²⁶ And having given a personal account of her own, Bolton now requested one from Philothea in return. Bolton was teaching Philothea not only to desire and pursue holiness, but to represent herself as a Methodist in her own narrative.

These accounts of holiness, as they were shared and solicited, were certainly personal as they were written within close relationship, but they also exhibit a self-conscious and practised quality, perhaps owing to the frequency with which letters were shared amongst Methodist circles and read aloud at Methodist meetings.⁸²⁷ As noted earlier, Bolton saw her letters to Wesley printed in the *Arminian Magazine*, and Briggs would have witnessed Methodist letters becoming more public, since her father was responsible for the extensive printing operations at the Foundery. Methodists had ample contemporary models for their accounts of holiness. Wesley's publishing activity was vast, and amongst the volumes of his *Christian Library* and his other publications 'there was a preponderance of religious biography of exemplary value, including illustrations of Christian perfection'.⁸²⁸ Wesley admired the religious experience of Jane Cooper, who died of smallpox at the age of twenty-four in 1762; in his *Plain Account of Christian Perfection* he wrote that she was 'a living and dying witness of Christian Perfection', and he published her letters in 1764, frequently recommending them to his correspondents.⁸²⁹ Bolton read Cooper's letters in December 1770, reflecting on them in her diary less than a

⁸²⁵ Ann Bolton to Philothea Briggs, 24 May 1772. Pudl., 4/25/7.

⁸²⁶ Ann Bolton to Philothea Briggs, 24 May 1772. Pudl., 4/25/7.

⁸²⁷ On 'letter days', see Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 146.

⁸²⁸ Hindmarsh, *Evangelical Conversion Narrative*, 242. See also Isabel Rivers, 'John Wesley and Religious Biography,' *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 85, no. 2-3 (2003): 209-226.

⁸²⁹ Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, 88. See Cooper, *Letters Wrote by Jane Cooper*.

week after her first experience of ‘perfect love’.⁸³⁰ In writing her own accounts of holiness she was participating in a broader religious practice, and in requesting accounts from younger friends she was initiating them into a religious culture that was actively being formed. Holy living, for Methodists, was thus teleological, driven toward the ultimate and attainable goal of perfect holiness, experienced on earth as pure love for God and neighbour.⁸³¹

Baptists: ‘Willing to be made holy’

John Wesley’s ongoing debates with Calvinists over Christian perfection were related to his objection that a theology of predestination would render the pursuit of holiness unnecessary. He correlated Calvinism with antinomianism: a neglect of the law that led to spiritual and moral laxity. On the other side of the debate, Wesley’s Calvinist detractors were suspicious of Arminian works-righteousness: the presumption that an individual could earn her own salvation through good works rather than relying solely on Christ’s death and resurrection. High Calvinistic Baptists, such as John Gill, believed that there was a “passive holiness” or a stamping of the image of Christ on the soul of the elect’.⁸³² This was precisely the kind of theology that Wesley worried would subvert holy living practices. Gill’s high Calvinist theology was dominant in Baptist circles in London, but we have seen that the theology of the Western Association of Baptists, which included the Steeles’ church, tended to be more moderate.⁸³³ Members of the Steele family did not exhibit antipathy or spiritual indifference concerning holy living, though their writings

⁸³⁰ Ann Bolton diary, 24 December 1770. Pudl., 2/2.

⁸³¹ Rebekah L. Miles, ‘Happiness, Holiness, and the Moral Life in John Wesley,’ in *The Cambridge Companion to John Wesley*, ed. Randy L. Maddox and Jason E. Vickers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 207-224.

⁸³² John Gill, ‘The Necessity of Good Works unto Salvation Considered’, quoted in Olin C. Robison, ‘The Particular Baptists in England, 1760-1820’ (DPhil thesis, University of Oxford, 1963), 28.

⁸³³ See p. 115.

are differently nuanced from Bolton's and Talbot's, notably emphasising the holiness of God and the belief that perfect holiness was only attainable in heaven.

Rather than foregrounding the duties of human will and activity in holy living, the Steeles emphasised the holiness of God. When Bolton, in her striving after perfection, heard the words 'Thou art all fair my Love there is no spot in thee', she understood them to mean that she had finally achieved perfect holiness.⁸³⁴ When Anne Cator Steele heard the same words in 1733, she wrote in her diary, 'I took it to be spoke of Christ and it seem'd very pleasant...my heart was drawn out to love & thankfulness & desires'.⁸³⁵ Anne Cator Steele emphasised the qualities of God that made her own efforts to live a holy life possible. Her Calvinistic theology convinced her that God was perfectly holy while she was sick with sin. She regularly reviewed her heart and life as part of her preparation to take communion, and frequently expressed a desire to 'improve the time', since she often failed in her attempts to live well.⁸³⁶ But her writings do not stress outward activity to such an extent as Talbot's, nor exhibit the anxious spiritual striving characteristic of Bolton. Anne Cator Steele taught this Calvinistic emphasis on divine agency in salvation and sanctification to younger relations. In 1751 her niece Jane Gibbs (1723–63) travelled to Broughton to spend a few weeks with the Steeles, and Anne Cator Steele took the opportunity to speak with her about the state of her soul and to encourage her to seek baptism. Gibbs's spiritual autobiography, which was read to the Broughton Baptist Church as part of her application for admission, records her uncertainty about election. As a young girl she understood 'I could do nothing my self' and that 'twas to no

⁸³⁴ Ann Bolton diary, 18 December 1770. Pudl., 2/2.

⁸³⁵ Anne Cator Steele diary, 7 January 1733. AL, STE 2/1/1.

⁸³⁶ For example, Anne Cator Steele diary, 17 December 1731. AL, STE 2/1/1.

purpose to endeavour'.⁸³⁷ But the death of her brother and sister and a serious illness of her own, and hearing a sermon on 'turn thou me & I shall be turned', made a deep impression.⁸³⁸ Conversation with her aunt now provoked a decision and she affirmed her faith in the holiness of God, adding that she was 'willing to be made holy here as well as happy hereafter'.⁸³⁹

Gibbs's reference to heaven highlights another distinctive Baptist understanding of holiness. Unlike the Methodist stress on the possibility of 'pure love' and perfect sanctification on earth, Baptists emphasised that perfect holiness was only possible in heaven. This Calvinistic urgency regarding human sin (so different from Anglican politeness and moderation) and the impossibility of ultimately overcoming sin on earth was taught to younger generations. In 1806 Jane Attwater wrote a letter to her daughter Anna Blatch, then thirteen years old and active in teaching children at the Bratton Baptist Church Sunday School. Attwater wrote the letter for her daughter to read to her 'scholars'.⁸⁴⁰ The letter is of interest in depicting a thirteen-year-old girl preaching to other children, and in her mother providing the words to do so: 'who will do any thing to lead us in that path w^{ch} shall bring us to the perfection of Good...I would say Come ye children hearken! unto me & I will teach you the fear of the Lord'.⁸⁴¹ It also highlights the potency of human sinfulness in Baptist self-understandings. Blatch (through Attwater) taught the children that they had 'no righteousness of [their] own', but that they were

⁸³⁷ Spiritual autobiography of Jane Gibbs, 14 July 1751. Preserved in Anne Cator Steele diary. AL, STE 2/1/3.

⁸³⁸ Spiritual autobiography of Jane Gibbs, 14 July 1751. Preserved in Anne Cator Steele diary. AL, STE 2/1/3.

⁸³⁹ Spiritual autobiography of Jane Gibbs, 14 July 1751. Preserved in Anne Cator Steele diary. AL, STE 2/1/3.

⁸⁴⁰ Jane Attwater to Anna Blatch, 1806. Bodl., Reeves Collection 19/2/f.

⁸⁴¹ Jane Attwater to Anna Blatch, 1806. Bodl., Reeves Collection 19/2/f.

entirely dependant on God's prior holiness to make them holy, and that while 'none but holy children go to Heaven', perfect holiness would, in time, be achieved there.⁸⁴²

Conclusion

Historians have begun to uncover the ways in which women were active in education in the eighteenth century, observing women's participation in public contexts where they instructed groups of children.⁸⁴³ The women considered here were active in such capacities: Catherine Talbot wrote in her diary of how she taught the catechism while living at St Paul's Deanery; Philothea Briggs corresponded with John Wesley about children he had asked her to instruct; and Anna Blatch (and Jane Attwater) exhorted the children of their local Sunday School while also teaching them to read.⁸⁴⁴ In this chapter I have argued that women were also involved in an active transmission of faith to younger friends and family members through very personal and individualised literary interactions. Certainly mothers were engaged in these acts of spiritual formation, but looking beyond the home and nuclear family recovers the educative activities of other women, notably aunts and single women, who have frequently been denigrated or hidden in contemporary literature and historiographies. These women loved girls and boys they came to think of as their spiritual children, and their extensive and intensive efforts to nurture belief and teach religious expression were creative, wide-ranging, and powerful. Personal interactions of this kind, particularly when a younger generation observed women they loved exemplify holy living, had scope to be more effective in passing on

⁸⁴² Jane Attwater to Anna Blatch, 1806. Bodl., Reeves Collection 19/2/f.

⁸⁴³ See, for example, Mary Hilton, *Women and the Shaping of the Nation's Young: Education and Public Doctrine in Britain 1750-1850* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007).

⁸⁴⁴ Catherine Talbot diary, 30 October 1751. BL, Add. 46690. Philothea Briggs to John Wesley, 28 August 1773. AM 9 (October 1786): 569. Jane Attwater to Anna Blatch, 1806. Bodl., Reeves Collection 19/2/f.

faith than instruction based in a more limited way on precept. Through such activities, religious communities were generationally renewed.

Chapter 5

‘Not willing to destroy these papers for your sake’:

Personal Writing as Spiritual Legacy

Let this be remember^d to the Redeemers Glory, the encouragement of my own soul & all that shall ever read it.⁸⁴⁵

Late one night in December 1770, when Ann Bolton was visiting her friend Patty Chapman (*fl.* 1770–90) at Watlington, Oxfordshire, she found herself unable to sleep. Bolton was on a spiritual journey, literally and figuratively. Her quest for assurance had lately become a source of anxiety and confusion, and so hoping ‘to learn how to proceed’ she set out on a journey ‘to meet with some frds who had made great profieency [*sic*] in the divine Life’.⁸⁴⁶ Her friends provided relief and advice, but alone in her room at night her fears intensified and she lay awake struggling to trust God in the midst of what she described as a spiritual battle: ‘the devills rage was so encreased that he came furiously...saying “now Ill possess thee” but for ever Glory be to Jesus he was in me as a strong Warrior & sattan stood confounded...I was enabled to say “me with all my sins I cast on thy atoneing Blood” then I was composed & went to rest’.⁸⁴⁷ Her relief was immense, and she turned to her diary to record the experience as a reminder of the spiritual battle Jesus had waged and won in her life. But she ‘put it on record’ not only as a reminder to herself. She conceived of her spiritual experience and her recounting of it as

⁸⁴⁵ Ann Bolton diary, 22 December 1770. Pudl., 2/2.

⁸⁴⁶ Ann Bolton diary, 22 December 1770. Pudl., 2/2.

⁸⁴⁷ Ann Bolton diary, 22 December 1770. Pudl., 2/2. She quoted ‘Hymn CLXXV’, John Wesley, *A Collection of Hymns, for the Use of the People Called Methodists* (London: Printed for J. Paramore, 1780), 178.

having enduring meaning, and so she committed the experience to paper also for the benefit of unknown future readers: ‘all that shall ever read it’.

This chapter explores the afterlives of religious women’s personal writings. Looking beyond the contemporary uses that were analysed in previous chapters, it asks how manuscripts were preserved and how they functioned in religious communities after the death of their authors. Scholars of manuscript cultures have highlighted the ways in which an historiographical emphasis on print culture has obscured women’s engagement in eighteenth-century intellectual and literary worlds.⁸⁴⁸ What does a consideration of manuscript cultures reveal regarding women’s engagement in eighteenth-century religious worlds? While illuminating previously hidden activities of women as religious authors, this chapter also considers the future readers of women’s manuscripts. Earlier chapters have explored informal literary interactions within and across generations. By tracing such manuscripts further down the generations, this chapter argues that as women’s writings continued to be read and cherished as spiritual legacy, they formed the community memory and shaped religious identity. It also examines how this varied across the spiritual communities under consideration here. Significantly, it was in recording in her diary a key Methodist experience (her quest for assurance) that Bolton was moved to address her anonymous future reader. She wrote her diary to aid her own spiritual progress, but she also wrote it, and preserved it, for Methodists yet to come.

⁸⁴⁸ Ezell, *Social Authorship and the Advent of Print*; Margaret J. M. Ezell, ‘The Posthumous Publication of Women’s Manuscripts and the History of Authorship,’ in *Women’s Writing and the Circulation of Ideas: Manuscript Publication in England, 1550-1800*, ed. George L. Justice and Nathan Tinker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 121-136; Justice and Tinker, eds., *Women’s Writing and the Circulation of Ideas*; Kathryn R. King, ‘Elizabeth Singer Rowe’s Tactical Use of Print and Manuscript,’ in *Women’s Writing and the Circulation of Ideas: Manuscript Publication in England, 1550-1800*, ed. George L. Justice and Nathan Tinker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 158-181; Ezell, ‘Domestic Papers,’ 33-48; Schellenberg, ‘Bluestocking Women and the Negotiation of Oral, Manuscript, and Print Cultures’; Melanie Bigold, *Women of Letters, Manuscript Circulation, and Print Afterlives in the Eighteenth Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

Keepers of Manuscripts and Meaning

A vision for the future

The women considered in this thesis all wrote for posterity: whether they wrote with an anonymous future reader in mind, or for a particular, loved individual, they all wrote with the hope that their words would be read again and would bear spiritual fruit. Their personal writings served the immediate purpose of giving shape and meaning to their spiritual lives, but they also were constructed with consideration for the future. This section surveys what women revealed, explicitly and implicitly, about their vision for the future. It asks how women's anticipation of future readers guided what and how they wrote, and how diverse spiritual and familial contexts influenced women's sense of a future audience. These women were not simply passive participants in keeping and passing on religious meaning (for example, by the posthumous publication by others of their letters and diaries), but intentionally wrote and actively prepared their writings for a future readership.⁸⁴⁹

This anticipation of a future readership is perceived most plainly in the case of the Steeles, whose religious writings formed part of their familial genealogy. The domestic archive into which Anne Steele's personal papers were integrated following her death in 1778 had been growing since the late seventeenth century.⁸⁵⁰ It contained the writings of her great-grandfather and her mother, who had died in 1680 and 1720, respectively, and in her lifetime she witnessed its expansion through the steady writing of her stepmother Anne Cator Steele and her half-sister Mary Wakeford, who had died in 1760 and 1772. It was natural for her to imagine her own poems and letters later joining the archive preserved in her home, to be read by future members of her family. Her growing

⁸⁴⁹ Compare Parish, 'Power of Female Pietism,' 33-46.

⁸⁵⁰ See the Steele Collection at the Angus Library. Whelan, ed., *Nonconformist Women Writers*, 1:xxviii.

readership and reputation as a poet (both within and beyond her family) may have facilitated her ability to conceive of a future readership, but other Steeles similarly revealed assumptions that their words would be read after their deaths. When urged by Steele to participate in a serious religious correspondence, Mary Wakeford argued that she was not a natural writer, like her sister, though having considered the future she consented: ‘perhaps when I am no more what I write however mean may not be intirely despised’.⁸⁵¹

Alongside this imagined future audience, some personal papers were written and prepared for real audiences of specific, loved individuals. Diaries in particular were often written as legacies for daughters, a tendency that has so far been recognised more for the nineteenth than the eighteenth century.⁸⁵² Moreover, while mothers did entrust personal writings to their daughters, aunts and single women, and their nieces, also participated significantly in such legacy formation, as we shall see. Anne Cator Steele specified that after her death several volumes of her diary should be given to her daughter Mary Wakeford, and she included instructions that would guide her use of them. Two slips of paper, pinned together, are tucked into the diary (see Figure 14). The first is a note:

tis my desire that both this book and another in which is about nine or ten years of my Experience should be my own childs when she comes of understanding to keep them.⁸⁵³

The second, a short transcription from a sermon by the Puritan Richard Steele:

Apply your selves to the practice of Real piety, by this I mean, that we should employ our Chief care to procure and increase a lively faith, to Exercise daily Repentance, to strengthen our Hope, to inflame our love to God, and to our neighbour....To be diligent in watchfulness over our thoughts, words & ways, in

⁸⁵¹ Mary Wakeford to Anne Steele, 23 September 1749. AL, STE 3/10/i.

⁸⁵² Delafield, *Women's Diaries as Narrative in the Nineteenth-Century Novel*, esp. Ch. 2: ‘The Female Diarist in the Nineteenth Century’; Temple and Bunkers, ‘Mothers, Daughters, Diaries,’ 197-216.

⁸⁵³ Anne Cator Steele diary, at January 1751. AL, STE 2/1/2.

mortification of our sinfull passions & affections, in the Examination of our spiritual Estate...⁸⁵⁴

Her diary had long focused her own efforts to ‘practice...Real piety’, but she intended it to have more than individual meaning. In passing on the transcription of Richard Steele’s sermon along with her diary, Anne Cator Steele illuminated her own diary-writing practice and her hopes for her daughter, furnishing her with both precept and practical example.

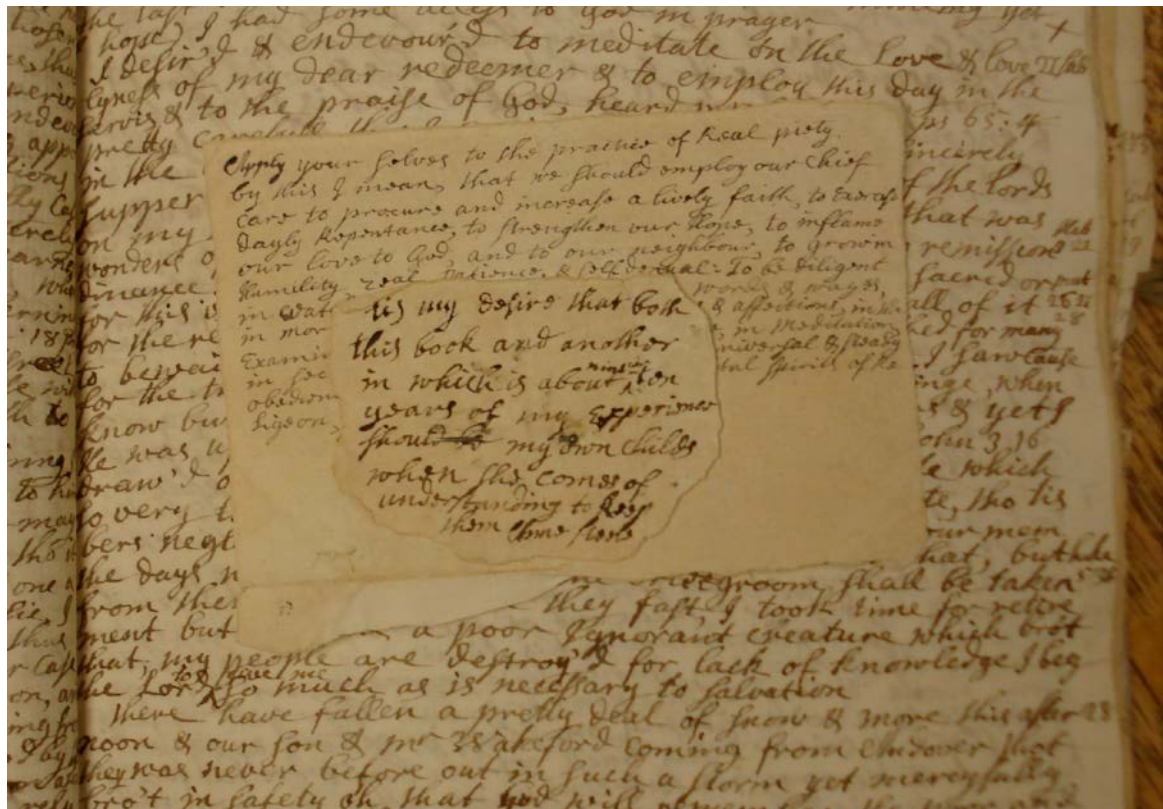


Figure 14: Anne Cator Steele’s diary, passed on to her daughter⁸⁵⁵

⁸⁵⁴ Anne Cator Steele diary, at January 1751. AL, STE 2/1/2. Richard Steele, ‘How the Uncharitable and Dangerous Contentions that are among Professors of the True Religion May be Allayed’. *Puritan Sermons*, 1659-1689.

⁸⁵⁵ Anne Cator Steele diary, at January 1751. AL, STE 2/1/2.

In the next generation, Anne Cator Steele's niece Jane Attwater also prepared her diary for her daughter Anna Blatch. In 1805, when Anna was eleven years old, Attwater reviewed the diary she had been keeping for nearly forty years, and added a note on the back cover of one booklet:

My Beloved Anna I am not willing to destroy these papers for Your sake...should their be any sentence in y^e whole...w^{ch} may give you pleaseure & profit in reading it, my End in saving them is answered. I commit them into your care & keeping...⁸⁵⁶

She hoped that Anna would one day find pleasure in reading her mother's words, but more than this she hoped that her diary would help Anna to make 'greater advancement in the Christian life'.⁸⁵⁷ She hoped that in passing on her diary she would pass on her faith. Marjorie Reeves describes Attwater's diary as 'intensely private', and certainly it is concerned with her own spiritual experience.⁸⁵⁸ But in addressing her daughter in its pages, and in her clear intention to pass the diary on to her, Attwater's diary was written not solely as an act of self-scrutiny or spiritual catharsis, but with a view to the future religious life of her family.

Within this Baptist family, for whom religious and familial identities were interwoven, it is unsurprising that Anne Cator Steele and Jane Attwater should intend personal spiritual writings for much-loved children. As a convert to Methodism, Ann Bolton did not write with the same sense of a familial spiritual genealogy, and her self-conscious writing for the future was directed less by affectionate ties than by religious context. As they circulated in both manuscript and print, she frequently encountered life writings being held up as examples of model Methodist spirituality, and this must have influenced her self-understanding as a writer. As we have seen, Bolton saw her own

⁸⁵⁶ Jane Attwater diary, note dated 13 July 1805. AL, Attwater Papers, acc. 76, I.A.22.

⁸⁵⁷ Jane Attwater diary, note dated 13 July 1805. AL, Attwater Papers, acc. 76, I.A.22.

⁸⁵⁸ Reeves, 'Jane Attwater's Diaries,' 207.

letters to Wesley printed in the *Arminian Magazine*,⁸⁵⁹ yet long before the first of her letters appeared in print she must have considered the possibility. When she wrote in her diary, ‘let all that read this Glorify him’, she probably imagined her religious experience and words later held up as Methodist exempla.⁸⁶⁰

Writing with a view to future audiences, diarists strove to give voice to their thoughts and experiences, even as they withdrew into secrecy and encryption.⁸⁶¹ Ciphers and censoring, present in writings expressly written for others, confirm the complexity of the genre and show how the individual and ‘private’ purpose of religious diaries could coexist with pedagogical purposes. Perhaps it was the dual function—self-reflection and spiritual exemplum—that introduced Jane Attwater’s practice of censoring her diary. She experimented with a cipher in 1779 and 1780, and she censored some entries for 1782 by carefully excising whole lines out of the text. Other lines she heavily blacked out.⁸⁶² Clearly the diary was not constructed wholly to promote her daughter’s religious training.

While Attwater’s censoring preserved privacy, Catherine Talbot employed elaborate coding systems in her correspondence and diary that may have forged affectionate and spiritual ties.⁸⁶³ She must have shared the keys to her codes with family and friends (or her letters would have been mysterious indeed). Her writings circulated more widely than those of others considered here, so perhaps her coded system was meant to reveal something of herself to friends and family while concealing it from those

⁸⁵⁹ See p. 171.

⁸⁶⁰ Ann Bolton diary, 24 December 1770. Pudl., 2/2.

⁸⁶¹ Helen Wilcox argues that life writings are ‘poised at the borderline between hiddenness and expressiveness’. Helen Wilcox, ‘Private Writing and Public Function: Autobiographical Texts by Renaissance Englishwomen,’ in *Gloriana’s Face: Women, Public and Private, in the English Renaissance*, ed. S. P. Cerasano and Marion Wynne-Davies (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1992), 60.

⁸⁶² Jane Attwater diary, 1780-1782. AL, Attwater Papers, acc. 76, I.A.10 and I.A.11.

⁸⁶³ On codes in diaries, see Ezell, ‘Domestic Papers,’ 40-41; Sara Heller Mendelson, ‘Stuart Women’s Diaries and Occasional Memoirs,’ in *Women in English Society, 1500-1800*, ed. Mary Prior (London: Methuen, 1985), 183.

more distant. In a comparable way, during his Oxford Methodist phase John Wesley used a coded diary system that he revealed only to other early Methodists, thus demarcating lines of social and religious connection.⁸⁶⁴ Talbot's codes masked persons and places. She used numbers, roughly corresponding to letters of the alphabet, in place of the first and last letters of names: thus 17.13 is Samuel Richardson and 3.13 is Cuddesdon.⁸⁶⁵ Those with whom she was particularly close were assigned pseudonyms: so Thomas Secker is Eugene or Eug, though she also deferentially or ironically referred to him as 'my Lord' and 'the Shah'; Jemima Yorke is Angelina, or simply A; and George Berkeley is 'the Governor' and, sometimes, 7. Such excisions and deliberate masking or suppression of details again confirm that these women's personal writings do not provide unmediated access to their interior lives or social worlds. Rather, their papers were crafted, and they were crafted not only for their own immediate needs or for contemporary readers, but with a vision for the future.

Preservation

In writing for the future, the women considered here expected their papers to be preserved. But how did this occur, and how did preservation patterns vary according to social and religious context? Tracing the preservation of manuscripts across several centuries leaves inevitable lacunae, yet sufficient data survive to point to the central roles of women in keeping and maintaining manuscripts, and with them religious meaning. In her study of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Quaker women, Sandra Stanley Holton

⁸⁶⁴ Richard Heitzenrater, ed., *Diary of an Oxford Methodist, Benjamin Ingham, 1733-1734* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1985), 3-6.

⁸⁶⁵ I am grateful to James Collett-White, archivist at the Bedfordshire and Luton Archive and Record Service, for help with this code, earlier interpreted by Joyce Godber. In each two-number sequence, the first number corresponds to the first letter of a name, while the second number corresponds to the final letter. 1 = A, 2 = B...9 = I/J, 10 = K, and so on. Thus 3.13 is C—n, or Cuddesdon, where Talbot lived in the bishop's palace when Thomas Secker was Bishop of Oxford.

observes that it was frequently women who preserved the letters and diaries of previous generations. She describes this as a typically feminine ‘work of kin’, consistent with women’s greater likelihood to seek out family connections, exchange family news, ensure that family bonds were not broken, and serve as family chroniclers.⁸⁶⁶ Arianne Baggerman also highlights family memory in her analysis of manuscript preservation; she sees the archive as ‘a paper bulwark, built and rebuilt by generations, with a specific function: to preserve and protect a common family identity’.⁸⁶⁷ More than an act of family memorialisation, the manuscripts considered here were preserved as spiritual memory and religious guides. Affectionate and spiritual ties were interwoven and thus religious and family memorialisation often overlapped, but considering manuscript preservation more broadly reveals the activities of those beyond the family and discloses diverse motivations for preservation.

Conceiving of themselves as writers, the women considered here put pen to paper, day after day, year after year, and as they did so their letters, diaries, poetry, and other personal writings accumulated. In time friends and family members would intercede to preserve those writings, but the first persons to sort, select, and save their manuscripts were the writers themselves. Ann Bolton habitually endorsed the outside of her letters with details regarding their receipt (see Figure 15), and she owned a series of letter racks

⁸⁶⁶ Holton, *Quaker Women*, 24-28. See also Sandra Stanley Holton, ‘Family Memory, Religion and Radicalism: The Priestman, Clark and Bright Kinship Circle of Women Friends and Quaker History,’ *Quaker Studies* 9, no. 2 (2005): 156-175; Vickery, *Gentleman’s Daughter*; Sabeen, *Kinship in Neckarhausen*; Margaret Benefiel, “‘Weaving the Web of Community’: Letters and Epistles,” in *Hidden in Plain Sight: Quaker Women’s Writings, 1650-1700*, ed. Mary Garman, et al. (Wallingford: Pendle Hill, 1996), 443-452.

⁸⁶⁷ Arianne Baggerman, ‘Autobiography and Family Memory in the Nineteenth Century,’ in *Egodocuments and History: Autobiographical Writing in Its Social Context since the Middle Ages*, ed. Rudolf Dekker (Hilversum: Verloren, 2002), 163.



Figure 15: Ann Bolton's letter endorsement⁸⁶⁸

used to organise them.⁸⁶⁹ Catherine Talbot's letters and diary are embedded with references to their own maintenance and destruction. In November 1751 she spent the day 'Sorting Burning reading & shedding Tears of Affection over Old Letters', and in January 1752 she wrote in her diary that 'some bewitching Old M^{ss}...stole away' her time.⁸⁷⁰ In October 1753 she recorded in her diary, 'Rumaged over an Unfathomable Old Box of Papers', and the following week she travelled with them ('me and my old papers') to visit

⁸⁶⁸ John Wesley to Ann Bolton, 13 August 1772. Pudl., 4/7/7.

⁸⁶⁹ The sale catalogue of Bolton's possessions following her death indicates that she owned at least three letter racks. *A Catalogue . . . of Household Furniture . . . of Mrs. Conibeere* (Witney: S. Biggers, 1822). On endorsing letters, see Daybell, *Material Letter in Early Modern England*, 217-218.

⁸⁷⁰ Catherine Talbot diary, 12 November 1751 and 4 January 1752. BL, Add. 46690.

the Duchess of Somerset at Percy Lodge, where she spent days ‘routing over old boxes of papers’, sometimes with the assistance of the Duchess.⁸⁷¹ The task was neither isolating nor confined within her home. As she organised and preserved papers she discussed them with her spiritual mentor.

With no children of their own, Talbot, Steele, and Bolton could not depend on descendents to preserve their manuscripts.⁸⁷² Having initiated the process of preservation, their manuscripts were later cared for by others. In the Steele family, nieces played a crucial role in this process, further confirming the importance of the aunt-niece relationship analysed in the previous chapter. Anne Steele’s papers passed into the possession of her niece Mary Steele who, having no children of her own, in time passed them on to her eldest niece Mary Tomkins. With each generation the archive grew. Mary Steele cared for her aunt’s papers and manuscript poetry, but she also wrote poetry of her own, which in time was collected, copied, and maintained by her niece.⁸⁷³ Mary Steele considered her niece to have inherited Anne Steele’s character and poetic ability, and indeed even her handwriting resembled that of the ‘revered’ Anne Steele: Mary Tomkins was, to her aunt, ‘one of *our* family’, a writer as well.⁸⁷⁴ (See Appendix 2, p. 334.) As Mary Steele played an early role in the preservation of her family’s personal papers, her friend and cousin Jane Attwater likewise was instrumental in collecting and preserving her ancestors’ papers, even as she added to them. Attwater’s only child died early, and these papers eventually were passed to her sister Caroline Whitaker’s children, her sister also having predeceased her. (See Appendix 2, p. 336.) As aunts used personal writings in

⁸⁷¹ Catherine Talbot diary, 30 October 1753 and 21 November 1753. BL, Add. 46688. Catherine Talbot to Elizabeth Carter, 12 November 1753. Pennington, ed., *Letters between Carter and Talbot*, 2:143.

⁸⁷² Whyman, ‘Gentle Companions,’ 177.

⁸⁷³ Whelan, ed., *Nonconformist Women Writers*, 1:xxvii, 3:1-2.

⁸⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 3:16. Mary Tomkins passed them to her daughter Selina Bompas, who cared for the archive until the early twentieth century. *Ibid.*, 3:27-28, n. 35. The papers eventually passed into the hands of her sister’s grandson Hugh Steele-Smith, who deposited the papers in the Angus Library at Oxford in 1992.

their active efforts to transmit faith to a younger generation, their nieces (the beneficiaries of those efforts) later performed important roles in preserving those writings for generations yet unborn.

While Talbot's acts of preservation were enacted in various locations, including the Duchess of Somerset's home at Percy Lodge, the preservation of Steele family manuscripts were highly localised, assisted by long association with particular houses. When her father died in 1785, Mary Steele inherited Broughton House, a stately Georgian manor house, and with it the large archive of family papers that had been accumulating since the late seventeenth century.⁸⁷⁵ Mary Tomkins's sister Emma later depicted Broughton House in watercolour around 1820, and her painting as well was preserved by the family. (See Figure 16.) As the Steele archive was long associated with Broughton House, personal papers on the other side of the family seem early to have become associated with the Whitaker family home, Yew Trees, at Bratton, Wiltshire.⁸⁷⁶ In both cases successive custodians of the archive lived in the same house, and in both cases many of those custodians were women. In her study of eighteenth-century American women and memory, Susan Stabile argues that women's efforts to preserve memories were uniquely associated with the local and particular, including family homes, and she understands such efforts to be part of the process of building national memory in the early

⁸⁷⁵ The younger William Steele rented Broughton House from 1749 and bought it in 1758, and it remained in the family until 1855. A Steele descendent bought it back in 1898 and lived there until his death in 1930, when it was sold again. The other Steele family home, Grandfathers, is located just down the lane from Broughton House and was longer associated with the family. It was built by Anne Steele's great-great-grandfather in the seventeenth century and remained in the family until 1970. Broome, *Bruised Reed*, 23, 234, 238, 241-242.

⁸⁷⁶ Reeves, *Sheep Bell and Ploughshare*, 92. See also Reeves, *Pursuing the Muses*. In the early nineteenth century Yew Trees was in the possession of Sophia Whitaker, the widow of Jane Attwater's nephew Thomas. Sophia Whitaker's brother-in-law was Philip Whitaker, whom Jane Attwater had once taught to keep a diary. When his grandson John Whitaker married Mary Brinkworth, Sophia Whitaker invited them to live with her at Yew Trees. It was their daughter Jane Whitaker who in the early twentieth century collected the family papers and associated memorabilia that eventually came into the hands of her niece, Marjorie Reeves, and then passed into public archives in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

Republic.⁸⁷⁷ Rather than national memory-building, the Steele and Attwater women's efforts to preserve personal writings, long associated with particular homes, can be seen as an important means of building spiritual memory and meaning.



Figure 16: Broughton House⁸⁷⁸

Successive generations turned the pages written by their ancestors while adding words of their own, so that the presence of each generation of these Baptist families is felt in the Steele archive. This was an active process of memory building. Mary Wakeford kept a diary that has not survived, but it was still extant in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century when Selina Bompas (1830–1921) transcribed selections from it.⁸⁷⁹ Bompas was not a detached custodian of the Steele family archive, but had a sense of her

⁸⁷⁷ Stabile, *Memory's Daughters*. On the association of manuscripts with family homes, see also Tanya Fitzgerald, 'Archives of Memory and Memories of Archive: CMS Women's Letters and Diaries, 1823-35,' *History of Education* 34, no. 6 (2005): 657-674.

⁸⁷⁸ Attributed to Emma Tomkins, c. 1820, private collection. Broome, *Bruised Reed*, 228.

⁸⁷⁹ Mary Wakeford diary. AL, STE 12/1/3.

place within its story: with the help of the archive in her care she wrote a history of her family for her niece or nephew.⁸⁸⁰ Her history is an example of the genre of domestic biography that Christopher Tolley observes flourishing amongst religious families in the Victorian period.⁸⁸¹ Addressing her reader warmly and personally, Bompas placed herself and them within the story she told: ‘Among the first reminiscences of both your Mamma and myself...’⁸⁸² She distilled the details of the papers in her care to give a lively account of marriages and children, homes and businesses, and relayed family stories dating back to the eighteenth century: ‘The famous preacher Robert Hall wished to make our Grandmother his wife, but he was eccentric in those young days and did not win her consent.’⁸⁸³ She took care to portray her family’s religious heritage and identity: ‘Mamma followed her beloved Mother’s example and that of her ancestors, both Steele and Tomkins, in worshipping in the Baptist Chapel at Broughton...’⁸⁸⁴ In the hands of subsequent generations, Baptist women’s personal writings were cherished, the memories of their authors kept affectionately alive, their religious experiences stimulating personal reflection in those who remembered.

Many of Ann Bolton’s personal papers have also been preserved by family, though there is less evidence of them being used by them in an ongoing effort to interpret their familial and religious present in terms of the past. The Bolton archive has not multiplied in the same manner of the Steele archive, with successive generations adding their own writings and annotations. There have been only minor additions, though there is

⁸⁸⁰ Selina Bompas, ‘The Story of the Steeles of Broughton’. AL, STE 12/4/1.

⁸⁸¹ Christopher Tolley, *Domestic Biography: The Legacy of Evangelicalism in Four Nineteenth-Century Families* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997).

⁸⁸² Selina Bompas, ‘The Story of the Steeles of Broughton’. AL, STE 12/4/1.

⁸⁸³ Selina Bompas, ‘The Story of the Steeles of Broughton’. AL, STE 12/4/1.

⁸⁸⁴ Selina Bompas, ‘The Story of the Steeles of Broughton’. AL, STE 12/4/1.

some evidence of copying and censoring the archive.⁸⁸⁵ While nieces played a large role in the preservation of the Steele archive, nephews were active in preserving Bolton's papers, thus complicating any categorical association between femininity, family, and preservation. While women often played key roles in manuscript preservation, men were also involved. Following her death in 1843, Bolton's papers came into the possession of her nephew Joseph Bolton and have followed a direct line of descent since then.⁸⁸⁶

Related Bolton manuscripts, many of which were written by Elizabeth Bolton (who married Ann Bolton's nephew Edward), have followed a direct line of descent through another branch of the family.⁸⁸⁷

Bolton's close association with John Wesley motivated acts of preservation and meant that from an early date her personal papers were of interest to those beyond her family. While she took pains to preserve Wesley's letters to her, at uncertain times and through unknown means, the majority of them were scattered. Of 116 extant letters, only thirty-one remain in the private holdings of the Bolton family. The dispersal of Wesley's letters to Bolton must have begun soon after his death, for when she was seventy years old Joseph Benson printed fourteen of them in the first edition of Wesley's *Works* (1813).⁸⁸⁸ Still during her lifetime, Thomas Jackson reprinted these letters in his edition

⁸⁸⁵ A lengthy letter, written in 1786 to an unnamed clergyman, in which Bolton wrote a version of her conversion experience, was transcribed in the early nineteenth century with a note: 'The foregoing is copied by Martha Early Bolton from the Original letter.' Ann Bolton to unnamed clergyman, 18 August 1786. JRL, MA 1977.610.33. As well, there may have been additional Bolton correspondence into the early twentieth century, but Nancy Rycroft indicates that her great aunt Lydia Bolton is thought to have burnt them, considering them too affectionate and therefore shocking. Personal conversations with Nancy Rycroft, November 2011.

⁸⁸⁶ Only in the last generation did the late Sir Frederic Bolton take a genealogical interest in his family and make efforts to organise the manuscripts.

⁸⁸⁷ It is only in the last generation that Nancy Rycroft, who was named for Ann Bolton (itself a sign of Bolton's persistence in family memory), has read, sorted, and interpreted them. Rycroft, 'The Boltons of Sandford, Enstone, Wootton, Witney and Finstock 1543-1950.'

⁸⁸⁸ Joseph Benson, ed., *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley*, vol. 16 (London: Printed by Thomas Cordeux, 1813).

of Wesley's *Works* (1829–1831).⁸⁸⁹ As indicated in the Introduction, originals and copies have since spread throughout the British Methodist world and beyond.⁸⁹⁰ Dislocated from the home, her manuscripts were taken up into official denominational memory and histories.

Catherine Talbot's manuscripts have been preserved in neither domestic nor denominational archives, but rather are scattered amongst various public archives. Her connections with high-ranking ecclesiastics and aristocrats and with powerful literary figures (such as Thomas Secker, the Duchess of Somerset, and Elizabeth Montagu) caused some of her papers to be preserved on account of her friends rather than particular intentions to memorialise her.⁸⁹¹ In other cases, the more deliberate interventions of those close to her reveal a more intimate intention: to remember her and perpetuate her spiritual example, both publicly (through print) and more privately. As with Steele, women played key roles in these measures to preserve Talbot's papers. In 1770, after Talbot's death, Mary Talbot gathered up her daughter's manuscripts and entrusted them to Elizabeth Carter, who published some of her friend's essays at her own expense.⁸⁹² As was customary, letters once written to Talbot were returned to their authors, including her childhood friend Jemima Yorke. Yorke died in 1797, and it was probably after her

⁸⁸⁹ Thomas Jackson, ed., *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley, A. M.*, 3rd ed., vol. 12 (London: John Mason, 1830).

⁸⁹⁰ See discussion in Introduction, p. 64. Further, John Telford's standard edition of Wesley's letters (1931) contains eighty-five letters to Bolton, including incomplete or inaccurate transcriptions of seven of the letters still in the Bolton family, suggesting that his access was through a copied source.

⁸⁹¹ See discussion in Introduction, p. 55.

⁸⁹² Harriet Guest, *Small Change: Women, Learning, Patriotism, 1750-1810* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 128; Zuk, ed., *Catherine Talbot and Hester Chapone*, 3, 13; Myers, *Bluestocking Circle*, 223. These publications were *Reflections on the Seven Days of the Week* (1770) and *Essays on Various Subjects* (1772). Not all of Talbot's papers were given to Carter. In the nineteenth century a later relative, Marianne Talbot, found Thomas Secker's housekeeper's diary amongst 'the manuscript papers belonging to Miss Catherine Talbot, that have descended to her relation, Sir George Talbot'. Marianne Talbot, ed., *Journal of the Housekeeper of Archbishop Secker* (London: Printed by John Strangeways, 1876), iv. These papers are now at the Beinecke Library, which has no provenance information regarding them. Beinecke, OSB c.291.

mother's death that Amabel Yorke (1751–1833), in going through her mother's papers, decided to transcribe Yorke and Talbot's more than thirty-year correspondence into seven large volumes.⁸⁹³ As noted, Talbot had acted as Amabel's surrogate aunt throughout her childhood, and though Talbot died when Amabel was eighteen (almost thirty years earlier), transcribing her correspondence with her mother must have evoked memories of Talbot's care for her and the guidance she had received as a child. Finally, others of Talbot's personal papers are preserved amongst the Berkeley family papers, and Eliza Berkeley clearly was active in maintaining them.⁸⁹⁴ Eliza Berkeley was married to George Berkeley, Talbot's one-time suitor and long-time friend/'brother', and following her husband's death in 1795, Eliza Berkeley sorted through his surviving manuscripts, annotating many of Talbot's letters to him.⁸⁹⁵ The flexible family patterns formed in life directed manuscript preservation patterns after death.

While women played key roles in the preservation of Talbot's personal papers, clergymen also took a part, further complicating Holton's gendered portrayal of manuscript preservation.⁸⁹⁶ The activities of clergymen preserving Talbot's personal papers were less personal than professional, however, and so are distinguishable from the more intimate acts of memorialisation undertaken by Amabel Yorke and others. After Talbot's mother returned Carter's letters to her, and following Carter's death, her nephew Montagu Pennington (1762–1849) (to whom Carter left all her manuscripts) published Talbot and Carter's correspondence in 1808.⁸⁹⁷ Whether or not she had anticipated their publication, Carter had prepared the correspondence for a future readership: after her

⁸⁹³ Myers, *Bluestocking Circle*, 67. See BLARS, L 30/9a.

⁸⁹⁴ From her husband's death in 1795 until her own death in 1800, Eliza Berkeley owned the Berkeley Papers now deposited in the British Library.

⁸⁹⁵ Myers, *Bluestocking Circle*, 216–220. BL, Add. 39311–39312, 39316.

⁸⁹⁶ Holton, *Quaker Women*, 2 and passim.

⁸⁹⁷ Pennington, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Elizabeth Carter*, unpaginated Preface.

death they were found ‘regularly arranged and bound up in volumes, with all such names carefully erased by herself as she did not chuse should appear in them’.⁸⁹⁸ In reviewing her letters to Talbot, Carter also had corrected and amended her earlier writing.⁸⁹⁹ Pennington further intervened, selecting and editing the letters, fashioning them in order to produce a book that would promote virtue and moral improvement. ‘Nothing has been added to any of the Letters’, he assured his readers, ‘but a good deal has been left out of trifling chit-chat and confidential communications’ (a separation of categories that of course will have distorted the richness of the originals).⁹⁰⁰ Thomas Birch was also an Anglican clergyman, and he was associated with the aristocratic circle in which Jemima Yorke moved and was a trustee of the British Museum, which opened in 1753. As part of his professional programme of collecting and transcribing manuscripts, and enabled by his relationship with the Yorkes, he copied Talbot’s correspondence with Yorke and Mary Grey, and after his death in 1766 (during Talbot’s lifetime) they were deposited in the British Museum.⁹⁰¹ Weeden Butler, another clergyman, transcribed letters of the Duchess of Somerset to Talbot and then published them in his *Memoirs of Mark Hildesley* (1799).⁹⁰²

Steele, Bolton, and Talbot each wrote for posterity and, believing their writing to have future meaning and usefulness, initiated a process of preservation that was taken up, after their deaths, by those close to them, affectionately and spiritually. Sometimes this was enacted within families, but flexible family relationships meant that others also participated in this preservation. Steele’s manuscripts were incorporated into a existing

⁸⁹⁸ Pennington, ed., *Letters between Carter and Talbot*, 1:iv-v. On Carter’s manuscripts and her knowledge of Pennington’s intention to write her memoirs, see Pennington, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Elizabeth Carter*, 169-170.

⁸⁹⁹ Pennington, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Elizabeth Carter*, 41.

⁹⁰⁰ Pennington, ed., *Letters between Carter and Talbot*, 1:v.

⁹⁰¹ BL, Add. 4291.

⁹⁰² BL, Add. 19689.

domestic archive that grew as subsequent generations added writing of their own while reviewing and annotating their ancestors' papers. Bolton's manuscripts were divided: some remained an intact collection in the family home though were not added to as Steele's were (as part of the ongoing religious life of the Steele family); others were spread throughout the Methodist world. The preservation of Talbot's manuscripts was more complex owing to her more diffuse social and religious world: her papers are scattered amongst various public collections, their survival a result of personal relationship and public usefulness. In all cases, women performed key, though not exclusive, roles in the preservation of these papers—sorting, selecting, interpreting—and in acting as keepers of manuscripts they preserved personal memory and religious meaning.

Personal Writings as Community Memory

Oft I frequent thy holy place
 And hear almost in vain
 How small a portion of thy Grace
 My Mem'ry can retain⁹⁰³

Jane Attwater was sixteen years old in 1769 when she filled the small booklet she was using for her diary, opened a new booklet, and transcribed Isaac Watts's verse on its inside cover. This was a common poetic code she used to recollect one of her purposes in writing: her diary was a spiritual aide-mémoire. She continued to remind herself of this purpose throughout the years. In 1781 she wrote, 'My diary is a kind of repository w^{ch}

⁹⁰³ Jane Attwater diary, 14 August 1769. AL, Attwater Papers, acc. 76, I.A.2. See 'Unfruitfulness, Ignorance, and Unsanctify'd Affections', Isaac Watts, *Hymns and Spiritual Songs*, 2nd ed. (London: Printed by J. H. for John Lawrence, 1709), 274.

reminds me of past experience and in the various dispensations of Providence'.⁹⁰⁴

Women across the denominational spectrum considered here described their impulse to write as a desire to know themselves and God more fully, and to preserve records of their lives as reminders of God's care for them. In 1752 Catherine Talbot wrote in her diary of her desire to 'know my own Heart Perfectly with all its Faults', and she recorded her religious failings in her diary as a 'warning' to her future self.⁹⁰⁵ Ann Bolton observed a personal rule of life that included daily writing, and in 1772 she again opened her diary—often referred to as her 'memorandums' or a 'memorial'—to record 'something of y^e state of my soul'.⁹⁰⁶ In each case, these women wrote in very personal ways to give shape and meaning to their emotional and religious experiences. We have seen that their diaries had sophisticated communal uses, but at the same time they functioned as stores of personal memory, material artefacts to which their writers could, and did, return for spiritual comfort in times of trouble.

Yet these writings were more than personal memory. Preserved by family and friends, they became a means of transmitting memory and meaning across generations. This section traces women's writings beyond contemporary uses, demonstrating the multiple ways in which they came to constitute the collective memory of religious communities. Drawing a connection between memory and religion, Danièle Hervieu-Léger argues that the authority of priests lies partly in their ability to mobilise and 'expound the true memory of the group'.⁹⁰⁷ In this way women can be seen to perform priestly functions as their preserved writings became a source of authority in religious

⁹⁰⁴ Jane Attwater diary, 17 May 1781. AL, Attwater Papers, acc. 76, I.A.10. On the educative purposes of Attwater's diary, see p. 222 and p. 255.

⁹⁰⁵ Catherine Talbot diary, 14 February 1752. BL, Add. 46690.

⁹⁰⁶ Ann Bolton diary, 2 February 1772. Pudl., 2/2.

⁹⁰⁷ Danièle Hervieu-Léger, *Religion as a Chain of Memory*, trans. Simon Lee (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), 126.

communities.⁹⁰⁸ Maurice Halbwachs argues that memory is always refracted by a particular social context, and thus here denomination is considered regarding its effect on the ways in which posthumous personal writings functioned within religious communities.⁹⁰⁹

Rather than the personal nature of these writings impeding their significance for future readers, the unique histories and experiences of their authors infused them with meaning. Letters, diaries, and familial poetry brought to mind friends and family now dead, and in their textual representations of real life joys and struggles, later readers found inspiration and guidance for their own religious lives. Their authority was found as much in their familiarity as in their 'heroic' religious example.⁹¹⁰ In *Les Travaux de L'Année Sociologique* (1925), Maurice Halbwachs argued that autobiographical memory is richer and more consequential and meaningful than 'historic memory', by which he meant official or 'objective' histories.⁹¹¹ The women's writings considered here were clearly constructed and cannot be read as uncomplicated windows into their author's mind or heart, yet they do represent an alternative to more 'official' contemporary narratives and their personal nature informed their authority.⁹¹² It was personal narrative, the 'testimony of a witness', that imbued women's personal writings with power to shape religious identities and communities posthumously, as will be explored in this section.⁹¹³

⁹⁰⁸ Fox, 'Custom, Memory and the Authority of Writing,' 89.

⁹⁰⁹ See Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, trans. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Pierre Nora, 'Between Memory and History: Les Lieux De Mémoire,' *Representations* 26, Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory (1989): 7-24; Charles Elliot, *Memory and Salvation* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1995), 9.

⁹¹⁰ On the greater capacity of 'heroic' or 'mythic' individuals to pass on collective memory, see Lewis A. Coser, 'Introduction', in Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, 25; Peter Burke, 'History as Social Memory,' in *Memory: History, Culture and the Mind*, ed. Thomas Butler (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 103-104.

⁹¹¹ Lewis A. Coser, 'Introduction', in Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, 29. *Les Travaux de L'Année Sociologique* was translated and published as *On Collective Memory* in 1992.

⁹¹² Burke, 'History as Social Memory,' 98.

⁹¹³ Marianne Hirsch and Valerie Smith, 'Feminism and Cultural Memory: An Introduction,' *Signs* 28, no. 1 (special issue) (2002): 7.

Yet not only their words, but the material nature of women's personal writings functioned fundamentally in constituting religious memory and shaping spiritual communities. Manuscripts themselves might be said to constitute 'lieux de mémoire', what Pierre Nora considers 'sites for anchoring' a group's memory, the 'embodiment of memory in certain sites where a sense of historical continuity persists', places 'where memory crystallizes'.⁹¹⁴ Here women's manuscripts are considered as 'sites for anchoring' the communal memory of religious communities and, alongside manuscripts, various memorabilia (including books and Bibles) are seen to have been active in memorial transmission. In what follows, women's personal writings are analysed to see how they functioned in religious communities after the deaths of their authors.

On several occasions Jane Attwater recorded reading her late great aunt Anne Cator Steele's diary, and in it she found a source of spiritual guidance and a sense of her place in her family's generational faith. In 1786, shortly after her mother died, Attwater turned to Anne Cator Steele's diary, expressing a particular interest in her mother's representation in the diary. She transcribed these sections into her diary:

the past week I have been reading in My Hond Aunt Steeles diary May it tend to quicken me in religious duties wherein she was so dilligent speaking of My dear & hond parent in May 1739. She says 'Cousin Waters came had a good deal of sweet agreeable talk with my neice she designing God willing to offer herself to ye Church the ensuing day in order to be baptized....' thus far my Aunts recital of wt concernd my dear mama at that time there is thro' ye book very frequent mention made of my dearest friends...⁹¹⁵

Reading these old family papers gave her a sense of connection with her past and of her place in her faith heritage, and it restored her lost mother to her by recalling her almost

⁹¹⁴ Nora, 'Between Memory and History,' 9, 7.

⁹¹⁵ Jane Attwater diary, 26 March 1786. AL, Attwater Papers, acc. 76, I.A.15.

fifty years earlier, then about the same age as Attwater was as she read the diary.⁹¹⁶ When Attwater read her great aunt's diary, Anne Cator Steele had been dead for twenty-six years. Her niece could not have known her well, since she was seven years old and lived about fifteen miles away when Anne Cator Steele died. Attwater's use of the diary confirms Anne Cator Steele's honoured place in family memory, as well as the authority imbued in her diary and its posthumous influence on the communal life of her overlapping familial and religious community. As she had guided the spiritual life of her family while living, the material artefact of her diary continued to shape the life of this extended Baptist family.

When Jane Attwater picked up Anne Cator Steele's diary, she encountered not only the words and memory of her great aunt, but a history of her family's religious life together. The diary, as it was constructed and has been preserved, demonstrates how a diary's form can embody the memory of a spiritual community. Merging spiritual diary and family chronicle, her diary integrates personal reflection with a collective record of her family's religious life as it occurred. When Anne Cator Steele's niece Jane Gibbs was in Broughton in 1751, her aunt, as noted earlier, was instrumental in guiding her to the decision to be baptised.⁹¹⁷ Anne Cator Steele wrote in her diary that her niece was 'very subject to be surpriz'd' and so Gibbs requested that she be permitted to write her spiritual experience, rather than give it extempore in front of the Broughton church. This written experience is preserved on a sheet tucked into Anne Cator Steele's diary (see Figure 17). Other written records are variously tucked, pinned, and stitched into the diary, including hymns by her stepdaughter Anne Steele (with the dates on which they were sung in the

⁹¹⁶ Joanne Bailey, 'The "After-Life" of Parenting: Memory, Parentage, and Personal Identity in Britain c. 1760-1830,' *Journal of Family History* 35, no. 3 (2010): 263; Baggerman, 'Autobiography and Family Memory in the Nineteenth Century,' 161-173; Holton, *Quaker Women*.

⁹¹⁷ Anne Cator Steele diary, 29 June–16 July 1751. AL, STE 2/1/2. See p. 247.

local Baptist church), the tombstone epitaph of a long-dead relative, and poetry written by her stepson William Steele.⁹¹⁸ The inclusion and preservation of these documents in this way denotes Anne Cator Steele's diary as a collage of her family's collective religious identity—a collage able to be consulted by later generations, such as Attwater, who encountered in it not an individualistic and solely internal spiritual account book, but an intimate and richly layered portrayal of communal life.

⁹¹⁸ Anne Cator Steele diary. AL, STE 2/1/1, 2/1/2, and 2/1/3. See also AL, STE 3/1/2. On the consideration of diary inclusions in interpreting manuscript diaries, see Cynthia Huff, 'Reading as Re-Vision: Approaches to Reading Manuscript Diaries,' *Biography* 23, no. 3 (2000): 504-523.

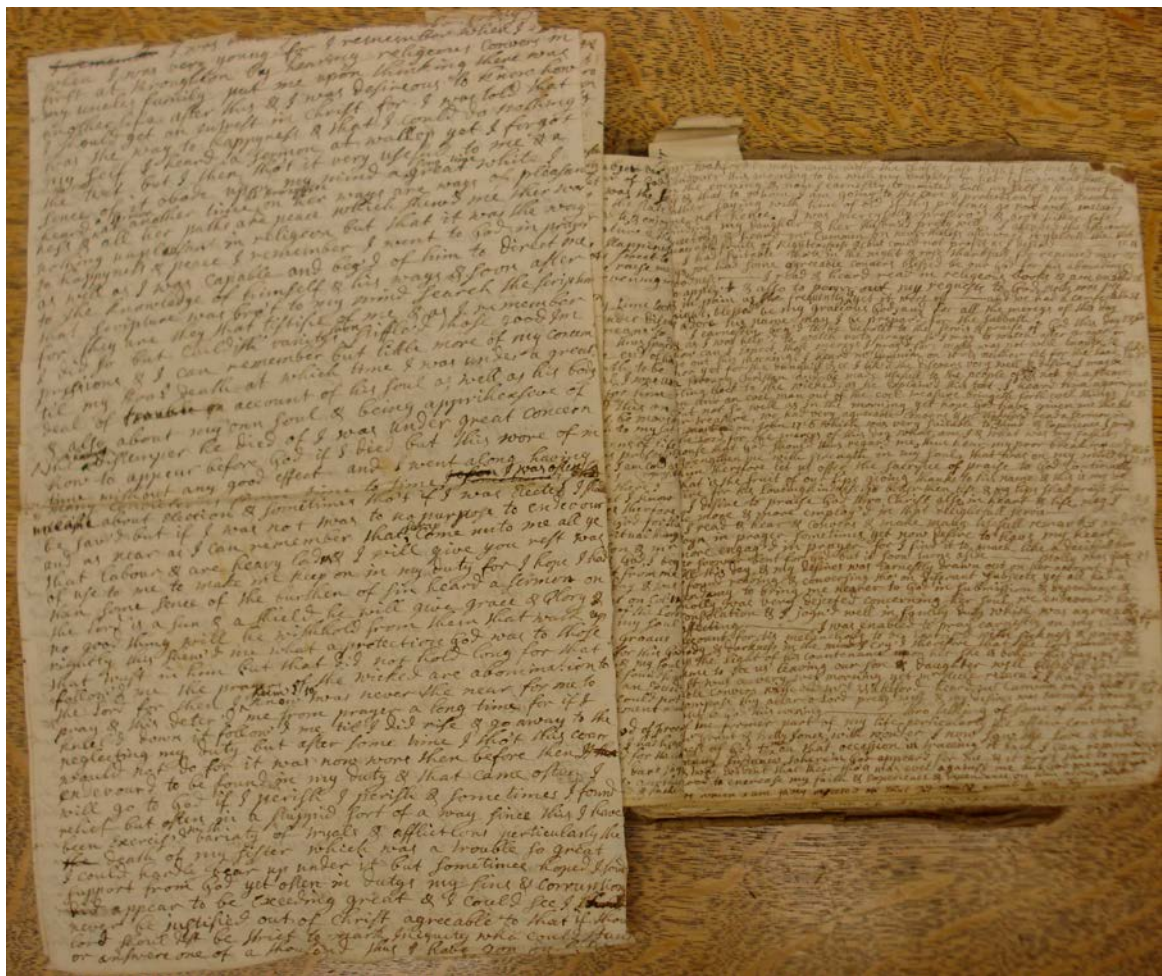


Figure 17: Jane Gibbs's spiritual experience⁹¹⁹

Perhaps taking her cue from her great aunt, Jane Attwater's diary similarly represents a layering of religious experience and family connections. Attwater's diary contains poetry addressed to friends, letters to and from family members, and fragments of her mother's and daughter's diaries, who both predeceased her. Attwater's mother kept a diary that survives only in fragments tucked inside her daughter's diary, and these insertions occur at times of personal anxiety. When Attwater's daughter Anna Blatch died at the age of sixteen, Attwater documented her declining health and eventual death in

⁹¹⁹ Spiritual autobiography of Jane Gibbs, 14 July 1751. Preserved in Anne Cator Steele diary. AL, STE 2/1/3.

poignant detail. She kept a separate diary solely for the purpose of remembering those heartbreaking months and memorialising her daughter.⁹²⁰ And alongside her own journalistic account, she placed the diary of her dead mother, Anna Attwater.⁹²¹ She herself had lost a child over fifty years earlier and recorded the event in her diary: ‘the Death of my Dear Little Babe was a Sharper Affliction then Any One can think It was’.⁹²² Either anticipating Blatch’s death or in immediate response to it, Attwater slipped the page from her mother’s diary into her own diary (see Figure 18). In conversation with her mother’s earlier entry, we have Attwater’s: ‘my beloved Anna departed this Life about half after twelve O solemn day ever to be rememberd...with y^e keenest anguish’.⁹²³ Her mother had known what she now suffered, and her efforts to practise pious resignation now guided Attwater’s response to her own loss.

⁹²⁰ Jane Attwater diary. Bodl., Reeves Collection 19/1.

⁹²¹ Anna Attwater kept a diary that has not survived apart from fragments inserted in Jane Attwater’s diary. The pages from Anna Attwater’s diary are anonymous, but a fragment kept in Attwater’s diary, dated 17 May 1740, records the writer’s baptism. See AL, Attwater Papers, acc. 76, I.A.22. The identity of the writer as Anna Attwater is based on the date of baptism, as well as on a scrap of paper at the bottom of the box containing Attwater’s diary, on which is written ‘Anna Attwater Her Book’; the hand matches the diary page here and elsewhere. See church book of Broughton Baptist Church. AL, Broughton 1/3.

⁹²² Anna Attwater diary, undated. Preserved in Jane Attwater diary for 1809. AL, Attwater Papers, acc. 76, I.A.26.

⁹²³ Jane Attwater diary, 28 July 1809. AL, Attwater Papers, acc. 76, I.A.26.

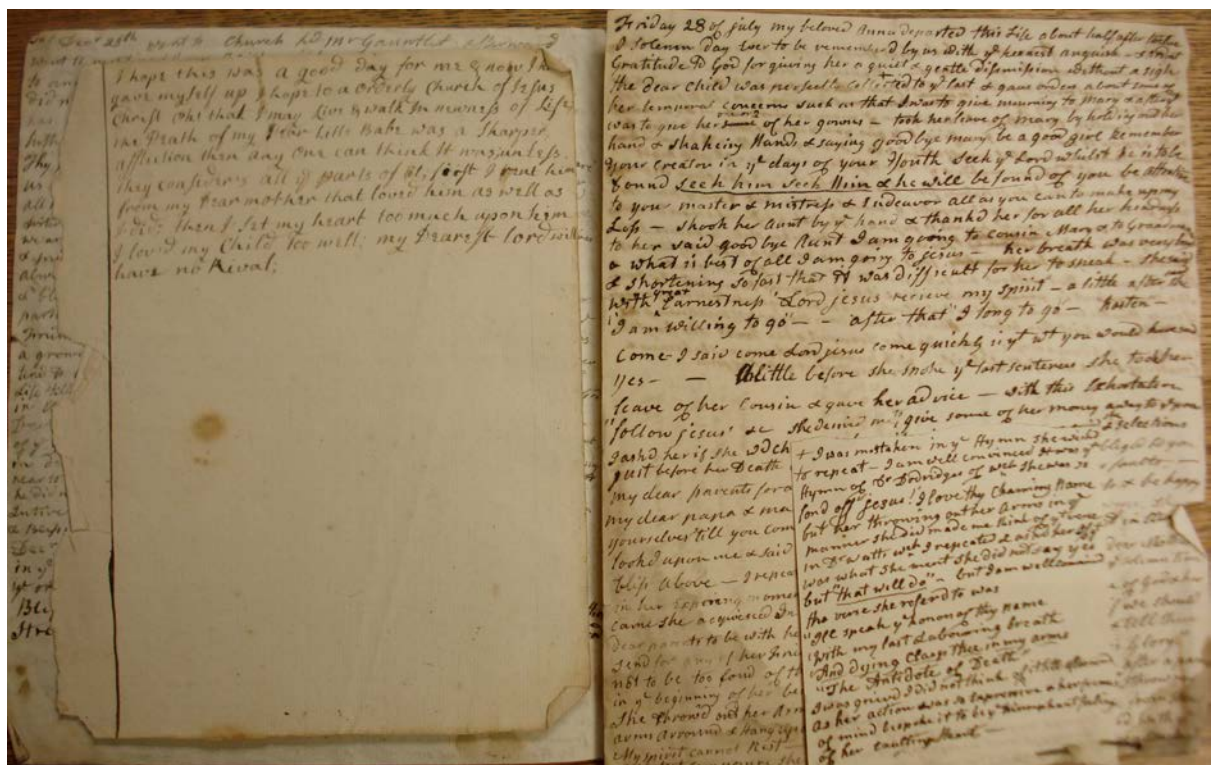


Figure 18: Jane Attwater's diary, interleaved with Anna Attwater's diary⁹²⁴

Of the religious communities considered here, the urge to memorialise is strongest amongst the Baptists, who had such a strong sense of family owing in part to their continuing memory of religious persecution.⁹²⁵ Throughout their archives are reflections in prose and poetry on the deaths of family members: these were deliberate attempts to remember much-loved persons by inscribing them in text and inserting them into their growing domestic archive. Anne Steele, for example, wrote 'To Amira on the Sudden Death of Her Mother' to comfort her half-sister after the death of Anne Cator Steele.⁹²⁶

Mary Steele followed her aunt's example, similarly writing poems 'in memory' of family

⁹²⁴ Anna Attwater diary, undated. Preserved in Jane Attwater diary for 1809. AL, Attwater Papers, acc. 76, I.A.26.

⁹²⁵ Kerry J. Birch, 'Richard Gay of Haycombe: An Exploration of a Story and Its Influence on Local Baptist Family and Community History,' *Baptist Quarterly* 37, no. 8 (1998): 367-385. On family legends of the Gays, see also Reeves, *Pursuing the Muses*, 211-213.

⁹²⁶ This poem was published posthumously as 'To Amira on the Sudden Death of Her Mother', Steele, *Poems on Subjects Chiefly Devotional*, 3:39-42.

and friends.⁹²⁷ The family also composed (often lengthy) tombstone inscriptions, the texts of which are scattered throughout the archive.⁹²⁸ In 1811, after the death of Mary Steele's husband, she wrote a memorial and kept a drawing of his grave. Funeral sermons also were transcribed into books and lodged in the archive. The active effort to memorialise family members and a familial faith is evident in these written remains.⁹²⁹

The archive also contains various memorabilia such as silhouettes of family members, which were powerful in evoking the presence of dead relatives and stimulating religious response.⁹³⁰ In 1773, when Mary Steele was twenty years old, she found a profile of her mother, who had been dead for eleven years. She reflected on the moment in verse, writing that 'Memory steals the grateful fillial tear', and praying that the memory of her mother's pious example might 'guide my erring steps to Heaven & Thee!'⁹³¹ Alongside profiles are preserved hair samples, carefully labelled and tied with string.⁹³² Silhouettes, locks of hair, recipe books, schoolbooks, samplers: the Baptist women's papers considered here were part of a larger material cache that speaks of strong familial ties, and were passed down generation to generation along with very physical reminders of ancestors' lives.⁹³³

⁹²⁷ For example, Mary Steele, 'To the Memory of the Amiable Miss Williams who dyed of the Smallpox Sept 14 1772 address to a Friend'. AL, STE 5/5/iii.

⁹²⁸ For example, Bodl., Reeves Collection, box 4.

⁹²⁹ On the external symbols of memory, including drawings, portraits, and writings, see Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family*, Ch. 14: 'The Consolations of Memory'. See also Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion and the Family in England 1480-1750*.

⁹³⁰ Bodl., Reeves Collection, boxes 17 and 22. On silhouettes and memory, see Stabile, *Memory's Daughters*, 170-175.

⁹³¹ Mary Steele, 'Occasioned by viewing a Profile of My Mother Inscrib'd to My ever Dear & Hond Father 1773'. AL, STE 5/5/iv.

⁹³² Bodl., Reeves Collection, boxes 17 and 19. Marcia Pointon observes the 'synecdochic relationship' of hair to the body, and argues that hair 'instantiates continuity and acts as a material figure for memory'. Marcia Pointon, 'Materializing Mourning: Hair, Jewellery and the Body,' in *Material Memories*, ed. Marius Kwint, Christopher Breward, and Jeremy Aynsley (Oxford: Berg, 1999), 45.

⁹³³ Bodl., Reeves Collection; AL, Steele Collection and Attwater Papers.

Religious lineages can thus be traced through religious books and Bibles, which became sites of memory and religious meaning as they were imprinted with women's hopes of passing on faith within affectionate relationships. The Steele archive reveals this gifting of books to be a chiefly female practice, reflecting cultural trends of gendered giving as well as women's felt responsibilities to guide the religious lives of children.⁹³⁴ Often this was the activity of mothers. In 1764 Jane Attwater's sister Caroline received from their mother a copy of Elizabeth Rowe's *Letters Moral and Entertaining* (1729–32). The copy was published in 1733 and therefore may have belonged to Anna Attwater before she passed it on to her daughter. Nearly twenty-five years later, in 1788, Caroline, now Whitaker, passed it on to her own daughter. The inscription leaves a trail of mothers' hopes that their daughters would accept as their own the faith that had ordered their lives, as it memorialises the faith of mother and grandmother (see Figure 19):

Caroline Attwater, Her book; gave to her by Anna Attwater, 1764. Mary Whitaker the gift of her Mother 1788.⁹³⁵

Here the line runs out, for Mary Whitaker died in 1800, having no children of her own. The book remained in the family as a memory of her lost life and the living faith of past generations.

As we have seen, aunts also were frequent donors of books, but here we see how this pattern extended across generations. Anne Steele gave a New Testament to her niece, also called Anne. It was likely on the occasion of her birth, for it was published in 1769, the year the younger Anne Steele was born. The book is inscribed with a verse written by Steele and addressed to her niece:

⁹³⁴ Grenby, *Child Reader, 1700-1840*, 172.

⁹³⁵ Bodl., Reeves Collection, box 26.

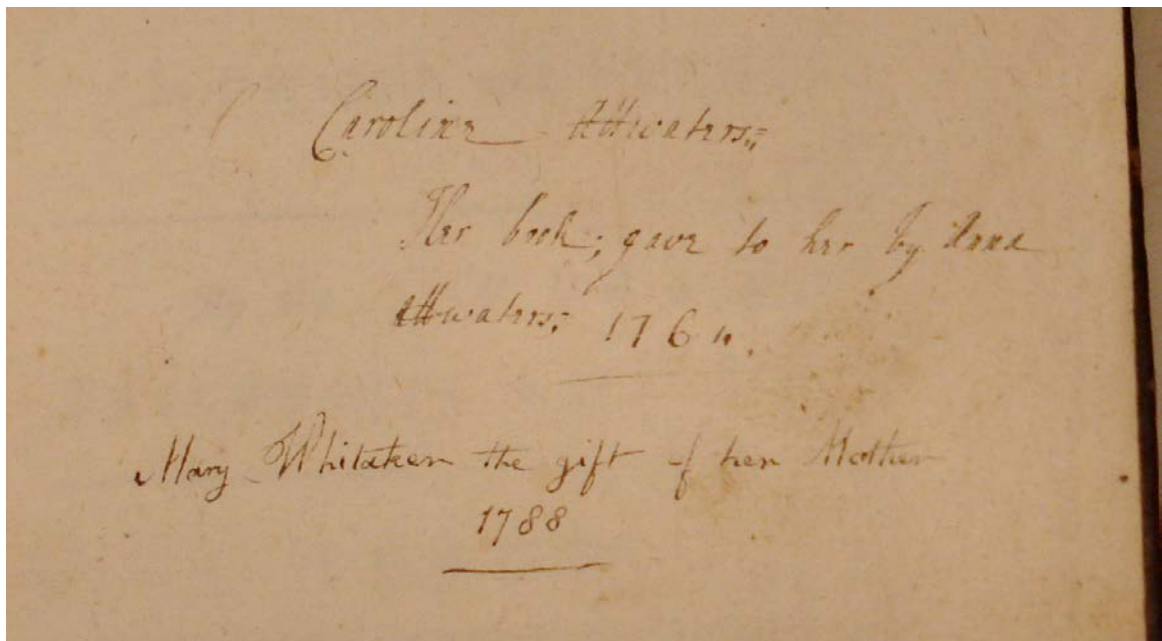


Figure 19: Attwater / Whitaker copy of Rowe's *Letters Moral and Entertaining*⁹³⁶

O may the sacred truths these leaves impart
Be blest to reach my dearest Nancy's heart!

May she read this Book with attention and pray to God to teach her to understand and love it, that she may be wise unto Salvation, is the wish of her affectionate Aunt, A. Steele.⁹³⁷

Anne Steele's own Bible was printed in 1690 and so must have belonged to someone before her, for Steele was born almost thirty years later. Two hundred years later it was still being passed through the family: an inscription dated 1893 reads, 'From Aunt Jane....S. Anne Bompas. Theodosia's Bible.'⁹³⁸ Aunt Jane had been Anne Steele's great-niece, and was also the recipient of other religious books. A copy of Isaac Watts's hymns is inscribed first by her mother when she was nine years old ('Anne Steele jun^r 1778') and then by eleven-year-old Jane ('Jane Tomkins give her by her dear Mamma June 2^d

⁹³⁶ Bodl., Reeves Collection, box 26.

⁹³⁷ AL, STE 14/6.

⁹³⁸ AL, STE 14/5.

1816').⁹³⁹ Jane Tomkins died in 1893 at the age of eighty-eight, when her niece Selina Bompas was sixty-three, and Bompas continued the pattern of passing books and Bibles to nieces and daughters. An 1816 volume containing Hester Chapone's *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind* (1773) and John Gregory's *A Father's Legacy to His Daughters* (1761) probably first belonged to Bompas's aunt. In 1920 it was inscribed by an unknown hand: 'Given to me (M) at Cambridge by S. A. B. (Selina Anne Bompas) Old Auntie'.⁹⁴⁰ These books were active in memorial transmission, complementing women's personal writings by evoking the memory and religious example of aunts and grandmothers, by helping future generations to locate themselves within a religious genealogy, and by encouraging contemporary belief.

Yet this gifting and passing on of books and Bibles transcended familial boundaries. Some books might have gained special meaning for a recipient based on the reputation or stature of the original owner, while others were passed on as a matter of affection. Such affectionate bequeathal was more typically feminine, for studies of wills show women's records revealing a more emotional investment in goods and effects.⁹⁴¹ By unknown means, Anne Steele came into the possession of the Bible of the theological writer Anne Dutton (1692–1765), who died at Great Gransden, Huntingdonshire in 1765.⁹⁴² Both were Baptist writers of some celebrity at the time so they may have known each other's work. There is no evidence that they knew each other, although in 1735

⁹³⁹ AL, STE 14/4.

⁹⁴⁰ AL, STE 14/7. The volume is first inscribed 'A. Tomkins', who is likely Anne Steele Tomkins (1802–1842), the daughter of Anne Steele Tomkins (1769–1859), who was Anne Steele's niece.

⁹⁴¹ Vickery, *Gentleman's Daughter*, 194. See also Maxine Berg, 'Women's Consumption and the Industrial Classes of Eighteenth-Century England,' *Journal of Social History* 30, no. 2 (1996): 415-434; Amanda Vickery, 'Women and the World of Goods: A Lancashire Consumer and Her Possessions, 1751-81,' in *Consumption and the World of Goods*, ed. John Brewer and Roy Porter (London: Routledge, 1993), 274-301; Gloria Main, 'Widows in Rural Massachusetts on the Eve of Revolution,' in *Women in the Age of American Revolution*, ed. Ronald Hoffman and Peter J. Albert (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989), 88-89.

⁹⁴² AL, Broughton Church 10/1.

Anne Cator Steele recorded a visit to Broughton from Dutton's husband, who was a Baptist preacher.⁹⁴³ In addition, Anna Attwater owned a Bible previously owned by Elizabeth Rogers, which Jane Attwater came into the possession of after her mother's death. She then gave it to an unnamed recipient, evidently outside of the family. A draft inscription is preserved in her diary: 'Elizabeth Rogers's Bible. Accept this as the gift of my dear & Hon^d parent M^{rs} Anna Attwater'.⁹⁴⁴

A similar practice of passing on books is discernible amongst the Methodists considered here, though they reveal both a shifting religious context and men's participation in the gifting of books. Sarah Ward (later Nind) owned a copy of James Hervey's *Meditations and Contemplations* (1746–47), and after her death in 1783 it came into the possession of her niece Elizabeth.⁹⁴⁵ When Elizabeth Ward (1788–1854) married Ann Bolton's nephew Edward (1785–1837) and moved to Finstock, Oxfordshire, she took her late aunt's books with her (see Figure 20). Like her aunt, Elizabeth Bolton was a Methodist, and while the books owned by the Baptists considered here confirm consistent religious identities, Elizabeth Bolton's books are material indicators of the breaking of spiritual genealogies that occurred with religious conversion. Elizabeth Bolton's mother Mary Corbett was born to Anglican parents and converted to Methodism when she married John Ward in 1786.⁹⁴⁶ Her brother Michael remained Anglican and gave his niece Elizabeth a copy of the *Book of Common Prayer* (see Figure 21). While a previous generation of Methodists, like Ann Bolton, could self-identify as both Anglican and Methodist and regularly attended both church and chapel, by Elizabeth Bolton's

⁹⁴³ Anne Cator Steele diary, 18 April 1735. AL, STE 2/1/1.

⁹⁴⁴ Jane Attwater diary, 1786. AL, Attwater Papers, acc. 76, I.A.15.

⁹⁴⁵ Stain.

⁹⁴⁶ Samuel Robinson, 'Memoir of Mrs. [Mary] Ward,' *The Cottager's Friend, and Guide of the Young* 1, no. 12 (1837): 165.

generation Methodism had formed a distinctive denomination and she rarely recorded attending the Anglican Church. In time she also took her uncle's gift with her to Finstock.

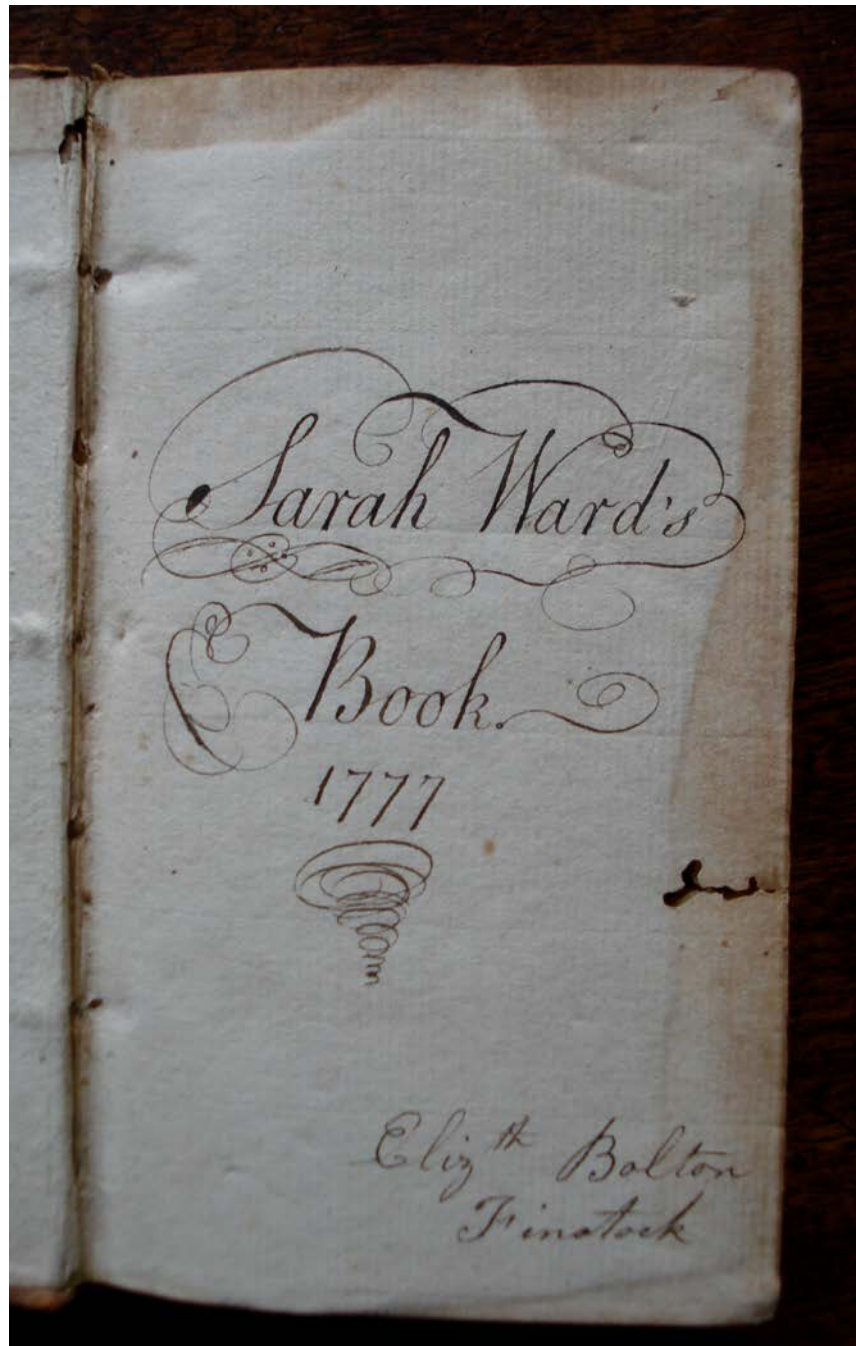


Figure 20: Sarah Ward's copy of Hervey's *Meditations and Contemplations*⁹⁴⁷

⁹⁴⁷ Stain.



Figure 21: Elizabeth Ward's *Book of Common Prayer*⁹⁴⁸

Elizabeth Bolton's aunt, Sarah Nind, was a friend of Ann Bolton's, and like Bolton she was a Methodist and an avid diarist. Her diary became a site of religious meaning amongst her family, as well as a supra-local network of Methodist friends and family. She died in childbirth in 1783 when she was thirty-six years old, by which time she had achieved a reputation for especial piety.⁹⁴⁹ After her death, her diary was circulated and read amongst her Methodist community, providing both encouragement and example to those seeking to live devout Methodist lives. The only volume of Nind's diary to have survived is preserved amongst Bolton's personal papers, though other volumes can be traced as 'fossils' in writing by and about the women of her family.⁹⁵⁰ After Nind's death her sister-in-law acquired some of the volumes of the diary, and in 1837 her biographer recorded that she frequently read its volumes, which 'greatly tended

⁹⁴⁸ Stain.

⁹⁴⁹ An autobiographical account of her life to 1769 was published by John Wesley: 'A Short Account of the Experience of Mrs. S. N.,' *AM* 12 (October 1789): 525-530 and (November 1789): 581-585. Wesley also printed at least nine of her letters, addressed both to him and to others.

⁹⁵⁰ Sarah Nind diary. Pudl., 4/51. On the inclusion of Nind's diary in Ann Bolton's personal papers and identification of Nind as author, see Appendix 3. On diary 'fossils', see Ezell, 'Domestic Papers,' 45.

to encourage her own pursuit of Christian holiness'.⁹⁵¹ Elizabeth Bolton was born five years after Nind's death, and at some later point she came to be in possession of some of the volumes of her late aunt's diary. In this next generation, Elizabeth Bolton was herself a Methodist and like her aunt (Sarah Nind) and her husband's aunt (Ann Bolton), she too kept a diary.⁹⁵² Her devotional practice included not only writing but re-reading previous diary entries—both her own and those written by her aunt.

It was often at key Methodist moments that Elizabeth Bolton turned to her aunt's diary as a spiritual guide. So in January 1834, as she marked the tenth anniversary of her experience of spiritual assurance, she not only re-read her own diary entries from January 1824, but she turned to Nind's diary to read about her aunt's religious experience, which she then reflected on in her own diary—a complex layering of text and time.⁹⁵³ In more difficult times, when she 'felt very dry and barren', she would appeal to her aunt's diary to stir up her spiritual desires and thus renew her quest for perfection.⁹⁵⁴ For over three decades she reflected on her own religious experience in light of her aunt's prior experience, investing her late aunt's diary with authority based on an exemplary spiritual life lived much closer in time to the beginnings of Methodism. More than fifty years after and many miles from where it was written, Sarah Nind's diary, having been passed along the women of her family, provided the example of a Methodist life well lived for a niece she never knew.

While members of the Steele family turned to a family archive to learn from past examples of Baptist faithfulness, and Ann Bolton and Elizabeth Bolton looked to the

⁹⁵¹ Robinson, 'Memoir of Mrs. [Mary] Ward,' 167.

⁹⁵² Elizabeth Bolton also recorded reading her mother, Mary Ward's 'memorandum book'. Elizabeth Bolton diary, 18 March 1832. Stain. Excerpts from Mary Ward's diary can be found in *ibid.*, 168-169.

⁹⁵³ Elizabeth Bolton diary, 19 January 1834. Stain.

⁹⁵⁴ Elizabeth Bolton diary, 25 August 1831. Stain.

personal papers of fellow Methodists for spiritual models, Catherine Talbot's proximity to wider literary circles provided access to manuscripts beyond those of family and close friends. Her relationship with the Duchess of Somerset, who had been a close friend of the writer Elizabeth Rowe, especially facilitated this access. Talbot had long admired Rowe's writing, referring to her in a letter to Carter as 'our favourite Mrs Rowe' and expressing delight when given opportunity to read her manuscripts.⁹⁵⁵ Rowe has been the subject of considerable scholarship on the manuscript cultures of eighteenth-century women. In their efforts to demonstrate the multiple ways in which women participated in the circulation of ideas, literary scholars such as Kathryn King and Robin Kirschbaum have highlighted Rowe's agency in negotiating overlapping modes of publication: print and manuscript.⁹⁵⁶ While the circulation of Rowe's manuscripts evidently heightened her literary influence during her lifetime, they continued to circulate after her death, functioning within personal relationships and as spiritual legacy.

The Duchess of Somerset acted as a custodian and overseer of some of Rowe's personal writings after her death in 1737, preserving and managing her memory, creating a site of communal religious meaning in her late friend's writings to her.⁹⁵⁷ During Rowe's lifetime, as Somerset received letters and poems from Rowe—which were permeated with religious reflections—she took measures to preserve them by transcribing

⁹⁵⁵ Catherine Talbot to Elizabeth Carter, 2 August 1748. Pennington, ed., *Letters between Carter and Talbot*, 1:290.

⁹⁵⁶ King, 'Elizabeth Singer Rowe's Tactical Use of Print and Manuscript,' 158-181; Robin Kirschbaum, 'Thoughts "All Easy and Sociable": Elizabeth Singer Rowe and Coterie Exchange,' in *Readers, Audiences and Coterie in Early Modern England*, ed. Geoff Baker and Ann McGruer (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2006), 47-60. See also Prescott, 'Provincial Networks, Dissenting Connections, and Noble Friends,' 29-42; Bigold, *Women of Letters, Manuscript Circulation, and Print Afterlives in the Eighteenth Century*.

⁹⁵⁷ Before her death, Rowe prepared those manuscripts in her possession for possible publication. These she entrusted to Isaac Watts and her brother-in-law Theophilus Rowe. Watts published those given to him as *Devout Exercises of the Heart* (1737), while Rowe published those entrusted to him as *Miscellaneous Works in Prose and Verse* (1739).

them into a volume with green leather covers, often referred to by her and others as the ‘green book’.⁹⁵⁸ Melanie Bigold refers to the book as a ‘showpiece for visitors’, and indeed it does seem to have been constructed for ‘public’ use, including being copied and circulated.⁹⁵⁹ The Duchess’s agency in preparing the ‘green book’ is evident: Bigold notes her ‘presence’ throughout the book, visible in her editing and annotating the transcriptions.⁹⁶⁰ Further, the book does not contain every letter sent to her by Rowe. When Rowe’s brother-in-law requested permission to publish Rowe’s letters, she sent him the ‘green book’, and in his return letter he referred to other letters that she was unwilling to show him.⁹⁶¹

When Talbot visited Percy Lodge the Duchess permitted her access to Rowe’s manuscripts, and Talbot read and reflected on the ‘green book’ in particular at length. Scholars of the bluestocking circle, whose interests in women’s social and intellectual influence have driven a tendency to interpret Talbot in terms of literary output, have wrongly assumed that the ‘green book’ mentioned in her correspondence was a volume of her own writings.⁹⁶² In September 1753 Carter wrote to urge Talbot to spend time on ‘that most excellent green book’, and scholars have construed Carter’s encouragement as an

⁹⁵⁸ The ‘green book’ is now in the possession of the Duke of Northumberland. See DNP 110. The Duchess of Somerset also copied the Countess of Pomfret’s letters into a book, which she considered amongst her most treasured possessions. Bingley, ed., *Correspondence between the Duchess of Somerset and the Countess of Pomfret*, 2:46.

⁹⁵⁹ Bigold, ‘Elizabeth Rowe’s Fictional and Familiar Letters,’ 3. On the ‘green book’ being copied and circulated, see references to it in Luxborough, *Letters Written by Lady Luxborough to William Shenstone*.

⁹⁶⁰ Bigold, ‘Elizabeth Rowe’s Fictional and Familiar Letters,’ 3.

⁹⁶¹ Theophilus Rowe to the Duchess of Somerset, 17 November 1737. Helen Sard Hughes, ‘Elizabeth Rowe and the Countess of Hertford,’ *Publications of the Modern Language Association* 59, no. 3 (1944): 740. Some of these letters were published as Rowe’s *Letters Moral and Entertaining*, but others were not. Bigold, ‘Elizabeth Rowe’s Fictional and Familiar Letters,’ 3.

⁹⁶² Zuk, ed., *Catherine Talbot and Hester Chapone*, 6–8. See also Clarke, ‘Bluestocking Fictions,’ 467; Myers, *Bluestocking Circle*, 213–214. For earlier examples of this assumption, see Montagu Pennington, ‘Some Account of the Life of Mrs. Catharine [sic] Talbot’, in Catherine Talbot, *The Works of the Late Miss Catherine Talbot*, 7th ed. (London: Printed for F. C. and J. Rivington, 1809), xvii–xviii; Walter S. Scott, *The Bluestocking Ladies* (London: John Green, 1947), 179.

effort to quell a native diffidence on Talbot's part.⁹⁶³ Yet rather than cause for regretting a lack of publishing activity, Talbot's interaction with the 'green book' actually is evidence of her participation in a collective process of maintaining memory and meaning begun by the Duchess. In November, while Talbot was at Percy Lodge, she wrote to Carter explaining that she was making little progress on the 'green book'. She added that she 'attempted once or twice to ask questions about it', presumably of the Duchess, 'but being referred to some other time, that other time has never yet come'.⁹⁶⁴ Returning to London she brought the 'green book' away with her, writing to Carter two months later that 'it is not out of my mind, and I have even put down some hints for future use'.⁹⁶⁵ The nature of her work on the 'green book' is unknown and appears to have been left unfinished, perhaps cut short by the Duchess's death six months later.⁹⁶⁶

Talbot's active engagement with the manuscripts preserved by the Duchess can be traced not only in references to the 'green book' in her diary and correspondence, but in the manuscripts themselves. As the Duchess was filling the 'green book' with Rowe's poems and letters, she was simultaneously engaging in a collective commonplacing project with friends and family. Her personal archive contains volumes written in various hands, including her daughter Elizabeth (who would become the first Duchess of Northumberland) and Talbot. Talbot's hand appears at various points in these volumes, as in her transcription of a sonnet by the poet Thomas Edwards, whose verse circulated in manuscript in the middle part of the eighteenth century:

⁹⁶³ Elizabeth Carter to Catherine Talbot, 21 September 1753. Pennington, ed., *Letters between Carter and Talbot*, 2:141. Cf. Elizabeth Carter to Catherine Talbot, 10 December 1753. *Ibid.*, 2:147.

⁹⁶⁴ Catherine Talbot to Elizabeth Carter, 12 November 1753. *Ibid.*, 2:145.

⁹⁶⁵ Catherine Talbot to Elizabeth Carter, 19 January 1754. *Ibid.*, 2:153.

⁹⁶⁶ She seems to have been acting as a custodian of other manuscripts as well, for she also referred to the 'other papers, your's and all' that 'lie in the same hopeless condition'. Catherine Talbot to Elizabeth Carter, 12 November 1753. *Ibid.*, 2:145.

My gracious God, whose kind conducting hand
Has steer'd me through this Lifes tumultuous sea
From many a rock, & many a tempest free...⁹⁶⁷

Of particular interest is the final entry in the 'green book', also in Talbot's hand. Here is a letter from Rowe to the Duchess, written years earlier, in which Rowe set out some thoughts on the fleetingness of time, 'for your Ladyships edification'.⁹⁶⁸ She charged the Duchess to beware of 'Killing Time' ('There is a sort of Terror in that Phrase'), but rather endeavour to 'Redeem' her time on earth ('this Flying Treasure'), while directing her thoughts towards heaven. Such instruction must have resonated with Talbot's own concern to use her time wisely, and must have had particular authority coming from her 'favourite Mrs Rowe' via the Duchess, her spiritual mentor. In making this entry, Talbot wrote herself into a literary and spiritual lineage that included Elizabeth Rowe and the Duchess of Somerset.

Rowe's manuscripts functioned as sites of memory, transmitting religious meaning through at least four generations. While scholars have tended to describe the relationship of the Duchess of Somerset and Elizabeth Rowe as a friendship, it might better be described as a mentorship, for the Duchess was twenty-five years younger than Rowe and was inspired by her exemplary piety both in life and, posthumously, by her personal papers.⁹⁶⁹ In this way, Rowe acted as a spiritual elder, and in superintending Rowe's memory (through her manuscripts) the Duchess passed on Rowe's spiritual legacy to Talbot, who was herself mentored by the Duchess. But the line of this spiritual and material legacy can be traced further still. In November 1753, when Talbot was visiting the Duchess at Percy Lodge and narrating her visit in diary entries that were

⁹⁶⁷ 'Sonnet of Mr E:s'. DNP 118, f. 102.

⁹⁶⁸ DNP 110.

⁹⁶⁹ Hughes, 'Elizabeth Rowe and the Countess of Hertford,' 726-746.

addressed to Julia Berkeley, she wrote, ‘The good Duchess has given me a Treasure – a Manuscript Letter of M^{rs} Rowes that was never printed.’⁹⁷⁰ A personal letter, written by the Duchess’s spiritual mentor and withheld by her from printing and thus public consumption, became a gift given in personal relationship. And a gift that was further shared in affectionate relationship, for Talbot promised Julia, ‘In the Month of May You shall see it.’⁹⁷¹

Steele, Bolton, and Talbot each participated in spiritual communities in which women’s personal writings held religious meaning, functioning posthumously as sources of communal memory that were used to order contemporary religious life. Whether consulted in the longstanding family homes of Baptists, in circulation within supra-local Methodist communities, or copied and shared amongst more diffuse Anglican circles, women’s personal writings continued to have life and meaning within religious communities long after the death of their authors.

Religious Identities and Cultures

In writing, as in preserving manuscripts and managing archives that functioned as the corporate memory of spiritual communities, the women considered here were active in shaping religious identities and cultures. This section analyses denominational distinctions more closely, asking what preservation patterns and manuscript usages might convey about different religious communities. In particular, what do Steele’s, Talbot’s, and Bolton’s respective attitudes toward time and memory communicate about religious identities and cultures?

⁹⁷⁰ Catherine Talbot diary, 22 November 1753. BL, Add. 46688.

⁹⁷¹ Catherine Talbot diary, 22 November 1753. BL, Add. 46688.

Baptists: Domestic archive, lineage of faith

With their familial memory of religious persecution, the Baptists considered here understood themselves religiously with reference to the past and therefore had a greater tendency to recount interwoven familial and spiritual genealogies than other religious communities. Women's writing activities were crucial in preserving these lineages of faith. Neil Keeble argues that nonconformists in the period were disproportionately literate on account of their greater need to reinforce their communal religious identity by telling stories of their past.⁹⁷² 'Communication and writing', he states, 'were essential to the continuance of nonconformity.'⁹⁷³ John Seed elaborates, noting the importance of memory for nonconformists: 'The future of Dissent...required a continuing commitment to the past and the production of meaningful connections with Dissenters of previous generations stretching back beyond living memory....Dissent was, in other words, an identity rooted in narrative history.'⁹⁷⁴ Seed indeed focuses his analysis on official retellings of British nonconformity: he cites Edmund Calamy's published accounts of ejected ministers (1702, 1713) and Daniel Neal's *History of the Puritans; or, Protestant Nonconformists* (1732–38) as especially important means by which the written word was effective in 'remembering, renewing, and reinforcing' nonconformist identity.⁹⁷⁵ Both works focus on the lives of nonconformist ministers and were written by nonconformist ministers. While more hidden, women's unofficial and more personal retellings, preserved in domestic archives, were as effective in reinforcing Baptist identity, often on a local level and within the context of close familial relationship.

⁹⁷² N. H. Keeble, *The Literary Culture of Nonconformity in Later Seventeenth-Century England* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1987), 82. See also Whyman, *Pen and the People*, 17; Reeves, *Pursuing the Muses*, 5.

⁹⁷³ Keeble, *Literary Culture of Nonconformity*, 82.

⁹⁷⁴ John Seed, 'History and Narrative Identity: Religious Dissent and the Politics of Memory in Eighteenth-Century England,' *Journal of British Studies* 44, no. 1 (2005): 48.

⁹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

Facilitated by her reading of the personal papers of past generations, Jane Attwater had a strong sense of her position in a lineage of family and faith. In a letter to her sister Caroline Whitaker, Attwater wrote of ‘our worthy ancestors & Friends.... a Gay a Steele an Attwater & a Whitaker will not be forgotten all died in Faith’.⁹⁷⁶ Her letter was an effort to write her family into biblical reflections on ancestral faith. She wrote a ‘motto’ at the top of a draft of this letter, which is preserved in her diary: ‘Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses...’⁹⁷⁷ The verse is from Hebrews 12, which commends the faith of the biblical patriarchs, from Abel through Abraham and Moses. Attwater recast this biblical lineage in more familiar terms, writing to her sister of their own ‘Antient Worthies’; she considered herself to live in ‘later periods of Time’, and she looked back to previous generations who had ‘borne a glorious Testamony to the Truth of our holy Religion’.⁹⁷⁸ Unlike those to whom Calamy and Neal pointed, Attwater clarified that these ‘Antient Worthies’ were also those with whom she and her sister were ‘most Intimately connected’.⁹⁷⁹ And lest there be any doubt which Gay, Steele, Attwater, or Whitaker she admired, in a postscript she specified that they included matriarchs: ‘our Hon^d Aunt Steele...the amiable & pious Theodosia...our hon^d Mother’.⁹⁸⁰ That is, Anne Cator Steele, Anne Steele and, Anna Attwater—all of whom left personal papers Attwater later read and reflected on in her own writing—were amongst those she considered most ‘worthy’.

In Baptist circles, the personal writings of Attwater, Steele, and other women were uniquely able to define a lineage of faith and shape religious identity and culture. Baptist

⁹⁷⁶ Jane Attwater to Caroline Attwater, July 1801. AL, Attwater Papers, acc. 76, II.B.3(d).

⁹⁷⁷ Jane Attwater to Caroline Attwater, [July 1801]. Draft letter preserved in Jane Attwater diary. AL, Attwater Papers, acc. 76, I.A.24.

⁹⁷⁸ Jane Attwater to Caroline Attwater, July 1801. AL, Attwater Papers, acc. 76, II.B.3(d).

⁹⁷⁹ Jane Attwater to Caroline Attwater, July 1801. AL, Attwater Papers, acc. 76, II.B.3(d).

⁹⁸⁰ Jane Attwater to Caroline Attwater, July 1801. AL, Attwater Papers, acc. 76, II.B.3(d).

ecclesiology avoided a centralised denominational confession, emphasising instead that each local church was an independent ‘gathered community’.⁹⁸¹ Without a leader like John Wesley authorising denominational positions, or the formal synthesis of Anglican belief found in the *Book of Common Prayer*, Baptist churches located sources of authority more locally and personally. Women’s personal writings were one such source of authority, and the eighteenth century supplied the conditions for their favourable acceptance. This was a pivotal moment when a tendency to look back toward previous generations that were still within living memory converged with the fresh influence of the evangelical revival, and in so doing elevated memory, emotion, and personal experience—and women’s writings, which incorporated these qualities—as sites of spiritual authority.⁹⁸² Personal writing stored in domestic archives, together with an emphasis on a lineage of faith, thus empowered Baptist women to shape religious identity and culture.

Anglicans: Public access, affirming a public faith

Unlike the Baptists considered here, Anglicans such as Catherine Talbot did not have the same drive to recall past generations in order to understand themselves religiously. Indeed, while Talbot regularly re-read the personal papers of deceased friends and others (such as Elizabeth Rowe), she encouraged wholehearted living in the present. In a diary entry addressed to Julia Berkeley she wrote, ‘while the tenderest Affection Gratitude & Esteem is preserved for every Absent Friend as strongly as if they were still Present one

⁹⁸¹ See p. 87.

⁹⁸² On the influence of the evangelical revival on Baptist churches, see W. Morgan Patterson, ‘The Evangelical Revival and the Baptists,’ in *Pilgrim Pathways: Essays in Baptist History in Honour of B. R. White*, ed. William H. Brackney, Paul Fiddes, and John H. Y. Briggs (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1999), 243-262; Hayden, *Continuity and Change*, Ch. 9: ‘The Evangelical Revival and Particular Baptists’.

should keep ones Thoughts as much as possible collected in the literally present Spot'.⁹⁸³ This produced inevitable tensions for Talbot. She wanted to remember and honour past friends: in June 1751, three years after Catherine Secker's death, she wrote in her diary, 'J[']ai lu aussi un peu d'Aristie', remembering her as a 'kind Instrument in the Hands of So Gracious so Unerring a Providence'.⁹⁸⁴ But as much as she regretted lost family and friends, she considered it her duty to be content in the present. On the day she recorded reading Catherine Secker's papers, she told herself in her diary, 'c'est toujours un Devoir de se tenir le plus heureux qu'on peut & ni aller chercher la Misere dans une Futurité voilée ou dans un attendrissement inutile'.⁹⁸⁵ This effort to be content, managing her emotions and presenting a cheerful outward countenance, is evident throughout her diary and correspondence.

Talbot's effort to manifest correct emotions was connected to her more visible role in ecclesiastical and literary circles, and in polite society in London. Her social and religious life was more publicly regulated and displayed than either Steele's or Bolton's, and she had seen her own and others' personal papers taken up in efforts to direct a public religiosity. In the 1760s she was surprised to find that an equally pious and polite letter she had written to her newborn cousin in 1742 continued to be copied and circulated in manuscript ('the Ghost of my own poor Letter...still walking bout the World').⁹⁸⁶ Emma Major uses Talbot in her discussion of the ways in which bluestocking women acted as

⁹⁸³ Catherine Talbot diary, 19 December 1753. BL, Add. 46688.

⁹⁸⁴ 'I also read a bit of Aristie'. Aristie was Talbot's affectionate pseudonym for Catherine Secker. Catherine Talbot diary, 3 and 14 June 1751. BL, Add. 46690.

⁹⁸⁵ '[I]t is always a Duty to hold on to the happiness we can & not to look for misery in a veiled Futurity or in a useless emotion'. Catherine Talbot diary, 3 June 1751. BL, Add. 46690.

⁹⁸⁶ Catherine Talbot to Eliza Berkeley, 21 February [no year]. BL, Add. 39312, f. 319. See also Zuk, ed., *Catherine Talbot and Hester Chapone*, 167-170; Myers, *Bluestocking Circle*, 207-209, 310 n. 1.

public, national examples of pious living.⁹⁸⁷ She argues that Talbot's social standing, particularly within the Anglican Church, and the influence and power this gave her, translated personal qualities of virtue and piety into means of public service.⁹⁸⁸ Elizabeth Montagu once wrote to Elizabeth Carter, 'I look upon her life as a publick concern'.⁹⁸⁹ Major's emphasis is on Talbot's public and contemporary activities, but her argument can be extended to the ways in which her and other Anglican women's manuscripts were used, including posthumously. While the Steeles wrote anticipating the incorporation of their personal papers into a domestic archive that was a material manifestation of a lineage of faith, Talbot could imagine her personal papers becoming part of a larger and more immediate public, articulating and furthering a national religion.

Thoroughly as Talbot and others located themselves within the Anglican Church, the way in which women's manuscripts functioned posthumously within Anglican circles reveals an ecumenism not sufficiently recognised. Talbot was moved by reading the papers of Anglican women such as Catherine Secker, but the personal papers of Elizabeth Rowe had a particularly stimulating effect on her religious life, and Rowe was an Independent. Rowe is a fascinating figure for whom convenient boundaries consistently break down: between print and manuscript publication (as seen earlier); between letters as fiction or non-fiction (for example, *Letters from the Dead to the Living* [1728]); and between nonconformity and the Established Church. Perhaps because of these ambiguities, she had an appreciative readership across a denominational spectrum.⁹⁹⁰

⁹⁸⁷ Major, *Madam Britannia*, esp. Ch. 2: 'Performing Madam Britannia and the Blessing of Example'. See also Emma Major, 'The Politics of Sociability: Public Dimensions of the Bluestocking Millennium,' in *Reconsidering the Bluestockings*, ed. Nicole Pohl and Betty A. Schellenberg (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 2003), 175-192.

⁹⁸⁸ Major, *Madam Britannia*, 69, 84-96.

⁹⁸⁹ Elizabeth Montagu to Elizabeth Carter, [1759]. HL, MO 3033.

⁹⁹⁰ Jane Shaw, 'Religious Love,' in *The History of British Women's Writing, 1690-1750*, ed. Ros Ballaster (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 190-191. Elizabeth Carter modeled her early career after Rowe.

Indeed, she was read and admired by Bolton, Steele, and Talbot, and thus provides a helpful reminder that while it is profitable to tease out distinctions in denominational belief, it is also important to recognise points of crossover and commonality. In 1777 Bolton invited three friends for tea and later wrote in her diary, ‘We were blest in reading part of “M^{rs} Rowes devout meditations”’, and the Steele archive contains transcribed letters from Rowe to the Duchess of Somerset, Isaac Watts, and others.⁹⁹¹ Talbot’s reading of Rowe illuminates her efforts to affirm a public, national faith in the midst of a plural religious scene. The eighteenth-century Anglican Church has sometimes been described as a *via media*, a ‘middle way’ between Puritanism and Roman Catholicism.⁹⁹² Here we perceive the Anglican Church also positioned at a middle point in time, neither looking backwards as were the Baptists, nor turning to the future to create something new as were the Methodists (as we will see in the next section), but secure in the present, where women’s manuscripts were taken up in public ways to affirm a public faith.

Methodists: Moving manuscripts, forging a new faith

More clearly than those of Baptists and Anglicans, Methodist women’s personal writings were powerful shapers of spiritual communities after the death of their authors. During the first generations of the movement Methodists had no communal memory on which to draw to support their religious self-understandings. In the absence of such memory, and in a culture that valued religious experience, personal writings such as letters, diaries, and spiritual autobiographies assumed especial meaning and authority. Reg Ward has argued,

Norma Clarke, ‘Soft Passions and Darling Themes: From Elizabeth Singer Rowe (1674-1737) to Elizabeth Carter (1717-1806),’ *Women’s Writing* 7 (2000): 353-371.

⁹⁹¹ Ann Bolton diary, 5 August 1777. Pudl., 2/8. AL, STE 3/17/5. On Talbot and Carter’s appreciation of Rowe, see Myers, *Bluestocking Circle*, 153-154.

⁹⁹² On the eighteenth-century Anglican Church as a ‘middle way’, see Major, *Madam Britannia*, 32-33; Walsh and Taylor, ‘Introduction: The Church and Anglicanism in the “Long” Eighteenth Century,’ 51-57.

‘The movements of renewal and revival of the eighteenth century sought their legitimisation in the hand of God in history; their characteristic achievement was not, like the Reformers of the sixteenth century, to offer a confession of faith for public discussion, but to accumulate archives which would support their understanding of history.’⁹⁹³ As these archives were accumulating during the eighteenth century, second and third generation Methodists, as we have seen, turned to them purposefully as they sought new patterns of life and religious expression. Thus as their papers were preserved and used, women participated posthumously in the active construction of a new religious community and culture.

This formative period was a cultural moment when women were particularly able to shape spiritual identities and the religious culture of Methodism. It is well known that the early decades of Methodism provided novel opportunities for women. Contemporary commentators and modern scholars alike have noted the new possibilities for preaching and other public activity that were taken up by Methodist women in the period.⁹⁹⁴ Yet this was not the common experience of women. Indeed David Hempton observes the ambiguities of women’s experiences, since Methodism provided a space within which certain women excelled at preaching and persuasion, even while the movement was grounded in domestic piety and moral restraint.⁹⁹⁵ More recently Hempton has stated that Methodism was ‘comprehensively shaped by women in ways that we still do not fully understand’.⁹⁹⁶ Analysing the ways in which personal papers functioned posthumously exemplify further ways in which women, within affectionate relationships and

⁹⁹³ Ward, *Protestant Evangelical Awakening*, 2.

⁹⁹⁴ See discussion in Introduction, p. 31.

⁹⁹⁵ Hempton, *Religion of the People*, 196.

⁹⁹⁶ Hempton, *Methodism*, 149.

(sometimes) domestic circumstances, comprehensively shaped Methodism during its formative years.

Following the deaths of their writers, women's personal writings functioned beyond the walls of home and thus illuminate more than domestic Methodist piety. Manuscripts also moved amongst supra-local communities, as demonstrated by the preservation of Sarah Nind's diary amongst Ann Bolton's personal papers. Tracing these manuscripts shows not only how they functioned posthumously within spiritual communities, but defines the very boundaries of those communities and of women's places within those communities. As noted, scholars of Methodism have tended to interpret Methodist spirituality in terms of local bands and classes, but here we have encountered persistent movement, both of women and of their manuscripts.⁹⁹⁷ Personal writings provide material evidence that Methodist women's spiritual lives were not strictly limited by family and home or, indeed, geography. As they moved amongst supra-local Methodist communities, their personal writings demonstrated spiritual experience and expression to those attempting to find their way in a new religious culture, and so helped to forge a new faith.

Conclusion

While an historiographical bias toward ecclesiastical structure and power for many years caused women to be excluded from the memory of the church, considerable efforts have since been made to restore women to that memory. Rather than directly continue this restoration work, however, in this chapter I have argued that eighteenth-century women, as writers of letters, diaries, and other personal writings, actively created spiritual

⁹⁹⁷ For example, *ibid.*, 78-79.

memory and so shaped religious cultures. Particularly active as preservers of manuscripts, they intentionally read and re-read the papers in their care, finding in them direction for their own spiritual lives. Broadly similar patterns of preservation and use are discernible across denominations, though significant social and religious differences can also be perceived. The interwoven nature of spiritual and familial lineages is evident in Baptist women's writings, which often persist as richly layered accounts of a family's faith. In turning to the writings of past generations, women such as Jane Attwater received guidance for the present as she gained a sense of her religious heritage. Methodist women's writings were not written nor appealed to under the same domestic conditions, and in the relatively early days of Methodism they became a source of authority to which others turned to make sense of new and confusing spiritual experiences. So Elizabeth Bolton turned to Sarah Nind's earlier experience of sanctification, as it was reflected on in her diary. The personal writings of the Anglican women considered here, and their use of earlier writings, took place within broader social and literary worlds and a religious world with less need to define itself according to the past or to delineate a new future. Catherine Talbot's reading of Catherine Secker's manuscripts took place alongside her reading of Elizabeth Rowe's manuscripts. Conformist and nonconformist, intimate friend and literary icon: both were valued for their posthumous religious guidance. In each case, women's personal writings, preserved by family, friends, and others, embodied the past and were cherished as spiritual legacies. Used within religious communities these manuscripts powerfully shaped religious cultures and communities.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

This thesis has used women's personal writings to examine eighteenth-century English women's spiritual lives, both individually and communally. A picture has emerged of women using letters, diaries, and poetry in vital and unexplored ways both to situate themselves within and to forge religious communities. Women's writing extended well beyond the bounds of nuclear families or a world of women and were unlimited by institutional structures and practices. While formal (often male) religious activities are more easily uncovered in archives, women's informal activities are often as hidden as their personal papers, which might be anonymous or embedded in the papers of others. Identifying women's papers not only restores female voices that long have been silenced, but reveals the nature of their participation in spiritual communities. Fragments of Anna Attwater's diary, interleaved in her daughter Jane Attwater's diary, speak eloquently of her posthumous ability to offer religious guidance to her daughter, and of her daughter's imaginative use of family manuscripts. The anonymous diaries preserved amongst Ann Bolton's personal papers, one of which was revealed to be that of her friend Sarah Nind, illuminate a shared diary culture in which writing elevated women as spiritual and literary exemplars. And Catherine Talbot's transcription of Elizabeth Rowe's letters in the Duchess of Somerset's commonplace books reveals a generational transmission of spiritual wisdom that stretched beyond the boundaries of family and denomination.

The material analysed here also suggests the need to reconsider understandings of the family, which have emphasised the emergence of the affectionate nuclear family in

this period.⁹⁹⁸ Rather than conforming to the ideal of a closed and sentimentalised nuclear family, in which the role of mother was essentialised as pious and instructive,⁹⁹⁹ the embodiment of family has here emerged as a highly flexible form. Interest in one's own or in loved ones' spiritual states led to a capacious sense of family, and relational boundaries between sibling and friend, or between mentor and parent, exhibited remarkable porosity. So Anne Cator Steele could consider her nieces and nephews, and even servants, to be her spiritual children, and Catherine Talbot turned to Thomas Secker as 'the tenderest Father'. More than tropes of spiritual kinship, affectionate and spiritual ties were interwoven in complex ways, overriding (and sometimes enhancing) more straightforward biological ties. It should also be noted that the intra- and inter-generational relationships analysed here in successive chapters (that of friend, elder, child) were not always so neatly delineated: children might instruct adults, and friends act as mentors. While a child, Anna Blatch was able to animate her mother's religious reflection. And though a friend, Elizabeth Carter acted as Catherine Talbot's spiritual 'confessor'. While these relationships are considered separately here for analytical purposes, the intricacies and subtleties of their interleaving are acknowledged.

Removing the nuclear family from its hegemonic position and decentring the role of mother has also highlighted the significance of neglected figures such as childless single women, who played important roles in religious communities yet have not been given the same critical attention as mothers. At a time when single women were often denigrated as 'females without a function', women such as Catherine Talbot and Anne

⁹⁹⁸ Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), Part 4: 'The Closed Domesticated Nuclear Family'. See also the discussion in Pearsall, *Atlantic Families*, 4-13. For discussions of the sentimentalised nuclear family in literature and art, see Christopher Flint, *Family Fictions: Narrative and Domestic Relations in Britain, 1688-1798* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997); Kate Retford, *The Art of Domestic Life: Family Portraiture in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

⁹⁹⁹ See discussion in Bailey, *Parenting in England*, 4-5.

Steele played pivotal roles in the transmission of faith to younger, much-loved friends and family.¹⁰⁰⁰ They creatively used literary genres to provide religious instruction, as Talbot did when she exchanged diaries with Julia Berkeley, and Steele did in catechising Mary Steele through poetry. In fact, their singleness sometimes facilitated such purposeful interactions, since their relatively greater freedom from the obligations of home and family enabled opportunities to travel and correspond. Women's personal papers also illuminate how travel was often motivated by spiritual concerns and complemented women's literary interactions in forging religious communities.

Analysing women's literary interactions in community also challenges overlapping scholarships that focus on the self. The eighteenth century has been depicted as the time when the notion of the modern introspective self emerged,¹⁰⁰¹ while feminist literary criticism often interprets women's writing as a crucial mode of verbal self-discovery and self-empowerment.¹⁰⁰² In such assessments writing was a place to focus on one's self, including one's spiritual self.¹⁰⁰³ Yet the women considered here consistently understood themselves in terms of their affectionate and spiritual communities, and their literary activities were motivated by such communal and emotional ties as much as by individual efforts to understand and articulate their faith. Such multiplicity likewise counters contemporary charges of anti-social 'enthusiasm', notably against Methodists, who were perceived as practitioners of a privately oriented and escapist faith, disconnected from community.¹⁰⁰⁴ As Ann Bolton wrote in her diary, 'We are not called

¹⁰⁰⁰ Whyman, 'Gentle Companions,' 177.

¹⁰⁰¹ For example, Wahrman, *Making of the Modern Self*.

¹⁰⁰² For example, Spacks, 'Personal Letters,' 631. On the tendency amongst literary critics to interpret letters as 'self-fashioning', see Pearsall, *Atlantic Families*, 14.

¹⁰⁰³ Mascuch, *Origins of the Individualist Self*, 71-96.

¹⁰⁰⁴ On 'enthusiasm' as anti-social, see Lawrence E. Klein, 'Sociability, Solitude, and Enthusiasm,' *Huntington Library Quarterly* 60, no. 1/2 (1997): 153-177. See also Jon Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm*,

to leave our Friends & Occupations to retire into Cells & convents in order to perfect holiness in the fear of God. But to walk with Jesus in our several circumstances & situations'.¹⁰⁰⁵ For each of the women considered here, personal faith and communal responsibilities and affiliations were held together: their writings had both individual and communal meaning.

Focusing on women's writings in religious communities further requires that we ask how gender informed their communal literary activities. In searching for motivations for their activities, one might look for proto-feminist impulses that looked to religious belief as authorisation for women's expression at a time when their voices were often constrained. Anne Steele articulated concern for the equal education of women:

why is Woman thus depress'd and scorn'd
By tyrant Man? if we're less wise then they
'Tis their own fault who cramp our education¹⁰⁰⁶

Yet generally the women considered here did not overtly resist oppressive or hierarchical structures or make claims to power. Nor did they typically interpret their spirituality in explicitly gendered terms. Elizabeth Ritchie once encouraged Ann Bolton's sense of pastoral responsibility by writing to her, 'the D^r people want a spiritual Mother amongst them; you are called to Nurse the Lambs & feed y^e Sheep'.¹⁰⁰⁷ Yet such a feminised rendering of their activity was uncommon. To what extent, then, is the expression and activity analysed here that of women?¹⁰⁰⁸ The archives used here reveal women's greater (though not exclusive) tendency to use personal writings in such informal and interpersonal ways, as well as women's extensive efforts to preserve those manuscripts. It

and Regulation: Poetics and the Policing of Culture in the Romantic Period (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 63-77.

¹⁰⁰⁵ Ann Bolton diary, 22 May 1788. Pudl., 3/14.

¹⁰⁰⁶ Anne Steele, untitled. AL, STE 3/3/6, no. 28.

¹⁰⁰⁷ Elizabeth Ritchie to Ann Bolton, 4 October [undated, but between 1792 and 1799]. Pudl., 4/17/3.

¹⁰⁰⁸ For similar questions, see Sharon Achinstein, 'Romance of the Spirit: Female Sexuality and Religious Desire in Early Modern England,' *English Literary History* 69, no. 2 (2002): 416.

appears to have been the women in these communities who more often used personal writings to encourage and educate, and who were moved to preserve those encounters. In this sense a female spiritual practice has been illuminated. But the archives also reveal that women did not understand these activities in gendered terms. Self-conscious femininity did not drive their literary activities; rather, they were motivated primarily by deeply held religious beliefs. Rather than being driven by a feminist will to break free from social or religious constraints, these women engaged in informal literary activities within and alongside church structures.

Catherine Talbot, Anne Steele, and Ann Bolton immersed themselves in church or chapel life and understood themselves in terms of particular denominations, and throughout this thesis denominational distinctions have been drawn out in order to illuminate variations in belief and practice. Yet in putting my subjects in conversation with each other, significant commonalities have been revealed as well—commonalities that would not be apparent if a more straightforward denominational approach were employed. Talbot, Steele, and Bolton were each concerned to respond with appropriate resignation in suffering circumstances, each valued the experience of spiritual assurance, and each desired to use their time well and live lives of holiness. Differences were a matter of theological and cultural emphasis. Bolton's striving for assurance, which she believed was attainable through human effort, was characterised by an anxiety not found in Steele, who emphasised God's sovereignty in matters of salvation. And Talbot's careful reckoning of her time underscores an attention to outward activity that contrasts with Bolton's strenuous struggle for inward holiness. Significant as these distinctions are for understanding their spiritual lives and the religious cultures which formed them and which they formed, perhaps more is gained by not thinking wholly in terms of

denomination. The eighteenth-century was a time of religious pluralism and denominational boundaries were frequently crossed: Bolton was, after all, not only Methodist but Anglican, and most of the women considered here habitually attended other churches and had friends who belonged to other denominations. In her diary for 1773 and 1774, Jane Attwater recorded her attendance at various Baptist chapels, but also Methodist meetinghouses (where she heard John Wesley speak and later wrote, ‘in my humble opinion many of his sentiments could not be agreeable to scripture’), Countess of Huntingdon Connexion chapels, Quaker meetinghouses, and Anglican churches.¹⁰⁰⁹ Having made these ‘few researches’, Attwater concluded that ‘there are good people amongst all Denominations who worship God in sincerity & Truth in & through Jesus Christ’.¹⁰¹⁰

If Steele, Talbot, and Bolton were all devoted believers who worshipped God ‘in sincerity & Truth’, and their different expressions of faith had roots in the same religious tradition, how are commonalities in their spiritualities best described? Some studies use ‘evangelical’ to describe religious affinities that transcended denomination. The term has been the subject of historical debate, though meanings coalesce around the importance of the heart and affections in religion, and are often associated with eighteenth-century movements of spiritual renewal or revival.¹⁰¹¹ While the word was used only sparingly by each of my subjects, most religious historians would not hesitate to designate Bolton an

¹⁰⁰⁹ Jane Attwater diary, volume for 1773–74, passim. AL, Attwater Papers, acc. 76, I.A.3.

¹⁰¹⁰ Jane Attwater diary, note dated 1776 on back of volume for 1773–74. AL, Attwater Papers, acc. 76, I.A.3.

¹⁰¹¹ David Bebbington famously summarised evangelicalism’s main characteristics: the need for conversion, a high regard for the Bible, the belief that Christ’s death provided atonement for salvation, and missionary activism. David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 1–19. For a critique of the ‘Bebbington quadrilateral’, see John Coffey, ‘Puritanism, Evangelicalism and the Evangelical Protestant Tradition,’ in *The Emergence of Evangelicalism: Exploring Historical Continuities*, ed. Michael A. G. Haykin and Kenneth J. Stewart (Nottingham: Apollos, 2008), 252–277. See also Hindmarsh, *Evangelical Conversion Narrative*, 13–16; Noll, *Rise of Evangelicalism*, 16–21; Ward, *Protestant Evangelical Awakening*, 4.

evangelical, and Steele's version of mid-century dissent had recognisable evangelical influences. Yet Talbot's inclusion in this study restricts such usage, for she did not think of her religious life in terms of the new focus on the affections or religious experience, and the popular revivals at mid-century went unremarked by her. While not evangelical, Talbot was a dedicated believer and her faith was the primary means by which she ordered her life. Thus the use of evangelical to signify a more 'real' or 'true' religion, because of its associations with conversion (the new birth) and living lives of active holiness, becomes problematic.¹⁰¹²

Other studies use the terms 'inward religion'¹⁰¹³ and 'heart religion' (or 'religion of the heart')¹⁰¹⁴ to denote a focus on interiority rather than theology or outward ritual. The language was germane to the period: John Wesley wrote in 1746, 'it is more especially my desire, first, to guard those who are just setting their faces towards heaven...from formality, from mere outside religion, which has almost driven heart-religion out of the world'.¹⁰¹⁵ While usages of such terms can overlap with the evangelical revival,¹⁰¹⁶ they can also be understood in a broader sense, more freely crossing denominations and centuries.¹⁰¹⁷ To varying degrees, each of the women

¹⁰¹² Noll, *Rise of Evangelicalism*, Ch. 9: 'True Religion'.

¹⁰¹³ Isabel Rivers, 'Inward Religion and Its Dangers in the Evangelical Revival', paper presented at the Heart Religion conference held at Dr Williams's Library, London, 21 May 2011; E. Gordon Rupp, *Religion in England 1688-1791*, Oxford History of the Christian Church (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), Ch. 14: "'Inward Religion'".

¹⁰¹⁴ Mack, *Heart Religion in the British Enlightenment*; Richard B. Steele, ed., *'Heart Religion' in the Methodist Tradition and Related Movements* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2001); Ted A. Campbell, *The Religion of the Heart: A Study of European Religious Life in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1991); Isabel Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment: A Study of the Language of Religion and Ethics in England, 1660-1780*, vol. 1, Whichcote to Wesley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 208.

¹⁰¹⁵ 'Preface' to *Sermons on Several Occasions* (1746), Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, 1:106.

¹⁰¹⁶ Hindmarsh, *Evangelical Conversion Narrative*, 79; Victoria Myers, 'Model Letters, Moral Living: Letter-Writing Manuals by Daniel Defoe and Samuel Richardson,' *Huntington Library Quarterly* 66 (2003): 382.

¹⁰¹⁷ David Hempton frames his discussion of eighteenth-century missions, both Catholic and Protestant, in terms of 'heart religion'. David Hempton, *The Church in the Long Eighteenth Century* (London: I. B.

considered here was concerned with inward holiness and with outward works; each exerted great effort (including efforts made through writing) to believe; each fashioned her inner life and communal interactions by religious belief first of all. Using the more expansive ‘inward religion’ or ‘heart religion’ restores high church Anglicans such as Talbot to discussions of vital religiosity in eighteenth-century England. Furthermore, her activities as a bluestocking, and her close connections with other bluestockings, suggest new possibilities for exploring their lives in terms of interiority, rather than intellectual accomplishment alone or socially oriented piety.¹⁰¹⁸

Again, perhaps the women considered here might most simply and helpfully be thought of as Protestants. Here too, however, we encounter an interesting and unexpected commonality, and a striking example of women’s creative use of personal writings to negotiate their faith, testing language and implementing religious practices in ways that harmonised sometimes only uneasily with ‘official’ beliefs. As we have seen, women across the denominational spectrum considered here appropriated Catholic imagery and language in surprising ways, given the common public invectives against Catholicism in eighteenth-century England. J. G. A. Pocock argues that ‘the strategy of Anglicanism’ in the period was ‘attacking popery and enthusiasm by turns’.¹⁰¹⁹ Yet Talbot and her friends

Tauris, 2011), Ch. 2: ‘Heart Religion and the Rise of Global Christianity: New Selves and New Places’. Ted Campbell uses ‘religion of the heart’ to describe movements from Catholic Jansenists to Quakers to Hasidic Jews, across the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, that shared an insistence that ‘the “heart,” denoting the will and affections (or “dispositions”), is the central point of contact between God and humankind’. Campbell, *Religion of the Heart*, 3. On a ‘religion of the heart’ (in this case, evangelicalism) in the nineteenth-century novel, see Elisabeth Jay, *The Religion of the Heart: Anglican Enthusiasm and the Nineteenth-Century Novel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979). See also Barker-Benfield, *Culture of Sensibility*, 65-77; Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment*, 164-253.

¹⁰¹⁸ As noted earlier, recent interest in the religion of the bluestockings has focused on their writing activities, their connections with Anglican clergy, and their theology. On commentators’ focus on the social, outward piety of the bluestockings, see O’Brien, *Women and Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, 57.

¹⁰¹⁹ J. G. A. Pocock, ‘Enthusiasm: The Anti-Self of Enlightenment,’ in *Enthusiasm and Enlightenment in Europe, 1650-1850*, ed. Lawrence E. Klein and Anthony J. La Vopa (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 1998), 13.

used writing imaginatively to fulfil religious roles (as saint or confessor) or to convey gifts imbued with spiritual significance (as relics). She also absorbed Catholic writings, remarking in 1763 that she was ‘very deep in French Divinity, & a little Popery excepted, it is really very good’.¹⁰²⁰ John Wesley, though politically anti-Catholic¹⁰²¹ and sometimes derided as a ‘papist’ himself,¹⁰²² found in Counter-Reformation piety meaningful models of spiritual interiority.¹⁰²³ He published a life of Gaston Jean Baptiste de Renty, a seventeenth-century French nobleman he looked to as an archetype of earthly perfection, which Ann Bolton and her friends read and admired.¹⁰²⁴ The women considered here all had ecumenical reading practices, confidently crossing denominations (including Catholicism) and looking backward in time for spiritual models.

As their religious lives were fed by earlier spiritual expressions, so the religious and writing practices analysed here stretch forward in time, challenging periodisations often used to delineate denominational activity and early evangelicalism. At the same time, the spiritually intense and person-focused activities analysed here very often transpired independently of references to external events such as the French Revolution. Thus while the years 1740 and 1790 have been used as approximate chronological limits

¹⁰²⁰ Catherine Talbot to George Berkeley, 8 October 1763. BL, Add. 39311.

¹⁰²¹ David Hempton, ‘Wesley in Context,’ in *The Cambridge Companion to John Wesley*, ed. Randy L. Maddox and Jason E. Vickers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 71. See also Peter Nockles, ‘Charles Wesley, Catholicism and Anti-Catholicism,’ in *Charles Wesley: Life, Literature and Legacy*, ed. Kenneth G. C. Newport and Ted A. Campbell (Peterborough: Epworth, 2007), 140-164.

¹⁰²² David Hempton, *Methodism and Politics in British Society, 1750-1850* (London: Hutchinson, 1984), 31. For the eighteenth-century association between Methodists and Catholics, see George Lavington’s *The Enthusiasm of Methodists and Papists Compared: Part II* (1749), which aimed to paint Methodists as crypto-Catholics. See further Misty Anderson, *Imagining Methodism in Eighteenth-Century Britain: Enthusiasm, Belief, and the Borders of the Self* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012).

¹⁰²³ Eamon Duffy, ‘Wesley and the Counter-Reformation,’ in *Revival and Religion since 1700: Essays for John Walsh*, ed. Jane Garnett and H. C. G. Matthew (London: Hambledon Press, 1993), 1-19. See also Jean Orcibal, ‘The Theological Originality of John Wesley and Continental Spirituality,’ in *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, ed. Rupert Davies and E. Gordon Rupp (London: Epworth Press, 1965), 81-111.

¹⁰²⁴ See undated letter. Pudl., 4/25/8. John Wesley to Ann Bolton, 14 January 1780. JRL, MAM JW 1.90. John Wesley to Ann Bolton, 2 December 1781. JRL, MAM JW 1.92.

for this study, the spiritual activities and cultures under discussion breached those boundaries. As generational interactions have been analysed and the afterlives of manuscripts were traced into the nineteenth century, this thesis has demonstrated ongoing affinities in the way women's personal texts were used. Across denominations, such continuities running into the nineteenth century are more striking than chronological shifts, including the narrowing of women's worlds in the 1790s that is observed by Davidoff and Hall and others.¹⁰²⁵ This thesis thus has illuminated not only the contemporary significance of women's personal writings in diverse religious cultures, but the enduring qualities of female religious writing and writing practices.

Catherine Talbot, Anne Steele, and Ann Bolton never met, but their spiritual lives and writing practices have remarkable affinities. From episcopal palace, manor house, or humbler home, they each made their way to church or chapel on Sundays and throughout the week. In cosmopolitan city, provincial village, and market town, they carved time from busy days to sharpen pens and dip them in ink. Slipped into a friend's hand or conveyed by horseback along the same roads, their letters, diaries, and poetry expressed their own deeply held faith even as they encouraged and challenged the spiritual lives of others. In transcribing their affection and devotion onto paper and then sharing those writings with family and friends, these women did not only write their own lives: through their writings they formed religious communities.

¹⁰²⁵ Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, xx-xxi.

Appendix 1

Biographical Index

A note concerning names: When historical subjects are women who married, decisions must be made regarding how to refer to them. A number of overlapping principles, which together aim at clarity and simplicity, have guided my decisions. I have chosen to refer to subjects consistently, by either their birth or married name, even if their marital status changed during the period covered by this thesis. Most often I chose the name they used during the majority of the literary interactions considered here. Thus Jane Attwater appears throughout this thesis by her birth name, despite the fact that she married in 1790 and became Jane Blatch. When subjects are known in scholarly literature by a particular name, I continue to use that name here. Thus I do not refer to Ann Bolton as Ann Conibeere, which is her married name, because she appears as Bolton in Methodist historiography. I have tried also to avoid using triple names (Ann Bolton Conibeere), unless doing so is necessary to provide clarity. Thus Anne Cator Steele is differentiated from Anne Steele by the inclusion of her birth name.

Arundell, John (*fl.* 1774–85)

A member of the Arundell family of Stroud, Gloucestershire, John Arundell was a longtime suitor of Ann Bolton, appearing often in her diary as ‘Mr A’. His sisters Nancy Arundell and Mary Scudamore were Bolton’s close friends. The Arundell family had many Methodist ties, but John Arundell was not religiously serious and therefore Bolton would not agree to marry him.

Arundell, Nancy (*fl.* 1777–84)

Nancy Arundell, of Stroud, Gloucestershire, was a Methodist and longtime friend and correspondent of Ann Bolton. Her sister was Mary Scudamore and her brother John Arundell.

Ash, John (1724–79)

John Ash was a Baptist minister at Pershore, Worcestershire. A close friend of Caleb Evans, together they published *A Collection of Hymns Adapted to Public Worship* (1769), which included sixty-two hymns by Anne Steele. Ash was also closely connected to the Steele family: he was married to Elizabeth Goddard, whose sister, Martha Goddard, was William Steele’s second wife; as well, his daughter Betsy was a close friend of Mary Steele.

Attwater, Anna Gay (1710–84)

Anna Gay was a cousin of Anne Steele living at Haycombe, near Bath. She visited the Steeles at Broughton in 1732, at which time her aunt Anne Cator Steele encouraged her

decision to join the Baptist church. In 1734 she married Thomas Attwater and they had four children, including Jane Attwater. Anna Attwater kept a diary, fragments of which survive in her daughter Jane's diary.

Attwater, Jane (1753–1843)

Jane Attwater, the youngest child of Anna Attwater and Thomas Attwater, was raised in a Baptist home at Bodenham, Wiltshire. She was a prolific diarist and occasional poet, and was particularly close to her cousin Mary Steele, born the same year as her. They were longtime correspondents. Her father died when she was a teenager and from 1773, after the last of her siblings were married, she cared for her mother in the family home. In 1790, at the age of thirty-seven, she married Joseph Blatch, who had pursued her for fifteen years. They had one daughter, Anna Blatch, who died of consumption at the age of sixteen.

Beddome, Benjamin (1717–95)

Benjamin Beddome was a Baptist minister at Bourton-on-the-Water, Gloucestershire. A collection of his hymns, originally written to be sung after his sermons, was published posthumously as *Hymns Adapted to Public Worship or Family Devotion* (1818). In 1742 he proposed marriage to Anne Steele, but she declined him.

Benham, Mary Steele (b. 1691/2)

Mary Steele was the sister of William Steele and aunt of Anne Steele and William Steele. Following the death of their mother, Anne Froude Steele, she lived with and cared for her young niece and nephew until their father's remarriage to Anne Cator. She later married John Benham.

Benson, Catherine

See Catherine Benson Secker.

Benson, Martin (1689–1752)

A close friend of Edward Talbot, Thomas Secker, and George Berkeley from the 1710s, Martin Benson's associations with the Talbot family resulted in various ecclesiastical preferments. In 1734 he was made Bishop of Gloucester. The brother of Catherine Secker, Benson was a frequent visitor to the Secker-Talbot household and an ongoing and affectionate pseudo-parental figure in Catherine Talbot's life.

Berkeley, Anne Forster (c. 1700–86)

Married to George Berkeley, Bishop of Cloyne, Anne Berkeley was the mother of George Berkeley and Julia Berkeley. She became acquainted with Catherine Talbot in 1752, after the Berkeley family relocated from Ireland to Oxfordshire, and they remained friends and correspondents until Talbot's death. After her husband's death, Anne Berkeley lived in Oxford until returning to Ireland in 1754 with her daughter Julia. By the early 1760s Anne Berkeley was again living in England, where she accompanied her son and his family through various ecclesiastical preferments.

Berkeley, Eliza Frinsham (1734–1800)

Eliza Frinsham was the eldest daughter of Henry Frinsham, Anglican vicar at White Waltham, Berkshire, near Windsor. In 1761 she married the younger George Berkeley, who was also an Anglican vicar. George Berkeley had been romantically connected with Catherine Talbot, and after his marriage to Eliza Frinsham, the three maintained a friendship until Talbot's death. Eliza and George Berkeley had four children including George Monck Berkeley, of whom Talbot was especially fond. She referred to him in a letter to Eliza Berkeley as 'our son'.

Berkeley, George (1685–1753)

George Berkeley was a philosopher and Bishop of Cloyne in Ireland, and in 1752 moved with his wife Anne Berkeley and their children George and Julia to Oxfordshire, when his son began studying at Oxford. George Berkeley and Thomas Secker had known each other since the 1710s, and when Berkeley died in 1753, Secker (then Bishop of Oxford) cared for the bereaved Berkeley family.

Berkeley, George (1733–95)

George Berkeley was the son of philosopher and Bishop of Cloyne George Berkeley. He met Catherine Talbot in 1752 when he moved from Ireland to Oxfordshire to begin studying at Oxford. Berkeley probably proposed marriage to Talbot but she turned him down, though the two remained lifelong friends and correspondents. In 1761 he married Eliza Frinsham and they had four children. Berkeley was an Anglican vicar, patronised by Thomas Secker, and he held posts at Bray, Berkshire, at Acton, Middlesex, and at Canterbury.

Berkeley, Julia (bap. 1738–fl. 1795)

Julia Berkeley was the youngest daughter of George and Anne Berkeley, and was fourteen years old in 1752 when she moved with them and her older brother George to Oxford. Catherine Talbot took Julia Berkeley under her wing, referring to her affectionately as 'my daughter', and often exchanged diaries with her. Julia's health was delicate and in 1754 her mother returned with her to Ireland for her health.

Blatch, Anna (1793–1809)

Anna Blatch was the only child of Jane Attwater and Joseph Blatch. She was given the middle name Theodosia after Anne Steele. Her mother taught her to keep a diary, parts of which survive within Jane Attwater's own diary. Anna Blatch died of consumption at the age of sixteen.

Blatch, Jane Attwater

See Jane Attwater.

Blatch, Joseph Goodenough (d. 1840)

Joseph Blatch, of Bratton, Wiltshire, married Jane Attwater in 1790, after pursuing her for fifteen years. Together they had one daughter, Anna Blatch. Joseph Blatch was a deacon in the Bratton Baptist Church.

Bolton, Ann (1743–1822)

Born at Witney, Oxfordshire, Ann Bolton was the eldest child of six born to Edward Bolton and Sarah Beacham Bolton. Ann Bolton converted to Methodism at the age of nineteen, an event that so disturbed her family that she was turned out of the family home for a brief time. Within months her younger brother Edward also converted, and eventually most members of her family, including her parents. She was deeply involved in the work of the Witney Methodist Society, through which she came to know John Wesley. They corresponded for nearly twenty-five years until his death in 1791. She was one of a select group that attended his burial. Through the 1770s and 1780s she lived alternately at Witney and at Finstock, Oxfordshire, dividing her time between caring for her parents and helping her brother Edward Bolton run his farm. She later mentioned having a ‘small shop’ in which she appears to have sold cloth. She married George Conibeere in 1792 and relocated to Gloucester, though when he died in 1799 she returned to Witney, where she lived the remainder of her life.

Bolton, Edward (1716/7–91)

Edward Bolton, of Witney, Oxfordshire, was variously described as a baker and a brewer. In 1741 he married Sarah Beacham and together they had six children, including Ann Bolton and Edward Bolton. Initially hostile to his daughter’s religious beliefs, in time he converted to Methodism through her influence.

Bolton, Edward (1746/7–1818)

Born at Witney, Oxfordshire, Edward Bolton converted to Methodism at the age of sixteen through the influence of his elder sister, Ann Bolton. Like her, he became very involved in the Witney Methodist Society and later served as a local preacher. From 1774 he rented a large farm at Finstock, Oxfordshire. He was often in financial difficulty and seems to have finally given up the farm by the late 1780s. He married Hannah Sheppard in 1784 and they had eleven children. His eldest son, also Edward Bolton, married Elizabeth Ward, the niece of Sarah Nind and Ann Eden.

Bolton, Edward (1785–1837)

Edward Bolton, of Finstock, Oxfordshire, was the eldest child of Edward Bolton and Hannah Sheppard Bolton. He was a farmer, married Elizabeth Ward in 1815, and they had seven children.

Bolton, Elizabeth Ward (1788–1854)

Elizabeth Ward, of Oxhill, Warwickshire, married Edward Bolton in 1815 and moved to Finstock, Oxfordshire. They had seven children. She both was born into and married into a Methodist family, and she kept a diary from 1820 to 1853.

Bompas, Selina (1830–1921)

Selina Bompas was the granddaughter of Anne Steele’s niece, Anne Steele Tomkins. The Steele family archive was inherited and added to by Bompas.

Bosanquet, Mary

See Mary Bosanquet Fletcher.

Briggs, Elizabeth

See Elizabeth Briggs Dickinson.

Briggs, Philothea (1753–1823)

Philothea Briggs was the younger daughter of Elizabeth Perronet Briggs and William Briggs, who was John Wesley's book steward at the Foundery. Born in London, she spent her childhood there and at Shoreham, Kent, where her grandfather, Vincent Perronet, lived. She was a correspondent of Ann Bolton, and they met together over the years in London, Shoreham, and Stroud. In 1781 Briggs married Thomas Thompson of Hull, a local Methodist preacher. Thompson was a banker in William Wilberforce's firm, and later became the first Methodist MP. Philothea and Thomas Thompson had several children, including a son, Thomas Perronet Thompson, and a daughter, Philothea, for whom her mother wrote a diary.

Bullock, Mary

See Mary Bullock Steele.

Butler, Joseph (1692–1752)

A friend of Edward Talbot from the 1710s, Butler's associations with the Talbot family and with Thomas Secker directed his ecclesiastical career. In 1738 he was made Bishop of Bristol, and in 1750 Bishop of Durham. Butler was a regular visitor to the Secker-Talbot household and one of several parental figures in Catherine Talbot's life.

Campbell, Jemima

See Jemima Campbell Yorke.

Carter, Elizabeth (1717–1806)

Elizabeth Carter was born at Deal, Kent, the eldest child of Nicholas Carter (an Anglican vicar) and Margaret Carter. In 1741 she met Catherine Talbot and in 1758 Elizabeth Montagu, and these lifelong friendships produced lengthy correspondences that were later edited and published by her nephew, Montagu Pennington (in 1808 and 1817, respectively). Pennington also published Carter's *Memoirs* (1807), in which additional letters to Talbot and others are printed. Carter remained single and lived much of her life at Deal, though as a young woman she spent some time in London pursuing a literary career. A widely-published poet, she was also celebrated for her translation of *All the Works of Epictetus* (1758), which she published with the help and encouragement of Talbot and Thomas Secker. Once she had secured her literary status and financial independence through her writings, she began to spend winters in London where she spent much time in the Secker-Talbot household and participated in the gatherings of the bluestocking circle.

Cator, Anne

See Anne Cator Steele.

Cator, Jane

See Jane Cator Gay.

Chapman, Patty (*fl.* 1770–90)

Patty Chapman was a friend and correspondent of Ann Bolton and corresponded as well with John Wesley. She participated in the leadership of the Methodist movement at Watlington, Oxfordshire, and Bolton visited with her there.

Conibeere, Ann Bolton

See Ann Bolton.

Conibeere, George (*c.* 1738–99)

George Conibeere, of Gloucester, was described as an ‘upholder’ in contemporary documents and appears to have been comfortably wealthy. He was connected with the Gloucester Cathedral and for much of his life was likely a devout Anglican. In December 1790 his first wife died and in January 1792 he married Ann Bolton, after a lengthy correspondence in which she instructed him in the spiritual ideals and practices of Methodism. They lived together at Gloucester, where she was his class leader, until his death in 1799.

Cottle, Grace (*fl.* 1729–61)

Grace Cottle was a cousin and correspondent of Anne Steele, who, together with her half-sister Mary Wakeford, stayed with the Cottles while they were at school at Trowbridge, Wiltshire. Grace Cottle’s grandson was the printer Joseph Cottle, who was one of Hannah More’s circle as well as a friend and patron to Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Robert Southey.

Cottle, Molly (*fl.* 1732)

A relative of the Steele family living at Trowbridge, Wiltshire, Molly Cottle visited the Steeles at Broughton in 1732, at which time Anne Cator Steele encouraged her decision to join the Baptist church.

Dickinson, Elizabeth Briggs (1751–1822)

Elizabeth Dickinson had many familial links to Methodism. Her grandfather was Vincent Perronet, vicar at Shoreham, and a longtime supporter of Methodism. His daughter Elizabeth Perronet married William Briggs, who was entrusted by John Wesley with his publishing affairs, and they had two daughters: Elizabeth and Philothea. Both were correspondents of Ann Bolton. Elizabeth Briggs married Peard Dickinson in 1788. They had four children who all predeceased their parents.

Dickinson, Peard (1758–1802)

Peard Dickinson was an Anglican clergyman who served as curate for Vincent Perronet and afterward as John Wesley’s assistant at City Road Chapel in London. He married Elizabeth Briggs, Vincent Perronet’s granddaughter, in 1788, and they had four children who all predeceased their parents.

Dunscombe, Mary Steele

See Mary Steele.

Dunscombe, Thomas (1749–1811)

Thomas Dunscombe, of Tiverton, Devon, was educated for the Baptist ministry at Bristol Baptist College, where he was taught by Caleb Evans. He was ordained in 1773. After serving in ministry for almost twenty-five years, and nearing the age of fifty, he married Mary Steele in 1797.

Dutton, Anne (1692–1765)

Anne Dutton, of Great Gransden, Huntingdonshire, was a prolific writer, publishing some fifty volumes of poetry, hymns, theological discourse, autobiography, and letters. Most of these volumes were published anonymously or under her initials, ‘A. D.’ Married to a Baptist pastor who visited the Steeles at Broughton in 1735, she may have known Anne Steele, for Dutton’s Bible later came to be in her possession.

Eden, Ally (fl. 1769–81)

Ally Eden was a daughter of Henry Eden, who built the Methodist chapel at Broad Marston, Gloucestershire, and was a lay leader there, and the sister of Thomas Eden, vicar of Ilmington, Gloucestershire. She was also a friend and correspondent of Ann Bolton, and they frequently visited each other.

Eden, Ann Ward (1743–1801)

Ann Ward was born at Oxhill, Warwickshire, married Nathaniel Eden in 1765, and moved with him to Honeybourne, Worcestershire. They had seven children. Her sister, Sarah Nind, provided her with ongoing spiritual encouragement (interspersed with parenting advice) through correspondence.

Eden, Sarah (fl. 1770–82)

Sarah Eden was the daughter of Ann and Nathaniel Eden, and when she was a child three of her aunts—Sarah Hawkes, Sarah Nind, and Elizabeth Ward—encouraged her religious development through letter.

Etheredge, Clemence (fl. 1732)

Clemence Etheredge was Henry Steele’s granddaughter and lived at Broughton, Hampshire. She was baptised in the summer of 1732, as were her cousins Anne and William Steele.

Etheredge, Sarah (fl. 1732, d. 1791)

Sarah Etheredge was Henry Steele’s granddaughter and lived at Broughton, Hampshire. She was baptised in the summer of 1732, as were her cousins Anne and William Steele. In 1734 she married John Kent, the assistant pastor of the Broughton Baptist Church.

Evans, Caleb (1737–91)

Caleb Evans was a Baptist minister at Bristol and later principal of Bristol Baptist Academy. Together with his close friend John Ash, he published sixty-two of Anne Steele’s hymns in *A Collection of Hymns Adapted to Public Worship* (1769). Evans was a personal friend of Steele’s; was instrumental in publishing a second edition of her *Poems on Subjects Chiefly Devotional* (1780), to which he appended a prefatory biographical

‘Advertisement’; and following her death began a correspondence with her niece Mary Steele.

Fermor, Henrietta (Countess of Pomfret) (1698–1761)

The Countess of Pomfret was a longtime friend of the Duchess of Somerset, and their lengthy correspondence was later published (1805). Known for her piety, Catherine Talbot expressed a desire to meet her at the end of her life.

Fletcher, Mary Bosanquet (1739–1815)

Married to John Fletcher, Methodist supporter and vicar of Madeley, Shropshire, Mary Fletcher had a ministry of preaching and, later in life, provided pastoral guidance through extensive correspondence and visiting. Ann Bolton corresponded with Fletcher throughout the 1790s and visited her at Madeley in 1797.

Freind, William (*bap.* 1715, *d.* 1766)

William Freind was the rector at Witney, where Ann Bolton attended St Mary’s Anglican Church. He was also connected to Catherine Talbot and her circle. In 1739 he married Grace Robinson, a niece of Elizabeth Montagu.

Frinsham, Eliza

See Eliza Frinsham Berkeley.

Froude, Anne

See Anne Froude Steele.

Froude, Edward (1645–1714)

Edward Froude was Anne Steele’s maternal grandfather, and had been a Baptist pastor at Erlestoke, Wiltshire during the time of persecution preceding the Act of Toleration in 1689.

Froude, Nanny (*fl.* 1732)

A relative of the Steele family living at East Knoyle, Wiltshire, Nanny Froude visited the Steeles at Broughton in 1732, at which time Anne Cator Steele encouraged her decision to join the Baptist church.

Gay, Anna

See Anna Gay Attwater.

Gay, Elizabeth (1715–43)

Elizabeth Gay, of Haycombe, near Bath, was a cousin of Anne Steele, and attended school with her in 1729. A niece of Anne Cator Steele, she stayed at Broughton for some months in 1731 and her aunt encouraged her increasing religious seriousness. After Gay returned to Haycombe, her aunt continued to encourage her through letter. In 1743 she married Thomas Phipps and soon died, probably in childbirth.

Gay, Jane Cator (1680–1756)

The sister of Anne Cator Steele, Jane Cator married John Gay and settled at Haycombe, near Bath. A Baptist meeting met in their home. Jane and John Gay had four children, including Anna Gay, whose daughter was Jane Attwater. The Gay family was close to the Steele family living at Broughton, and there was frequent travel and correspondence between the two families.

Gay, Jane

See Jane Gay Gibbs.

Gay, Richard

Richard Gay was a Baptist minister in the seventeenth century, during which time he was imprisoned with John Bunyan for not conforming to the Established Church. This story was retold within the family circle throughout the eighteenth century. His son John Gay married Jane Cator.

Gay, Richard (1717–36)

Richard Gay, of Haycombe, near Bath, was a cousin of Anne Steele. Throughout 1731 and 1732 his aunt Anne Cator Steele encouraged his spiritual seriousness through both visit and letter. In 1736, with his cousin William Steele at his side, he died at the age of nineteen.

Gibbs, Jane Gay (1723–63)

Jane Gay, of Haycombe, near Bath, was a cousin of Anne Steele. In 1750 she married Philip Gibbs and together they had two children. She traveled to Broughton in 1751 and her aunt Anne Cator Steele guided her to the decision to be baptised. Her spiritual autobiography is preserved in her aunt's diary.

Goddard, Martha

See Martha Goddard Steele.

Grey, Mary (1719–61)

Lady Mary Grey was the aunt of Jemima Yorke, though as she was only three years older, the two girls grew up together as something like siblings. Catherine Talbot was their childhood friend, and their friendships endured into adulthood. Portions of Talbot's diary are addressed to her as 'Laura'. In 1742 Mary Grey married David Gregory, later dean of Christ Church, Oxford.

Hawkes, Sarah Eden (1759–1832)

Sarah Eden was born at Broad Marston, Gloucestershire, the daughter of Thomas Eden and Mary Loxdale, and thus early moved in Methodist circles. She married and moved to London, where she came under the evangelical influence of Richard Cecil and John Newton. Sarah Hawkes remained connected to her family and regularly visited Broad Marston and corresponded with family members, including her niece Sarah Eden.

James, Sarah (*fl.* 1771–82)

A Methodist living at Gloucester, Sarah James was a friend and correspondent of Ann Bolton. Bolton visited her in 1782.

Johnson, Elizabeth (1720–98)

Elizabeth Johnson had a reputation for particular piety within the Bristol Methodist community and was well known to Methodists throughout Britain, including John Wesley. Ann Bolton visited her in 1772 and transcribed some of Johnson's correspondence to others into her own letter-books.

March, Jane (1743–c. 1816)

A supporter of the Methodist movement in London, Jane March corresponded widely with Methodists throughout Britain, including Ann Bolton. In 1771 March was at the Foundry with Bolton when Bolton had a climactic experience of spiritual assurance.

Montagu, Elizabeth Robinson (1718–1800)

Born at York, Elizabeth Robinson married Edward Montagu in 1742 and thereafter divided her time between London and Sandleford, an estate in Berkshire. Montagu hosted bluestocking gatherings from the 1760s and knew many literary and political figures of the day. The success of Elizabeth Carter's translation of Epictetus caused Montagu to seek out her acquaintance in 1758, and they remained close friends until Montagu's death. Through Carter, Montagu became acquainted with Catherine Talbot, with whom she visited and corresponded, though they were never intimate friends.

Mortimer, Elizabeth Ritchie

See Elizabeth Ritchie.

Nind, Sarah Ward (*bap.* 1747, *d.* 1783)

Sarah Ward was born at Oxhill, Warwickshire and married local Methodist preacher James Nind in 1772, after which she moved to Tewkesbury, Gloucestershire. She was well known within the British Methodist world for her piety, and had several children before dying in childbirth at the age of thirty-six. Nind kept a diary that was subsequently cherished by and circulated amongst her family and friends. While the majority of it is not extant, one volume survives amongst the personal papers of her friend Ann Bolton.

Overbury, Nancy (*fl.* 1800)

Nancy Overbury, of Tetbury, Gloucestershire, belonged to a long-standing Baptist family that was closely aligned with the Whitaker family at Bratton, Wiltshire. She was friends with Mary Whitaker and corresponded with her towards the end of the eighteenth century, until Whitaker's death in 1800. After Whitaker's death, her aunt Jane Attwater corresponded with Overbury.

Pennington, Montagu (1762–1849)

Montagu Pennington was Elizabeth Carter's nephew and named for her friend Elizabeth Montagu. Educated by Carter as a child, he later became an Anglican vicar and lived with his aunt for nearly twenty years. Carter left her papers to Pennington and he published,

amongst other works, Carter's *Memoirs* (1807) and her correspondence with Catherine Talbot (1808).

Perronet, Damaris (1727–82)

Damaris Perronet, of Shoreham, Kent, was the eldest daughter of Vincent Perronet and very involved in the Methodist movement at Shoreham. She was influential in the increasing religious seriousness of her niece Philothea Briggs.

Perronet, Vincent (1693–1785)

Vincent Perronet, of Shoreham, Kent, was the father of Damaris Perronet and Elizabeth Briggs, and the grandfather of Elizabeth Dickinson and Philothea Briggs. An Anglican clergyman, Perronet supported Methodist activity in his parish. Charles Wesley referred to him as the 'Archbishop of Methodists', and he was a friend and advisor of both Charles and John Wesley. John Wesley's *Plain Account of the People Called Methodists* (1749) had originally been written as a letter to Perronet.

Phipps, Elizabeth Gay

See Elizabeth Gay.

Pomfret, Countess of

See Henrietta Fermor.

Richardson, Samuel (*bap.* 1689, *d.* 1761)

A popular author, Samuel Richardson was a friend and correspondent of Catherine Talbot. Talbot and Elizabeth Carter suggested traits for the title character of Richardson's *Sir Charles Grandison* (1753–54), who came to embody for Talbot (as for others) ideal Christian qualities. Talbot also edited *Grandison* and read it in company with friends and family.

Ritchie, Elizabeth (1754–1835)

Elizabeth Ritchie, of Otley, Yorkshire, was born to Methodist parents and, while initially hostile to Methodism, converted in 1772. She was connected to many leading Methodists and traveled extensively, sometimes with John Wesley, visiting Methodist communities throughout England. Her many correspondents included Ann Bolton. She stayed with John Wesley during the final months of his life, was with him when he died, and wrote a published account of his final days. In 1801 she married Harvey Mortimer.

Rowe, Elizabeth Singer (1674–1737)

Elizabeth Rowe, of Frome, Somerset, was the daughter of an Independent minister. A popular poet of an earlier generation, she had been a close friend of the Duchess of Somerset and Isaac Watts, who published her *Devout Exercises of the Heart* (1737) and dedicated it to the Duchess. The Duchess preserved many of Rowe's manuscripts after her death and made them available to Catherine Talbot, who read them at Percy Lodge and returned with them to her home in London. Rowe was read and admired by those across a denominational spectrum, including Catherine Talbot, Anne Steele, and Ann Bolton.

Rundle, Thomas (1687/8–1743)

An Anglican clergyman and Church of Ireland Bishop of Derry, Thomas Rundle was an early friend of Edward Talbot and, following his friend's death, Rundle took a special interest in his young daughter Catherine, and wrote to her letters of advice and guidance.

Ryan, Sarah (1724–68)

Sarah Ryan was a Methodist preacher and close friend of Mary Fletcher, who preserved some of her late friend's manuscripts. These manuscripts were afterwards shown to Ann Bolton on her visit to Madeley, Shropshire.

Scudamore, Mary Arundell (*fl.* 1777–96)

Mary Scudamore, of Stroud, Gloucestershire, was a Methodist and longtime friend of Ann Bolton. Her sister was Nancy Arundell and her brother John Arundell.

Secker, Catherine Benson (*c.* 1695–1748)

Born into an Anglican family in Cradley, Herefordshire, Catherine Benson was a close friend of Mary Talbot. After Edward Talbot's death in 1720, Benson invited the pregnant Mary Talbot to share her home, and when a daughter was born some months later she was named Catherine after Benson. When Benson married Thomas Secker in 1725 the Talbots moved with her to Secker's home. Her brother Martin Benson, the Bishop of Gloucester, was close to the Secker-Talbot household.

Secker, Thomas (1693–1768)

Born at Sibthorp, Nottinghamshire and raised a nonconformist, Thomas Secker left dissent to take orders in the Church of England, rising through the ecclesiastical ranks to become vicar of St James's, Piccadilly, Bishop of Bristol, Bishop of Oxford, Dean of St Paul's, and eventually Archbishop of Canterbury. In 1725 he married Catherine Benson, who was living with Mary Talbot and her four-year-old daughter Catherine Talbot. The Talbots became part of the Secker household, and while the Seckers had no children of their own, Secker explained that Catherine Talbot was 'instead of a child to my wife and me'.

Seymour, Frances Thynne (Duchess of Somerset) (1699–1754)

Frances Thynne married Algernon Seymour, Earl of Hertford, in 1715, thus becoming Countess of Hertford, the title by which she is most often known. She was a friend and patron of Elizabeth Rowe and other poets, as well as a poet herself. A lifelong Anglican, she corresponded with well-known religious figures across a denominational spectrum, including Isaac Watts, Philip Doddridge, and Selina, Countess of Huntingdon. Following her father's death in 1748, she became Duchess of Somerset. In 1751 she met Catherine Talbot, an event that initiated an intensive correspondence and Talbot's extended visits to her home at Percy Lodge.

Smith, Sukey (*fl.* 1771)

Sukey Smith was correspondent of Ann Bolton, who encouraged Smith through letter in Methodist faith and practice.

Somerset, Duchess of

See Frances Thynne Seymour.

Steele, Anne (1717–78)

Anne Steele was the second child of William Steele, Baptist minister and timber merchant, and Anne Froude Steele, who died when Steele was three years old. She lived and died in Broughton, Hampshire: she lived with her father and stepmother until his death in 1769, and thereafter with her brother and his family. She was particularly close to her niece Mary Steele, who had lost her own mother as a child, and acted as a ‘second parent’ to her as well as a literary and spiritual mentor. While Steele received several marriage proposals, including one from the Baptist minister Benjamin Beddome, she never married. A poet and hymn-writer, Steele’s two-volume *Poems on Subjects Chiefly Devotional, by Theodosia* was published in 1760 and republished posthumously with a third volume of *Miscellaneous Pieces, in Verse and Prose* in 1780.

Steele, Anne Cator (1689–1760)

Born into a Baptist family near Trowbridge, Wiltshire, Anne Cator most likely met William Steele, a widower with two small children, when he traveled through the area preaching in Baptist chapels. They were married in 1723 and she then moved to Broughton, Hampshire, where she lived for the rest of her life and was very involved in the life of the Broughton Baptist Church. The stepmother of Anne Steele and William Steele and the mother of Mary Wakeford, Anne Cator Steele was also the spiritual matriarch of a widespread Baptist family and took an active role in encouraging the spiritual seriousness of nieces, nephews, and more distant relatives. She was also a prolific diarist and correspondent.

Steele, Anne Froude (1684–1720)

Anne Froude, likely of Edington, Wiltshire, was the daughter of Edward Froude, a Baptist minister, and Elizabeth Blackborrow. Froude was the first wife of William Steele and the mother of Anne Steele and William Steele. She likely died in childbirth, for an infant son, Thomas, was buried two months after her death.

Steele, Henry (1654–1739)

Henry Steele, of Broughton, Hampshire, was the minister of the Broughton Baptist Church from 1699 until his death. From 1708 his nephew William Steele served as his assistant in the church, taking over the role of minister after his uncle’s death. Henry Steele was married to Clemence, and they had one daughter, also called Clemence.

Steele, Martha Goddard (1734–91)

Martha Goddard was the sister-in-law of Baptist minister John Ash and attended his church at Pershore, Worcestershire. In 1768 she married Anne Steele’s brother William Steele, whose first wife had died in 1762. Together they had three children, two of whom survived to adulthood.

Steele, Mary (1753–1813)

Mary Steele was the daughter of William Steele and Mary Bullock Steele. She was born in Broughton, Hampshire and lived there most of her life. Her aunt Anne Steele helped to

raise her after her mother's death in 1762, also serving as a spiritual and literary mentor. Mary Steele's long poem *Danebury: Or the Power of Friendship* was inspired by her close friendship with her cousin Jane Attwater. Written in 1768, when she was fifteen years old, her father William Steele brought it to publishers and it was printed in 1779. She continued to write poetry throughout her life, though only a few other poems were published. Mary Steele was resistant to the Calvinistic theology of her family's Baptist faith and postponed baptism until 1795, when she was forty-two. In 1797, at the age of forty-three, she married Thomas Dunscombe, a Baptist minister. They had no children.

Steele, Mary

See Mary Steele Benham.

Steele, Mary Bullock (1713–62)

Mary Bullock was the first wife of William Steele, whom she married in 1749, and they had one daughter, Mary, in 1753. Mary Bullock Steele was baptised and joined the Broughton Baptist Church in 1750. Often in ill health, she died in 1762 at the age of forty-nine. Her daughter was then nine years old, and from that time her aunt Anne Steele acted as her surrogate mother.

Steele, Mary

See Mary Steele Wakeford.

Steele, William (1689–1769)

William Steele, of Broughton, Hampshire, was a Baptist minister and timber merchant. From 1708 he assisted his uncle Henry Steele in the pastorate of the Broughton Baptist Church, and assumed the role of minister following his uncle's death in 1739. In 1713/4 he married Anne Froude and they had three children: William, Anne, and Thomas (who died as an infant). In 1723 he married Anne Cator and they had one child: Mary.

Steele, William (1715–85)

William Steele was the eldest child of William Steele, Baptist minister and timber merchant, and Anne Froude Steele, who died when he was five years old. Steele lived in Broughton, Hampshire for his entire life. As a teenager he began to help his father with his timber trading and eventually took over the business, which became increasingly successful. In 1758 he purchased a large estate and manor home called Pigeon House, which he renamed Broughton House. He married Mary Bullock in 1749, and they had one daughter: Mary. Mary Bullock Steele died in 1762. In 1768 he married Martha Goddard, and they had three children: Anne, Martha, and William (who died as an infant).

Talbot, Catherine (1721–70)

Born in Berkshire, Catherine Talbot was the posthumous child of Edward Talbot, Archdeacon of Berkshire, and Mary Martin Talbot. Talbot was raised in the household of Thomas Secker, later Archbishop of Canterbury, and had close ties to many ecclesiastical and aristocratic elites. As an adult she became close friends with Elizabeth Carter and knew many of those associated with the bluestocking circle. Her essays remained unpublished until after her death from cancer at the age of forty-nine. Carter then

published them as *Reflections on the Seven Days of the Week* (1770) and *Essays on Various Subjects* (1772). Talbot did not marry though she had several proposals, including one (probably) from the younger George Berkeley.

Talbot, Edward (1690/1–1720)

Edward Talbot, of Berkshire, died of smallpox five months before his daughter Catherine Talbot's birth. He was then Archdeacon of Berkshire, and his friends Thomas Secker, Martin Benson, Joseph Butler, and others took a special interest in caring for his widow and daughter.

Talbot, Mary Martin (c. 1691–1784)

Mary Talbot was Catherine Talbot's mother. They had an affectionate relationship and lived together for Talbot's entire life, most of it in Thomas Secker's household. After Catherine Talbot's death, Mary Talbot gave her daughter's manuscripts to Elizabeth Carter, who published them as *Reflections on the Seven Days of the Week* (1770) and *Essays on Various Subjects* (1772).

Thompson, Philothea Briggs

See Philothea Briggs.

Underdown, Hannah (fl. 1738, d. 1783)

Hannah Underdown, of Deal, Kent, was a friend of Elizabeth Carter, and when Carter was in London between 1738 and 1742, she and Carter corresponded. In 1755, John Carter (Elizabeth Carter's eldest brother) married Frances Underdown (Hannah Underdown's daughter).

Wakeford, Joseph (1719–85)

Joseph Wakeford was a linen draper and banker at Andover, Hampshire, where he attended an Independent Church. His first wife, Hannah Towgood Wakeford, died in 1746, and in 1749 he married Mary Steele. Wakeford had a daughter, Hannah, from his first marriage, and he had five children with Mary Steele, though only two, William and Mary, survived to adulthood.

Wakeford, Mary Steele (1724–72)

Mary Steele was born at Broughton, Hampshire, the daughter of William Steele, Baptist minister and timber merchant, and Anne Cator Steele. She was the half-sister of Anne Steele and William Steele. In 1749 she married Joseph Wakeford and moved to Andover, after which time she and Anne Steele initiated a purposeful correspondence intended to encourage each other in their efforts to live serious religious lives. Mary Wakeford had five children, though only two, William and Mary, survived to adulthood.

Wakeford, Samuel (1754–67)

Samuel Wakeford, of Andover, Hampshire, was the son of Joseph and Mary Wakeford. He was also Anne Steele's nephew, and when he was a child his aunt wrote to him letters of religious guidance and encouragement.

Wakeford, William (1753–1819)

William Wakeford, of Andover, Hampshire, was the son of Joseph and Mary Wakeford. He was also Anne Steele's nephew, and when he was a child his aunt wrote to him letters of religious guidance and encouragement.

Ward, Ann

See Ann Ward Eden.

Ward, Elizabeth

See Elizabeth Ward Bolton.

Ward, Elizabeth (b. 1749)

Elizabeth Ward, of Oxhill, Warwickshire, was a sister of Sarah Nind and Ann Eden. She encouraged the religious development of her niece, Sarah Eden, through letter. She later married a Mr Mortimer.

Ward, Sarah

See Sarah Ward Nind.

Watts, Isaac (1674–1748)

Isaac Watts was an Independent minister and writer, and crossed denominational lines to become a leading figure in the eighteenth-century Protestant world. He was a correspondent of the Duchess of Somerset and a close friend of Elizabeth Rowe, whose *Devout Exercises of the Heart* he published in 1737, with a dedication to the Duchess.

Wesley, John (1703–91)

Born at Epworth, Lincolnshire to nonconformist parents, John Wesley was educated at Oxford, where he participated in the Holy Club and was later fellow of Lincoln College, and ordained in 1728. As founder, with his brother Charles, of the Methodist movement, Wesley traveled and corresponded extensively. It was likely on a visit to Witney in 1764 that he met Ann Bolton, who had converted to Methodism the previous year. She was twenty years old and he was sixty, and their meeting initiated a close relationship and regular correspondence that ended only with his death in 1791.

Whitaker, Mary (1773–1800)

Mary Whitaker, of Bratton, Wiltshire, was the daughter of Caroline Whitaker and Thomas Whitaker and the niece of Jane Attwater. Until her death in 1800, at the age of twenty-seven, Whitaker engaged in a purposeful religious correspondence with her friend Nancy Overbury.

Whitaker, Philip (1766–1847)

Philip Whitaker, of Bratton, Wiltshire, was the son of Caroline and Thomas Whitaker and the nephew of Jane Attwater, who taught him to write a diary. In 1798 he married Anne Andrews, and he became a leader in the Bratton Baptist Church.

Wilkins, James (*fl.* 1741, *d.* 1755)

James Wilkins was vicar of Hurstbourne Tarrant, near Andover, Hampshire. The Duchess of Somerset had a role in his preferment and was a longtime correspondent.

Yorke, Amabel (1751–1833)

Amabel Yorke was the eldest daughter of Jemima Yorke. Known as Bell to Catherine Talbot, who took a special interest in her childhood friend's child, Talbot wrote letters to the young Amabel and her sister Mary Jemima. After Jemima Yorke's death, Amabel Yorke transcribed her mother's thirty-year correspondence with Talbot into seven large volumes.

Yorke, Jemima Campbell (1722–97)

Born in Copenhagen, in 1725 Jemima Campbell moved to Wrest Park in Bedfordshire, the country seat of her grandfather, Henry Grey, the Duke of Kent. While her parents remained in Denmark due to her father's diplomatic career, Campbell was raised in England with her aunt, Lady Mary Grey, just three years her elder. When her grandfather remarried, the two young girls were established in a household in London, where Thomas Secker regularly looked in on them. Through Secker, Campbell met Catherine Talbot, who became a lifelong friend and correspondent. In 1740 Campbell married Philip Yorke and concurrently was made the Duke of Kent's heir. When the Duke of Kent died several weeks later, Jemima Yorke became Marchioness Grey. The Yorkes divided their time between London and Wrest Park, where Catherine Talbot sometimes made extended visits. They had two daughters, Amabel and Mary Jemima, known to Talbot as Bell and Mouse.

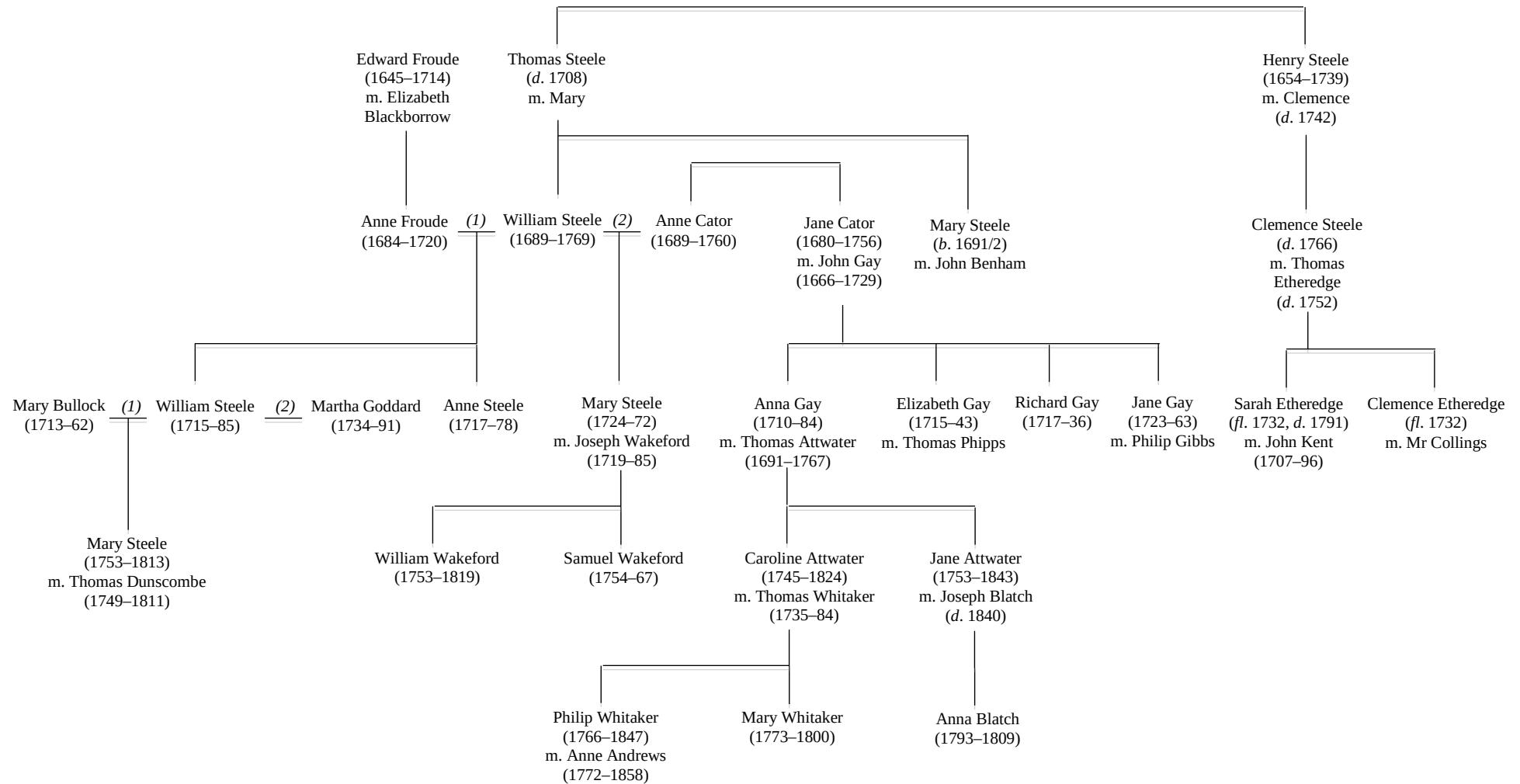
Appendix 2

Family Trees

A note concerning people included: To enhance clarity, the following family trees contain only those people who appear in the analysis.

1. Steele family tree
2. Talbot and Berkeley family trees
3. Bolton-Ward-Eden family tree
4. Perronet-Briggs family tree
5. Catherine Talbot's parental figures
6. Anne Cator Steele's spiritual care for younger relations, 1732
7. Sarah Eden and her aunts
8. Steele manuscripts descent
9. Attwater manuscripts descent

1. Steele family tree



2. Talbot and Berkeley family trees

Edward Talbot
(1690/91–1720)
m. Mary Martin
(c. 1691–1784)

Catherine Talbot
(1721–70)

George Berkeley
(1685–1753)
m. Anne Forster
(c. 1700–86)

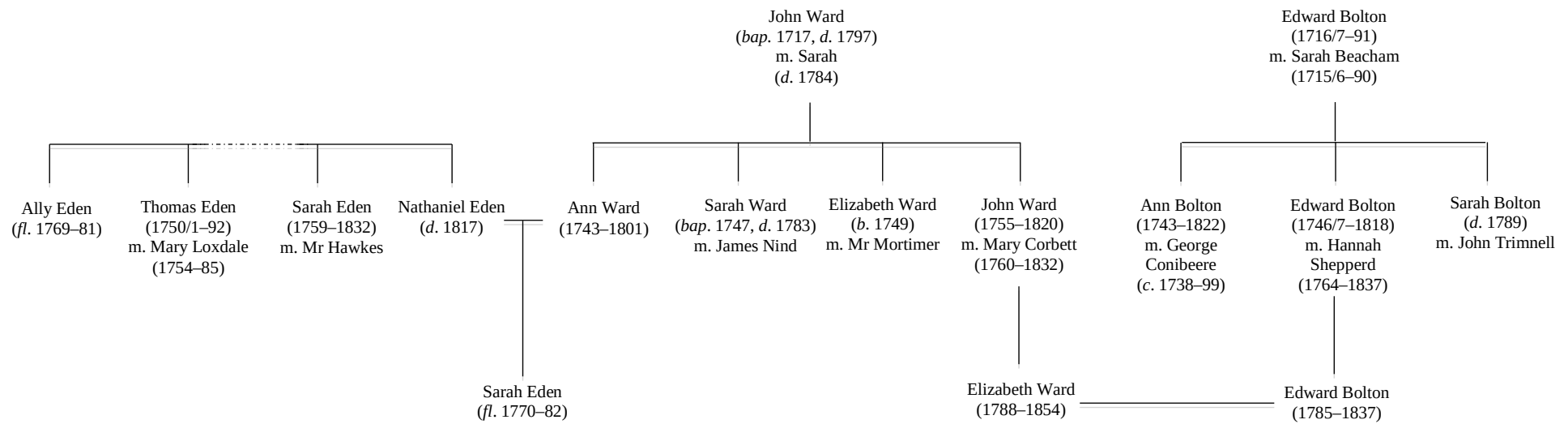
George Berkeley
(1733–95)
m. Eliza Frinsham
(1734–1800)

Julia Berkeley
(*bap.* 1738–
fl. 1795)

George Monck
Berkeley
(1763–93)

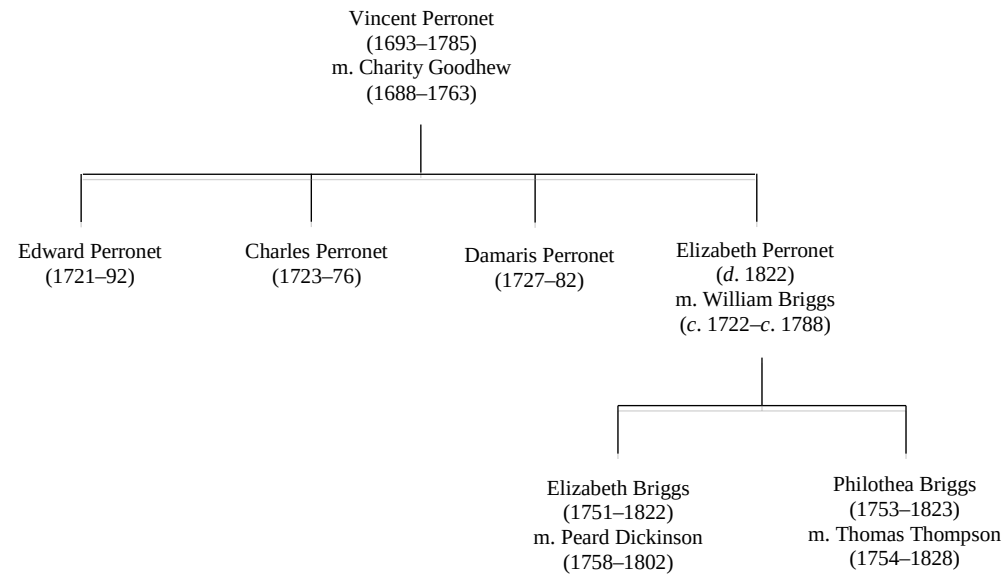
George Robert
Berkeley
(1767–75)

3. Bolton-Ward-Eden family tree

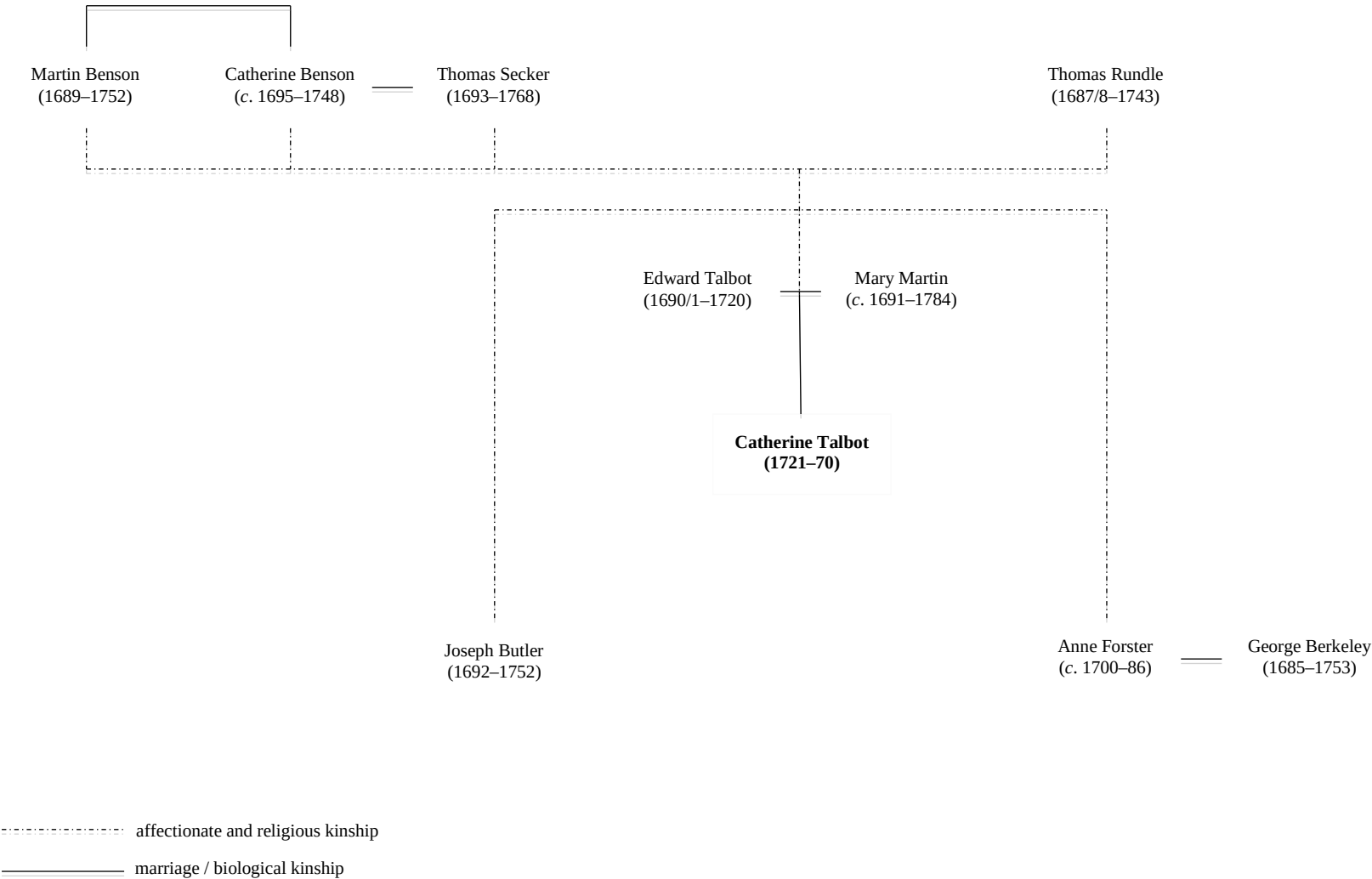


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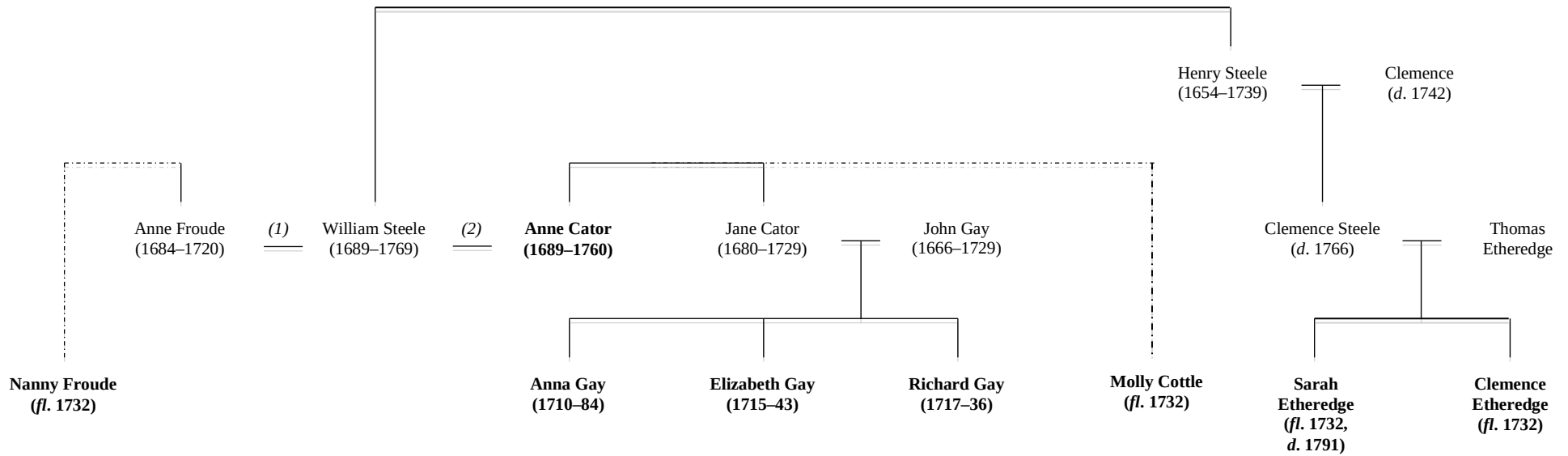
4. Perronet-Briggs family tree



5. Catherine Talbot’s parental figures

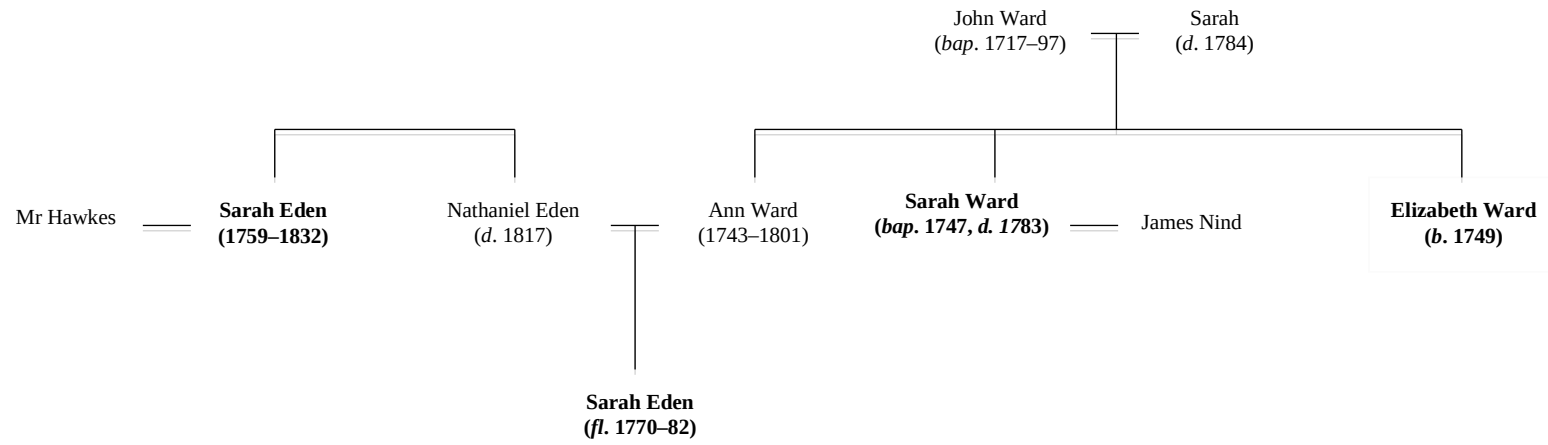


6. Anne Cator Steele's spiritual care for younger relations, 1732

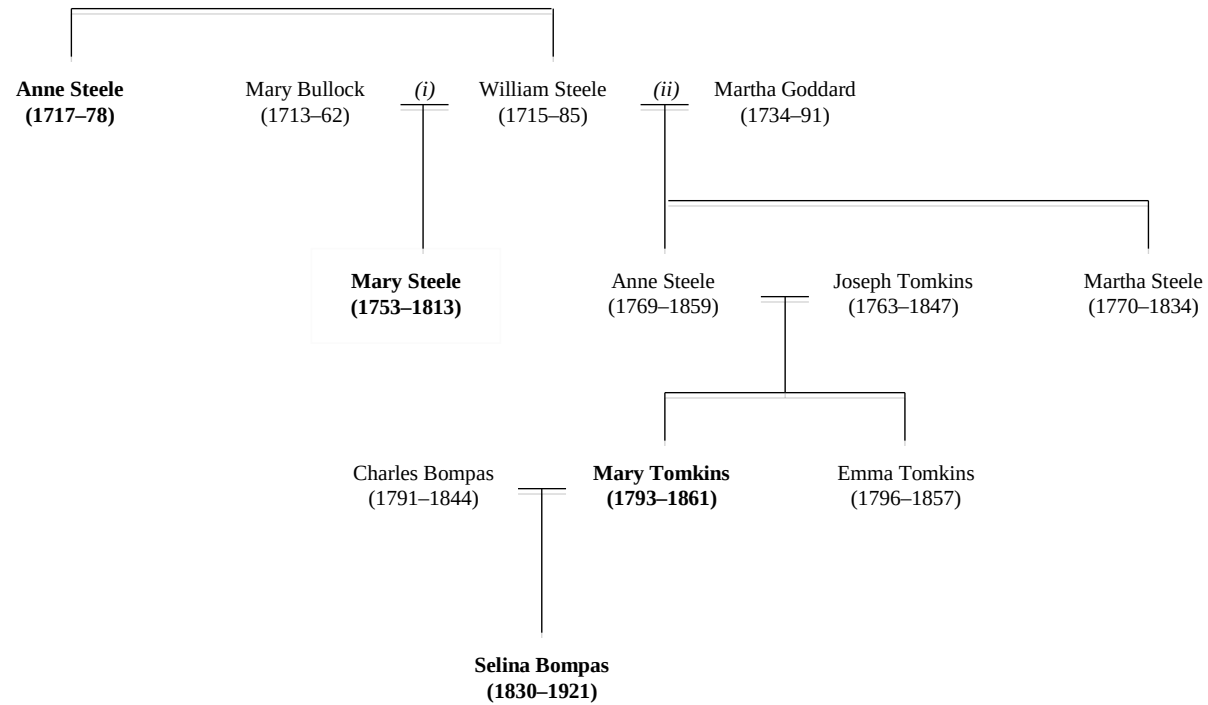


----- exact relationship unknown

7. Sarah Eden and her aunts

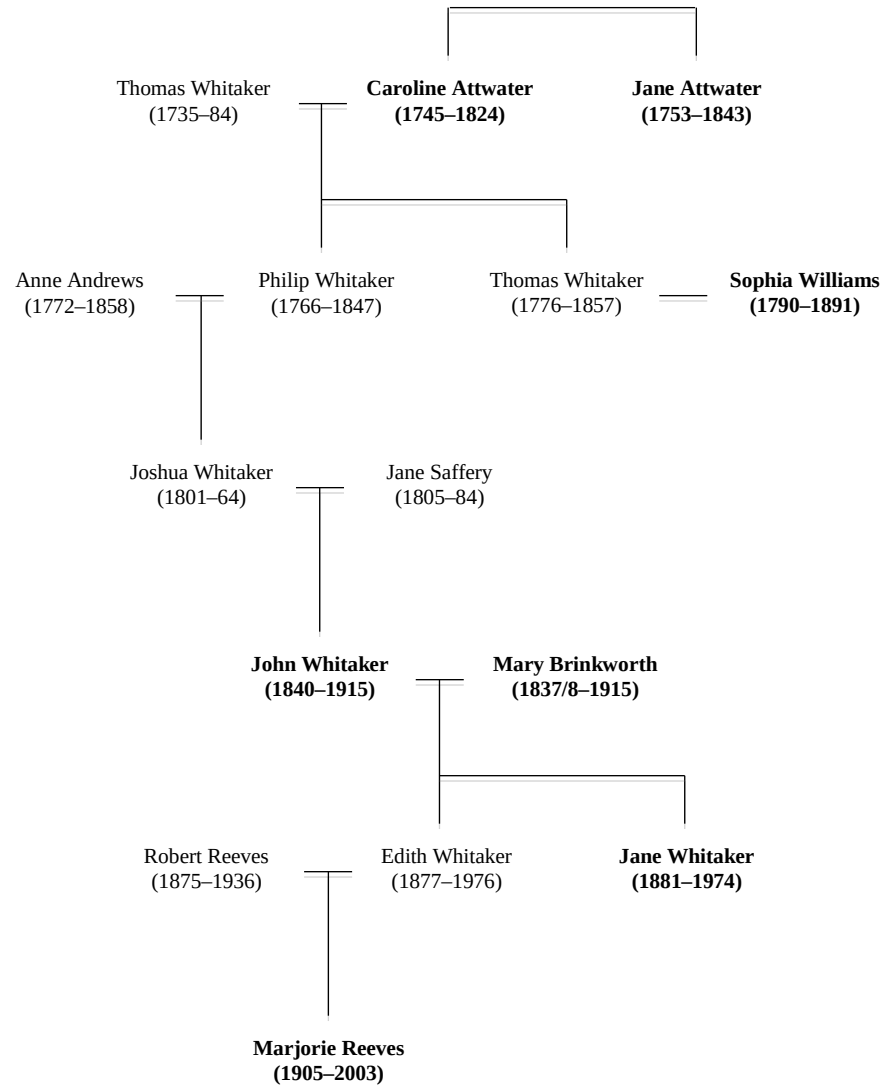


8. Steele manuscripts descent



names in bold mark custodians of manuscripts

9. Attwater manuscripts descent



names in bold mark custodians of manuscripts

Appendix 3

Bolton Manuscripts

Manuscripts related to Ann Bolton are preserved in various repositories, both public and private (see Chapter One). The bulk of those in private hands are in the possession of Vanessa, Lady Bolton, of Pudlicote, Oxfordshire, and generously were made available to me for the purposes of this study. Vanessa Bolton's late husband, Sir Frederic Bolton, was a descendant of Ann Bolton's brother Joseph, and the papers were handed down the family along that line. These papers include thirty letters from John Wesley to Bolton. Still cherished as a memory of their eighteenth-century ancestor's brush with fame, Wesley's letters are carefully preserved in acid-free plastic sleeves. The papers at Pudlicote also include Ann Bolton's diary, along with many of her letters and other miscellaneous documents. These manuscripts had been stored in a trunk in the attic, and were in considerable disarray when I began my work on them (see Figure 22).

Much of the trunk was filled with a diary, written by Bolton over a period of almost thirty years. A total of 1,300 manuscript pages have survived, the earliest extant entries written in 1769 and the latest in 1797. Bolton's diary-writing method meant that the document was in approximately one hundred pieces. While sometimes she used readymade notebooks for her diary, most often she did not. When she did not, she wrote on large loose sheets that she folded horizontally and vertically, slitting the folded edges to create quires of eight sheets each. After filling the eight sheets, she would set them aside and take up another large sheet, fold it, slit the edges, and begin again. These quires of eight pages were almost always incompletely dated (dates might appear as 'Saturday

13 October', '13 October', or simply 'Saturday'), and sometimes the smaller sheets created by slitting edges had become separated from each other. In one instance Bolton stitched together quires to form a booklet after writing, though unfortunately she ordered the pages incorrectly. The diary had become terribly disorganised in the centuries since its writing and thus had to be reordered. This physical reconstruction required careful scrutiny of both material and internal evidence.



Figure 22: Bolton manuscripts (before)

Materially, attention was paid to such properties as paper used, torn edges, pin piercings, and staining. Bolton's paper supplies altered from time to time, so sometimes the size of paper used or watermarks in paper located undated fragments within a certain timeframe. At other times, pages had been torn or torn out of notebooks and I was able to align edges to reestablish dating (see Figure 23). Sometimes pages that had once been

pinned together had become separated, and piercing patterns were used to reestablish order. And at other times matching stains confirmed the earlier correlation of pages that had become separated.

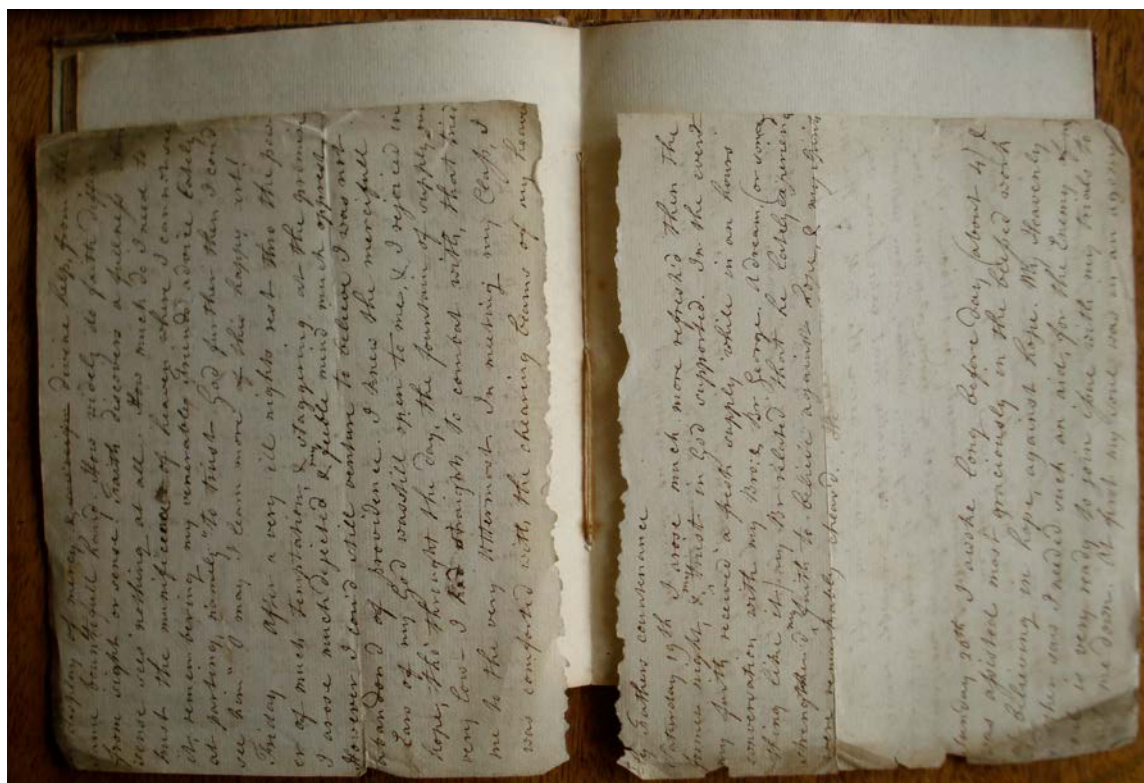


Figure 23: Ann Bolton diary reconstruction

Internal evidence was also used to reestablish diary order. Incomplete dating, when compared to historical calendars, helped to narrow down fragments to several possible datings: thus 'Friday 6 February' might have occurred three times during the period in which Bolton wrote her diary. Sometimes sentences that began at the end of one fragment clearly concluded at the beginning of another. In one instance, eight fragments were thus shown to follow one another, and the confident dating of one fragment established the dating of all others in the sequence. Textual references were also used:

Bolton's reference to an event, such as John Wesley's funeral or her own possible marriage, confirmed dating; her reference to snow or excessive heat located fragments in certain seasons; her tendency to prolonged reflection on particular Bible verses (often referred to as 'promises') correlated certain entries; and references to ongoing visits in certain locations connected fragments. Cross-referencing to a range of documents was also used to establish dating: church burial records confirmed the date of a friend's death; the *Arminian Magazine* was checked against her recorded reading of articles; and Wesley's diary and journal established his (and others') presence or absence at a particular place. Bolton's habit of conversing with Methodist preachers and reflecting on their sermons was particularly helpful in reconstructing her diary. Since Methodist preachers typically were assigned to circuits for two years, her reference to a preacher's ongoing presence in a certain location located relevant entries within a two year window. *Hall's Circuits and Ministers* was used to identity those windows.¹⁰²⁶

Attention to material and internal evidence, and often several pieces of evidence in conjunction with one another, was thus used to reorder the diary. In this way all but a few weeks were dated confidently, and those weeks that could not be dated precisely have been placed in the correct year. The restored document—the manuscript diary of an eighteenth-century Methodist laywoman, kept daily for almost thirty years—is unique and provides an important new lens into eighteenth-century Methodism.¹⁰²⁷

The trunk at Pudlicote also included several diary volumes that were not written by Ann Bolton. Though the writers were anonymous, I was able to identity the author of

¹⁰²⁶ Joseph Hall, *Hall's Circuits and Ministers, 1765 to 1885, with Appendix from 1886 to 1896*, ed. Thomas Galland Hartley, Revised and enlarged ed. (London: n. p., 1914).

¹⁰²⁷ The John Rylands Library at Manchester, which stores the national Methodist archives, contains nothing comparable in terms of lay-authorship or length. The majority of eighteenth-century diaries at the John Rylands Library were written by Methodist preachers. Those written by women were almost all written by preachers' wives and are considerably shorter in length. Mary Fletcher's diary, which is longer, is arguably at least partially professional.

one volume as Bolton's friend Sarah Nind (born Sarah Ward), of Oxhill, Warwickshire, who appears in Bolton's diary as 'Mrs Nind'. My reasons for concluding that the anonymous author was Nind are based on internal evidence matched to baptismal and other records of St Lawrence Church at Oxhill: the author wrote from Oxhill; the author gave her date of birth, which corresponds with Sarah Ward's baptism on 16 July 1747; and the author often mentioned 'Sister E' of Honeybourne, who would be her sister Ann Eden who married Nathaniel Eden of Honeybourne, Gloucestershire. The Edens, a prominent Methodist family at Broad Marston, Gloucestershire, appear in Bolton's diary from its beginning. Identifying the author of this diary volume helped me to establish connections between the Bolton, Ward, and Eden families (see Appendix 2).

Other manuscripts in the trunk included correspondence, letter-books, conversion narratives, biographical and spiritual reflections, sermon notes, and commonplace books. Multiple conversion narratives were ordered according to content, sometimes cross-referenced with Bolton's diary. The letters were written by a range of writers, including well-known Methodists such as Elizabeth Ritchie and Jane March, and unknown Methodists such as Mary Scudamore and John Arundell. Authorship of unsigned letters was determined, on occasion, by matching handwriting and style. The Bolton manuscripts at Pudlicote are no longer stored in a disordered trunk in the attic, but are secured and preserved in archival boxes and acid-free sleeves (see Figure 24). The cataloguing system I devised has been used to reference manuscript items.



Figure 24: Bolton manuscripts (after)

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DNP 30–31, Duchess of Somerset correspondence, 1745–54

DNP 115–118, Duchess of Somerset commonplace books (prose and verse in various hands)

DNP 110, Elizabeth Rowe correspondence and poetry, 1697–1734

Bedford, Bedfordshire and Luton Archives and Record Services

Wrest Park (Lucas) Manuscripts

L 30/9, 30/21/1, Catherine Talbot correspondence 1737–69

L 30/106, Catherine Talbot diary, 1745

L 30/21/3, Jemima Yorke correspondence and diary

Durham, North Carolina, Duke Divinity School

John Wesley correspondence, 1781

Gloucester, Gloucestershire Archives

GL, D7824/1, Stroud deeds, 1700–1952

London

Manuscripts in the possession of Anne Bolton Logue

Ann Bolton correspondence, 1789–92

London, British Library

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Add. 39311, 39312, Anne Berkeley correspondence, 1756–60

Add. 39311, 39312, Eliza Berkeley correspondence, 1761–97

Add. 39311, 39312, George Berkeley Jnr correspondence, 1753–70

Add. 46689, George Berkeley Jnr diary, 1754

Add. 39311, Thomas Secker correspondence, 1732–66

Add. 39311, 39312, Catherine Talbot correspondence, 1756–69

Add. 39316, Catherine Talbot poetry and essays

Add. 46688, 46690, Catherine Talbot diary, 1745 and 1751–54

Birch Collection

Add. 4291, 4319, 4475, Catherine Talbot correspondence, 1735–56

Weeden Butler Papers

Add. 19689, Duchess of Somerset correspondence, 1754

Joseph Cottle Papers

M468, Anne Steele correspondence, 1761

Harkwicke Papers

Add. 35597, 35607, 35608, 35638, 35639, Catherine Talbot correspondence, 1763–69

Mark Hildesley Papers

Add. 19684, Mark Hildesley correspondence, 1768

Elizabeth Montagu Papers

Add. 40663, Elizabeth Montagu correspondence, 1782–89

London, Lambeth Palace Library

MS 1719, 4728, Thomas Secker correspondence, 1747–57

MS 1349, 1719, 2872 Catherine Talbot correspondence, 1757–69

MS 1719, Legal documents

Manchester, John Rylands Library

MA 1977.610.33, MAM FL 2/1/15–2/1/16, Ann Bolton correspondence, 1786–1798

MAM FL, Mary Fletcher diary, 1772–1813

MAM JW 1.66–1.71 and 1.73–1.99, MAW Ms 296–297, John Wesley correspondence, 1768–89

New Haven, Connecticut, Beinecke Library, Yale University

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OSB 53, Catherine Talbot correspondence and prose writings, 1729–51

OSB c.22, Duchess of Somerset correspondence, 1749–54

OSB c.291, Thomas Secker's housekeeper's diary, 1744–46

Oxford, Angus Library, Regent's Park College

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Acc. 76, Anna Attwater diary, 1740 and undated

Acc. 76, Anna Blatch diary, c. early 1800s

Acc. 76, Jane Attwater correspondence, 1771–1833

Acc. 76, Jane Attwater diary, 1766–1834

Acc. 76, Jane Attwater poetry and reflections, c. 1780s and 1790s

Acc. 76, Anne Steele correspondence, 1741–67

Broughton Baptist Church Records

Broughton 1/1–1/4, church books of Broughton Baptist Church, 1655–1891

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STE 5/16, Caleb Evans correspondence, 1778–86

STE 3/7–3/13, Anne Steele correspondence, 1729–65

STE 3/1–3/5, 3/17, Anne Steele hymns, poetry, and prose writings

STE 1/3, 2/2/1–2/2/2, 3/7, Anne Cator Steele correspondence, 1717–51

STE 2/1, Anne Cator Steele diary, 1730–60

STE 2/2/3, Anne Cator Steele record of preachers heard, 1706–60

STE 4/5, 5/10–5/16, Mary Steele correspondence, 1761–1811

STE 5/1–5/3, 5/5–5/7, Mary Steele poetry, 1766–1810

STE 5/9, Mary Steele spiritual autobiography and other prose writings

STE 3/10, Mary Wakeford correspondence, 1749–57

STE 12/1/3, Mary Wakeford diary (extracted by Selina Bompas), 1750–71
 STE 10/2, Mary Wakeford poetry, 1748–69
 STE 3/8, 4/4, 4/5, William Steele Jnr correspondence, 1736–77
 STE 3/15, 4/2, 5/4, 5/17, 14, Steele family books and ephemera

Oxford, Bodleian Library

English Letters

C.209, Catherine Talbot correspondence, 1761

Pegge Papers

Add. c.243, Elizabeth Carter poetry

Reeves Collection

Box 19, 22, Jane Attwater correspondence, 1789–1810

Box 19, Jane Attwater diary, 1809

Box 22, Mary Whitaker correspondence, c. late 1790s

Box 4, 17, 19, 22, 26, Attwater/Whitaker family books and ephemera

Oxhill, Warwickshire, St Lawrence Church

Church books

Pudlicote, Oxfordshire

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Pudl., 4/1–4/25, Ann Bolton correspondence, 1769–1813

Pudl., 4/28–4/48, Ann Bolton conversion experiences and other prose writings

Pudl., 4/51, Sarah Nind diary, 1771

Pudl., 4/7, John Wesley correspondence, 1769–91

Pudl., 1, Bolton family books and ephemera

San Marino, California, Huntington Library

Montagu Collection

MO 3019–3597, Elizabeth Carter correspondence, 1758–85

MO 5139–5140, Catherine Talbot correspondence, 1761 and undated

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